English Teaching in Private Language Institutes: An Analysis of Teachers' Experiences, Challenges, and Needs[1]

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Abstract

Although private education is no longer a subsidiary mode of learning, it has been an area of little interest to English Language Teaching (ELT) researchers. This study touches on the English language teaching in private language institutes (PLIs) in Yemen with a particular reference to teachers' experiences, challenges, and needs. Forty-five classroom observational forms and subsequent interviews with fifteen teachers in three major PLIs were used to find information about teachers' classes in terms of presentation, teacher-student interaction, and teaching materials. Over six months, teachers' practices in the classroom and beliefs about their teaching situations were detected and analysed. The classroom observations, tied with the qualitative data came from the interviews, and related the teachers' challenges. Findings showed that teachers are in need of training on how to plan their teaching more accurately, integrate technology into their classes properly, and manage their teaching time. In tandem with workshops and refresher courses on the purpose, the training should include ethics of the profession, recent trends and practices, learner autonomy, and innovative teaching— elements deemed necessary for language teachers in the twenty-first century.

Resumen

Aunque la educación privada ya no es un modo subsidiario de aprendizaje, ha sido un área de poco interés para los investigadores de la enseñanza del idioma inglés (ELT). Este estudio aborda la enseñanza del idioma inglés en institutos privados de idiomas (PLI) en Yemen con una referencia particular a las experiencias, desafíos y necesidades de los docentes. Se utilizaron cuarenta y cinco formularios de observación en el aula y entrevistas posteriores con quince maestros en tres importantes PLI para encontrar información sobre las clases de los maestros en términos de presentación, interacción maestro-alumno y materiales didácticos. Durante seis meses se detectaron y analizaron las prácticas docentes en el aula y las creencias sobre sus situaciones de enseñanza. Las observaciones en el aula estaban ligadas a los datos cualitativos provenientes de las entrevistas, y detallaron los desafíos de los docentes. Los hallazgos mostraron que los maestros necesitan capacitación sobre cómo planificar su enseñanza con mayor precisión, integrar la tecnología en sus clases de manera adecuada y administrar su tiempo de enseñanza. Junto con talleres y cursos de actualización, la capacitación debe incluir la ética de la profesión, las tendencias y prácticas recientes, la autonomía del alumno y las prácticas innovadoras, elementos que se consideran necesarios para los profesores de idiomas en el siglo XXI.

Introduction

English language, which has become a truly global necessity, is now taught in public and private institutions to meet the growing need for it in the worldwide arena (Alipour, 2018; Chan, 2019; Le, 2011; Mustary, 2019). Yung (2015) postulated that "it is not only a core subject students need to pass in public examinations to compete for the limited university places" (p. 210), but also "a crucial asset in deciding how far they can move upward" (Gao, 2008, as cited in Yung, 2015, p. 211). Putting it in the Yemeni context, English has been taught formally in schools and universities for general and specific purposes (Ashuja'a, 2004; Ghanem & Al-Hidabi, 1993; Ramaswami et al., 2012). Ramaswami et al. reported that nine percent of the population spoke "English at an intermediate level" in 2011 (p. 251). The need for English in this country, which has undergone ruthless war and political turmoil for almost a decade, has increased more than ever, because it is a means for Yemenis to communicate with the rest of the world and make their voices heard through international organizations, conferences, and social media. Additionally, English has been a requirement for the mining, oil, and gas industry and non-government organizations (NGOs) operating in Yemen (Al-Naqeeb, 2012; Al-Sohbani, 2013; Ramaswami et al., 2012; Zuheer, 2013). Thanks to the on-going war, oral and written English have become relevant due to the increase in immigration, studying abroad, and job opportunities that require English in other countries (Ramaswami et al., 2012).

[1] This is a refereed article. Received: 21 July 2021. Accepted: 27 December, 2021. Published: 30 September, 2022.
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Previous studies in the local context investigated classroom teaching practices in secondary schools and found the outcome to be quite unsatisfactory (Al-Naqeeb, 2012; Al-Sohbani, 2013; Zuheer, 2013). This situation has been criticized severely because it does not coincide with the recent trends and updates in English language teaching (ELT). Despite awareness of the importance of English, some previous studies reported a severe dearth of resources, textbooks, teaching materials, as well as a shortage of qualified English teachers. Such weaknesses undermine students' confidence for they are receiving training in the proper language skills (Ghanem & Al-Hidabi, 1993; Zuheer, 2013). The ongoing conflict, which began in 2011, has worsened the situation. Subsequently, the learners' proficiency is barely adequate (Ashuja'a, 2004; Bose, 2002; Ramaswami et al., 2012). Teachers, likewise, struggle to keep on teaching under difficult conditions. Ashuja'a (2004) thought the standards of English teaching and learning, for the most part, were deteriorating day by day in public schools, making opportunities of learning appropriate communicative English rather questionable. Sahu (2008) speculated that "Yemen has the largest number of low proficiency learners in English classes" (p. 55). This poor performance jeopardizes adherence to the twenty-first century requirements that promote English language skills.

The overall educational situation in the country, as mentioned above, has made learners and their parents discontented with the results achieved by the formal educational system. Sahu (2008) expressed that learning English in school is not enough to achieve an optimal level of proficiency, and this has given way to private language institutes (PLIs) which are mushrooming throughout the country. These fee-paying institutions are also called private language centers. With a few exceptions of international language institutions such as AMIDEAST, the British Council, American Language Institute (MALI), which are excluded from the current investigation, the PLIs are generally owned by local individuals who are typically non-educator investors. Over the last two decades, a multitude of PLIs has mushroomed— some are well-established now, while some others closed shortly after opening. There are few formal statistics on their exact numbers and profiles. It is even more difficult to obtain accurate data and statistics during the on-going political conflict. Obviously, more and more PLIs open every year, and an overwhelming number of learners of different ages enrol in such institutions. They take courses in English among other vocational training programs, such as computer skills and human development. These institutes considerably have more facilities than public institutions and they help the entrants do well in their studies and perform effectively in their professions (Kuntz, 1997; Mustary, 2019). It is also assumed that PLI teachers perform better than their counterparts in public schools.

Private education is no longer just supplemental, and the present study was designed to examine it in the local context. While the status quo of ELT in formal settings has been of substantial interest to local (Al-Sohbani, 2013; Zuheer, 2013) and foreign researchers (Ramaswami et al., 2012; Sahu, 2008), research into English in the private sector continues to be a rare undertaking. Earlier in 1997, Kuntz surveyed fourteen institutes in Sana'a, and the study found that the PLIs barely prepared their teaching materials, and they had no regular teaching staff. Nevertheless, tremendous changes have occurred in the ELT since Kuntz's study. The availability of such private learning venues is now a phenomenon that deserves scrutiny. Educators and policymakers in the local context lack a clear vision of the PLIs' learning outcomes. Therefore, it is necessary to shed light on this sector bringing teachers' credentials, expertise, and needs for PD into the foreground.

Review of the Literature

Shadow education

The need for English has been increasing in the worldwide context. There have been drastic changes in the field of ELT in terms of teaching methods and venues of learning (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Yung, 2015). The fee-paying education has become more popular in the recent decade (Chan, 2019; Le, 2011; Safari & Shafei, 2017). Taking private lessons or attending classes beyond formal education is now a global phenomenon (Mustary, 2019; Yung, 2015) and some researchers (e.g., Bray, 1999; Chan, 2019; Yung, 2015; Zhang & Bray, 2020) refer to it as 'shadow education'. Nevertheless, it is increasingly moving from the shadow to the light. PLIs are noticeably growing in numerous countries. In Vietnam alone, Le (2011) reported that around 100 private language centers open every year; courses and ads of such institutes are evident.

Thus, learners decide to study in private schools to improve their language communicative skills (Le, 2011; Safari & Shafei, 2017). These institutes accept learners of different age groups– children, teenagers, and adults of both genders. Specific purposes for learning English add impetus to individual learners to join these

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institutes. Some students would like to get a diploma in English, some improve their English they acquired poorly at school or university, and some study in these institutes to pass a university placement test, or take an international proficiency test, such as TOEFL or IELTS (Alipour, 2018; Ganji et al., 2018; Kuntz, 1997; Yung, 2015).

Teacher needs

Under the influence of learner-centered pedagogy that predominated in ELT, teacher needs were ignored until the post-method movement surfaced at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Al-Kadi, 2020). The post-method pedagogy re-positioned the teacher status which results in empowering teachers to reshape and localize teaching that complies with their cultural, political, and social realities (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). While learner needs have been emphasized in the literature (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Long, 2005), analysis of teacher needs, however, remains an area of little research (Al-Qahtani, 2015; Heydarnejad et al., 2017; Klinkerd, 2016). With this new perspective, collecting information about teachers' credentials, challenges, and voices has become an interesting field for TESOL researchers (Al-Qahtani, 2015). Shing and Seng (2020) speculated that assessing teacher needs helps to "avoid making any generalization and hasty decision in designing remediation contents" (p. 106).

Teacher needs are defined in this study as "the skills that teachers want and they should learn in order to perform their job" (Klinkerd, 2016, p. 4). Heydarnejad et al. (2017) and Zuheer (2013) contend that teacher needs are built on the idea that teaching is a profession of burnout, burden, and stress. Identifying teachers' needs is normally the first step in building a teacher training program designed for professional enhancement to make them successful in their profession (Klinkerd, 2016; Shing & Seng, 2020). Zuheer (2013) categorized teacher needs into professional needs and teacher specialist needs. The former set of needs helps teachers to meet the challenges and changes of the field in terms of methods, paradigm shifts, and the like. The latter set includes linguistic and intercultural competencies.

Public schooling vs. private education

Learning in public and private institutions have been examined in a world-wide context (Alipour, 2018; Klinkerd, 2016). Some studies have shown that PLIs enhance formal education. For instance, Torshizi and Torshizi (2016) found that students who take courses in private institutes in addition to their formal education outperform those who do not or cannot take advantage of this dual learning chance. The difference in performance results from "inappropriate placement, disproportionate number of students, simple and ordinary teaching method and grade oriented environment" (Torshizi & Torshizi, 2016, p. 33), which were demotivating factors in public schools in comparison to the private institutes

While private institutes are generally touted as alternatives to poor formal schooling, the pedagogy in terms of approaches and practices in private centres are not entirely different from what formal education endures. For instance, the PLIs, similar to formal institutions, adopt product-based, exam-driven, and teacher-dependent pedagogy (Heydarnejad, et al., 2017; Le, 2011; Torshizi & Torshizi, 2016; Zhang, & Bray, 2020). While post-method pedagogy empowers teachers to take several roles in the process of teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), the roles the teachers play in the given context are exclusively dedicated to delivering the imposed syllabi (Al-Kadi, 2020). They stick to the imposed textbooks, with little freedom to organize their classes or select limited supplementary materials. Learners depend heavily on teachers to "spoon-feed them examination skills in a short period of time" (Yung, 2015, p. 722), and to help them do their assignments and other tasks (Safari & Shafei, 2017; Zhang, & Bray, 2020). The concept of learner autonomy, however, could allow learners to be self-dependent (Heydarnejad et al., 2017), yet it is still unlikely in both public and private institutions. That is to say, private teaching is similar to formal education in exam washback — an exam-oriented education in which students learn for competition and assessment (Yung, 2015), not for innovation and life-long learning.

PLIs cannot be devoid of challenges that require due attention. For example, not all students are able to study in private institutions, which results in *testing bias* in schools (Safari & Ashafei, 2017). Students who take some private lessons to supplement their school English courses tend to outperform students who could not pay for the private lessons (Torshizi & Torshizi, 2016). This causes social inequalities and injustice to the learners who are only in mainstream schooling. Although private tutoring shares some elements of formal teaching (e.g.. teaching paradigms, teacher dominance), it is generally preferable to learners who rely on PLI teachers to help them with their school assignments. Moreover, with the big burden on teachers, the private institutes pay attention to the learner needs in terms of convenient timetables and teacher

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selection, and they also attend to the teacher needs in terms of training, refresher courses, motivation, and promotion.

In the context of the present study, the profound effects of private learningon formal learning lack evidence; formal statistics and studies on this matter hardly exist. In light of the literature, this study explores the ELT situation in PLIs. It intends to gain insights into the teachers' beliefs and practices to encourage educators and decision-makers to bring shadow education to light and make timely reforms and refinements.

Method

The study, inspired by previous studies, was carried out by two local researchers who are primarily EFL teachers and researchers with experience in teaching English in public and private institutions at home and abroad. They have brought their practical and personal experiences to the inquiry. The research design of this study takes on a more recent paradigm shift in language research – a shift from a highly quantitative paradigm with an overreliance on questionnaires to contextualized qualitative paradigm to uncover the informants' real personal practices (Cohen et al., 2006; Fisher, 2016; Loch & Black, 2016; Yung, 2015). It leans towards qualitative research while leaving room for some necessary quantitative elements. In addition to the classroom observations, the interview was used as a narrative inquiry to get an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Participants

The study took place in three private institutes whose capacity at the time of the study was 1700 learners and 47 teachers. A conveniencs sample of the participant included all the teachers in three institutes (*n*=47) in the City of Taiz. The informants (aged between 19 and 40) held either a two-year English diploma (18) or a Bachelor of Arts degree (27), while two participants were still university students. The participants were socio-culturally homogeneous with different teaching background. They were classified according to their qualifications into qualified, under-qualified, and non-qualified. The first category included graduates of teacher training programs in colleges of education, the under-qualified teachers had little experience/training in teaching, and the non-qualified category included the teachers from out of the teaching field. Out of the initial sample, fifteen teachers were singled out for classroom observations and interviews on a voluntary basis (five teachers from each institute). They were nominated from the qualified and under-qualified categories who had degrees in English studies and English literature. The background information is outlined in Table 1.

			Qualifications			Classification		
Gender	No.	Age range	BA	Diploma	Other	Qualified	Under-qualified	Non-qualified
Male	19	22-40	8	7	1	9	13	3
Female	28	19-34	19	11	1	6	9	7

Table 1: Major Characteristics of the Participants

Instruments

The study used a classroom observation scheme and interview guidelines to collect data. This combination of tools was necessary to get an in-depth understanding of how English is taught in PLIs, focusing on teachers' needs for professional growth. The instruments were designed in light of relevant work on needs analysis (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Long, 2005) and teacher needs (Heydarnejad et al., 2017; Shing & Seng, 2020; Zuheer, 2013). The observation was used to record incidents as they happen in reality, not as they are perceived. Structured and unstructured classroom observations were employed to collect data on ongoing classes. The structured part was used to annotate the frequency of observed teaching practices (tallies), and the unstructured to comments on observable practices. Both parts, contingent on prior studies (e.g.. Al-Sohbani, 2013; Le, 2011), included four dimensions: lesson organization, presentation, teacher/student interaction, and materials. Under each of these dimensions, specific items were used to assess the teachers' performance and they were annotated as *observed* or *not observed*.

A semi-structured interview was adopted in order to supplement and triangulate the observational data. It generally elicited information about the teachers' teaching expertise, students, and learning situations. This included questions on their previous experiences, training, the materials they use in addition to the textbooks, and lesson planning. The interviewees provided responses on a graded scale, multiple-choice

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questions, and prompted questions that required open-ended responses to questions about the teaching ecology, technology-integration in their teaching, and others, among others.

Procedures

Procedures concerning the psychometric features of the instruments, formal approval, and ethics were maintained. Before implementing the study, the validity and reliability of the instruments were checked. The observational guide was piloted on five teachers with characteristics similar to the actual sample. This pilot study helped to refine items and make changes that fit the focus of observation. Similarly, the agenda of the interview were validated by three experts in research methodology in the Department of English at Taiz University. They were requested to check the content validity, criterion-related validity, and construct validity, and some changes were necessarily made. Most of the interviews were follow-up interviews after the classroom observations to debrief the teachers whose classes were the target of observations. Then, the investigation began as visits to actual classes and then interaction with the teachers.

Formal approval was obtained and cooperation was sought from the administrations of the target institutions. The researchers explained the purpose of the study and assured the participants that the findings would not affect their work as the findings will be used for research purposes only. One of the researchers made arrangements to attend the scheduled classes (15-20 students in each class) as a non-participant observer. The observations stretched out for over six months because some of the classes planned for observation were discontinued. Three teachers also quit their job during the study, and the researcher had to adjust the observation schedule by adding teachers with similar characteristics. Observations were conducted in three rounds because it was difficult to reach final decisions on teachers' performance from only one observation. Each teacher was observed three times. Features that were evident at least twice in the three rounds were included in the analysis; and features that were observed once were excluded. For instance, if *pair work* or *unfocussed games* were evident in the three rounds or at least two, such observational features were taken as common features of teachers' teaching. It was also important to remind the teachers and their students that the researcher's visits were normal and they (teachers and students) should act as they usually do in normal classes. Using an observation form, the researcher (observer) annotated items, took notes, and tallied up occurring instances (counting how many times a feature occurred).

After the observations, the teachers were interviewed for more in-depth information. The interviews were voluntary. The interviewees were given a choice to withdraw at any time. Data were collected from teachers via interviews until saturation was achieved, i.e., when additional interviews would add no essential information or as Fisher (2016) put it, "a point at which further interviews were not adding any "new" information to that previously gathered" (p. 98).

<u>Data analysis</u>

The comments and notes obtained from the classroom observations along with the interview scripts were added to the quantitative data (tallies) and displayed in such a combined manner to strengthen the analysis. The interviews were transcribed to ease the process of analysis/coding. It was a line-by-line coding to accurately conceptualize the data ensued from the interview. Generally, the qualitative data that were possibly changed into numeric data were tabulated and discussed, other texts and comments were sorted out into themes and quotations. The analysis of the interview adopted the idea of saturation underlined in the grounded theory (Cohen et al., 2006; Loch & Black, 2016). To maintain ethics, the participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms to hide their identities in the Analysis Section.

Results and Discussion

<u>An overview of PLI classroom teaching</u>

Figure 1 captured the frequencies/tallies of the classroom practices of the items in the observational guide. By analysing the observational data quantitatively, the analysis resulted in numeric data of the four dimensions (lesson organization, presentation, teacher-student interaction, and instructional materials). Each of these four dimensions was taken as a whole, weighted, and presented graphically. With reference to the figure, the teachers need to improve delivery of the content/syllabus to the learners (the lesson organization and presentation). Perhaps, the participants' weakness in these two dimensions is due to the fact that the aims of their lesson were notably unplanned and unorganized. As will be discussed later in this section, the lesson objectives were included because, in the case of this sample, none of the teachers used written lesson plans.

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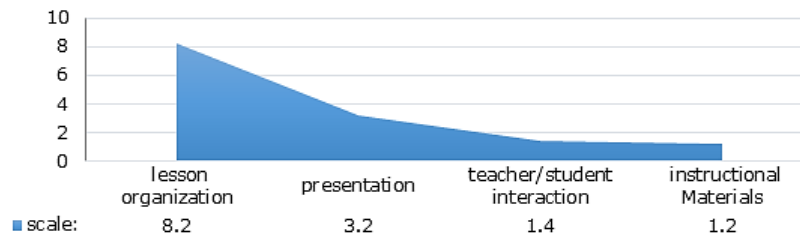

Figure 1: The teaching practices the participants need to promote

In the observational sheet, each of the four dimensions included some detailed points. In so far as the lesson organization is concerned, it was further analyzed quantitatively. Relying on evidence obtained through tallies in the observational protocol, the following nine constituents of classroom teaching were worth mentioning. Each one was marked as either *observed* or *not observed*. Calculating the none-observed practices yielded the percentages outlined in Table 2. The teachers needed, with varying extents, to organize their teaching more carefully. Noticeably, the percentages of needs varied from 78% to 94%. Follow-up interviews with those teachers showed that they were not mindful of the lesson organization-based needs in Table 2. Such needs are common in previous studies (e.g., Alipour, 2018; Chan, 2019; Ganji et al., 2018; Klinkerd, 2016; Le, 2011; Mustary, 2019; Yung, 2015).

making clear statement of the purpose of every lesson.	92%
linking a lesson with previous and next lessons.	83%
presenting an overview of each lesson.	87%
presenting the lesson in a logical sequence.	78%
providing clear instructions for each activity (focus).	88%
restating important ideas at appropriate times, such as repetitive phases and hanging articles.	94%
pacing lesson to allow time for notetaking.	86%
relating formal teaching with informal/personal learning activities.	83%
posing questions to be handled outside of class.	91%

Table 2: Lesson-Organization–based Needs

It is to be noted that classroom discourse does not comprise content delivery only. There are some other elements that should be considered. To draw a picture of what goes on in the PLI classes, there are other basics of a language class that were examined through observations and interviews. What follows is an analysis of major themes that surfaced from the field notes and comments taken during the on-going classes and the subsequent interviews. Table 3 includes fifteen teachers who were observed three times each whose names were replaced with pseudonyms for anonymity. The themes are based on teachers' lesson planning, clarity of objectives, textbook utilization, interaction patterns, technology integration, and supplementary materials.

<u>Lesson planning/mental preparation</u>

As for lesson preparation, none of the teachers in the given sample had written lesson plans. As it was not possible to retrieve their lesson plan records for assessment, the results surfaced from the interviews showed that written planning was not required. Nine teachers (out of fifteen) had unclear learning objectives to accomplish in the observed classes. Even those who had explicit objectives could not stay focused on the lesson itself. With no written plans, the focus of the lessons appeared rather flawed. They, for instance, tended to incorporate irrelevant games and/or patchy supplementary materials. When asked about the lesson planning, all the teachers stated that they had mental lesson preparation. Even so, a written plan guides a focus to formulate observable and measurable objectives and evaluate the learning outcomes that corresponded to the written objectives (Al-Naqeeb, 2012; Al-Sohbani, 2013; Ghanem & Al-Hidabi, 1993). Bose (2002) and Zuheer (2013) advocated that teaching without lesson plans makes teachers flounder—moving forwards with unclear goals and become unable to successfully manage the teaching time. This has been observed when the teachers in question used some games and technological devices as an 'add-on' in their classes. As indicated in Table 3, only Sua'ad used a timer to manage her game-based activities, but Sarah, Aziz, Rami, Anwar, and Jamil used unfocused games. When they were asked in the follow-up interview, they confirmed that they used games for fun and breaking the boring routine in their classes. Therefore, they need to realize how gamification can help them achieve the objectives of their lessons before they decide to use games in their classes.

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Participant	Lesson plan	Lesson objectives	Textbook used	Type of interaction	Supplementary materials	Educational technology
Sarah	none	Explicit	*Top Notch*	pair work	unfocused games	observed
Aziz	none	Vague	*Summit*	group work	unfocused games	observed
Samira	none	Vague	*Side by Side*	lecturing	quiz (exercises)	not observed
Laila	none	Explicit	*Top Notch*	Pair work	focused games	observed
Faten	none	Vague	*American Files*	Individual	video-taped	observed
Rami	none	Explicit	*Summit*	lecturing	unfocused games	observed
Randa	none	Vague	*Top Notch*	lecturing	focused games	observed
Atef	none	Vague	*Top Notch*	lecturing	quiz	not observed
Anwar	none	Vague	*American Files*	group work	unfocused games	observed
Zahra	none	Explicit	*Top Notch*	lecturing	focused games	observed
Nadia	none	Explicit	*Side by Side*	lecturing	crossword	observed
Omar	none	Vague	*Summit*	group work	crossword	not observed
Sameer	None	Explicit	*American Files*	pair work	crossword	observed
Sua'ad	None	vague	*Summit*	lecturing	timed games	not observed
Jamil	None	Vague	*Top Notch*	pair work	unfocused games	observed

Table 3: Common observational features in PLI classes

Textbooks/teaching materials

Figure 2: A sample of the textbook series used in the private institutes

Regarding the textbook series, observations showed that the teachers in focus used four different textbook series — *American Files, Side by Side, Summit*, and *Top Notch*. It is customary that the PLI managers determine what series to adopt. Only a few senior teachers were consulted in the selection process, and such teachers thought the series promote communicative English and relegate language accuracy to a secondary level of importance in the curriculum. Interviewing one of the teachers, who was in charge of the English classes in one of the target institutes, said that his institute used two different series – *Side-by-Side* (for the first three levels) and *American English File* (for the fourth level onwards), but the selection caused a gap in students' performance. There was a common heterogeneity in the two series. Based on the interviews with the teachers, the series *Top Notch* and *Summit* seem more homogeneous in content and scope, yet these series emphasize communicative skills at the expense of writing abilities. Both series are designed with clear goals of each unit/lesson and this promotes teachers' abilities to have clear lesson objectives. These series, despite defenders, did not fully meet the learners' needs. For this reason, some teachers (namely Sarah, Aziz, Rami, Anwar, Randa, and Laila) used additional materials including games, quizzes, and video-taped activities. Nevertheless, the bulk of game-using teachers (particularly those who were under-qualified) used unfocused games (aimless game-using), and the games were irrelevant to the objective of the lesson and they were not timed. Teachers need to ensure the games they used support their teaching and the lessons at hand. The majority of the teachers used games with no obvious objectives.

Technology integration

In the context of this study, the teachers tend to use a variety of techniques to enrich their teaching, such as recordings, videos, and animations. Nevertheless, the classes were generally teacher-based with a few technology-based activities that were handled inefficiently. For instance, due to a lack of tech skills, Zahara spent about ten minutes trying to play a two-minute tape recording because her Bluetooth did not work

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well. She invited another teacher to help her fix the problem. In Atef, Omar, Sua'ad, and Samira's classes, no technology was used. In Atef's words,

> *The technological facilities available in this institute are low-tech, slow internet connection, or inadequate to the aim of my teaching. This discourages me to integrate it into my teaching.*

Samira contends that

> *The available devices, for the most part, are used to present parts of the content only, not to innovate or construct knowledge.*

<u>Teacher-learner interaction</u>

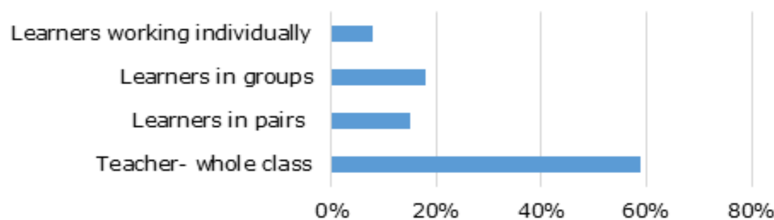

Figure 3: Teacher-student interaction in the observed classes

All the observed classes stayed busy with little waste of time. Interaction in the case of the sample classes varies from lecturing to working individually, in pairs and groups. Again, this cooperative learning was not evaluated by the teachers. After the group work, for instance, the teachers (Anwar, Aziz, and Randa) moved to other activities without checking the task the learners performed in groups/pairs. As Figure 3 shows, lecturing is the most remarkable technique – a teacher teaches the whole class and this intensifies teacher centeredness (Lemos et al., 2014). Teacher dominance was measured by calculating 'teacher talk time'. In a 120-minute class, teacher talk was recorded and timed. Then, it was converted into percentages (Figure 3). In the follow-up interviews, most of the interviewees admitted that the lion's share of classroom interaction goes to them when it comes to classroom interaction.

A senior teacher commented that:

> *The societal awareness and educational system do not help me to realize the learner centeredness. They erroneously believe the teacher is weak and reliant on learners if the teacher tries to put more burden of learning on the learners.*

In another comment illustrating the learner-centeredness teaching, Jamil critically commented that "the learner-centered approach and other relevant theoretical ideas are easier said than done".

One of the interviewees who worked as a coordinator in one of the target institutes commented that :

> *Because the teachers were trained on the teacher-centered approach, it seems that a change would take years to shift to modern trends such as learner's autonomy and learning for communication, not for exams.*

With relevance to Table 3, five of the teachers (Sarah, Sameer, Randa, Laila, and Gamil) thought that the textbook series (*Top Notch*) dictated their interaction in the class because the series accentuates conversations. That is why they opted for the pair work technique more than the other patterns of interaction. Given the nature of the textbook series and bureaucratic teaching policy, individual learning likely takes more time than the time allotted to each course. Samira, Sua'ad, Zahra, and Rami, who adopted the lecturing technique, believed that pair work and group work were less practical and teacher-whole class teaching helped teachers cover the syllabus and finish each course on time. They assumed that individualized learning did not fit their teaching situation because it was based on rigid scheme – teaching for exams! In the literature, teacher-dominance, arguably, degrades self-managed learning (Le, 2011), and in a language class there is a need to minimize the teachers' dominance and maximize learners' involvement. Power shared by the teacher and students in the classroom encourages active learning and promotes individualized learning (Heydarnejad et al., 2017; Lemos et al., 2014).

A broad look across the findings shows that teaching in the PLIs lacks uniformity. Each institute selects its teaching materials. Flexibility of selection is presented as an advantage over the rigid imposed textbooks in formal education. However, the PLIs arbitrarily adopted English series published by Western publishers and, as a result, the series were not designed for the local needs and identities (Al-Kadi, 2018; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). In terms of teaching methods, all the participants worked from what seemed to be an eclectic

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approach that supported their teaching., The existing syllabi were still book-centered and exam-driven – a pedagogy that basically controlled the direction of teaching (Le, 2011; Safari & Shafei, 2017; Yung, 2015; Zhang, & Bray, 2020). Teachers generally taught in order to test their students, and this determined the time and practices of the course. As for teaching supervision in the PLIs, it was mostly non-existent or, if it existed, it was superficial and biased. Most of the teaching in such institutes was not formally evaluated. Unlike formal institutions, private institutions lack inspectors who meet with teachers on a regular basis to evaluate their performance and provide them with feedback. One of the administrative staff (who also teaches some classes) advocated that:

> *I don't have time to look into teachers' lesson plans, so I don't care if they teach with a written lesson plan or mental plan. What is important is that the learners are happy and their performance is noticeable. The teachers' guide can do. It can replace the written lesson plans.*

The teacher needs, the basis of this investigation, varied from one institute to another. The needs for a guide, washback, and professional development (PD) are generally unmet. The teachers rarely shape their own teaching because they have no say in the curriculum design or series selection. Some were school teachers who, in parallel to their teaching in public schools, give lessons in private institutes. With the increasing number of learners and lack of qualified teachers, PLIs tend to hire non-qualified or under-qualified teachers. The newly hired teachers appeared to be "novices" who were inexpert in formulating specific, observable, and measurable objectives of their lessons, and similarly used untimed classroom activities and games without accurate purposes. Although games and technological devices were observed in their teaching, they were inept at handling such gadgets. In addition, the majority were less passionate about teaching. They had little obsession with the profession of teaching; they were teaching merely to earn their living. Therefore, teachers in all the institutes needed an overhaul of training predicated on ELT orientation and practices, similar to those in previous studies, e.g., Al-Qahtani (2015), Ganji et al. (2018), Klinkerd (2016), and Shing and Seng (2020). These range from classroom management (timing games, specific technology uses, proper students' arrangements), to familiarity with teaching approaches and philosophies — imbibing theories that drive practices in them. On the main, teachers desperately need training to promote the following aspects:

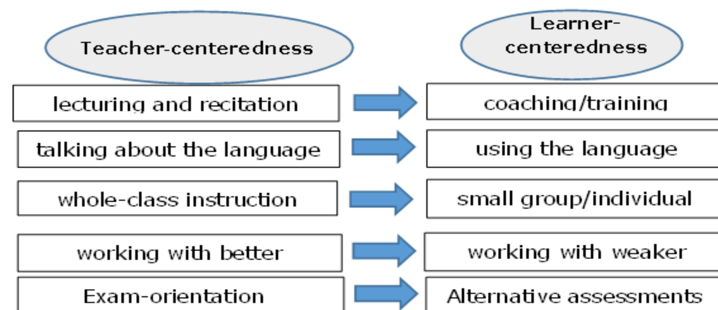

Figure 4: A paradigm shift that teachers need

Taken as a whole, the findings would be cautiously extrapolated to other institutes with similar characteristics at home and abroad. In contexts where private education is possible, some of the findings would be similar in terms of teaching approaches, exam-oriented pedagogy, shortage and inadequacy of teaching materials, and lack of teacher training. All these require continual training and refresher courses that support teachers' PD (Klinkerd, 2016; Shing & Seng, 2020). That being said, contexts in which teachers and learners prefer teacher-directed instruction, it seems difficult to leap from book-bound teaching and exam-based assessment to completely learner-centred instruction. Hence, it would be reasonable to adopt gradual changes towards such paradigm shifts. Being familiar with teacher-directed learning, students still need instructional support from teachers to increase their confidence to learn independently.

Implications and limitations

The study provides implications for policymakers to bring about a change in the current policy regarding private education. It highlights that today's generation learns outside formal settings, PLIs is a case in point, and this private learning should be recognized, standardized, and brought into the light instead of keeping it in the shadow. Along with that, teaching in the PLIs should be supervised, evaluated, and improved. With teachers being the backbone of this *shadow education*, their needs should be met, primarily their need for training in teaching different levels using current methods, strategies, and techniques. Moving forward,

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teachers should be empowered to make a change and to be a part of the course designers/selection. This would require teachers be well-qualified. Therefore, teacher training should be a part of the process of private learning and teaching. Realizing teachers' linguistic and pedagogic needs would be a stepping point to overall renovating teacher preparation. Those who have no relevant certificate or degree in education, need to get extensive training and orientation in the field of education, its theories, approaches, techniques, and class management. If taken seriously, these essentials would be a first step to define and refine the teaching situation at PLIs in the country.

Although the study sought to gain insights into ELT situation in PLIs, it was conducted at a time when political disorder affected everything in the country, including the educational system (Al-Kadi, 2022). It ran the risk of forced limitations on convenience sampling, analysis of teachers' performance, and the attitudes of the participants might have been influenced by the general conflict situation. That is to say, the circumstances in which the study was carried out could be considered a limitation that warrants caution in interpreting the results and suggest replicating the study when peace and normal situation are re-established. The present study, in its current form, has provided an initial attempt to improve language teaching in PLIs and draw the attention of other researchers to shed more light on language pedagogy in PLIs and prepare a teacher training program accordingly

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Conclusion and Further Research

This classroom-based investigation examined the PLI teacher's expertise, challenges, and needs. Touching a little studied area of research in the local setting, it attempted to throw light on a sample of PLIs to demonstrate how English is handled in private institutions across the country. Besides training teachers on properly planning their teaching, the study discussed other important issues relevant to teacher and material selection and teaching approaches that come in line with the pedagogy of the current century.

Although analyzing the teacher needs is only a partial picture of such an ignored area in the local TESOL community, this paper opens a gate to a new research territory. Future research projects may dig into the topic from the perspective of institute owners, parents, and officials. With the growing acceptance of informal and individualized learning, education in private institutes is gaining more ground. It provides fertile territories for more educational research. Researchers should not feel hesitant to select their samples from PLIs to investigate linguistic, pedagogic, and other educational issues that have been exclusively explored in formal settings. A comparison between public and private schooling could be a good research topic. In a similar landscape of research, the impact of learning in such private venues in parallel to formal classes should be substantiated, eliciting data from a wide range of sources, including learners, teachers, teaching practices and materials.

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