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The Perceptions of EFL Teachers About Their Pre-service Preparation in Iraqi-Kurdistan

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The Perceptions of EFL Teachers About Their Pre-service Preparation in Iraqi-Kurdistan

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction

by

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This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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ABSTRACT

The booming economy in Iraqi-Kurdistan during the last decade attracted hundreds of international companies to the region. The young Kurdish workforce seeks secure jobs that are well paid in such companies. Therefore, they need to be proficient in English. Besides, in general the Kurdish young generation has a positive attitude towards English and consider it the language of science, business, economy, tourism and prestige. Hassan (2014) states that Kurdish-speaking people generally have a positive opinion about learning the English language and believe that having a degree in English means better chances to get a job.

Therefore, the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Education (ME) have been working hard during the last decade to renew the programs of learning English in schools and implemented various programs. Despite of the efforts, there has not been noticeable progress. It has been said that the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher preparation programs seem to be one of the key points in this issue (Sofi-Karim, 2015; Vernez, Culbertson & Constant 2014). In other words, it has been hypothesized that EFL teachers in Kurdistan are not prepared adequately to meet the needs of the students and the modern Kurdish society. This study attempted to investigate EFL teachers' pre-service preparation in Kurdistan by exploring the experiences, feelings and concerns of the EFL teachers about the way they have been prepared in the institutions in charge of their preparation.

The study adopted a qualitative approach to investigate the issue of EFL teacher preparation with a focus on in-depth interviews with 20 in-service teachers who have graduated from the EFL teacher education program under this study. The findings of the study indicated that most of the EFL teachers considered themselves to be under-prepared. The participants believed that their weak pre-service preparation was due to 1) the irrelevant courses they took, 2) critical

courses that were missing in the curricula, 3) the inefficiency and impracticality of the practicum, and 4) the poor feedback and scaffolding they received from their teachers, supervisors, and cooperating teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my mother and my beloved wife who was beside me

during the hard times of working on my Ph.D.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Background

Education seeks to change human beings and their quality of life. Teachers are arguably the main tools for making this change and are certainly central to the process of education. Every day we hear or read stories about good teachers who have influenced their students and changed their lives for the better. DeMonte (2013, p. 1) says, "Having a good teacher can improve the life of a student far beyond school." Therefore, the quality of teachers and the way they are prepared should be a primary concern of educational institutions. However, the question is how we can be sure that all teachers are well-prepared for the important work that they do. In Darling-Hammond and Bransford's (2005) words, good preparation means preparing students to be effective teachers and having programs that have power to change teachers and to change their students. The improvement of teacher preparation is a process that never ends. Teachers need to be updated, refined, and improved so that they can be responsive to the needs of their students and society. As Scholz (2014) stated, under-prepared teachers cannot equip their students for a rapidly changing world.

The scope of this study is devoted to the perceptions that English as a Foreign Language (EFL[1]) teachers hold regarding their pre-service preparation in the formal institutions charged with EFL teacher education in Iraqi- Kurdistan, a region of particular importance both to the researcher and to the world community. The study investigated their sense of preparedness and its relation to the nature, quality and quantity of the coursework they have taken; the field

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[1] The distinction between EFL and ESL comes from the native language of the country in which instruction is being given. An ESL classroom is one in which English is the primary national language. On the other hand, an EFL classroom is one in which English is not the native language.

experiences they have been involved in, and their overall feelings, experiences and concerns about the way they have been prepared to be an EFL teacher.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher education has long been under investigation. Education researchers continue to find it an important topic and consider it an essential component of any education system (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; DeMonte, 2013; Guyton, 2000; Scholz, 2014; Sofi-Karim, 2015). Researchers believe that there is a strong relationship between the quality of teacher education programs and students and schools' academic success. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) stated "Providing our children with capable and well-prepared teachers is one of the most important factors for providing a high-quality education for all of them" (p. 444). These researchers and others summarized the problems of traditional teacher education programs in six points. They are 1) inadequate time, 2) fragmentation, 3) uninspired teaching methods, 4) superficial curriculum, 5) traditional views of schooling, and 6) inadequate field experience. Teacher education has not been investigated thoroughly by Kurdish researchers and, therefore, is one of the very fields that is in need of further study. However, a few researchers found the same problems in the teacher education programs in the Kurdistan region of Iraq (Hassan, 2014; Sofi-Karim, 2015; Vernez, Culbertson & Constant 2014). Little is known about what perceptions Kurdish EFL teachers hold about the ways they have been prepared by their teacher education programs. Therefore, this study tried to investigate the EFL teachers' perceptions of their preparation by the educational institutions that are in charge of EFL teacher education in Kurdistan. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of Kurdish EFL teachers about their preparation, and how well they think they have been prepared to become effective EFL teachers.

Purpose of the Study

Iraqi-Kurdistan is a developing regional government in the Middle East that is booming economically. Recent geological inspections found that the region is among the top 10 richest in the world for oil and gas fields. Therefore, more than 2000 international companies have come to the region in the last decade to participate in the oil and gas extraction and other important projects to build up the foundations of the region (RAND, 2012). This number increases every day. So, it is not hard to realize that most of these international companies need employees with good English proficiency. This is one of the factors that led the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to think of improving the English courses in K-12 schools around the region. To this end, they began the English proficiency reform program and changed the curriculum to meet the needs of the current situation. In this regard, English is taught from first grade in primary schools, five times a week, and continues to the 12th grade. The KRG invested a lot of money and effort to achieve this goal. As a part of evaluating this reform, this research attempts to determine whether the EFL teachers feel that they have been adequately prepared by the institutions that are in charge of EFL teacher preparation to do this reform.

Significance of the Study

Kurdish students take 12 years of English lessons (grade 1-12) and yet they are not proficient in English at graduation (RAND 2012, Sofi-Karim 2015). There are certainly many factors in it including teacher preparation, school and class environments, as well as teacher motivation, social, political and cultural issues that may affect the quality of EFL education in Kurdistan. Unfortunately, due to political, educational and administrative issues in Kurdistan, there is little research on the quality of teacher education in general, and EFL teacher education in particular. There is little data available to inform us about Kurdish EFL teachers' perceptions

about their pre-service preparation and the ways they think it can be improved. The lack of consistent knowledge on the topic of EFL teacher education adds to the importance of this study. Therefore, this research attempted to explore this issue from the perspective of EFL teachers in Kurdistan.

The study investigated whether EFL teachers felt that they were well-prepared or not. If not, what did they think are the problems? The results could impact the restructuring and reorganizing of the curriculum and instruction of the institutions in charge of EFL teacher preparation in Kurdistan. Furthermore, the results of this study can offer a profound understanding of the EFL teachers' sense of preparedness and the ways they have been prepared. It examined their feelings, experiences and concerns about the overall process of their preparation and can therefore help policy makers, educational leaders and EFL teacher educators make positive changes according to these findings.

Specific Research Questions

This research addressed the following questions:

1. What opinions do in-service EFL teachers in Iraqi-Kurdistan say they hold about their pre-service preparation?

2. What do in-service EFL teachers in Iraqi-Kurdistan say they think about the relevance and quality of the coursework they have taken during their teacher education?

3. What do in-service EFL teachers in Iraqi-Kurdistan say they think about the quality and length of the practicum during their teacher education?

Conceptual Framework

My paradigmatic approach and conceptual framework for this study is the Social Constructivism theory. Social Constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding (Derry, 1999). Kim (2001) explains this in terms of understanding the nature of reality, knowledge and learning. In this approach reality is not discovered, but rather is constructed as the result of interactions among members of the society (Gergen, 1994). In other words, we do not find reality, we make it. Similarly, knowledge is defined in terms of a human product that is constructed through meaningful cultural and social interactions in each context. Learning is also a social process that occurs when individuals cooperate and collaborate to make meaning. Kim stated, "Meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities" (p. 3). This is particularly true in second language learning. People cannot learn a new language if they do not interact with others (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

The most important characteristics of Social Constructivism are 1) subjectivity, 2) multiple realities of the participants, 3) social negotiation, 4) social and cultural construction, and 5) interpretativity (Creswell, 2013). The main question in this research is "What opinion do in-service EFL teachers in Kurdistan hold about the adequacy of their pre-service preparation?" In other words, I am interested in knowing the perceptions of in-service English as a Foreign Language teachers about their pre-service preparation. Do they report that they believe that they are adequately prepared to be effective EFL teachers or not? The occurrence of the words "opinions", "perceptions", and "think" means that the researcher realizes that the perspectives and the world view of the participants are personal and subjective and this needs to be taken into consideration. As it is clear from the questions raised here, the participants might have different

and even contrasting views about the way they have been prepared. These different participants each sees the realities of his/her preparation from a different perspective. There is not only one answer to this question. All the participants are right because they have experienced that event from the perspective of their own worldview. The lens through which each of these participants sees the world is different. Therefore, being subjective is one of the basic principles of my study. However, this subjectivity does not mean that it is impossible to reach a common understanding about the problem under investigation. In contrast, this subjectivity will give valuable opportunities to look at the problem from different perspectives at the same time. Having the opportunity to examine the problem from these diverse lenses will certainly provide the researcher with a comprehensive and inclusive picture that can interpret and help understand the issue.

This is related to the second characteristic of the Social Constructivism paradigm that are the multiple realities of the participants. It is also connected with the ontological philosophical assumption in which reality is subjective and multiple (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative researchers understand that there are multiple realities even if they are not aligned to and supportive of our own realities. This is like Plato's example of apple in which he tried to explain the meaning of truth for his students in a very simple way. In the circle of students, he stood in the middle and held up an apple so that everyone could see it. One side of the apple was rotten and the other side of it was perfectly fine. Plato asked his students to describe the apple. As you might imagine, half of the class said that the apple is rotten and is not good to be eaten and the other half described the apple as perfectly fine and delicious.

This is exactly how I will look at the problem of adequate preparation in my study. There is not only one reality, but multiple realities about teacher preparation in a given context. The

participants in my study will have different attitudes toward the way they have been prepared. A collection of these attitudes and realities can enrich the exploration process and help the researcher to understand the issue under investigation. Some of these realities might conflict with my own personal realities and the way I was prepared to be an EFL teacher. These conflicts are essential because they help me to construct new knowledge and interpretations about EFL teacher preparation. Furthermore, these multiple and sometimes conflicting realities of the participants will provide a critical vision, a vision that is crucial for educational researchers.

The third characteristic of Social Constructivism is the importance of social negotiation. The participants of this study are teachers which means they are social entities who interact and negotiate with other fellow human beings regularly. They construct meaning and knowledge through negotiation with other teachers, educators, cooperating teachers, students and school principals. They are continuously building their realities through interactions with other members of the society. This study is a part of this social negotiation. During their in-service preparation, student teachers[2] interact with many people and construct their knowledge of teaching through these interactions. For example, during their practice teaching, student teachers constantly interact and negotiate with their cooperating teachers and supervisors on a regular basis. Such social negotiations help the student teachers to build up their understandings of the schooling system, their identity as prospective teachers, and their overall perception of their capabilities as a teacher. That is why Social Constructivism is the appropriate paradigmatic approach through which to study these interactions and investigate the hidden meanings behind them. Such meanings will be crucial in understanding the perceptions of these teachers about the ways they

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[2] My word choice of the more traditional "student teacher" versus the more current "intern" is because Darling-Hammond uses "student teacher" in her writings and she is my favorite writer.

have been prepared to be EFL teachers. Sometimes, a negative interaction between a cooperating teacher and a student teacher can have negative consequences in the student teacher's overall perception of the educational system in general and the teacher education program in particular.

Another element of Social Constructivism that can help explore the subject under investigation is the culturally and socially constructed meanings and realities of the participants. For example, in the Kurdish culture, teachers are defined and presented as authority figures and schools as students' second homes. Therefore, there is always this ongoing conflict inside the students' minds about the role and responsibilities of their teachers. Such understanding of the character of teachers makes students think that teachers always have the final say in everything, like their parents. Another cultural understanding is that of looking at teachers as authority-figures of knowledge. Teachers cannot and must not make mistakes. Such perceptions have led to teacher-centered classrooms where students are silent most of the time and teachers do most of the talking. These culturally constructed understandings can lead the study to new and interesting findings. This is applicable to the context of EFL teacher preparation. For example, consider the practice teaching period of the EFL teacher education in Kurdistan. Cooperating teachers who act as mentors and faculty members who act as supervisors in the process need to discuss class issues with the student teachers and give them feedback regularly. Such collaboration and feedback constructs knowledge and helps the student teachers to improve their awareness learning skills. But, imagine this in the cultural and social context of Kurdistan where cooperating teachers and supervisors are defined as authority figures rather than cooperators and helpers. Many of my friends, during their practice teaching experience, complained that they could not talk with their mentors and supervisors about the classroom issues frankly. Some of them were afraid that such conversations might affect their grades. Some others could not

criticize the mentors because they thought that mentors are authority figures and whatever they did was correct. Studying this through Social Constructivism will clarify many of these problems.

The researcher's interpretation of the experiences and opinions of the participants about the problem is another interesting element of Social Constructivism paradigm. "The researcher's intent, then, is to make sense (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world" (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). Therefore, it is the researcher's job to examine the problem through the different perspectives of the participants and interpret them in a framework. A framework that clarifies the problem and identifies the related issues. This is where the researcher can see the "big picture" and interpret it in meaningful ways. This interpretation that is the result of a deep understanding of the topic might lead to some possible solutions.

Context of Kurdistan

Kurdistan Region of Iraq that I will refer to as Kurdistan throughout the study is a federal entity of Iraq. The name Kurdistan literally means land of Kurds. It is a mountainous region located in the north of Iraq and bordering Turkey to the north, Syria to the west, and Iran to the east. The population of Kurdistan is estimated to be about five million in 2014. Kurdistan consists of four governorates of Erbil, Dohuk, Sulemani and Halabja with Erbil city as its capital. The formal language of communication is Kurdish and most people in Kurdistan can speak Arabic, Farsi and Turkish as well. Kurdistan is a parliamentary democracy with a regional assembly that consists of 111 seats and has representatives from all political parties and religious and ethnic minorities. Due to its booming economy in the last 10 years, Kurdistan became a center of finance for more than 3000 international companies. The number of public and private universities increased from three in 2003 to 40 in 2013.

Education System in Kurdistan

The education system in Kurdistan is central and all the departments of education and schools around the region are run by the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Education (ME). Therefore, all the schools have the same curriculum that is designed by a committee assigned by the ME. Generally, there are two levels of education, basic and preparatory. Basic education is from grade 1-9, and preparatory education is from grade 10-12. In basic schools as the name suggests, students take all the necessary basics of almost every subject including, Kurdish language, English language, Arabic language, sciences, civics, religious studies, arts, and sports. After passing the national ninth grade exit exam successfully, students are admitted to the preparatory schools. Preparatory schools have three main branches of scientific, literary and vocational. The ninth grade's GPA has nothing to do with the branch students choose in the preparatory school. By passing the ninth-grade national exam, they are eligible to be admitted to the branch they like the most. After finishing the basic education successfully, students may choose to go to the scientific high schools that prepare students for medicine, engineering and science majors or they may go to the literary high schools that prepare students for arts and human sciences majors. The admission of students in universities is central and is administered by a committee appointed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR). Thereafter, students are admitted to universities according to their high school GPA scores. The top students in scientific high schools are admitted to colleges of medicine and engineering. Similarly, the top students in literary high schools are admitted to the colleges of law and business. Other students with lower GPA scores are admitted to colleges of science, administration, education and agriculture. Vernez et al. stated:

> Students in universities are assigned to academic programs depending on their scores on the secondary-school national exam. Highest scorers are typically assigned to medical schools,

next highest to engineering schools, and so on, in a hierarchy of professions and academic specialties centrally administered by the government (2004, p. 64).

As explained above, it is the students' GPA in the national high school exit exam that determines their future major in higher education. There is a lot to say about the disadvantages of this system, but that is not the subject of this study. Unfortunately, as it is apparent from the description given above the colleges of basic education and education are in the bottom of the list and admit students with low GPA scores. Many of these students are admitted to these colleges because they have no other options. Their low GPA scores do not allow them to be admitted to colleges at the top of the list. Therefore, most of the students admitted to colleges of basic education and education have two main characteristics: a) most of them have low GPA scores and b) most of them are admitted into such colleges not of their choosing. Vernez, Culbertson and Constant (2014) stated that people who are admitted into the colleges of education and basic education in Kurdistan are not high-achievers. Students assigned to be trained as teachers in the teacher education programs are among the lower scores on the national high school exit exam. Vernez et al. argue that this current method of student recruitment is unlikely to enhance high quality and strong motivation in the teaching profession. This might look unreasonable or even shocking to an extent, but it is the reality. So, why do these students not go to other colleges such as administration and agriculture? The answer is because the probability of finding a job after graduation from the colleges of education or basic education is higher than other colleges. The KRG needs fresh teachers and the need is increasing day after day. According to RAND Corporation for Research and Analysis, Kurdistan Region needs to recruit about 60000 new teachers in the next ten years (2010-2020). Therefore, despite their interest, many students with low GPA scores go to colleges of basic education and education to increase the probability of finding a secure job after they graduate.

Thus, many of the people we prepare and train to be teachers are not interested in the job. Therefore, the correlation between teachers' attitudes towards their jobs and their success in teaching tends to be a negative one. Furthermore, the general view towards teachers is that they are incapable people whose low GPA scores led them to colleges of education. Looking down at teachers is a common characteristic of Kurdish society. However, these students, with the educational and sociocultural background described previously, are admitted to the colleges of education and basic education and are prepared and trained to be future teachers in basic and preparatory schools.

Teacher Education in Kurdistan

The two biggest institutions that are in charge of teacher preparation in Kurdistan are colleges of education and basic education. There are more than twenty such colleges around the Kurdistan Region. Basically, colleges of basic education prepare teachers for grade 1-9 and colleges of education are responsible for preparing teachers for grade 10-12 or the preparatory grades. Student teachers study for four years with a major in their area of interest such as English Language, Kurdish Language, chemistry, or physics and a minor in education including courses of general psychology, educational psychology, methods of teaching, and methods of research. All colleges of education and basic education around the region have the same curriculum and are administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. To better understand the nature of teacher preparation in Kurdistan, the philosophy behind these programs should be explored first. This philosophy can present an inclusive and comprehensive picture of the way teachers are prepared in Kurdistan. In other words, it says everything about the missions and the objectives of these programs.

Philosophy Behind Teacher Education in Kurdistan

Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005) state that there are two main schools of thought in teacher preparation. One school looks at teacher preparation in terms of training. In this model teachers are trained to master some necessary skills and a particular teaching model. On the other hand, the other school looks at the teacher preparation in terms of education. In this model teachers are prepared to be life-long learners and practical decision-makers (Richards & Crookes, 1988). Teacher education programs in Kurdistan look at the process of teacher preparation as training rather than education. In this training view of preparation, teachers gain the mastery of some teaching skills to be ready for the job market without much focus on the learning-awareness that is crucial for the teaching career (Vernez et al. 2014).

This form of preparing teachers has roots in the way the Kurdish society looks at education. In the public education system in Kurdistan, teaching is understood as a job of delivering to the students what is put forward in the curriculum, which consists of a static body of information and facts designed by the Kurdistan Regional Government's Ministry of Education. Students are required to regurgitate the curriculum content the way the education system in Kurdistan has approved. Teachers, therefore, become the mediators between the curriculum and the students, and neither the students nor teachers have any control and say over the content, organization and purpose of the curriculum. Teachers' preparation and training programs in Kurdistan mainly focus on two things: a) acquiring the body of information and fact that will be passed on to students, and b) acquiring general guidelines in educational and behavioral psychology, methods of teaching and classroom management. Other than these, not much critical and creative thinking, participation, professional development, and innovation in pedagogy are expected from teachers. Narrowing the process of teaching into a technical task of delivering information

undermines the professional aspect of teaching and the political, cultural and social significance of knowledge production and advancement (Personal correspondence with Wahab[3], 2014).

Besides, due to the central bureaucratic nature of the education system in Kurdistan, neither the teachers nor the students feel empowered in the overall process. Teachers-autonomy is completely negated as they are assigned to a curriculum which they cannot go beyond. Furthermore, they are being trained in a system that is central too, so, they have not been prepared to be independent thinkers. Little (1995) suggests that for student teachers to be professional, they should experience autonomy within their teacher education programs. Therefore, we do not expect our teachers to practice teacher autonomy or student autonomy because they have not been prepared to do so. Sofi-Karim (2015) describes the centralized education system of Kurdistan as "spoon-feeding", a teaching culture in which students and teachers are passive. Teachers and students are assigned to some tasks and are not permitted to go beyond those tasks.

Sofi-Karim (2015) and Vernez et al. (2014) found that the teacher-centered tradition of the teacher education programs in Kurdistan is transferred to schools. Teachers are looked at like authority figures who have the final say over everything inside the classroom. This tradition lacks meaningful cooperation and collaboration among the students themselves on one side and between students and teachers on the other side. Furthermore, it produces passive students who are treated as vessels to be filled. This old-fashioned identity of the teacher as authority figure creates uncomfortable classrooms where the students cannot learn properly because they do not have any sense of belonging. Instead, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) believe that we

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[3] Wahab is a Kurdish educational researcher.

need to look at our students as potential and active learners who have their own opinions, perspectives and experiences. This collaborative perspective will help teachers to use these opinions and sources of knowledge to facilitate learning and improve the achievement of all the students and teachers.

One of the big issues in teacher education programs in Kurdistan is that there is no meaningful relationship, cooperation and collaboration between the ME and MHESR. They function as two independent institutions which are not connected in any way. Teacher education programs do not consult the schools to become familiar and aware of the current schooling needs of the society that is rapidly changing. This unhealthy connection results in having teachers who are not prepared to recognize the real needs of the schooling system. They are not prepared to be responsive to the needs of the schools and the students, because they have never been aware of such needs during their pre-service preparation. Meaningful cooperation between colleges of educations and schools could result in the growth of the prospective teachers and students. Regular meetings between teacher educators and school professionals is crucial to find the gaps in the teacher education programs (Sofi-Karim, Vernez et al.).

Assumptions

It is assumed that the participants of the study will honestly answer the survey questions, the interview questions, and the follow-up questions because they feel that this will be an important study concerning EFL teacher preparation.

Limitations on Generalizability

Because the researcher dealt with EFL teachers who have graduated from governmental universities in Iraqi-Kurdistan, the findings cannot be generalized to the other parts of the world

or even the other parts of Iraq. Governmental universities in general and colleges of education

and basic education in particular have a special system and curriculum that is unique to the

Kurdistan Region. However, because the governmental universities in Kurdistan are run by a

central institution, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, they have much the

same curriculum and therefore the findings can be used to improve the education of students and

all EFL teachers in Kurdistan who have graduated from such universities.

Delimitations Regarding Nature of Project

One of the delimitations of this study is that I could not interview the participants in person

because of distance and visa concerns. Therefore, I collected the data through Skype interviews,

E-mail correspondence and Facebook chats.

Definitions

KRG   Kurdistan Regional Government is a federal entity of Iraq. It is the official ruling

            body of the predominantly Kurdish region of Northern Iraq referred to as Iraqi

            Kurdistan.

EFL   English as a Foreign Language. An EFL classroom is one in which English is not

            the native language. EFL is used in context to teaching English to groups of

            students in their own country.

ESL   English as a Second Language. An ESL classroom is one in which English is the

            primary national language. Teaching English in multilingual groups in a country

            where English is the official or dominant language

ME   Ministry of Education is a body of KRG in charge of K-12 education in Iraqi

            Kurdistan. Ministry of Education hires teachers, develops the school curriculums

            and observes schools' performance. In addition, the ME administers national exit

            exams.

MHESR   Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is a body of KRG in charge

            of higher education in Iraqi Kurdistan. MHESR's duties include policy, research,

            and university teacher development. The public and private universities function

            independently and the MHESR acts as an observer. MHESR is also in charge of

            pre-service teacher preparation for K-12 schools.

TESOL   Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. The teaching of English to

            people whose first language is not English, especially in an English-speaking

            country.

MATESOL   Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This study attempted to examine the perceptions of in-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Kurdistan about how adequately they feel they have been prepared to be EFL teachers by the institutions which are in charge of EFL teacher preparation in Kurdistan. To explore the issues surrounding adequate EFL teacher preparation, a subset of literature has been selected and reviewed based on their relevance to the following:

1. Who is a well-prepared teacher? Who is an effective EFL teacher?

2. The nature and quality of subject matter (coursework) in teacher preparation

3. The nature and quality of practicum (field experience) in teacher preparation

Who is a Well-prepared Teacher?

Why do we need to care so much about the quality of teachers? Does the effectiveness of teachers make any difference in the overall process of education in general and students' achievement in particular? The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) made a very comprehensive review of the relevant literature on teacher preparation (Allen, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Goldhaber, 2006) and came up with four key findings (2015, p. 3):

1. Teacher preparation helps candidates develop the knowledge and skills they need in the classroom.

2. Well prepared teachers are more likely to remain in teaching.

3. Well prepared teachers produce higher student achievement.

4. Leading industrialized nations invest heavily in pre-service teacher preparation.

Therefore, teacher education programs need to pay more attention to teacher quality. To do so, they need to deepen their understanding of effective teachers in education in general, and in specific domains of education such as second language teacher education in particular. However, a well or adequately prepared teacher might have different meanings according to the perspective and point of view of different people who are involved in the process of education in a way or another. The characteristics of a well-prepared teacher might be different in the eyes of student teacher educators, prospective teachers, in-service novice and experienced teachers and in the eyes of students. Guyton (2000) defines effectiveness in terms of being powerful. She explains that adequately prepared teachers are the ones who have the power to change themselves and their students. Therefore, powerful teachers can have a positive effect on their students' achievement and eventually on the overall process of learning. Cheung's (2006) findings assert that well-prepared teachers are the ones who have the power to change themselves in a way to be able to meet their learners' needs and interests.

Teachers' adequate preparation has also been associated with their ability to use instructional time effectively, provide a comfortable classroom environment, and to maintain a positive student-teacher interaction environment where learners feel that they are engaged in the learning process (Kyriakides, Campbell & Christofidou, 2002). In an interesting study in Turkey, Cakmak (2009) explored the characteristics of an effective teacher from the prospective teachers' point of view. She found that the five characteristics of an effective teacher that are considered to be the most significant according to these prospective teachers are being able to (1) state the aim of the lesson, (2) keep students active in the lesson, (3) enjoy his/her job, (4) teach with students' interests and talents, and (5) establish a good approach with students. Beside these common

characteristics of a well-prepared teacher, ESL/EFL teachers need to have some extra characteristics to be considered effective ESL/EFL teachers. What are these characteristics? How can ESL/EFL teacher education programs prepare such teachers? What is the importance of coursework and field experience in such preparation? What follows is my attempt to answer these questions through the relevant literature on these topics.

Effective ESL/EFL Teacher

The general characteristics of effective EFL/ESL teachers are usually put into three categories of knowledge: (1) subject matter knowledge (2) pedagogical knowledge and (3) socio-effective skills (Park & Lee, 2006). Subject matter knowledge is the domain-specific knowledge. In other words, effective teachers command the knowledge base of their field (Darling-Hammond & Bransford 2005; Velez-Rendon, 2002). In ESL for example, teachers need to be proficient in the target language and know about the structure (syntax and grammar), phonetics and phonology of the English language. Pedagogical knowledge is the ability of teachers to transfer the knowledge they possess to the learners and make this knowledge comprehensible and understandable for them. Socio-effective knowledge is the ability of teachers in making meaningful connections with their students and dealing with their everyday issues and problems (Darling-Hammond and Bransford).

Furthermore, to better understand these characteristics, we need to examine them from the different perspectives of the people who are engaged in the process of ESL/EFL teaching and learning. Who are well-prepared or effective EFL/ESL teachers according to expert educators, EFL teachers and EFL students? Certainly, there are some common characteristics of an adequately prepared teacher, no matter in what major he or she is, like being responsive, self-regulated, fair and so on. However, there are some characteristics that are major specific. EFL

teachers, for example, need to have some very specific abilities to be considered as well prepared EFL teachers. Over the last three decades, many researchers have investigated the behaviors and characteristics of effective ESL/EFL teachers (Bell, 2005; Brosh 1996; Celik, Arikan & Caner, 2013; Hassan, 2014; Park & Lee, 2006; Sofi-Karim, 2015; Wichadee, 2010). Bell (2005), an expert educator in the field defines an effective EFL teacher as the one who "provides learners with the grammatical (syntactical and morphological), lexical, phonological, pragmatic, and sociocultural knowledge and interactive practice they need to communicate successfully in the target language". (p. 260). In other words, Bell believes that an effective EFL teacher is the one who has mastery of the knowledge about English language and can transfer this knowledge to his/her students.

However, this could be slightly different in the perspective of EFL learners. In research done in Turkey by Celik, Arikan and Caner (2013), EFL learners believed that an effective EFL teacher is the one who exhibits fairness well, is successful in reducing students' foreign language anxiety, has a sound knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, teaches pronunciation and speaking well, and is highly skilled at providing explanations in the students' mother tongue (Turkish) when necessary. Dealing with and reducing the learners' foreign language anxiety is also one of the findings of Kourieos and Evripidou (2013) in their research in Cyprus. The participants of their study who were EFL university learners described effective EFL teachers as the ones who engage them in meaningful activities to reduce their anxiety. The findings suggest that the authoritarian figure of the EFL teachers has negative impact on the learners' anxiety and makes them feel that they are not able to learn the language.

Similarly, Barnes (2010) examined the perceptions of Korean university students about the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher. He found that students were much concerned about

the friendly and supportive personality of their EFL teachers and its role in reducing their foreign language anxiety. They argued that good EFL teachers usually make them feel valuable and comfortable and help them improve their self-confidence by engaging them in group work and meaningful activities. The findings of a study by Mollica and Nuessel (1997) support the findings of these studies in which the participants, ESL learners, emphasize with the positive role of the ESL teachers in reducing their second language anxiety by creating a safe and comfortable class environment.

As one might imagine, these characteristics are much related to the context of the language learning as well. For example, in an intensive course of learning English for communication purposes, the learners expect their teachers to be proficient English speakers and show mastery of communicative abilities like pronunciation and knowledge of vocabulary. In another intensive course that intends to prepare learners for more sophisticated things like reading and writing, EFL teachers are required to have some additional abilities in grammar (syntax and morphology), creative writing, and reading comprehension. Therefore, the way different learners interpret the characteristics of effective EFL teachers is related to the context of the learning and its purpose.

The proficiency and fluency of the EFL teachers in the target language is highlighted in several studies. Brosh (1996) investigated this characteristic of EFL teachers among Israeli high school students. Most of the participants stated that the proficiency of their English teacher is an important element that motivates them to learn better. Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul's (2012) findings support Brosh's argument of the importance of EFL teachers' proficiency in English. The participants, high school students, believed that the communicative abilities of their EFL teachers is essential. They also emphasized their EFL teachers' ability in engaging them in

productive and meaningful activities and their ability in organizing such activities. Khaksefidi (2015) asked Iranian faculty members, EFL teachers and students "what makes an effective EFL teacher?" Like other studies, the participants gave priority to the proficiency and fluency of the EFL teachers in the target language. The findings show that students prefer those EFL teachers whose pronunciation is close to the native speakers of English. They argue that EFL teachers are their only sources of the target language, therefore, they should be excellent English speakers.

Similar findings were also reported by Kurdish researchers Sofi- Karim (2015) and Hassan (2014). They found that Kurdish students value the proficiency and fluency of EFL teachers in the target language and believe that if an EFL teacher is not a good English speaker, they cannot learn the English language very well. This is understandable when we see that EFL teachers are the only sources of English knowledge for these kids. The classroom is the only place where they can really encounter authentic materials, and practice and improve their English language. Once they go out of school, they have no interaction with people who can speak English. Therefore, EFL teachers have the responsibility to act as excellent models.

Also, EFL teachers might have different perspectives on a well prepared EFL teacher. Wichadee (2010) based his investigation of effective English language teachers on four main categories of (1) English proficiency, (2) pedagogical knowledge, (3) organization and communication skills, and (4) socio-effective skills. Most of the teachers who participated in this study believed that English proficiency is the key characteristic of an effective language teacher, while the student participants ranked teachers' organization and communication skills as the most important quality of a well-prepared EFL teacher. In a similar study in Korea, Park and Lee (2006) discovered that teachers and students have contrasting perceptions on the qualities of a good EFL teacher. Korean EFL students ranked teachers' English language proficiency and

skills over their organization and communicative skills, while Korean EFL teachers positioned pedagogical knowledge above all other characteristics of an effective EFL teacher.

The Nature and Quality of Subject Matter (Coursework) in Teacher Preparation

Due to the rapid changes of societies in the modern world, teacher education programs' curriculum needs to be changed continuously to meet the new needs and demands of the modern generation. As stated by Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) curriculum is not static, but is continuously negotiated. Darling-Hammond and Branford reviewed several studies about teacher effectiveness and its relation to the quality and amount of coursework taken by student teachers during their pre-service preparation. They argue that there is a positive relationship between teacher effectiveness and the quality and quantity of the coursework they have taken during their teacher education. Scholz's (2014) findings support Darling-Hammond and Bransford's review of research, she found that there is a positive relationship between the amount of relevant coursework taken and a teacher's sense of preparedness. She states that those EFL teachers who took relevant classes like (learning theory, developmental psychology and teaching methods) reported that they were well or very well prepared. Research in Kurdistan suggest that a large majority of students in English Departments are not satisfied with the coursework and consider it to be useless. Hassan (2014) found that about 96% of the participants in his research argue that most of the coursework is theoretical. They learn theoretical things that they do not have enough chance to practice. Therefore, most of what they learn is unhelpful and impractical. Most of the students who participated in his study believed that "Very little of what they learn is usable after graduation" (p. 34). They think that the coursework presented in the English departments do not prepare them adequately so that they can meet the requirements of an occupation related to their major.

Furthermore, Baecher's (2012) study on the perceptions of new in-service ESL teachers about their pre-service preparation reveals their emphasis on the importance of coursework in preparing ESL teachers. Most of the participants argued that the coursework they have taken during their preparation was theoretical and impractical. They complained that once they became teachers in real classrooms, they encountered many issues that they did not know how to manage. Baecher states that part of the issue goes back to the irrelevant and impractical coursework that is offered in such programs. She suggested that the coursework be designed according to the needs of the students and the schooling system. The gap between the ESL teacher preparation programs and the real needs of the students might lead to under-prepared teachers who cannot cope with the real-world classrooms and the dominant schooling system. In Baecher's study, the participants ranked the second language acquisition as the best class they have taken in their preservice program, the K-12 teaching methods and practicum took the second place in this ranking.

Sofi-Karim (2015), one of the very few Kurdish researchers who investigated EFL teacher preparation in Kurdistan, argues that the under-achievement of Kurdish k-12 learners in English goes back to unqualified English teachers. Sofi-Karim's findings suggest that EFL teachers are not well prepared because they have not taken enough coursework on teaching methods and are not trained in real classroom settings. He asserts that deficiency of pre-service teacher programs in the colleges of education and basic education is one of the reasons behind the lack of English language proficiency among high school graduates. Hassan (2014) agrees with Sofi-Karim and argues that the English teaching materials that are used in Kurdistan's classrooms do not reflect the needs of the students and the capacities and knowledge of the teachers. "The current university materials, as an important source of input in the process of learning English are not

suitable and are of limited help," he reported (p. 5). Sofi- Karim also found many of the coursework taught in the colleges of education and basic education / English department to be irrelevant. He believes that most of the materials focus on the knowledge of language and literature rather than the methods of teaching that knowledge.

Therefore, it is important for ESL/EFL teacher education programs to consider the opinions of the in-service teachers about the coursework that can prepare them in a better way. In-service teachers have the advantage of being in the real schooling system for a while and therefore are familiar with the everyday needs and problems of the classrooms. They are the best sources of knowledge for revising and developing the ESL teacher education programs. But, unfortunately their voices have been marginalized and are rarely listened to in the process of decision making in general and curriculum development in particular. This means in-service teachers who perfectly understand the needs of their students and can be of great help in developing a good curriculum for them are excluded from this process.

The Nature and Quality of Field Experience (Clinical Practice) and a Teacher's Sense of

Preparedness

Field experience, usually referred to as practicum or teaching experience, is considered as one of the cornerstones of teacher preparation programs, and if not done adequately it can result in under prepared teachers (Darling-Hammond & Chung, 2002; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Ingersol, Gang, Meilu, Lai, Fujita, Kim & Boonyananta, 2007; Kee, 2012). Ingersol et al. (2007) stated that "The problem of low-quality teaching can be traced to inadequate and insufficient pre-employment training" (p. 1). Research has shown that there is a positive and strong relationship between teachers' sense of preparedness and the quality and longitude of the practicum they have taken in their pre-service preparation. Kee (2012) found that teachers who

participated in a year-long practicum felt more prepared to teach than those who did not. Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005) assert that those student teachers who had field experiences early in their programs performed better as teachers. They believe that insufficient fieldwork is one of the major issues in teacher education programs that cause under-prepared teachers. "Fieldwork has often been divorced from coursework, inadequately designed, and placements have often failed to reflect standards for good teaching" (p. 454). Darling-Hammond and Chung concluded that "more systematic and connected clinical experience" (2002, p. 287) is a key to better teacher preparation. Like Kee, they suggest that a one-year long field experience can prepare teachers well if it is done with attention and consistent supervision from teacher educators and cooperating teachers. Sofi-Karim (2015) found the same thing in Kurdistan. He believes that insufficient and impractical student teacher practice in real classroom settings is one of the most important reasons behind teacher's sense of unpreparedness. He also found that the practicum period is too short, is poorly designed and is poorly followed up by the faculty supervisors and the cooperating teachers. Vernez et al. (2014) found that Kurdish prospective teachers are not involved in any clinical experience until late in their programs.

The philosophical perception of different teacher preparation programs towards the practicum is a key point to understanding the objectives and components of it. Some programs look at the practicum as an opportunity to develop certain qualities and skills in novice teachers and help them for the real classrooms (Richards, 1996). The perspective of such programs towards the teacher preparation is more of a training in which they try to implement and develop certain skills in novice teachers. On the other hand, some other programs look at the process of practicum from a developmental perspective in which novice teachers find the opportunity to apply theory into practice, make mistakes, ask questions, investigate and develop their teaching

abilities and skills through the process. The general philosophy of such programs is to increase the learning awareness of the teachers and help them become life-long learners (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Therefore, the practicum and its objectives are very much under the influence of the general philosophy of the teacher education programs towards the objectives of teacher preparation (Richards & Crookes, 1988). Practicum in Kurdistan is affected by the general philosophy of teacher education that emphasizes on training rather than education (Sofi-Karim, 2015; Vernez et al. 2014).

In teacher education programs' practicum, constructive post observation discussions and collaboration among student teachers, supervisors and cooperating teachers are crucial in raising student teachers' awareness. He (2009) stated, "Without adequate communication between mentors and pre-service teachers regarding teaching expectations and beliefs, pre-service teachers leave the teacher education programs ill-prepared to negotiate potential conflict between their beliefs and reality of teaching, leading to dissonance and resistance to adaptation" (p. 264). Freeman (1991) explains that the practicum should foster a relationship between teacher educators and student teachers in a way to help the prospective teachers by providing them with insights and inputs to improve their teaching. The teacher educator's responsibility is to help the student teachers teach more effectively, but this cannot happen when the student teachers are not supervised and supported appropriately during their practice teaching.

In the context of Kurdistan, Iraq and the wider region, supervisors expect student teachers to accept their "advice" as a prescription and preferred methodology to teach. There is often no constructive discussion after the observation and no room for meaningful feedback. Time is limited, and the student teachers are only supervised once during the eight weeks period of the practice teaching. This short visit has no constructive consequences and is only done for the sake

of a grade that is supposed to evaluate the performance of the student teachers. Furthermore, this type of supervision increases the anxiety of the student teachers and will not lead to a process of awareness-raising or collaboration that is necessary to help them become continuous learners (Sofi-Karim, 2015; Vernez et al., 2014).

Yet another issue is the role and responsibilities of the cooperating teachers that is not defined anywhere in the system. The cooperating schools and teachers are chosen on the basis of availability. Cooperating teachers are largely passive in the process. They are not instructed and encouraged to supervise the classrooms of the student teachers, they do not discuss with them about their teaching and they do not give them feedback. The reality is that by the time the student teachers arrive at schools to begin their practice teaching, they begin to act as substitute teachers. The cooperating teachers compete to accept student teachers because they find it a golden opportunity to use them as substitute teachers and decrease the load of their classes. Many student teachers reported that they were left alone in the classroom from the very beginning of the practice teaching period. Therefore, the student teachers are left on their own to teach the class and are responsible for all the activities and grades without the help of the cooperating teachers. No feedback is required from the cooperating teachers and therefore the student teachers are not sure of the correctness of their activities and actions inside the classrooms. They are supposed to learn all the skills during the observation process (Sofi-Karim, 2015; Vernez et al., 2014).

There are no detailed handbooks or set of guidelines for the cooperating teachers to explain their roles and responsibilities in the practicum. Neither, the ministry of education nor the programs of teacher preparation have provided the cooperating teachers with information for the practicum. Part of this goes back to the lack of a meaningful collaboration between the colleges

of education that are responsible for teacher preparation and schools. As a result, important things like the practicum that needs a common understanding and strategy from the two parties remains vague and impractical. Furthermore, cooperating teachers do not receive any training to act as mentors or cooperating teachers. Payant and Murphy (2012) reported similar results in their study concerning the roles and responsibilities of the cooperating teachers in the practicum. In their study, the cooperating teachers complained that they did not know their exact duties as cooperating teachers. In other words, their responsibilities as cooperating teachers were "poorly defined" (p. 9) by the practicum instructors.

Practicum in Language Teacher Education

Practicum is an integral part in most of the language teacher education (LTE) programs around the world. In many of these programs, practicum is designed to help the student teachers put the theories they have learned into practice and get the chance to become familiar with the real world of teaching (Canh, 2014; Farrell, 2007, 2008; Johnson, 1996; Palmer, 1995; Richards & Crookes, 1988). This practice teaching is usually supervised and mentored by two group of people, the faculty members or practicum instructors who regularly visit the schools and supervise student teachers and the cooperating teachers who work in the field schools and mentor the student teachers' daily activities (Crookes, 2003).

One of the first studies in LTE practicum was conducted by Richards and Crookes (1988) in which they investigated the objectives, implementation and effectiveness of practicum in 60 TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) programs around the United States. They discovered that the objectives of the practicum courses in these programs are built on their philosophy towards LTE. Some of these programs look at teacher preparation like a training in which they teach a certain type of skills to the prospective teachers and help them practice and

show mastery of these skills. Some other programs, however, look at the preparation of teachers in terms of education. In such programs teacher preparation is not defined in terms of mastering certain skills, but rather a life-long process of learning awareness (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). In another study, Stoynoff (1999) describes a successful model of TESOL practicum in the U.S. In his description, he explains that the success of the program is because of meaningful collaboration among the three groups of people who are involved in the process, namely the student teachers, the cooperating teachers, and the faculty supervisors. Stoynoff argues that in this model the three groups need to meet regularly and work as a team to achieve good results. In a similar study done by Payant and Murphy (2012), the importance of teamwork and constant communication among student teachers, cooperating teachers, and faculty supervisors is one of the major findings.

Flowerdew (1999) analyzed the practicum of an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher education program in Hong Kong. He found that the success of the program is due to its ability in dealing with the idealistic views of the student teachers about teaching and recognizing the realities of the classrooms. In other words, the program tries to make the practicum experience a real challenge in which students face real classroom difficulties. Canh (2014) conducted a study about these classroom realities and the idealistic views of student teachers, which he calls great expectations, in Vietnam. He found that these tensions that are caused by the student teachers' misconceptions of the real world of teaching affect their capabilities and attitudes towards teaching negatively.

In his case study of a student teacher in Singapore, Farrell (2007) studied the effect of critical reflection in EFL teacher education practicum. He realized that the meaningful cooperation between student teachers and faculty supervisors is a key factor in the practicum.

Farrell argues that critical reflections and meaningful discussions between the student teachers and faculty supervisors increases the learning-awareness of the prospective teachers and helps them improve their teaching abilities and get ready for the real world of teaching. Ongondo and Borg's (2011) findings about the influence of supervision on the practice of English language student teachers in Kenya support Farrell's conclusions. They argue that the supervisions are brief, and the feedback is poor. Therefore, not much real learning about teaching accrues.

Furthermore, Payant and Murphy's (2012) study is one of rare studies about the roles and responsibilities of cooperating teachers in TESOL practicum from their own point of view. In their study, they found that cooperating teachers were not sure about their responsibilities as mentors. They did not have any guidelines to follow and that they had not been trained to be cooperating teachers. In addition, the findings of the study indicated that there was no meaningful communication between the cooperating teachers and the faculty supervisors that lead to a low-quality practicum experience. In another study done in an English language Teaching (ELT) preparation program in Singapore, Farrell (2008) investigated the perceptions of 60 student teachers about the roles and responsibilities of cooperating teachers during the practicum. Farrell stated that most of the participants complained about the poor collaboration and feedback of the cooperating teachers and that they were not instructed and trained to be cooperating teachers. The same findings are reported by Sofi-Karim (2015) in his study of English language education in Kurdistan. He argued that the lack of collaboration between the cooperating teachers and faculty members affected the EFL teacher education practicum negatively, and that the cooperating teachers are not informed and instructed about their responsibilities in the process.

ESL/EFL Teachers' Perception of Their Preparation

We know very little of the perceptions of in-service ESL/EFL teachers about their pre-service preparation (Baecher, 2012). Fradd and Lee (1997) investigated the opinions of the graduates of an MATESOL program on how their teacher education programs prepared them to meet the challenges of their everyday classrooms. The findings show that this program failed to prepare ESL teachers to meet the needs of their English language learners in special education. Furthermore, the participants asked for more field experience and practice teaching opportunities before graduation. In another study Gandara, Maxwell-Joly, and Driscoll (2005) examined 5000 California ESL teachers' experiences about their everyday challenges in their classrooms and the way they have been prepared to be ESL teachers. Findings show the participants' low ability in facing the variable needs of their learners, lack of instructional time needed for ESL learners, and dealing with unmotivated students.

In a recent study, Baecher (2012) explored the perceptions of 77 graduates of an MA TESOL program in the U.S about their preservice preparation. About 62.3 % of the participants agreed that their TESOL program prepared them well and 23.4 % said that they have not been adequately prepared. Baecher suggest that ESL teacher education programs take into consideration the opinions of their graduates in order to develop their programs. Furthermore, she argues that in order to prepare ESL teachers adequately, these programs need to collaborate with schools to be aware of the most current needs of the English language learners (ELLs) and the schooling system. Scholz (2014) asked 100 in-service EFL teachers in Thailand "to what extent do you feel prepared to teach?" The participants who described themselves as well-prepared where the ones who took subject specific courses and completed training and had one year of practice teaching. Scholz's findings about the practice teaching supports the findings of

Gandara, Maxwell-Joly, and Driscoll in which the participants asked for more supportive and practical practice teaching opportunities. The two studies suggest that prospective ESL/EFL teachers need to spend more time in real classrooms and get more meaningful feedback from their faculty member supervisors and cooperative teachers in order to become effective teachers.

Angelidou (2011) came up with similar findings in her study of the EFL teachers' experiences and opinions towards their pre-service preparation in Cyprus. The majority of the participants who were prospective and practicing EFL teachers complained that they could not find a real connection between theory and practice. They argued that they took several theoretical courses during their pre-service preparation that they could never use in their real classrooms. Furthermore, the findings show that the participants were not satisfied with the way they were treated as prospective EFL teachers. They were expected to become EFL teachers while they were treated as EFL learners during their pre-service preparation. In other words, they were not given the chance to act as real teachers; therefore, they could not easily transform their identity from being an EFL student to be an EFL teacher. Angelidou suggests that EFL teacher education programs make more meaningful connections between theory and practice and give their prospective teachers the chance to act as real classroom teachers in order to prepare them for the transfer phase.

The perceptions of EFL teachers in Kurdistan were also examined by Sofi-Karim (2015) and Vernez, Culbertson & Constant (2014). The findings of Sofi-Karim's study reveal that the majority of the participants consider themselves as inadequately prepared by their teacher education programs. The Kurdish EFL teachers who participated in this study had three main concerns about their preservice preparation. First, the curriculum is too old and out of date.

Second, the practicum is too short and impractical. Third, most of the faculty members are not proficient in the English language.

Vernez, Culbertson & Constant (2014) argue that part of the underachievement of Kurdish students in EFL learning goes back to the inadequately prepared EFL teachers. They state that the EFL education programs do not consider the needs of the K-12 students and the schooling system and are therefore incapable of training well-prepared teachers. Furthermore, the in-service EFL teachers do not receive regular training to update themselves on the most modern approaches of teaching foreign languages to strengthen their teaching abilities. Teachers are not prepared well enough to teach the new EFL curriculum which requires a student-centered approach. EFL teachers usually rely on traditional teacher-centered methods because they have not been trained to teach the new curriculum. Vernez et al. state that EFL teachers are not trained to teach the new curriculum and are therefore unsuccessful in teaching it properly.

The Kurdistan Schools' EFL curriculum is based on Communicative Language Teaching[4] approach, while this is difficult to apply. It is not practical and applicable due to the large class size and the deficient infrastructure such as, inappropriate school buildings and lack of necessary equipment for English language teaching according to this approach. Furthermore, EFL teachers are not prepared in a way to practice this approach in their classes. This is largely related to the nature of the education in Kurdistan in which the Ministries of Education and Higher Education in general, and colleges of education and schools in particular do not cooperate and collaborate to build meaningful connections and arrive at with informed decisions about the real needs of the students and the schooling system and preparing teachers accordingly.

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[4] Communicative Language Teaching is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the goal of study.

Hassan (2014) argues that the materials that are used and the courses that are offered in EFL teacher education programs are not sufficient to meet the needs of the student teachers and could not prepare them adequately. Vernez et al. argue that only 8% of the material in colleges of education focuses on pedagogy and teaching methods. As a result, teachers are not well prepared to transfer the knowledge they have to their students. In addition, they stated that practice teaching is too short and impractical.

Research on Teacher Education in Kurdistan

Ali (2012) argues that the university curriculum, including teacher education, are outdated and needs to be changed and renewed according to the needs of global changes. He stated, "The poor quality of academic programs leads to the poor academic level of the graduates and underperformance, besides inactive interaction between the higher education and the society" (p. 622). Ali believes that the reform process goes through many levels of bureaucracy and become ineffective when it is to be implemented in the real world of teaching and learning.

Vernez, Culbertson and Constant (2010) conducted an interesting research about the overall education system in Kurdistan. In part of their research, they explored both the pre-service and in-service teacher education programs and the difficulties in producing well-prepared teachers. In their investigation of the in-service teacher preparation they come up with these findings:

1. Many practicing (in-service) teachers lack the required knowledge to effectively teach the new curriculum

2. Practicing teachers receive too little training

3. Many practicing teachers are called upon to teach subjects outside of their specializations.

4. Practicing teachers have difficulties implementing teaching methods for student-centered learning

Furthermore, Vernez, Culbertson and Constant described the difficulties in pre-service teacher education in the following points:

1. The current system (central admission) for assigning students to post-secondary education does not place high achievers in the teaching profession
2. The teacher colleges do not provide enough training in pedagogy and teaching methods
3. The teacher colleges do not provide enough training on the new curriculum

Another study conducted by Sofi-Karim (2015) explored the English Language teaching in Kurdistan. He asserts that the deficiency of teacher preparation in their pre-service programs and their in-service professional development is one of the reasons behind the decline of English language learning in the schools. Sofi-Karim's findings suggest that Kurdish EFL teachers are not well-prepared because they have not taken enough coursework on teaching methods and are not trained in real classrooms settings. Furthermore, most of the coursework focus on the English language and literature rather than knowledge and methods of teaching English.

Hassan (2014) argues that the teaching English curriculum that is used in Kurdistan's EFL teacher education programs does not reflect the needs of the students and the capabilities and knowledge of the teachers. He stated, "The current university materials, as an important source of input in the process of learning English, are not suitable and are of limited help" (p. 33).

In a survey conducted by RAND in (2010) less than 40% of the teachers who surveyed rated themselves as well or vey well-prepared. In the same survey about half of the English teachers

reported that they had not received any training or professional development courses at all during

their teaching.

Chapter Three

Research Design

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the Kurdish EFL teachers' perceptions as to how well they believed their pre-service teacher programs prepared them to become teachers of English as a Foreign Language in basic and preparatory schools in Kurdistan. To this end, this chapter contains the following sections to describe the methodology that was used in this research: research questions, the positionality of the researcher, nature of the study, participants, data collection, data analysis, research procedure, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations

Research Questions

This research addressed the following questions:

1. What opinions do in-service EFL teachers in Iraqi-Kurdistan say they hold about their pre-service preparation?

2. What do in-service EFL teachers in Iraqi-Kurdistan say they think about the relevance and quality of the coursework they have taken during their teacher education?

3. What do in-service EFL teachers in Iraqi-Kurdistan say they think about the quality and length of the practicum during their teacher education?

The Positionality of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is considered to be the main instrument in collecting data. The researcher is a human who looks at the research through his/her lens and as a result always brings an element of bias to the study (Yin, 2015). Therefore, the researcher's values,

expectations, experiences and biases can influence the research process and need to be identified (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I graduated from Salahaddin University/College of education with a major in English and a minor in education. Therefore, I have gone through the same process of EFL teacher education as the participants in the study and this has certainly influenced my positionality towards the issue under investigation. I have taught English in a high school for two years. Later, I earned an M.A. in English literature and taught English short story in Soran University/College of Education for three years. I am interested in the way we prepare EFL teachers in Kurdistan, and how we can improve it. To further explore this issue and the existing context, I wanted to know the perceptions of in-service EFL teachers about their training programs and whether they believe that they have been adequately prepared.

Nature of the Study

I decided to employ a qualitative approach to examine the issue under investigation for three reasons. First, I believe that human subjects can be best studied by qualitative means. I found the qualitative study a place where I can hear the voices of the participants and approach the problem through their perspectives and understanding of the problem. Merriam and Tisdell state that "In fact, we believe that research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people's lives" (2016, p. 1). In another sense, this tended to be a form of evaluation research through which I investigated a process or program (i.e. the EFL teacher preparation programs in Kurdistan) by collecting and analyzing data "to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programing" (Patton, 2015, p. 18). I conducted this research through EFL teachers' perspectives because their experiences and points of view about their preparation process are marginalized. They are seldom listened to and are

neglected in the process of decision-making about their preparation that is particularly related to them (Sofi-Karim, 2015; Vernez et al., 2014).

The second reason for choosing a qualitative methodology for conducting this study is that this type of study can show a whole picture of the problem that is referred to as a holistic account by Creswell. He stated, "Qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges" (2007, p. 39). This is appropriate in the setting of Kurdistan because we do not have enough research done on the field of EFL teacher preparation. As a result, we do not have enough date, "big picture", to inform us about the perceptions of EFL teachers concerning their pre-service preparation. Third, the study is descriptive. I have presented the findings in the form of richly descriptive data. However, I have also used a survey for the purpose of triangulation and getting a more comprehensive perspective on the nature of the problem.

Furthermore, a case study approach was employed to gather in-depth data about the experiences, feelings and concerns of the individual participants towards their training program (the case). Merriam and Tisdell stated "A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (2016, p. 37). Creswell's definition of a case study is more detailed and comprehensive. For him:

> Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or a multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes (2013, p. 97).

The researcher has investigated the perceptions of a group of teachers who have graduated from an EFL teaching program to describe and analyze the quality of the program.

Participants

The target population of this study was English as a Foreign Language teachers who have graduated from the largest university in the Iraqi-Kurdistan region charged with teacher education. The EFL teacher preparation department of this University was the case under investigation for this study. This university follows the central system and policy administered by the KRG's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. All EFL teachers who have graduated from the governmental colleges of education and basic education/English Departments around the Kurdistan Region have experienced nearly identical systems and undergone the same training procedures during their undergraduate studies. Therefore, all the EFL teacher graduates of this university qualify for this study.

A convenience sampling strategy, based on teachers' willingness to participate, was conducted to gather data. This researcher made a Facebook group of EFL teachers in Kurdistan to facilitate the process of sampling and data collection. The group has about four hundred members who are all EFL teachers in basic and high schools around Kurdistan Region and have graduated from the teacher education program under investigation. A request of participation in the study, explaining all the requirements and rights was sent to all the group members. 380 members of this group agreed to participate in the study. Next, a sample of twenty EFL teachers were chosen from the people who accepted to participate in the study for the in-depth interviews.

Data Collection

Data was collected by using three instruments: survey, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. First, a survey taken from Darling-Hammond (2002) and modified by the researcher was sent to 380 people. From this number 200 surveys came back completed. Second, from these

200 people who completed the surveys, 20 volunteered for the in-depth interviews. Third, the curriculum of the EFL teacher education program and some other related documents such as practicum guidelines and forms were analyzed. In-depth semi-structured interviews were the main source of data collection through this study. There are some very critical hidden sources of information for a qualitative researcher that cannot be observed. Because they cannot be observed by the researcher, feelings, opinions, and experiences of the people who are participating in a study like this are of utmost importance. Interviews help qualitative researchers to uncover these feelings and enter into the world of the participants and see the world through their eyes and understanding (Patton, 2015). Another reason for interviews is to reveal something that happened in the past, something that cannot be observed anymore. "Sometimes you want to know about something that happened in the past. Certainly, you cannot observe it therefore you need to interview someone who had experienced that event" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 104). A semi-structured type of online interview was conducted to help the researcher to be both systematic and flexible at the same time.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis began with the documents. I went over the curriculum and practicum guidelines of the EFL teacher education program to enrich the survey and interview questions. After I received the completed surveys, I entered the data manually into the Excel program. I labeled the entries and continued the process until I received all the completed surveys. Next, I begin to interview the participants. The analysis of data from interviews occurred in two steps (cycles) of open coding and axial coding. In the first cycle (open coding), text is broken down, analyzed, and coded line by line at paragraph level in order to build connections and generate themes. Similar codes are grouped into a specific category. In the

second cycle coding, an axial coding system was developed to label and categorize data. In axial

coding system codes take on hierarchical structure (Saldana, 2013). This helped me to organize

the data in a way to inform me about the most recurring ideas and themes during the process of

data collection. First, all the participants were interviewed one by one. After the first interview,

the emerging themes were labeled and categorized. The researcher then began to make

connections across the individuals looking for a general explanation or interpretation toward the

participants' perceptions about their preparation. The process continued with follow-up questions

to complete the "big picture." The process of analyzing documents were usually simultaneous

with the process of analyzing data from surveys and interviews.

Organization of Findings

The three criteria that helped me organize my findings were the research questions, the

categories that emerged from the data and the reviewed literature. The research questions provided

me with a framework for organizing my findings. In other words, the findings were the answers to

my research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The first question was devoted to the overall

perception of the participants about their preparation. The second question was about the nature

and quality of the coursework. Furthermore, the third question was about the quality of the

practicum and its relationship to the participants' sense of preparedness.

The categories and classifications that emerged after the first and second cycle coding

became the main findings in the study. These categories were considered to be the final

production of data analysis and were therefore considered to be major findings of the study

(Lichtman, 2013).

Another criterion that I considered for organizing my findings was the literature review. In the literature that I have reviewed, there were some findings that I expected to be close to the findings of my own study. Merriam and Tisdell call this "borrowed classification schemes" (p. 212). They argue that one should be careful in dealing with these borrowed classification schemes, because they might lead to biases in his/her own data analysis. By taking this caution into consideration, I did not want the findings of the reviewed literature to limit the findings of my own study. I wanted the literature to inform the study.

Trustworthiness and Dependability

In qualitative research issues of trustworthiness which corresponds to validity and dependability which corresponds to reliability are of specific importance because the researcher is the main instrument in the process of data collection and analysis. The correspondence of the results of the study to the real world is the main concern of internal validity or credibility. Merriam and Tisdell stated, "Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality" (2016, p. 242). One way to increase the credibility or "the correspondence between research and the real world" (Wolcott, 2005, p. 160) is triangulation. Triangulation is the strategy of using multiple methods of data collection or measurement points to make sure that the findings are credible and close to reality (Patton, 2015; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). For trustworthiness and credibility, multiple sources of evidence, survey, in-depth interviews, and document analysis were used. Furthermore, a check mark or respondent validation procedure was employed through which the participants had the chance to review and verify the analysis and results and comment on its accuracy before the final report was written. This increases the trustworthiness of the findings and reduces the possible biases of the researcher (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). To do so, I sent the findings of the study to the participants and asked them to

comment on their accuracy. Twelve of the participants responded to my E-mail and verified that the findings are accurate and close to their overall perception of their pre-service preparation.

Transferability (external validity) deals with the generalizability of the study (Yin, 2015). Similarly, Merriam and Tisdell also stated, "External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to another situation. That is, how generalizable are the results of a research study" (p. 253). Merriam and Tisdell argue that the findings of qualitative research are not meant to be applied to other similar situations. The results of this research can be generalized to the program under this study.

Merriam and Tisdell state, "Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. In other words, if the study is repeated, will it yield the same results" (p. 250). However, they argue that in qualitative research the question of reliability "is not whether findings will be found again (if the study is replicated) but whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 251). To help in establishing reliability triangulation, varied methods of data collection were used, and I followed a protocol of data collection. In addition, I have tried to leave a clear audit trail for researchers to follow. Cohen and Crabtree stated, "An audit trail is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of findings (2006, para. 1)

Ethical Considerations

The issue of ethical considerations is particularly important in qualitative research as human beings are the subjects of study and the researcher is considered to be the main instrument of data collection. Creswell (2013) and Yin (2015) explain that ethical issues deal with the anonymity of the participants, the confidentiality of the data and the sense of participation among

the subjects of the study. Furthermore, Patton (2015) argues that there is a relationship between the trustworthiness of the data and ethics. "Ultimately, for better or worse, the trustworthiness of the data is tied directly to the trustworthiness of those who collect and analyze the data-and their demonstrated competence," he stated (p. 706). I followed four strategies to fulfill the ethical considerations of this study. First, I provided the participants with a consent form explaining all their rights and their role in the process. Second, I used pseudonyms to keep the real names of the participants confidential. Third, I have complied with the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Arkansas. Fourth, the participants had a chance to look at the findings and see if the study's results had any biases or not.

Chapter Four

Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the analysis of the data. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions that English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers hold regarding their preparation in the formal institutions charged with EFL teacher education in Iraqi-Kurdistan. The findings are presented according to the research questions.

The researcher used three main methods for data collection. First, a survey taken from Darling-Hammond (2002) and modified by the researcher was sent to 380 in-service EFL teachers. From this number 200 surveys came back completed. Second, from these 200 participants who completed the surveys, 20 volunteered for the in-depth interviews. Third, the curriculum of the EFL teacher education program under study and some other related documents were analyzed to improve the survey and interview questions and backup findings. The interview questions were sent to the participants through e-mail. Later, for the follow up questions, the researcher corresponded with the participants through Facebook Messenger. For the analysis of the data, the researcher first analyzed and classified the completed surveys. Later, the research interviews were analyzed, coded and categorized. The findings of the study are presented according to the combined analysis of the surveys, interviews and site documents. Furthermore, the findings in this chapter are organized around the three research questions of this study. In addition, the findings are presented under three categories of survey findings, interview findings, and site document findings.

Research Question One

What opinion do in-service EFL teachers in Iraqi-Kurdistan say they hold about their pre-service preparation?

Below the researcher presents the findings of the EFL teachers' perceptions of the adequacy of their pre-service preparation through two themes: the overall perception of EFL teachers' preparation as effective teachers in general, and the teachers' perception of themselves as effective EFL teachers. These two themes emerged from the reviewed literature and the analysis of the data. The first theme is an analysis of the overall perception of the EFL teachers about their pre-service preparation as a teacher. The researcher was interested in knowing about the EFL teachers' ideas of a good teacher and the way they had been prepared. The second theme is more specific. It presents the perceptions of the teachers about the characteristics of a good EFL teacher and the way they think about their own pre-service preparation. Do they think that they were prepared to be good EFL teachers? Do they see these characteristics in themselves?

The Overall Perception of EFL Teachers' Preparation

Survey Findings

About 80% of the EFL teachers who completed the survey considered themselves "not at all prepared." Only 8% of the participants said that they had been "well prepared." Figure 1 on the next page illustrates the participants' perception of their overall preparation.

Figure 1
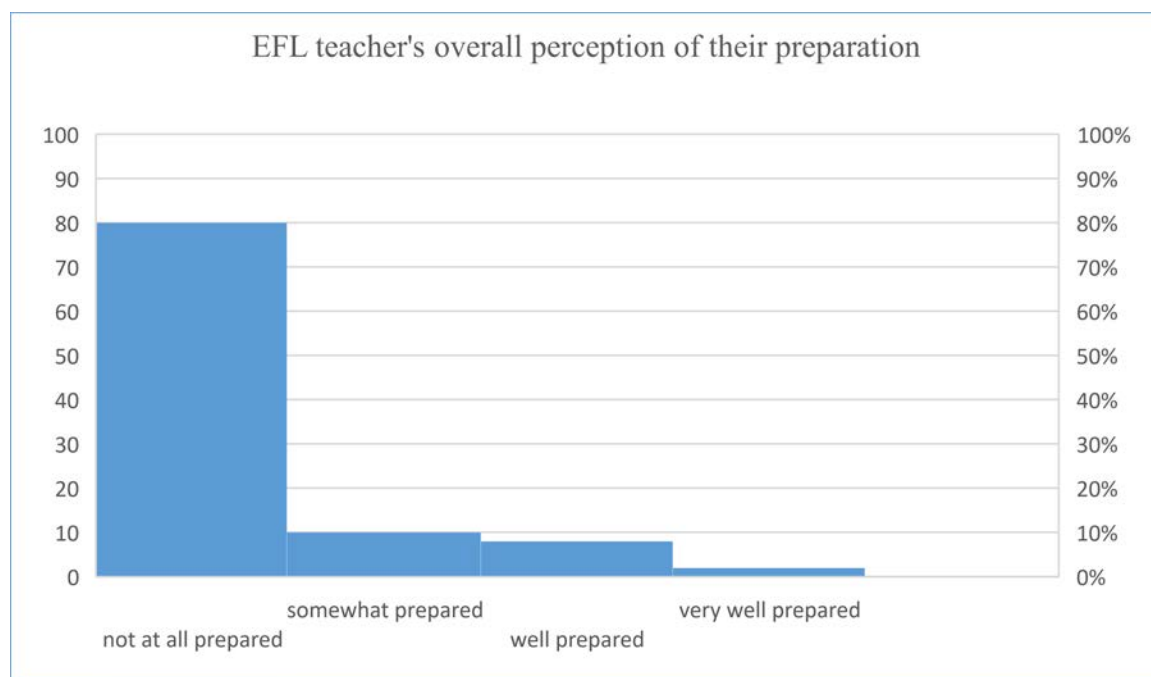
Interview Findings

Most of the teachers I interviewed considered themselves "not very well prepared." They offered different reasons for their poor level of pre-service preparation. Aso (all the names used are pseudonyms), an EFL teacher with more than three years of experience, said, "Well, the biggest issue was that we did not have good teachers at the university to prepare us." It was not just Aso who believed that he did not have good teachers during his pre-service preparation; seven other participants had the same opinion. Mina ironically said, "Our professors themselves were not well prepared to prepare us, so how you expect that we become good teachers?" Another EFL teacher, Nergez, stated the reasons why she is not well prepared:

> I have not been well prepared to become a good teacher because one, the university lecturers were not themselves well prepared to teach us appropriately. Two, the courses were not well organized. I mean we took some courses that were irrelevant and unhelpful. Three, the materials we were studying were outdated. Moreover, the academic environment was not well equipped.

Hamed added:

> Most of our teachers were not even Ph.D. holders. They just had Masters. Most of them could not speak English properly and they expected us to become good English teachers. I think those who teach in EFL teacher preparation programs must be proficient in English. Only then, they can produce proficient EFL teachers.

Nergez and Hamed's narrative excerpts and other EFL teachers' opinions about their pre-service professors illuminate one of the reasons behind their perception of being not well prepared. They believed that they could have been prepared well only if they had better professors during their preparation.

In addition to the problem of not having good professors, most of the participants believed that they had not been well prepared because they did little practice teaching. They stated that most of the time they had test anxiety and could not concentrate on learning how to become a good EFL teacher. Amin said, "We were worried too much about taking exams and passing the required courses. Instead, we should have done more practice teaching and the best ways of teaching English as a second language." Matin, another EFL teacher, stated:

> Very little attention was paid to teaching English language as a career. I mean as prospective teachers we should have done a lot of practice teaching instead of taking theoretical classes and being worried to pass the exams to graduate and get a job.

The participants argued that taking theoretical courses without practicing them could not produce good EFL teachers. They believed that the main thing about being a good EFL teacher is practicing the act of teaching so that the student teachers can analyze themselves and know about their weak and strong points.

The analysis of the interview data also indicated that most of the EFL teachers believed that they had not been prepared according to the real needs of the schooling system. Some of the participants complained that after they graduated, the English curriculum of the schools changed, and they were not prepared to teach the new curriculum. Mina said, "Surprisingly, after I

graduated, the EFL curriculum of the high schools changed. It was a whole new curriculum and I did not know how to teach it." The participants believed that things like this happen because there is no meaningful relationship between the Ministry of Education and the colleges of education. Therefore, they produce EFL teachers who are not prepared according to the current needs of the primary and secondary students. Bayar stated:

> Ministry of Education and colleges of education have no connection. They are not aware of each other's decisions and this affects student teachers negatively. These two institutions need to work together so that they can produce teachers who are aware of the needs and requirements of the schooling system.

The Ministry of Higher Education is the responsible party to prepare teachers for primary and secondary schools and the Ministry of Education hires these teachers. However, according to the participants, these two institutions do not coordinate well, and this affects the quality of teachers and their performance.

Site Document Findings

The analysis of the documents such as the EFL teacher education program's website and the profiles of the faculty members show that most of the professors hold M.A. degrees. Only three professors from a group of 23 faculty members hold Ph.D. degrees. Furthermore, the program does not have any professional development programs for the faculty members.

The Teachers' Perception of Being Effective EFL Teachers

Survey Findings

Many of the participants believed that they had not been prepared to be effective EFL teachers. In answering a survey question asking, "Do you think that you have been prepared to be an effective EFL teacher?" Most of the participants, about 75%, said that they were "not at all

prepared" to become effective EFL teachers. Only 8% of the remainder of the participants said that they had been "well prepared" to become effective EFL teachers. Figure 2 below describes those participants.

Figure 2

The teachers' perception of being effective EFL teachers

- not at all prepared
- somewhat prepared
- well prepared
- very well prepared
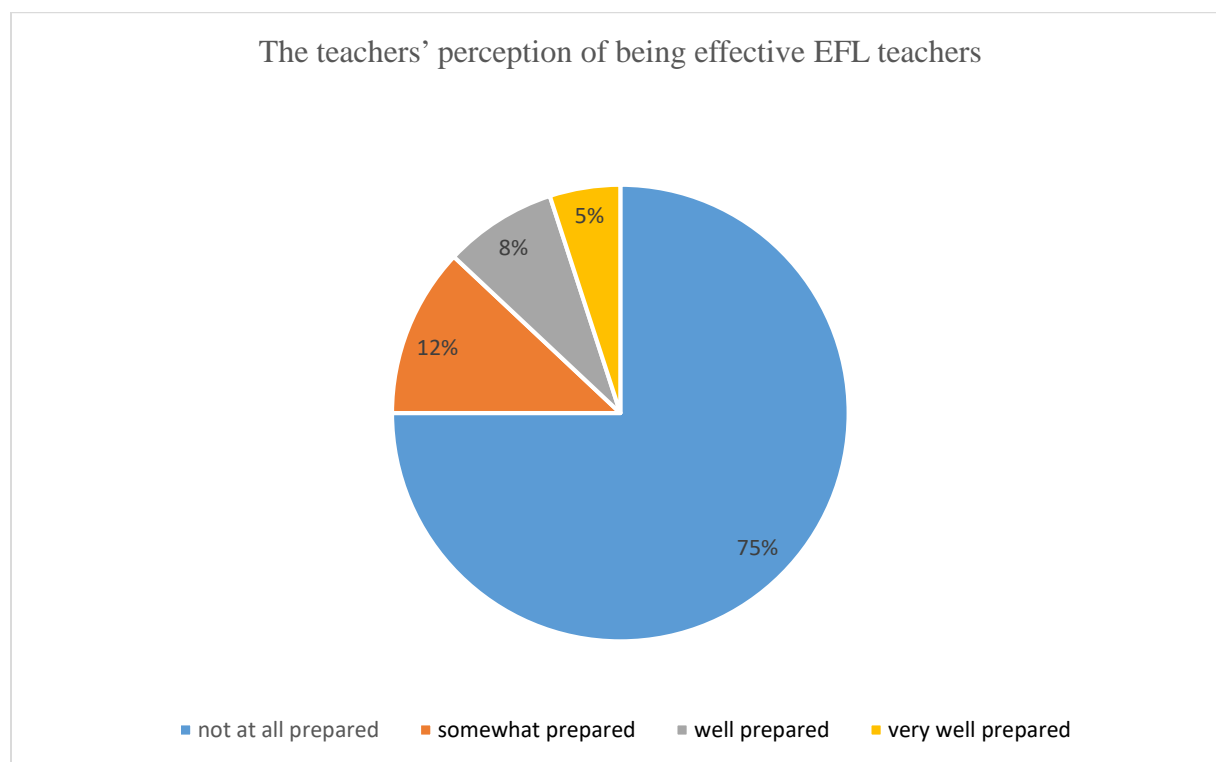
Interview Findings

Most of the data analyzed from the interviews suggest the same results. Sixteen participants interviewed believed that they had not been at all prepared to become effective EFL teachers. Most of the interviewees thought that to be an effective English teacher one must be proficient in English (four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and be able to transfer the knowledge that he/she has to the students (content knowledge pedagogy). Nergez said, "Many of the EFL teachers are not fluent in English. Therefore, they cannot be good models for their students." In addition, Amin stated:

A good EFL teacher must be a good English speaker, listener, reader, and writer. How can I teach my students to write while I myself am not a good writer? Unfortunately, we have not been well prepared to become effective EFL teachers. An effective EFL teacher needs to be perfect; we are not perfect.

The participants argued that because the student teachers are not native speakers of English, the first one or two years of the program should be devoted to their proficiency in the four skills of language. In other words, the EFL teachers believed that student teachers need to master the English language first in order to be able to teach it properly.

In addition to the problem of their English proficiency, almost all of the participants believed that they have serious problems in transferring their knowledge to the students. They believed that they had not been trained properly to do that. Avin said, "They taught us how to learn not how to teach English language." In addition, Aso stated, "I should have taken more classes on content knowledge pedagogy. Many times, I have this feeling that I know something, but I do not know how to transfer it to my students and help them learn." Some of the participants thought that more attention needs to be paid to the methods of teaching and assessing English as a foreign language. Matin explained:

During the four years of my pre-service preparation, the priority was always given to learning English not how to teach English. As an EFL teacher, I think we need to know more about teaching, what makes us effective EFL teachers, and how to teach and assess the language skills of our students.

Site Document Findings

Assessing the curriculum of the EFL teacher education program under study shows that only three courses of content knowledge pedagogy (Language Testing, English Curriculum, and Methods of Teaching) are offered during the four years of the program. The participants argued that the student teachers need more courses on content knowledge pedagogy in order to be effective EFL teachers. In addition, the participants described the content of these three courses

as outdated and unhelpful. They argued that the methods of teaching languages are changing daily, and they need to be aware of these recent changes and developments.

Research Question Two

What do EFL teachers think about the relevance and quality of the coursework they have taken during their teacher education?

The courses that the EFL teachers had taken during their pre-service preparation and the effect of such courses on their teaching career was one of the major concerns in the survey and interviews conducted with them. The findings differed among participants concerning the courses they had to pass in their pre-service preparation. However, on some certain points they had common understandings about the quality and appropriateness of some of the courses. Below, the researcher presents the perceptions of the participants about the courses they had taken during their pre-service preparation through three themes: 1) the courses that the participants considered relevant and useful, 2) the courses that the participants considered irrelevant and unhelpful, 3) the courses that the participants believed were missing in the curricula and if taken could had helped them became better EFL teachers.

Relevant Courses

Survey Findings

About 80% of the EFL teachers who took the survey said that the courses of conversation, grammar, essay writing, phonology and phonetics were the best courses they took during their pre-service preparation. Figure 3 on the next page illustrates the relevant courses according to EFL teachers in more details.

Figure 3
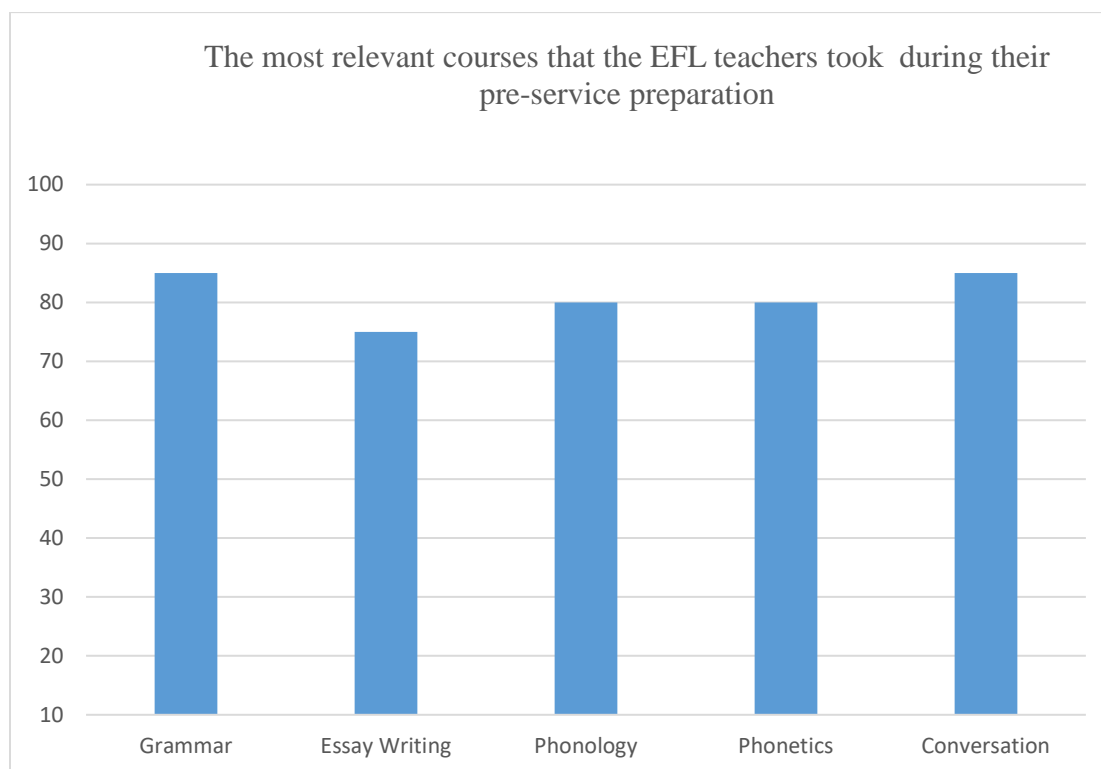
The most relevant courses that the EFL teachers took during their pre-service preparation

Grammar	Essay Writing	Phonology	Phonetics	Conversation
85	75	80	80	85

Interview Findings

Most of the participants agreed that some of the courses they had taken were useful and relevant to their career as EFL teachers. In an interview question, the participants were asked about the most relevant courses they had taken during their pre-service preparation. Most of the teachers ranked grammar as number one, conversation as number two, phonology as number three, phonetics as number four, and essay writing as number five. Mina said, "Some of the courses we took during our training were really helpful. The best five courses for me were: conversation, grammar, phonology, phonetics and writing." The participants considered these courses relevant because they believed that these courses are directly connected to their daily activities inside the classroom. Mina explained that she had chosen conversation as one of the best courses because this course helped her to become confident in English:

> Before taking this class, I was very ashamed of my English. I felt embarrassed when I talked in English in front of my friends. I thought I was not a fluent English speaker. Nevertheless, after I took the conversation course, I was not afraid any more. I felt confident to speak in English, and this is what a good EFL teacher needs. She must be a confident English speaker.

The participants believed that courses like conversation helped them increase their self-confidence when listening to and speaking in English. They argued that being confident in English is one of the necessities of EFL teachers because they are the only role models available to the students.

In addition, the participants believed that English grammar courses helped them understand the structure of English language and transfer this knowledge to their students. Although, the new curriculum of the K-12 grades are based on the Communicative Approach but still the participants believed that their students need to know about the structure of the sentences they produce in English. Bayar said, "I need to know about the grammar of English language because our students usually compare the structure of the Kurdish language to English and want to produce better English sentences." Most of the participants agreed that they took good grammar classes of good quality during their pre-service preparation.

Some of the participants discussed the importance of taking teaching methods classes. They believed that courses such as "methods of teaching" was one of the best courses they had taken. Aso stated:

> 'Methods of teaching' was an excellent course. This course helped me learn and practice the best ways of teaching English as a foreign language. Before taking this class, I did not know how to transfer my knowledge of English to my students. After I took this course, I realized that I could use many different methods to teach my students what I know.

However, the participants argued that they should had taken more classes like this. They suggested taking two courses of teaching methods, one for general teaching and another for

teaching English as a foreign language. Nevertheless, they believed that the course was useful for their teaching career and truly helped them in their everyday activities inside the classroom.

Irrelevant Courses

Survey Findings

Surprisingly, almost 90% of the participants considered Arabic language and Kurdish language irrelevant. Some 70% said that many of the English Literature courses they took during their pre-service preparation were irrelevant (figure 4).

Figure 4

the irrelavant courses that the EFL teachers took during their pre-service preparation
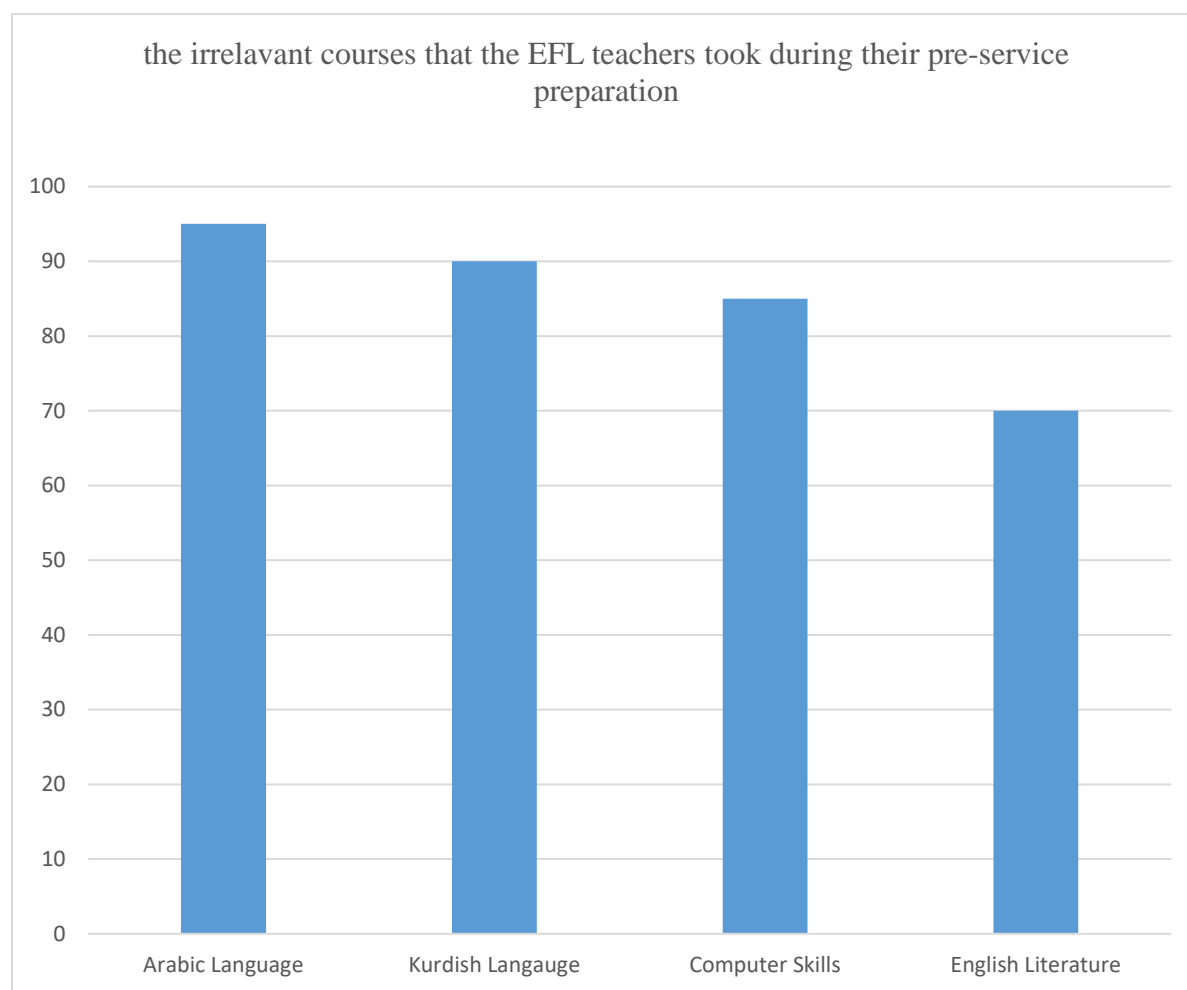
Interview Findings

In their comments, the participants talked about some irrelevant and unhelpful courses that they had taken during their pre-service preparation. During interviews with the participants, 16 out of 20 acknowledged that the three courses of Arabic language, Kurdish language and computer skills were useless and irrelevant. Bayar said, "Arabic language was a waste of time. It has nothing to do with teaching English." Many of the participants agreed with Bayar. Matin stated:

> I had a lot of stress in the Arabic language class because I had to pass that course and my Arabic was not very good. I really could not understand the connection of this class to the teaching English language. Only I knew that it was a requirement and I had to pass it, so I could graduate. Most of my classmates had the same feeling. They all hated that class.

Most of the participants said that they were not sure why they had to take that course. A few of them said that they had asked the head of the Department about this course and the only answer they got was, "It is in the curriculum, so you need to take it."

All the participants confirmed that the Kurdish language course was useless and unhelpful. According to Aso, "In this class we studied a lot of things about the Kurdish history and literature. Well, we already took all of this stuff during the high school, so why do we need to do it over?" Most of the participants believed that taking this course was a waste of time. They argued that instead of taking such useless classes, they should have taken more courses on the subjects that were directly related to teaching English as a foreign language. Nergez said:

> There are some courses in the curriculum that are required, and you cannot graduate if you do not pass them. Courses like Arabic language, Kurdish language and computer skills. I think these three classes wasted a lot of our time and energy. We spent countless hours of studying to pass these classes. In addition, they gave us a lot of stress and we could not concentrate on other important courses. I really do not understand the logic behind taking these classes. The curriculum is outdated. It is designed about twenty years ago and I do not understand why they [faculty members] do not think of updating it in a way to meet the real needs of the students and the schooling system.

The analysis of the data that emerged from the interviews revealed student teachers' concerns about the connection between the courses they had taken and their career. Most of the participants believed that they could not find a real connection between some of the courses they had taken during their pre-service preparation and their real daily life interactions inside the classroom. Matin said, "Some of the courses were neither interesting nor useful for the content I currently teach." Mina said, "In general, most of the courses taught to me during my pre-service preparation were not directly connected to the topics and the subject matter being studied in primary and secondary English classes." Bayar had a similar opinion:

> We took many courses on English literature, from Renaissance to postmodern, and you know what, after I became an EFL teacher there were not any literary content to teach within the curriculum of the secondary schools. Most of what we had learned during our pre-service teacher preparation is completely different from what we teach. You know, it is very different when you teach in a real classroom.

The participants described some of the literature courses they took as interesting and beneficial in improving their English language skills. However, they argued that they did not need to take all those courses especially when they were not supposed to teach any literary content in the secondary schools.

Another issue that most of the participants were concerned about was the over-theoretical courses they took. They believed that they took some courses that were too theoretical. The participants argued that they did not know how to translate these courses into real life problems of their classrooms. Bayan said:

> When I took the classes theoretically, I had to memorize the theories but could not really apply them in the real-world classroom. In other words, I could have forgotten some of the rules and regulations since I did not know how to use them simultaneously. I think student teachers should put into practice what they learn inside the class so that they can see and understand the way it works in real situations.

One of the courses that most of the participants were concerned about was Childhood and Adolescent Psychology. Amin said, "We do not know how to deal with the very specific problems of the children and adolescents because we took some very theoretical classes on child and adolescent development." They believed that these courses were theoretical and that they did not know how to use these theories in their classes.

Site Document Findings

The analysis of the EFL teacher preparation program's curriculum show that the two courses of Arabic and Kurdish each has three credit hours and are required courses. Furthermore, The EFL student teachers must pass ten required literary courses (30 credits) to graduate.

Courses Missing in the Curriculum

Survey Findings

The participants believed that there are some important courses that are missing in the curriculum. Seventy-five percent of the participants said that courses of Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Methodologies need to be added to the curriculum. Sixty-five percent agreed that Learning Theories is missing in the curriculum. Another 60% said that Classroom Management is a necessary course that needs to be included in the curriculum of teacher education programs.

Interview Findings

After having the experience of teaching in secondary schools for more than three years, most of the participants believed there are courses that are missing from the curriculum of the program in charge of EFL teacher preparation. They argued that in order to prepare better EFL teachers,

there are some important courses that need to be added to the curriculum. Most of the participants said that during their pre-service preparation, they learned a lot about the knowledge of the English language and little about the knowledge of teaching English language. Fourteen of the interviewees believed that the five courses of Second Language Acquisition, Learning Theory, Methods of Teaching EFL, Classroom Management, and Special Education are crucial for EFL teachers and must be included in the program.

Fifteen of 20 participants confirmed that they have students with special needs in their classes and they do not know how to deal with them. Armeen said, "We do not know how to deal with students with special needs because we did not get any courses on this subject when we were in our pre-service preparation." Mayan added, "I have a student with a language disorder and I am afraid I do not know how to help her." These EFL teachers believed that a course of Special Education is necessary to be added to the curriculum of teacher education programs.

Another course that the participants believed is missing in the curriculum and is important in preparing EFL teachers is Second Language Acquisition. They argued that the ultimate aim of English classes in primary and secondary schools is to improve students' skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing English. To do so, EFL teachers need to know the way a foreign language is learned so that they can help their students learn faster and easier. Mina stated:

> I think a very important course that is missing in the curriculum is Second Language Acquisition. As an EFL teacher who is responsible of teaching a new language to his learners, I should be familiar with the process of learning a second or foreign language. In this way, I can better assist my students in learning English language properly. Most of us [EFL teachers] try different ways and methods to help our students learn English and fail. However, if we are familiar with the ways a second language is learned, our students and we could be more successful.

The participants believed that the curriculum is outdated and that this is the only reason an important course like Second Language Acquisition is not included in the curriculum. The EFL

teachers discussed that it is crucial for them to know about the process of learning a language before they can teach it.

Twelve of the participants said that Learning Theory is another necessary course that needs to be added to the curriculum. They believed that learning a foreign language is a part of a bigger process, which is learning. The participants stated that they need to know about the most recent developments in the field of learning. Armeen said:

> We are living in a world that is rapidly changing. In order to catch up with the most efficient ways of teaching and learning, we have to make ourselves familiar with the best methods of learning. This will influence our teaching positively and help our students understand the topics presented to them properly. If the programs in charge of EFL teachers hope to prepare better teachers who are familiar with the most recent theories of learning, they have to pay a lot of attention to the courses like Learning Theory.

Methods of Teaching EFL is one of the courses that the majority of the participants believed is important and missing in the curricula. Chnar stated, "I absolutely believe that we should have taken such courses. If I took such classes, I believe I would have been a better EFL teacher." Bayar's statement confirmed Chnar's belief about the importance of this course:

> Learning English language has become a very popular thing all over the world. Therefore, every day the scholars in the field of TESOL come up with new and better methods of learning English efficiently. EFL teachers need to be aware of these developments and try to update their knowledge of teaching EFL regularly. I think this course is very crucial for the EFL teacher education programs in Kurdistan. I am very sorry I did not take this class during my pre-service preparation, but I suggest strongly that this class to be added to the curriculum.

Another course that most of the participants believed should be added to the curriculum is Classroom Management. Nergez said, "I do not know what to do when things go wrong inside the classroom." Bayan stated:

> Classroom Management is a vital part in any teacher education program, especially for the Kurdistan region where we usually have crowded classrooms. It is not easy to manage 30-40 students and you have not taken any courses in classroom management. This is particularly

important in teaching English language because the EFL teacher needs to create groups and keep students busy with meaningful activities.

Site Document Findings

The researcher examined the curriculum of the EFL teacher preparation program under study and discovered that the curriculum misses the courses of Second Language Acquisition, Learning Theory, Methods of Teaching EFL, Classroom Management, and Special Education. To conclude, almost all the participants agreed that the five courses of Second Language Acquisition, Learning Theory, Methods of Teaching EFL, Classroom Management, and Special Education are important for preparing good EFL teachers and need to be included in the curricula of the EFL teacher education programs.

Research Question Three

What do EFL teachers think about the quality and length of the practicum during their teacher education?

Below the researcher presents the findings of the student teachers' experiences and concerns about the practicum through six themes: the role of the supervisors, the role of the cooperating teachers, feedback from the supervisors and cooperating teachers, the relationship between supervisors and cooperating teachers, student teachers' observation, and time limitation.

The Role of The Supervisors (Organization of Supervision)

Each of the student teachers who participated in the study was observed only one time during the entire period of the practice teaching. Most of the participants believed that their supervisors were not helpful during the practicum. They complained about the infrequency of

their supervisors' visits, the superficiality of the supervision process, the behavior of the supervisors, and the unhelpful feedback they received from their supervisors.

Survey Findings

Most of the participants said that they did not receive any benefit from their supervisors during the practicum period. Eighty percent of the EFL teachers considered the role of their supervisors as unhelpful. The other 20% said that the role of their supervisors was helpful and positive. Ninety percent of the participants said that their supervisors visited them only one time during the entire period of the practicum.

Interview Findings

The participants argued that their supervisors visited them only one time and that was not sufficient. Mina said, "My supervisor came to the school only one time without giving me any feedback. It was just a waste of time." Chnar had the same experience. She was concerned about the infrequency of her supervisor's visit and poor evaluation. She said:

> My supervisor visited me only one time during the whole 40-day period of my practice teaching. I do not know how he could evaluate my teaching properly in one short visit. I tried to do my best and I was very nervous. I wish he could visit me two or more times so that I could show the best of my teaching.

Maher had the same opinion about the frequency of his supervisor's visit.

> She only visited me once and scarcely gave me any advice regarding what I was doing. We talked for five minutes after the class. The supervisor could sit in the classroom more than one session, give critical and constructive feedback, and feel more responsible toward the student teachers.

The participants confirmed that they had a lot of stress because they knew that there was only one chance to demonstrate their abilities. They had to show the supervisors all they were capable of as an EFL teacher in 45 minutes and these time constraints caused them a lot of

frustration. Mina stated, "It was one of the worst days of my life. I was scared because I could

not concentrate on my thoughts." The participants explained that their stress affected their

teaching negatively. Bayar added, "I had a lot of stress. This stress affected my performance

negatively. I could do better if I did not have much stress."

The behavior of the supervisors was a concern mentioned by many of the participants.

During the interviews, 17 out of 20 of them acknowledged that they saw rude behavior from

their supervisors. Amin explained the situation as follows:

> When I started my practice teaching in the school, I began to feel that I am a real teacher. Everything was so exciting. The day my supervisor came to visit me in the school, I was very well prepared to surprise him with my unique style of teaching. However, he did not like it and told me to stick to the traditional method. From that day, I fear to try any new methods.

Bayar, another EFL teacher, complained about the irresponsible behavior of his supervisor. He

stated:

> Well, I am sorry to say this, but my supervisor was very rude. During the class, I did not feel safe and I had a lot of stress. I remember I mispronounced a word and the supervisor corrected me in front of the students. I felt very embarrassed. He could have told me about my mistake after the class.

The participants argued that when they began the practice teaching in real classrooms, they

expected the supervisors to respect them and treat them like real teachers and not like students.

Indeed, most of the participants reported that the misbehavior of their supervisors affected their

perspective toward teaching negatively.

This study also found that the supervisors' time constraints and busy schedules of

supervising many student teachers proved to be a big issue. Some of the participants talked about

the limited time of the supervisors and their rush after the class. Mina complained:

> After the class finished, I was excited to hear from my supervisor about how I did. I felt very disappointed when he said that he could not talk to me because he needed to go to another school and attend another student teacher's class. I was expecting him to give me some feedback and the ways I could improve myself.

In accordance to Mina, Armeen also stated:

> I talked to my supervisor only once during my practice teaching. That was absolutely neither enough nor helpful because all I got was the grade of my practice teaching. He did not give me any evaluation or instructions so that I could learn about my week and strong points and improve my teaching.

Furthermore, most of the participants were concerned about the professionalism of the supervisors. Interviews with all the participants revealed this lack of supervisors' professionalism. They argued that the supervisors did not know what to do inside the classroom. The participants believed that their supervisors were not familiar with the very basic rules and regulations of academic supervision. Mina said, "My supervisor did nothing for me. It was just a routine visit so that he could fill out the supervision forms and let the department know that he has visited me." In addition, Bayar stated:

> The supervision is just a routine [formality], therefore, neither the supervisors nor the department pay a lot of attention to it. They do not deal with it as an essential part of the practicum. Supervisors do not know what they are supposed to do. I think the department should give supervisors clear instructions and guidelines about their duties when they visit a student.

The analysis of the data indicated that the supervisors' role in the practicum was not well defined by the EFL teacher preparation program. The participants' experiences with their supervisors revealed a kind of miscommunication between them. In addition, there was no meaningful communication between supervisors and cooperating teachers. Student teachers believed that each supervisor had his/her own particular set of rules for the practicum. They argued that the teacher education programs should have a set of standard rules of supervision to be followed by all the supervisors.

Site Document Findings

All EFL teacher education programs in Kurdistan consist of eight semesters. Student teachers need to pass a practicum course in order to graduate. They take this course in the last year of their pre-service preparation. The practicum has two parts of observation and practice teaching. In the observation part of the course, student teachers observe an EFL teacher for a period of 50 days in a school of their choice. After this part is completed, student teachers are required to teach a class of EFL for 40 days in a school of their choice. Student teachers are then evaluated and graded by the cooperating teachers and supervisors.

The study found that the main reason behind the supervisors' limited time was the large number of the student teachers and the small number of the faculty members. Each faculty member usually supervises 10 student teachers during the practice teaching. Therefore, supervisors often had to travel between different schools in the same day and had little time to communicate with the student teachers and cooperating teachers.

The Role of the Cooperating Teachers

Survey Findings

Survey findings show that the cooperating teachers, classroom teachers who work in schools, did not have a positive role during the process of practicum. Eighty-five percent of the participants said that their cooperating teachers did not observe them during the practice teaching period. Ten percent of the participants saw their cooperating teachers inside the classroom only once. The other 5% reported regular visits of their cooperating teachers.

Interview Findings

Most of the participants did not value the role of the cooperating teachers they had worked with during their practicum. They described their cooperating teachers as unhelpful, unsupportive and irresponsible toward the student teachers. The study found that the participants expected support and productive feedback from their cooperating teachers, but they were often disappointed after they began their practice teaching. Sana said, "My cooperating teacher was not really cooperative." Bayar had the same opinion:

> To be honest, when I began my practice teaching, I was scared. However, I was certain that my cooperating teacher would be there to help me. This idea of his support and help comforted me. In the first lecture, he came to the class and introduced me to the students and I did not see him again until the last day of the practicum when he signed my exit papers.

The participants argued that the cooperating teachers did not know their roles and responsibilities. Mina stated:

> This was strange that the cooperating teachers did not know anything about their responsibilities. Our EFL education program had not instructed them about their duties during the teaching practice. I expected my cooperating teacher to observe me during the practicum and give me instructions to improve my teaching, but he did not. I asked him about this once and he said that no one told him to observe me.

The participants believed that it is the duty of the EFL education programs to give cooperating teachers detailed instructions about observing and helping student teachers. However, some of the participants argued that the cooperating teachers are not awarded for the extra work they do as a cooperating teacher, therefore, they do not take it seriously.

The study also revealed that the cooperating teachers used the student teachers as substitutes during the practicum. Fifteen of the participants complained that their cooperating teachers left them in the classroom with the children. Hamid said, "My mentor used me as a substitute teacher. He left me alone in the classroom with 40 kids and I was scared to death. I did not know

what to do." The participants asserted that cooperating teachers were meant to be supporting to the student teachers during the practicum, but they were not. Mina said:

> I do not know exactly the role of the cooperating teachers in the practicum and their responsibilities towards the student teachers and supervisors. Nevertheless, I simply expected my cooperating teacher to observe me in the class and support me. Unfortunately, it was not as I expected. I never saw him again during the practicum. I heard from his students that he took a vacation for 40 days.

Site Document Findings

According to the manual of instructions for cooperating teachers, cooperating teachers do the mentoring of practice teaching voluntarily. They do not receive any compensation or benefits for the time and effort they put on the process of practicum. Furthermore, the analysis of the EFL teacher preparation curriculum and other related documents showed that the cooperating teachers do not receive any structured preparation or instructions about their roles and responsibilities as a cooperating teacher.

To sum up, the study found that most of the participants were not satisfied with the way they were treated by their cooperating teachers. The majority of the participants argued that the cooperating teachers were looking for this chance so that they could use the student teachers as substitutes and relax themselves. furthermore, most of the participants believed that the cooperating teachers did not know their roles and responsibilities because they had not been instructed by their schools or by the EFL teacher education program.

The Relationship Between Supervisors and Cooperating Teachers

The analysis that emerged from the data of the surveys, interviews, and site documents indicated that there was no coordination between the cooperating teachers and the supervisors.

Survey Findings

Most of the participants said they could not see any relationship between their supervisors and cooperating teachers. Seventy-five percent of the participants said they never saw their supervisors and cooperating teachers talk to each other. Twenty percent of the participants witnessed short conversations between their supervisors and cooperating teachers. Five percent noticed long conversations between their supervisors and cooperating teachers.

Interview Findings

Most of the participants could not find a meaningful relationship between their supervisors and cooperating teachers. The EFL teachers argued that supervisors and cooperating teachers must work with each other and exchange information on the student teachers' progress during the practicum. Matin said, "I think it was strange that my supervisor did not talk to my cooperating teacher when she visited me. I thought they should had talked about how I was doing." Milad stated:

> Well, I think to make the practicum as fruitful as possible there should be a meaningful relationship among the student teachers, cooperating teachers, and supervisors. Cooperating teachers can inform the supervisors of student teachers' progress in the classroom. I think this will help us become better teachers.

The interviewees discussed that to integrate the knowledge of teaching to the act of teaching; they need to meet with supervisors and cooperating teachers on a regular basis. However, they argued that the cooperating teachers and supervisors never met and never exchanged any opinions during the practicum. Therefore, due to lack of communication between the parties who are involve, the practicum remained a formality in which the student teachers' duty was pleasing the supervisors and cooperating teachers in order to get a good grade.

The participants believed that there is a problem within the system where the schools and universities do not coordinate on such an important part of the student teachers' preparation. They argued that the roles of the cooperating teachers and supervisors are not defined, and they do not know how to treat student teachers and each other. Mina stated:

> We could see that there was a lack of communication between cooperating teachers and supervisors. My supervisor had to visit four students in different parts of the city and he did not have enough time to talk to me. My cooperating teacher told me that he could not talk to my supervisor because the supervisor rushed out of the school after he did the observation.

The participants thought that part of the problem goes back to the EFL teacher preparation program itself. They discussed that there are no defined and detailed standards of supervision designed by the program to help the supervisors and cooperating teachers know their duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, the supervisors and cooperating teachers are not trained to communicate with each other, and to observe and assess student teachers.

Site Document Findings

After careful examination of the manual of instructions for cooperating teachers and supervisors in the EFL teacher education program under study, the researcher could not find any sections concerning the relationship between cooperating teachers and supervisors during the practicum.

Supervisory Feedback

Two main findings emerged from the analysis of the surveys and interviews concerning the supervisors' feedback to the student teachers. First, it was very brief and, second, it was not constructive.

Survey Findings

In the survey, there were two questions concerning the feedback the participants received from their supervisors and cooperating teachers. The first question was about the quantity (length) of the feedback. And the second question was about the quality of the feedback. Most of the participants agreed that the feedback they received from their supervisors and cooperating teachers were short and unconstructive. Figures 5 and 6 show the details.

Figure 5

The quality of the feedback received from supervisors and cooperating techears

- unconstructive ■ constructive

Figure 6

The length of the feedback received from supervisors and cooperating teachers

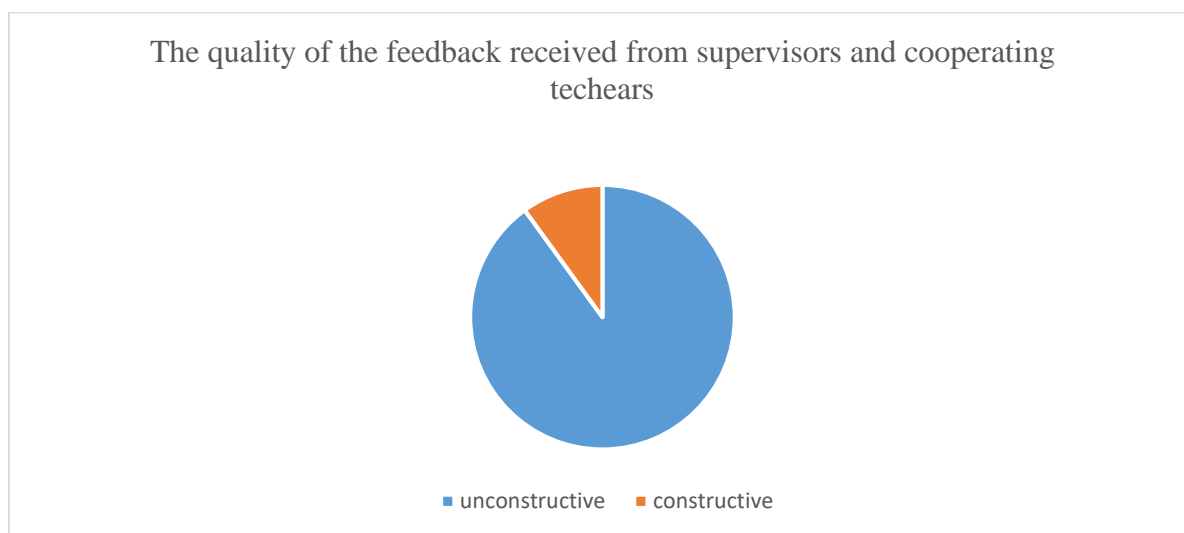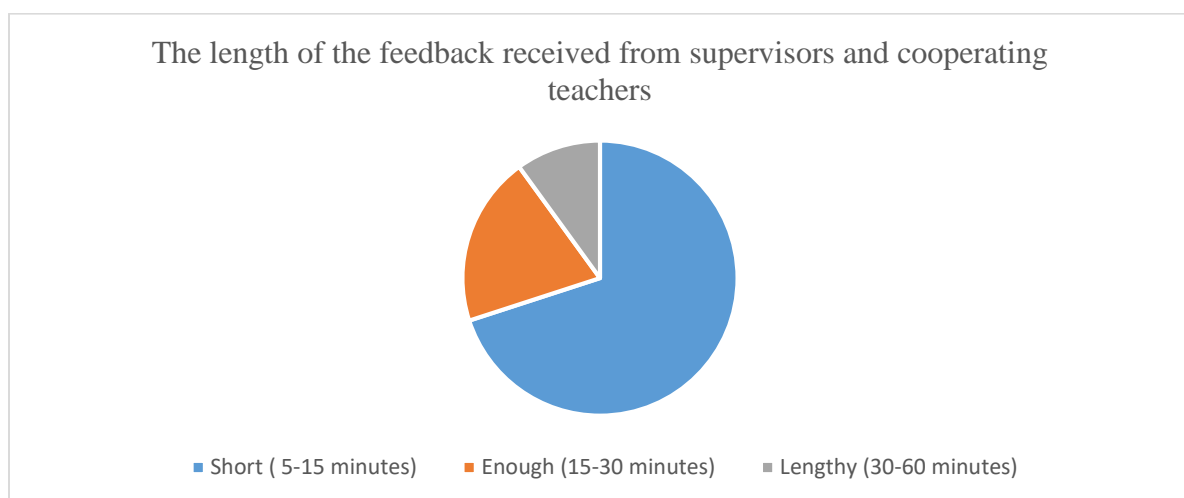■ Short (5-15 minutes) ■ Enough (15-30 minutes) ■ Lengthy (30-60 minutes)

Interview Findings

The participants described the feedback they received from their supervisors and cooperating teachers as superficial, very brief, judgmental and unhelpful. Most of the participants argued that getting good feedback from their supervisors could have improved their teaching style, but it was not as they thought. Mina described the feedback she got from her supervisor as artificial. She said:

> If the goal of practicum is to help student teachers practice their teaching and improve, they need more meaningful feedback from the mentors and supervisors. I am sorry to say that most of the feedback I received from my supervisor was superficial and useless.

Other participants believed that they got destructive feedback from their supervisors and they felt humiliated. For example, Amin said, "My supervisor told me that I will not be a good teacher. This destroyed my dream of becoming a teacher." The same thing happened to a few other participants. Armeen stated:

> Supervisors are supposed to emphasize on the strong points of the student teachers and encourage them to correct and improve their weak points. My supervisor did exactly the contrary. He made a hill of my mistakes and did not really mention the good parts of my teaching. I think he did not help me.

The student teachers' interviews also revealed that the feedback they received from their supervisors was not detailed and comprehensive. Matin believed that the feedback he received from his supervisor was brief and unhelpful. He said:

> Supervisors are supposed to help us find our weak points and give us detailed feedback so that we can improve ourselves. My supervisor evaluated my forty-five minutes of teaching in three lines he wrote in my lesson plan notebook. It was very general things on how well I managed the classroom. There were no specific details about my weak and strong points. I wish he could give me some advice on how to correct my students when they do a mistake. This was one of my biggest problems during the practice teaching and my supervisor never gave me a hint.

Furthermore, the study found the authoritarian figure of the supervisors had a negative impact on the practicum. Most of the participants related this to the general "authority of knowledge" figure of the supervisors they have in their minds. The student teachers argued that they could not talk to their supervisors about their daily problems in the classroom frankly. Mina stated:

> Well, it was not easy to talk to my supervisor about the problems I faced in the class. I was afraid these could affect my grades. Therefore, I just listened to my advisor and replied with yes to all his comments. In addition, I thought he knew everything about teaching and whatever he said must be correct.

Observation

Site Document Findings

The program's manual for practicum states that observation is the first phase of the practicum in the EFL teacher education program. Student teachers are required to observe an experienced EFL teacher in the classroom of their choice for 45 minutes per day for 50 days. During the observation, they have special forms designed for this purpose that they are required to fill out. During this time, student teachers visit their universities once a week and discuss their observation experiences with their fellow student teachers and supervisors. However, the EFL programs' instructions for observation did not specify the detailed duties of the supervisors and cooperating teachers. In the observation section of the practicum manual, it is stated that the student teachers will observe an experienced EFL teacher of their choice in a school close to their neighborhood. It is also stated that the supervisors will visit the student teachers two times during the observation. The observation section did not include anything about the role and duties of the cooperating teachers.

Survey Findings

Most of the participants, about 85%, said that the duration of the observation was short. The other 15% percent believed that it was enough. Seventy-five percent of the participants said that the observation was unhelpful. Twenty-five percent of them believed that the observation was helpful in improving their teaching.

Interview Findings

Most of the participants described their observation experience as short and useless. They believed that they should have spent more time inside the classroom to become familiar with all the aspects of teaching. Mina stated:

> The observation was very short. I believe it will be more beneficial if the student teachers have the chance to observe actual teachers teaching in real classrooms for the whole year or at least one semester. In this way, we can be familiar with all the aspects of teaching from the very beginning. I remember when I went to observe my cooperating teacher, it was near the end of the academic year, so I could not see the way he planned his lessons.

In addition to being short, the participants believed that the observation was not useful because they did not talk to the cooperating teachers or supervisors about what happened inside the classroom often. The participants believed that there should have been conferences among student teachers, cooperating teachers, and supervisors so that they get good constructive feedback. Bayar stated:

> During the observation, I asked myself many questions about the way things were done inside the classroom. Why did the teacher do this? Why he did not correct the student when she made a mistake? Why the teacher did not explain the grammar? And many other similar questions. Nevertheless, there was no one to answer those questions. We had meetings in the university once every week, but we could not get all the answers in one short meeting.

The participants argued that the cooperating teachers were not usually available to answer their questions. Furthermore, in the weekly meetings they had in the university with their supervisors,

there was not enough time to discuss what happened in the class during the last week. Therefore, the conferences were not productive or helpful.

However, a few participants argued that they learned many good things about teaching in real classrooms during their observations. They believed that they could identify many good techniques in their cooperating teachers' teaching that they could apply in their own classrooms. Matin said:

> My cooperating teacher was a very experienced and excellent teacher. During the fifty days of the observation, I learned many good things from her teaching style. I filled my notebook with the very good techniques that she used to warm up her students, ask questions, and teach new vocabulary and pronunciation. I wish I could become a good teacher like her.

Drawing on the analysis of the EFL program's instructions and the participants' interviews, the study found that the cooperating teachers are chosen either by the student teachers themselves or by availability; and the quality of the cooperating teachers is not taken into consideration by the EFL teacher education program. Therefore, the experiences of the student teachers during observations can be very different. Some of them, like Matin, happen to observe good experienced teachers whom they benefit from and some others, like Bayar, encounter careless teachers whom the student teachers do not value.

Time Limitation

Survey Findings

Eighty percent of the participants said that 40 days was too short for the practice teaching. Ten percent believed it was short and the other 10% said that it was enough.

Interview Findings

Most of the participants said that the period of their practice teaching was short. They believed that 40 days was not enough for practicing their teaching. Amin said, "There is much to learn about teaching and I think 40 days is not sufficient." In addition, Nergez noted:

> I wish I had much more chance to practice my teaching. Our practice teaching was very short, about 40 days, and we did not have enough time to practice all the aspects of our teaching capabilities. I wish I had enough time to practice different teaching styles or different methods of assessment and their results on the learning process.

Site Document Findings

The EFL program's manual for practicum has a section for practice teaching. There are two things mentioned in this section: 1) The student teachers will practice their teaching in a school of their choice that is close to their neighborhood for 40 school days and 2) the supervisors will visit the student teachers for two times during the practice teaching period. There are no more details given on the number of classes they should teach in one week or anything about cooperating teachers and their qualifications.

To conclude, the data analyzed from the surveys and interviews show that most of the participants were not satisfied with the role of their supervisors and cooperating teachers during the two phases of observation and practice teaching. Furthermore, most of them believed that the 50 days of observation and the 40 days of practice teaching was short. Feedback that were provided by the cooperating teachers and supervisors to student teachers during the practicum proved to be a big issue. Most of the participants were not satisfied with the feedback and described it as judgmental and unconstructive for their teaching.

Conclusions

To understand the perceptions of in-service EFL teachers about their pre-service preparation in Kurdistan, the data collected and analyzed for this study included semi-structured interviews, survey, and document analysis. What follows is a summary of the findings.

Surveys revealed:

1. About 80% of the EFL teachers who completed the survey considered themselves "not at all prepared".

2. About 75% of the participants said that they were not at all prepared to become effective EFL teachers.

3. Most of the participants said that the period of their practice teaching was short.

Interviews revealed:

4. The participants believed that they had not been well prepared because they did very little practice teaching.

5. Most of the participants believed that they had not been prepared according to the real needs of the schooling system.

6. Almost all the participants believed that they have serious problems in transferring their knowledge to the students. They believed that they have not been trained properly to do that.

7. Most of the participants agreed that some of the courses they had taken during their pre-service preparation like grammar, conversation, phonology, phonetics and essay writing were very useful and relevant to their careers as EFL teachers.

8. The majority of the participants acknowledged that the three courses of Arabic language, Kurdish language and computer skills were useless and irrelevant.

9. Fourteen of the interviewees believed that the five courses of Second Language Acquisition, Learning Theory, Methods of Teaching EFL, Classroom Management, and Special Education are crucial for EFL teachers and must be included in the program.

10. The majority of the participants complained about the infrequency of their supervisors' visits, the superficiality of the supervision process, the behavior of the supervisors, and the unhelpful feedback they received from their supervisors.

11. The participants argued that their supervisors visited them only one time and that was not sufficient.

12. Indeed, most of the participants did report that the rude behavior of their supervisors affected their perspective toward teaching negatively.

13. The participants described their cooperating teachers as unhelpful, unsupportive and irresponsible toward the student teachers.

14. The study explored that the cooperating teachers used the student teachers as substitutes during the practicum. Fifteen of the participants complained that their cooperating teachers left them in the classroom with the children.

15. The participants described the feedback they received from their supervisors and cooperating teachers as superficial, brief, judgmental and unhelpful.

16. Most of the participants described their observation experience as short and useless.

Site Documents revealed:

17. The analysis of the data indicated that the supervisors' role in the practicum was not well defined by the EFL teacher preparation program.

18. The analysis that emerged from the data indicated that there was no coordination between the cooperating teachers and the supervisors.

In brief, the participants described their pre-service preparation as inappropriate and insufficient. They believed that they had not been prepared to be effective EFL teachers. The participants considered themselves underprepared because of, first, the irrelevant courses they had taken during their pre-service preparation, second, the courses that were missing in the curriculum and they did not take, and third, the poorly organized and insufficient practicum they had experienced during their pre-service preparation. In the following chapter, the researcher discusses the findings of the study, suggests some recommendations for improving the quality of the EFL teacher education programs in Kurdistan, and gives suggestions for future research.

Chapter Five

Findings, Discussion, and Suggestions for Future Research

Introduction

The final chapter of this study presents a summary of the findings and discusses the conclusions organized by research questions. Furthermore, chapter five presents the discussion of the results in the light of the literature reviewed in chapter two and the conceptual framework of this study which is Social Constructivism. In the final part of the chapter, the researcher makes suggestions for future research. This study explored the perceptions that English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers hold regarding their preparation in the formal institutions charged with EFL teacher education in Iraqi-Kurdistan.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the feelings, experiences, and concerns of the in-service EFL teachers about their pre-service preparation. To do so, the researcher designed in-depth interviews and surveys to gather the data, and examined site documents. For the design of the interview questions, the researcher studied the curriculum of the EFL teacher education program under study. Furthermore, the survey taken from Darling Hammond (2002) was modified by the researcher. The survey was sent to 380 in-service EFL teachers who have graduated from the EFL teacher education program under study. From this number, 200 surveys came back completed. Form the 200 EFL teachers who answered the surveys, 20 volunteered to answer the interview questions. In-depth interviews through e-mail and follow ups through Facebook Messenger were conducted with the participants and the data were analyzed accordingly. Also, site documents of the EFL program under study were examined.

Findings and Discussion

Discussion of Research Question #1-What opinion do in-service EFL teachers in Iraqi-Kurdistan say they hold about their pre-service preparation?

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education's comprehensive study on teacher preparation found that well-prepared teachers produce higher student achievement (2015). However, the findings of this study indicated that the majority of the EFL teachers in Kurdistan considered themselves as "not at all prepared." Eighty percent of the 200 EFL teachers who took the survey considered themselves "not at all prepared." In addition, 16 out of 20 EFL teachers who were interviewed declared that they have not been well-prepared during their pre-service preparation program. Therefore, we can discuss that these ill-prepared EFL teachers may not produce higher student achievement. Nergez, one of the EFL teacher interviewees, said, "Sometimes I feel very sorry for my students because I think I have not been prepared in a way to help them learn. Therefore, I need to work harder." Many other EFL teachers had the same opinion.

Furthermore, studies define well-prepared teachers as those teachers who are able to meet the needs and interests of their students (Cheung, 2006). This study revealed that EFL teachers were not prepared according to the real needs and interests of the K-12 students. The participants argued that one reason behind this is a lack of meaningful relationship and cooperation between the two ministries: of Education and Higher Education in Kurdistan. Aso, one of the participants, stated:

> Ministry of Education and colleges of education have no connection. They are not aware of each other's decisions and this affects student teachers negatively. These two institutions need to work together so that they can produce teachers who are aware of the real needs of the students and the requirements of the schooling system.

However, this research found that the EFL teachers did not feel they have been prepared in a way to meet the needs of the schooling system. Some of the participants said that after they graduated, the English curriculum of the schools changed, and they were not prepared to teach the new curriculum. Mina stated, "Surprisingly, after I graduated, the English curriculum of high schools changed. It was a whole new curriculum and I did not know how to teach it." Such things happen because there is no meaningful cooperation between the ministries of Education and Higher Education. Looking at this through the lens of Social Constructivism means limited knowledge is constructed because of limited interactions among the parties involved in the process of teacher education. As Gergen (1994) stated, in Social Constructivism, knowledge is defined in terms of a human product that is constructed through meaningful cultural and social interactions in a given context. Therefore, producing teachers who feel unprepared is an inevitable outcome of such a limited and unhealthy relationship.

Guyton (2000) believes that adequately prepared teachers are the ones who have the power to change themselves and their students. Most of the participants considered themselves "not at all prepared" because they believed that they have not been equipped well enough by their pre-service teacher preparation program to be powerful teachers. Therefore, they must work harder to compensate the low-quality preparation they received during their pre-service preparation to become powerful enough to change themselves and their students.

Besides the issues related to general education, the EFL teachers who participated in this study considered themselves ill-prepared in their specific domain of teaching which is EFL. Survey results show that 75% of the EFL teachers who participated in the survey described themselves as "not at all prepared." Furthermore, 16 out of 20 interviewees considered themselves as "not at all prepared" by the EFL teacher education program under this study.

Research in the field of EFL teacher education describes effective EFL teachers as teachers who are fluent in English, have mastery of the knowledge about English (like syntax, phonology, morphology, phonetics), and can transfer this knowledge to their students (Bell, 2005; Brosh, 1996; Celik, Arikan & Caner, 2013; Hassan, 2014; Park & Lee, 2006; Sofi-Karim, 2015; Wichadee, 2010). Unfortunately, most of these participants argued that they have not been prepared to meet these requirements. Amin stated:

> A good EFL teacher must be a good English speaker, listener, reader, and writer. How can I teach my students to write while I myself am not a good writer? Unfortunately, we have not been well prepared to become effective EFL teachers. An effective EFL teacher needs to be proficient; we are not proficient.

Proficiency in English language turned out to be one of the biggest issues among the participants. Most of them argued that being a proficient English speaker is a vital part of their job as an EFL teacher. However, they believed that they have not been prepared in a way to feel confident about their English proficiency. Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul's (2012) findings show that high school students value the communicative abilities of their EFL teachers and consider it as an essential characteristic of an effective EFL teacher. This is also true in the context of Kurdistan where English learners have limited interaction with native English speakers outside the classrooms, and therefore, need proficient EFL teachers.

The findings of the study also indicated that the EFL teachers were not satisfied with the way they have been prepared to transfer their content knowledge. Content knowledge pedagogy is a cornerstone of teacher education in the modern world. Many researchers consider it as one of the three necessities of teacher education. Park & Lee (2006) defined these three general categories in teacher education: (1) subject matter knowledge (2) pedagogical knowledge and (3) socio-effective skills. EFL teachers in Kurdistan argued that their pre-service preparation was insufficient concerning content knowledge and pedagogy. Many of the participants said that

many times they felt that they had the knowledge, but they did not know the good mechanics of transferring it to their students. Avin said, "They taught us how to learn not how to teach English language." Most of the participants agreed that more attention needs to be paid to content knowledge pedagogy in the EFL teacher education programs so that they can feel more prepared when they teach inside classrooms. As Bell (2005) stated, an effective EFL teacher is the one who has mastery of the knowledge about English language and can transfer this knowledge to his/her students.

To sum up, the participants believed that they have not been well prepared by their pre-service EFL teacher education program. They classified their unpreparedness in two categories of the knowledge of English language and the content knowledge pedagogy. Studies on EFL teacher education show that having the characteristics defined in these two categories are necessary for an effective EFL teacher. Therefore, EFL teacher education programs in Kurdistan must pay more attention to these two categories of knowledge and try to prepare teachers accordingly.

Discussion of Research Question #2-What do in-service EFL teachers in Iraqi-Kurdistan say they think about the relevance and quality of the coursework they have taken during their teacher education?

<center>*Relevant and Irrelevant Coursework*</center>

Studies suggest that there is a positive relationship between teacher effectiveness and the quality and quantity of the coursework they have taken during their teacher education (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Scholz, 214). Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) state that "In both elementary and secondary classrooms, the more developmentally prepared teachers are,

the higher the probability that each child will learn and grow successfully" (p. 125). It is important to know to what extent the coursework helped in-service teachers to be prepared and effective in their classrooms. This study disclosed that most of the participants were not satisfied with the quality and quantity of the coursework they have taken during their pre-service preparation. Nergez said:

> There are some irrelevant courses in the curriculum that are required, and you cannot graduate if you do not pass them. Courses like Arabic language, Kurdish language and computer skills. I think these three classes wasted a lot of our time and energy.

Similarly, Kosar stated, "The Kurdish language course focused on Kurdish history and literature. It was useless because we had already taken these during our high school education." The participants argued that they have taken many courses that were irrelevant to their future career as a teacher. Therefore, they ended up unprepared and unconfident in their teaching abilities. Baecher's (2012) findings revealed that part of the issue of unpreparedness of teachers goes back to the irrelevant coursework that is offered in teacher education programs.

In addition, the EFL teachers complained about the quality of their coursework and described them as outdated. This is one of the major reasons behind the participants' perception of not being well-prepared. They thought that the coursework presented in the EFL teacher education programs did not prepare them adequately so that they can meet the requirements of an occupation related to their major. Sofi-Karim's (2015) findings suggest that Kurdish EFL teachers are not well prepared because they have not taken enough relevant coursework during their pre-service preparation.

The over theoreticality of some of the courses proved to be another big problem for most of the EFL teachers. They argued that they did not know how to translate these courses into the real-life problems of their classrooms. Bayar complained:

> When I took the classes theoretically, I had to memorize the theories but could not really apply the in real-world classroom…I think student teachers should put into practice what they learn inside the classroom so that they can see and understand the way it works in real situations.

The findings are consistent with the literature on EFL teacher education in Kurdistan. Hassan (2014) found the same problem in his study of the curriculum in EFL teacher education programs in Kurdistan. Ninety-six percent of the participants in his study described their coursework as theoretical. They argued that they learned theoretical things that they did not have enough chance to practice. Most of the participants believed that "…very little of what they learn is usable after graduation" (p. 34).

Courses Missing in the Curriculum

The majority of the EFL teachers believed that the five courses of Second Language Acquisition, Learning Theory, Methods of Teaching EFL, Classroom Management, and Special Education are crucial for EFL teachers and must be included in the program. Scholz's (2014) findings show that coursework in developmental psychology and learning theory can be very helpful in preparing qualified teachers who understand the needs of their students. Curriculum analysis and interviews with EFL teachers revealed that the EFL teacher education program under study in Kurdistan lack a consistent curriculum necessary for educating their prospective teachers about the cognitive and social development of children. The program does not have strong coursework on child and adolescent development that are important for prospective teachers to understand the developmental processes of their students and the ways they can learn better. There is no systematic observation of children and their development.

In addition to child development, EFL teachers need to be familiar with the process of second language acquisition to help their students learn English proficiently. Data analysis

revealed that prospective teachers do not take such classes and are not at all familiar with the process. Mina stated, "As an EFL teacher who is responsible of teaching a new language to his learners, I should be familiar with the process of learning a second or foreign language." In Baecher's (2012) study, the participants ranked the Second Language Acquisition as the best class they have taken in their preservice program. The participants in my study held that it is crucial for them to know about the process of learning a language before they can teach it and therefore SLA course needs to be added to the curriculum.

Classroom Management turned out to be one of the biggest problems in Kurdistan according to the participants. Large class size is one of the reasons behind this issue, yet this is not the only reason across the region. Reports released by the ME show that most classes have an average of 45 students which is a large number. This is particularly considered to be a large number for EFL classes where teachers need to assign speaking and listening assignments or work with individual learners. However, the findings revealed that the participants did not take any courses related to classroom management during their pre-service teacher education. Therefore, when they entered the classroom for the first time, most of them did not know how to organize and manage a class. Hajar, an EFL teacher in a rural village, said "I have 50 students in my classroom and sometimes I do not know what to do with them, because they make a lot of noise and I waste a lot of class time to manage them." She added "During my preparation years when I was an undergraduate student in college, they did not teach us anything about classroom management, especially when there are many students in the classroom." Almost all EFL teachers who participated in this study agreed that the reason they felt unprepared is because they did not take relevant coursework and that they did not do enough practice teaching under the supervision of an experienced mentor.

Curriculum Development

As Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) stated, the fundamental curriculum issue is what knowledge is worth teaching. It is expected that teachers should decide on the appropriateness of a certain curriculum. But, EFL teachers in Kurdistan complain that they have no voice in curriculum development. Concerning considering EFL teachers' opinions about curriculum development, Kosar stated:

> The ministry of education and superintendents never ask about our opinions concerning the development of the curriculum and the real needs of our students. They meet behind closed doors and come out with very unrealistic and impractical conclusions about curriculum change. I think they should take our input and insights to come up with better changes.

It is concluded that whenever changes are to be made in the curriculum, teachers' views and opinions are not taken into consideration and therefore the practical needs of the students are often neglected. Jeger, another EFL teacher, said "I have no choice over the curriculum. There have been times that I wanted to change some certain things in the curriculum simply because I found them unsuitable for my students' needs, but I could not." There is to be a positive change, EFL teachers must have a voice in the curriculum development and the overall process of decision making. Teachers are the main players of the education process and no critical decisions should be made without their active participation.

Due to the rapid changes of societies in the modern world, school curricula need to be changed continuously to meet the new needs and demands of the modern generation. As stated by Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) curriculum is not static, but is continuously negotiated. However, because the k-12 education and higher education in Kurdistan are central, implementing changes and reforms in the curriculum is difficult, time consuming, and ineffective. As to the overall situation of programs of the universities in Kurdistan, Ali (2012)

stated that university programs are outdated and need to be renewed and changed according to the needs of the modern world. He said, "Poor quality of academic programs leads to the poor academic level of the graduates and underperformance besides inactive interaction between the higher education and the society" (p. 622). He argues that because higher education is centralized, universities and colleges do not have the autonomy and independence needed to make positive changes. He believes that the reform process goes through many layers of bureaucracy and becomes ineffective when it is to be implemented in the real world and inside the classrooms.

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) state that teacher education programs need to have a "conceptual framework" or a "cognitive map" of what they want to achieve. Having a shared understanding among faculty members, school teachers, and student teachers of how it all "fits together" will result in a productive curriculum. Many EFL teachers in Kurdistan argue that teacher education programs cannot prepare teachers adequately simply because they do not have a clear understanding of the real needs of the current schools. The curriculum they teach in colleges of education and basic education has nothing to do with the practical things that happen in the schools and what is expected from students. Regular meetings between teacher educators and school professionals is crucial to understand the gaps in the teacher education programs. Unfortunately, there are no such regular meetings and networking culture in Kurdistan, and this is one of the main reasons we do not know how to prepare our teachers.

In brief, the participants believed that they were unprepared because first, they wasted a lot of their time and energy with taking irrelevant courses and second, they did not take some courses that are essential in preparing effective EFL teachers. Studies on EFL teacher preparation revealed that taking relevant courses during in-service teacher education and teacher

effectiveness are closely related. Therefore, EFL teacher education programs must reform their curriculum to produce high quality teachers and to do so, they need to hear what pre- and in-service teachers are saying.

Discussion of Research Question #3-What do in-service EFL teachers in Iraqi-Kurdistan say they think about the quality and length of the practicum during their teac0her education?

Research on field experience and practice show that student teachers who had observation and practice teaching experiences early in their programs performed better (Darling-Hamond & Chung, 2002; Ingersol et al., 2007; Kee, 2012). EFL teachers in Kurdistan argued that they were not involved in any clinical experience until late in their programs, so that they did not have enough chance to see what it is to be a teacher. The analysis of the EFL program revealed that the practicum consisted of two parts, observation and practice teaching, and student teachers take this course in the last year of their pre-service preparation. In the observation part of the course, student teachers observe an EFL teacher for a period of 50 days in a school of their choice. After this part is completed, student teachers are required to teach an EFL class for 40 days in a school of their choice. Student teachers are then evaluated and graded by the cooperating teachers and supervisors. Most of them described their field experiences as insufficient and impractical. Kosar, an experienced EFL teacher in a high school in Hawler said, "Our student teaching experience was a real waste of time. We were left alone in a classroom full of children. There were no mentors and our faculty supervisors came to the class only one time."

Many participants said that they faced the disconnected experiences of the university and school. Hajar said "University and school are two different worlds. Our field experience was fragmented and was not supervised by experienced practitioners. So, we were not sure if what we were doing in the class was right or not." Darling-Hamond and Bransford (2005) stated,

"Field work has often been divorced from coursework, inadequately designed, and placements have often failed to reflect standards for good teaching" (p. 454).

Some of the participants had suggestions to improve the supervision. Mobin said, "The experience can be improved with more visits and giving necessary information to the student teachers. I think supervisors should provide student teachers with good instructions and advice." Chnar elaborated this in more details, she stated:

> I think it will be a great thing if student teachers and their supervisors can meet every week and discuss what and how student teachers did in the classrooms. In this way, student teachers can learn from each other's positive and negative points and the supervisors can give them constructive feedback in a friendly environment.

Drawing on the perspective of EFL teachers, this analysis suggests that the practicum was an unsuccessful experience of their pre-service preparation. The participants believed that during their practicum, they largely thought about pleasing their cooperating teachers and supervisors so that they could pass the course and graduate. The hierarchical value system of the Kurdish society, in which authority and respect are given to teachers, plays an important role in the way supervisors and student teachers communicate. Therefore, supervisors usually dominate the conversation and little chance is given to the student teachers to talk about their opinions and concerns. Supervisors usually expect student teachers to accept their advice as a prescription and preferred methodology.

Structural issues in the designing of the practicum proved to be one of the fundamental problems in the EFL teacher education programs in Kurdistan. Sofi-Karim (2015) found that the practicum period is too short, is poorly designed, and is poorly followed up by the faculty supervisors and the cooperating teachers. The researcher could not find detailed manuals or catalogues designed specifically for the student teachers, supervisors, and cooperating teachers to

set the guidelines of the practicum and precisely define the responsibilities of the three parties. Student teachers argued that they did not know exactly what they were supposed to do as a practicing teacher. Similarly, findings revealed that the supervisors and cooperation teachers had the same problem. They did not know their responsibilities in the process of practicum.

The lack of sufficient support and feedback from supervisors and cooperating teachers in the process of practicum was one of the main concerns of the EFL teachers. The participants described the practicum as a failure because they believed that they never received enough constructive feedback from their supervisors and cooperating teachers. He (2009) stated, "Without adequate communication between mentors and pre-service teachers regarding teaching expectations and beliefs, pre-service teachers leave the teacher education programs ill-prepared to negotiate potential conflict between their beliefs and reality of teaching, leading to dissonance and resistance to adaptation" (p. 264). In a similar study done by Payant and Murphy (2012), the importance of teamwork among student teachers, cooperating teachers, and faculty supervisors is one of the major findings. Collaboration among the three parties involved in the practicum, supervisors-cooperating teachers-student teachers, was missing in the EFL teacher education program under study.

Conceptual Framework

The participants discussed that their knowledge of teaching was constructed through interactions with their professors, supervisors, and cooperating teachers. However, they also argued that they did not experience many of these interactions during their pre-service preparation. Social Constructivism Theory that is used as the conceptual framework for this study explains this issue clearly. Gergen (1994) discussed that knowledge is constructed as the result of interactions among members of the society. Also, Kim stated, "Meaningful learning

occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities" (2001, p. 3). Due to the social value

system of the Kurdish society, professors are looked at as authority figures. As a result, students

are usually passive listeners in the process of learning. Most of the classes are teacher-centered

where the teachers do most of the talking and students take notes passively. Accordingly, not

many incidents of interaction happen among teachers and students and even among students

themselves.

This is also evident in the practicum. Drawing on the analysis of the data, there were few

meaningful relationships among the student teachers, supervisors, and cooperating teachers.

Most of the participants complained that they never discussed what happened in the classroom

with their cooperating teachers. Similarly, supervisors did not have enough time to talk to the

student teachers after their visits to schools. Therefore, the amount of the knowledge about

teaching constructed by the student teachers tended to be limited and insufficient to help them

become effective EFL teachers in their future careers. Giving feedback to student teachers during

the practicum is one of the opportunities where student teachers can discuss their issues with the

supervisors and cooperating teachers and increase their learning awareness skills. As mentioned

earlier, the participants described the feedback they received from their supervisors as

insufficient, directive, and judgmental. Therefore, they argued that the construction of the

knowledge was limited. Studying this through Social Constructivism tells us the reason why

most of the participants considered themselves as "not at all prepared" by their EFL teacher

education program.

Recommendations for Improving the Pre-service Preparation of EFL Teachers

The objective of this study was to examine the feelings, experiences, and concerns of the in-

service EFL teachers about their pre-service preparation. Drawing on the results generated from

this study and considering the current education system in Iraqi-Kurdistan and after the examination of 200 surveys, 20 in-depth interviews, and the analysis of the curriculum of the EFL teacher preparation program under study, the researcher proposes two recommendations for improving the pre-service preparation of EFL teachers:

1. Development of Curriculum

    Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) stated that curriculum is not static, but is continuously negotiated. Most of the participants of this study believed that the curriculum of the EFL teacher education programs is outdated. They argued that the current curriculum is incapable of equipping prospective teachers with the kind of knowledge they need to meet the needs of the 21st century students. Therefore, the curriculum needs to be renovated according to the standards of modern education and based on research. Part of this renovation should emphasize on removing the courses which are not necessary in EFL teacher preparation. I suggest that for better EFL teacher preparation special attention should be paid to the pedagogy and teaching methods. Besides, courses like classroom management, second language acquisition, and learning theory could be added to the curriculum to better prepare teachers. Research on teacher education proved that there is a positive relationship between the amount of relevant coursework taken and a teacher's effectiveness and sense of preparedness (Baecher, 2012; Scholz, 2014).

2. Development of Practicum (observation and practice teaching)

    Practicum proved to be an essential element of any teacher education program. Darling-Hammond and Chung concluded that "more systematic and connected clinical experience" (2002, p. 287) is a key to better teacher preparation. The results of this study

indicated that practicum was not accommodated efficiently and therefore most of the participants complained that it was a "waste of time." The practicum experience can be improved in several ways. This includes improving the observation, practice teaching, and supervisors and cooperating teachers' roles. First, the observation of the experienced teachers can begin very early in the program. In the current system, the observation happens in the first semester of the fourth year. I suggest moving this back to the first semester of the third year. In addition, the observation should have a follow up workshop at the end of each week in which students and supervisors talk about what happened inside the classes that the students observed. This will give the students the chance to freely discuss what they observed in the class. Furthermore, the supervisors or instructors can give feedback to students and give comments on their observations. This will help the supervisors and student teachers to negotiate the process of learning and teaching in a safe and stress-free environment.

Second, in the current system, practice teaching is a forty-day program happening in the second semester of the fourth year. Drawing on the results of this study, I suggest two eight-week programs, one in the first semester and the other in the second semester of the fourth year. This will give the students enough chance to practice their teaching and become confident teachers. Furthermore, the supervisors and cooperating teachers will have enough time to give feedback to the students and discuss their problems. Kee (2012) found that teachers who participated in a yearlong practicum felt more prepared to teach than those who did not.

Third, the roles of the supervisors and cooperating teachers need to be clearly defined. Unfortunately, the analysis of the curriculum showed that there are not detailed

guidelines available for the supervisors and cooperating teachers. Therefore, they do not know their roles and responsibilities in the practicum. A comprehensive guideline based on research must be designed for both the cooperating teachers and supervisors so that they know their duties in the process. In addition, to make the practicum a successful experience for the student teachers, cooperating teachers and supervisors need to work together. They need to meet regularly with the student teachers and discuss their progress. Farrell (2007) asserts that the meaningful cooperation between student teachers and faculty supervisors is a key factor in the practicum. He argues that critical reflections and meaningful discussions between the student teachers and faculty supervisors increases the learning-awareness of the prospective teachers and helps them improve their teaching abilities and get ready for the real world of teaching.

Suggestions for Future Research

One of the limitations of this study was that I could only study the graduates of one program. Future studies might incorporate a larger number of EFL teacher education programs across the Kurdistan Region to get a clearer view on the process of EFL teacher education. There are five large universities in the Kurdistan Region which have EFL teacher education programs. An inclusive study of these programs would be helpful.

Besides using surveys and interviews, a variety of other data collection methods such as observation of teaching performance and examination of portfolios or diaries might be used in the future research to get a better understanding of the EFL teachers about the way they have been prepared in their pre-service programs.

Researchers should investigate the perceptions of the supervisors and cooperating teachers about their roles in the practicum to know about their feelings, experiences and concerns. This will lead to a very comprehensive understanding of the issues of practicum in EFL teacher education programs. In addition, this might lead to practical guidelines for practicum that can be used by supervisors and cooperating teachers to assist their student teachers better.

A final recommendation would be to explore supervisors and cooperation teachers' post-observation feedback to student teachers during the practicum. This would allow a deeper understanding of the nature of feedback and its importance in the process of learning to become a real teacher.

To conclude, researchers should investigate the other aspects of EFL teacher education in Iraqi-Kurdistan by using other means of data collection such as portfolios and observation. Furthermore, researchers can explore the roles of the supervisors and cooperating teachers during the practicum in more detail. These include the quality and quantity of the feedback they give to their student teachers, the relationship among the three groups of people involved in the practicum, and the process of observation during the practicum.

Conclusion

In this qualitative study, the researcher examined the overall perceptions of in-service EFL teachers regarding their pre-service preparation in Iraqi-Kurdistan. The study explored the feelings, experiences, and concerns of these teachers through surveys, in-depth interviews and document analysis. There appears to be a high level of dissatisfaction among in-service EFL teachers about their pre-service preparation. The results of the study revealed that most of the

EFL teachers believed that they have not been well prepared by the EFL teacher education program under this study. These findings may be assumed to be true to some extent in other EFL teacher education programs in Iraqi-Kurdistan as most of them have the same curriculum and are administered by the Ministry of Higher Education.

The study investigated EFL teachers' perceptions about two main components of their pre-service preparation; first, the courses they have taken during their in-service preparation and second, their field experience. Regarding the first component, the participants discussed the unnecessary courses they have taken that did not benefit their teaching in the real-world classrooms. In addition, they mentioned some necessary courses that were missing in the curriculum of their program. They believed that courses like Second Language Acquisition, Learning Theory, Second Language Teaching Methodology, and Classroom Management are vital courses that they had to take during their pre-service preparation to became effective teachers.

On another level, the findings of the study indicated that there are serious structural issues in the designing of the field experience or practicum. The participants complained about the impracticality and shortness of the field experience during their pre-service preparation. They argued that the 40 days period of the practice teaching was short. Furthermore, they were not satisfied about the feedback they received from their supervisors and cooperating teachers and described their feedback as artificial, brief, and judgmental.

Practice teaching needs to be longer and supervised and mentored by expert teachers and faculty members. In-service teachers need to receive regular training to update their content and pedagogy knowledge. To prepare quality EFL teachers, the teacher education programs need to

collaborate with schools to understand the real needs of the students and the schooling system. Moreover, these programs need to update their curriculum and pay more attention to the practice teaching. EFL teachers' voices are marginalized and neglected in the Kurdistan's education system. The curriculum is imposed on them and they have no say over its content. Teachers need to be consulted and trained properly over any changes that are to be made in the curriculum.

The findings of this study can be used for future planning in many areas but primarily in field of pre-service EFL teacher preparation programs. The findings can be useful for the evaluation and designing of a new curriculum that can help prepare effective EFL teachers. Furthermore, this study can be used for designing a practical practicum that enforces the learning experience of the student teachers and helps them improve their teaching abilities.

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APENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

Title: *THE PERCEPTIONS OF EFL TEACHERS ABOUT THEIR PRE-SERVICE PREPARATION IN IRAQI-KURDISTAN*

Researcher:	Administrator:
Nawzar Haji, Ph.D. Candidate	Ro Windwalker, Compliance Officer
Felicia Lincoln, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor	Research Compliance
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Description: This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of   Arkansas. The purpose of the study will be to explore the perceptions of in-service EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers regarding their pre-service preparation in the institutions that are in charge of teacher preparation in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This will be accomplished through surveying and in-detail interviews with a sample of EFL teachers in Iraqi-Kurdistan. Your participation in this study, answering the survey and interview questions, should approximately take 60 minutes.

Risks and benefits: There is no risk, other than the minimal risk associated with the surveying and interview procedures. The benefits of this study include the potential to uncover EFL teachers' perceptions about the way they have been prepared. This will help the educators and policymakers to make changes and developments in the EFL teacher education programs in Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Confidentiality: All data collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. This includes the obtained surveys and the interviews. To ensure confidentiality pseudonyms will be given to each participant. There is no transcription needed for the interviews because the answers will be in the written format. All data including the surveys and the recorded interviews will be stored in a secure location, only accessible to the researcher. All data will be destroyed after the conclusion of the study

Right to Withdraw: if you decide to participate in this program, but at any time and for any reason change your mind, you may withdraw your consent. There would be no negative consequences for this decision.

Informed Consent: I, _____, have read the description of this study. I understand the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, the potential risks and benefits, how confidentiality will be established and maintained, and the option to withdraw.

My participation in this survey and interview indicate that I agree for my responses to be used in this research and that I have received a copy of this agreement from the researcher.

_____   _____
PRINT NAME OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT   DATE

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS INSTRUMENT

1. What is your name, please?

2. From what university did you graduate? When?

3. How long have you been an EFL teacher?

4. How do you feel about your job? Do you like your job?

5. What is that you like about your job? Why?

6. What is that you don't like about your job? Why?

7. Did anything surprise you when you first entered the classroom as an EFL teacher? Why? Can you tell me a little about that?

8. What is the hardest part about your job? Tell me about that, please.

Let's go back to the time when you were a student at the university.

Here is the list of the classes you have taken in your teacher education program.

First year	Second year	Third year	Fourth year
Grammar1	Grammar2	Morphology	Syntax
Phonology1	Phonology2	Drama	Drama
Composition	Conversation	Novel	Novel
Introduction to Literature	Free Composition	History of English Language	Language Testing
Listening composition	Medium Comprehension	Translation	Linguistics
Conversation	Rise of Novel	Methods of Research	Textbook analysis
Computer Skills	Drama	Essay Writing	Literary criticism

Kurdish Studies	Poetry	Poetry	Research project
Arabic Language	Educational Psychology	Conversation	Teaching practice
Phonetics	Developmental Psychology	English Curriculum	
Reading comprehension		Methods of teaching English	
Foundations of Education			

9. What are some of the classes that you have taken, and you think were helpful? Why?

10. What are some of the classes that you have taken, and you think were not helpful? Why?

11. What are the best 10 courses you have taken during your preparation?

12. Can you rank the courses you have taken in your 3rd and 4th year?

13. Do you think that your pre-service preparation (the courses you took) helped you to have a deep knowledge of the content you teaching? Can you explain please.

14. Do you feel that "you know the content, but you don't know how to teach it or transfer it to your students"? Do you think that you have taken enough courses on pedagogy? Do you think you should have taken more classes?

15. From the curriculum, I noticed that you have not taken courses like "Learning Theory, Classroom Management, Second Language Acquisition". Do you think that taking these courses might have helped you to become a better EFL teacher?

16. Did you get any courses on child and adolescent development? Do you think they are useful in your career? What do you suggest?

17. Have you learned anything about assessment? Do you think what you have learned is useful in your career as an EFL teacher? How?

18. Are there any other particular classes that you think you would have liked to take to become a better EFL teacher? Why you think so?

19. What course or courses would you like to be added to that?

20. Can you describe a component of your EFL training that has directly impacted your teaching today?

21. From the curriculum I can see that you had a teaching practice course in the final year of your program. How long was your teaching practice? Was that enough? Why?

22. What do you think were the positive points of the teaching practice?

23. What do you think were the negative points of the teaching practice? How could it be improved?

24. Describe how your field experience influenced your development as an EFL teacher

25. Did you have any mentors or supervisors during the teaching practice? If yes, what was their role? How often did you see them and talk to them? Was that enough? Do you think they were helpful? How could that experience be improved?

26. As an EFL teacher, what do you think about the way you have been prepared to be an EFL teacher? I mean do you think that you have been well trained? Why?

APPENDIX C: SURVEY INSTRUMEN

Thank you for taking time to assist me in this study of teacher perceptions of preparedness to teach English as a Foreign Language. Completing this survey should take approximately 15 minutes.

Today's date _____

1. What is your gender? ☐Female ☐Male
2. What was your age on your last birthday? _____
3. Please specify the name of the university that you received your bachelor's degree from (example: Salahaddin University). _____
4. Please specify your major program of study at your university. _____
5. Please specify your minor program of study at your university. _____
6. During your university studies, did you complete three or more courses appropriate for the age of the students you taught during your first three years of teaching in...

(a) Selecting and adapting instructional material ☐ Yes ☐ No
(b) Learning Theory ☐ Yes ☐ No
(c) Developmental Psychology ☐ Yes ☐ No
(d) Teaching Methods ☐ Yes ☐ No

7. During your university studies, did you complete at least one (1) year of practice teaching?
☐ Yes ☐ No
8. At what level did you do your practice teaching? ☐ Primary School ☐ Secondary School
9. At what level do you currently teach? ☐ Primary School ☐ Secondary School
10. How many months have you been a teacher? _____
11. Is the school where you are currently teaching in a rural or urban area? ☐ Rural ☐ Urban
12. What would you say (on average) is the number of students enrolled in your English classes?
13. Have you received any teacher professional development training since you began teaching?
☐ Yes ☐ No
How well prepared do you feel you are to:
14. to teach subject matter concepts, knowledge, and skills in ways that enable students to learn.
☐ not at all prepared ☐ somewhat prepared ☐ well prepared ☐ very well prepared
15. to understand how different students in your classroom are learning.
☐ not at all prepared ☐ somewhat prepared ☐ well prepared ☐ very well prepared
16. to identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties.
☐ not at all prepared ☐ somewhat prepared ☐ well prepared ☐ very well prepared
17. to resolve interpersonal conflict in the classroom.
☐ not at all prepared ☐ somewhat prepared ☐ well prepared ☐ very well prepared
18. to maintain an orderly, purposeful learning environment.
☐ not at all prepared ☐ somewhat prepared ☐ well prepared ☐ very well prepared
19. to use a variety of assessments (e.g., observation, portfolio, tests, performance tasks, anecdotal records) to determine student strengths, needs, and programs.
☐ not at all prepared ☐ somewhat prepared ☐ well prepared ☐ very well prepared

20. Overall, how well prepared did you feel you were when you first started teaching?
☐ not at all prepared ☐ somewhat prepared ☐ well prepared ☐ very well prepared
21. Do you think that you have been prepared to be an effective EFL teacher?
☐ not at all prepared ☐ somewhat prepared ☐ well prepared ☐ very well prepared
22. How do you evaluate the role of the supervisor during your practicum?
Helpful ☐   Unhelpful ☐
23. How many times did your supervisor visited you during the practicum?
One ☐   Two ☐   Three ☐   Four ☐
24. How many times did the cooperating teacher observed you during the practicum?
None ☐   Once ☐   Twice ☐   Regularly ☐
25. Did you notice a conversation between your supervisor and cooperating teacher?
None ☐   Short conversations ☐   Long Conversations ☐
26. How do you evaluate the quality of the feedback you received from your supervisors and cooperating teachers?
Constructive ☐   Unconstructive ☐
27. How do you evaluate the length of the feedback you received from your supervisors and cooperating teachers?
Short (5-15 minutes) ☐   Enough (15-30 minutes) ☐   Lengthy (30-60 minutes) ☐
28. How do you evaluate the length of the observation?
Short ☐   enough ☐   long ☐
29. How do you evaluate the observation period of the practicum?
Helpful ☐   Unhelpful ☐
30. How do you evaluate the length of the practice teaching period of your practicum?
Too short ☐   short ☐   enough ☐   long ☐
31. write the names of the five best courses you took during your pre-service preparation that were relevant to your teaching career.
32. Write the names of the five worst courses you took during your pre-service preparation that you think were irrelevant to your teaching career.
33. Write the names of the courses that you think were missing in the curriculum of your pre-service preparation program.

APENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

February 9, 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Nawzar Haji
Felicia Lincoln

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 17-01-401

Protocol Title: *The Perceptions of EFL Teachers about their Pre-Service Preparation in Iraqi-Kurdistan*

Review Type: ☒ EXEMPT ☐ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 02/07/2017 Expiration Date: 02/06/2018

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 40 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.