

Developing whole-class interactive  
teaching: meeting the training needs  
of Syrian EFL secondary school  
teachers

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores teacher instructional practices within EFL secondary school classrooms in Syria. In 2004, the Syrian Ministry of Education introduced a new national curriculum, *English for Starters*, which recommends a shift in EFL teachers' instructional practices. Despite this costly innovation, there has been no attempt to check whether it was working. Adopting a socio-cultural perspective on learning, the study looks at teacher-student interaction and discourse taking place during teacher-fronted whole class talk. Using a mixed-methods approach comprising classroom observations, teacher interviews and a structured questionnaire, teacher beliefs and classroom practices are investigated to help in the identification of teachers' training needs.

Despite official attempts to introduce a Communicative Language Teaching approach, detailed discourse analysis revealed a traditional textbook-directed, teacher-controlled transmission mode of teaching, focusing on rote learning and mechanical practice rather than meaningful interaction to develop language skills and understanding. Students were afforded few opportunities to participate meaningfully in classroom interaction, as teachers controlled not only the topics of academic learning, but also the way students learned the content.

Based on the analysis, the study highlights the need to invest in teachers' professional development, particularly during the critical phase of curriculum innovation, to promote communicative approaches in the Syrian educational system. Drawing on the findings of the study regarding the interactional and discourse practices of Syrian secondary EFL teachers, the thesis explores the training needs of teachers in the light of recent reforms to the English language curriculum.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	EXPLANATION
ZPD	ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT
NT	NOVICE TEACHER
IELTS	INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTING SYSTEM
INSET	IN-SERVICE TRAINING
CI	CURRICULUM INNOVATION
GTM	GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD
GPA	GRADE POINT AVERAGE
DES	DIPLOMA IN EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
EFL	ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
CLT	COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING
RQ	RESEARCH QUESTION
MOE	MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
ELT	ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
ESL	ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
LCA	LEARNER-CENTERED APPROACH
SCT	SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORY
SLA	SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION
TD	TEACHER DEVELOPMENT
CPD	CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
TESOL	TEACHING OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES
ODCS	OBSERVATIONAL DATA CODING SYSTEM
PRESET	PRE-SERVICE TRAINING
^	RAISED INTONATION

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# Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is an original piece of work of mine. No part of this thesis has been previously published or submitted for another award or qualification in other institutions or universities.

I declare that all the material in this thesis which is not my own has, to the best of my ability, been acknowledged. The material in the thesis has not been submitted previously by the author for a degree at this or at any other university.

# **C** **HAPTER** **One**

---

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Background to the study**

Attempts are often made to change teaching and learning of languages, but these are not always monitored, especially at classroom level. The present research is an exploratory study investigating the pedagogical practices of Syrian English language secondary school teachers at three government schools in the District of Homs, located in the middle of Syria. Teacher-student interaction is central to this study as a lens for exploring whether there is a mismatch between the guidelines of the newly-adopted Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the national curriculum and teacher beliefs and pedagogical practices in the classroom. The present chapter presents the working concepts of the study and outlines the organization of the thesis. It also presents the research questions, the aims and rationale for the study.

## 1.2 Identifying the problem

The teaching of English as a second or foreign language is being made a priority in many countries worldwide, as it is the language of international communication, i.e. the lingua franca of trading, media, politics and academia (Crystal, 2006). More specifically, Al-Khatib (2000) has drawn attention to the growing importance of English language in the Arab region. Currently in Syria, as in most other Arab countries, the majority of students who finish their public secondary school education must have had at least eight years of ‘compulsory’ instruction in English. Given its growing status, Syrian education policymakers have been trying to improve the quality of English language teaching, especially as regards the teaching and learning of oral communication skills.

In order to improve the teaching of English, many countries have introduced a CLT curriculum. Following this global trend, the Syrian Ministry of Education (MOE) recently (2004) introduced a new English language curriculum that is CLT-based and learner-centred. The new curriculum is called *English for Starters* and it recommends a shift in EFL teachers’ instructional practices away from being teacher-centred, towards more student-centred approaches. The curriculum guidelines suggest that the appropriate and effective implementation of language-based activities (e.g. pair and group work, role-play, problem-solving and language games) cannot be achieved unless student engagement and active participation are established. Under the CLT-oriented curriculum, teachers are recommended to move away from being knowledge transmitters and to adopt of the role of a facilitator (Savignon, 2007).

However, after a few years of implementation of the curriculum, personal observation suggested that the instructional approaches of many Syrian EFL teachers in secondary schools are still teacher-centred, even though they ‘profess’ to be using a communicative approach. This could be responsible for the common phenomenon of Syrian students often finishing their secondary school education with very poor speaking and listening skills which in turn affects their English education at university.



As a result of the introduction of the new curriculum, the professional development of EFL secondary teachers has been receiving more attention. British teacher trainers have, for example, been brought in to train and help teachers deliver the new curriculum. However, research suggests that without an understanding of how teachers are actually teaching in the classroom, such initiatives are doomed to fail (Alexander, 2008). What the Syrian educational system is experiencing is not unique, as this situation has been reported and documented in various parts of the world. The international literature indicates that when a problem is identified in EFL, an attempt is then made to find a remedy for it by introducing initiatives which ignore teacher beliefs and underlying pedagogical practices (Seedhouse, 2004).

Taking a socio-cultural approach to language teaching and learning, the present study positions the teacher at the core of the teaching and learning process, in which knowledge is co-constructed between students and teachers. The driving force for this study emerges from the fact that the first step to providing professional training for EFL teachers is to identify their current practices through empirical research. In this study, the case is made that a systematic review of teaching and learning in the Syrian EFL secondary English classroom serves as a starting point for pedagogical innovation and change. This, it is argued, will provide a rich evidence base needed for the making of the development of educational policy in EFL teaching in Syria.

### **1.3 Rationale for the study**

In presenting a rationale for the study, the general perception of a deteriorating level of ELT in Syria in general, at the secondary level in particular, has raised several questions as to where the ‘problem’ lies. This has led me to the view that, in order to improve the quality of secondary English teaching education in Syrian secondary schools there is a need to place pedagogy and its training implications at the centre of teacher education reform. Fullan (1991) echoes the centrality of the teacher in raising the quality of education when he states ‘educational change depends on what teachers do and think, it's as simple and complex as that’ (p.117).

It can also be argued that the current policy for secondary English teaching in Syria has been built on anecdotal, unsystematic evidence, as there is little empirical research to inform educational policy. Given the centrality of the teacher's role, there is a need to know more about what teachers actually do in the classroom when charged with implementing a curriculum innovation, on what basis they resist or accept the innovation, and the extent to which they see themselves as agents of change (Carless, 2001).

International research into classroom processes recognizes that managing the quality of teacher-pupil interaction is one of the most important factors in improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in contexts where learning resources and teacher training are limited (Alexander, 2008; Hardman et al., 2009). It therefore suggests that intervening at the school and classroom level through school-based in-service education and training will be crucial in raising the quality of teaching and learning in Syrian secondary English teaching, as ultimately educational quality is obtained through pedagogical processes in the classroom: through the knowledge, skills, dispositions and commitments of the teachers in whose care students are entrusted (Hardman, 2011).

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The study sets out to answer the following research questions:

- What interactive and discourse practices do Syrian secondary school EFL teachers currently use in their whole class teaching?
- To what extent do teachers feel equipped to implement interactive approaches in the classroom as advised by the Syrian MOE and the guidelines of the newly adopted national curriculum?
- What can be done to address the training needs of Syrian secondary school EFL teachers, in order to promote a wider repertoire of interactive and discourse practices in whole class teaching?

## 1.5 Organization of the thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Following on from the introduction:

**Chapter Two** presents a detailed description of the context of the study. It provides an overview of the structure of the educational system in Syria, describing the new English curriculum for Syrian secondary schools. It also offers a brief account of EFL teacher education in Syrian secondary schools. The chapter argues that contextual factors are crucial to the effective implementation of educational reforms.

**Chapter Three** presents the theoretical background that underpins the study. The chapter reviews relevant literature on the following areas: effective teaching and learning, current perspectives of classroom innovation, classroom interaction from a theoretical and empirical perspective, and current approaches to teacher professional development in EFL.

**Chapter Four** describes the methodology and methods adopted to answer the research questions. It gives detailed descriptions of the piloting and sampling procedures. A justification of the research methods employed and a detailed account of the development of the various instruments used in the study is also provided.

**Chapters Five, Six and Seven** report on the findings of the study in answer to the research questions. **Chapter Five** focuses on teacher responses to a survey questionnaire where teachers' understanding of the innovation, their classroom practices and professional training needs are explored. **Chapter Six** focuses on analyzing the data derived from classroom observation i.e. discourse analysis and systematic observation, as well as the interviews.

Finally, **Chapters Seven and Eight** summarise the main findings and discuss their implications for those charged with curriculum innovation in Syria and beyond. A discussion of the limitations of the study and directions for future research is also provided in **Chapter Eight**.

# **C** **HAPTER** **TWO**

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## **Context of the Study**

### **2.1 Introduction: Setting the scene**

This chapter introduces the educational background to the current study. As the study focuses on Syrian secondary EFL education, investigating teachers' practices and perceptions, it is necessary to examine the national context where the study was undertaken. Three main areas of enquiry will be examined: the wider Syrian educational system, teacher education, and the new Syrian EFL curriculum. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the Syrian educational system before moving on to discuss EFL provision in the country, and how the training needs of teachers are being addressed.

## 2.2 Overview of the Syrian educational system

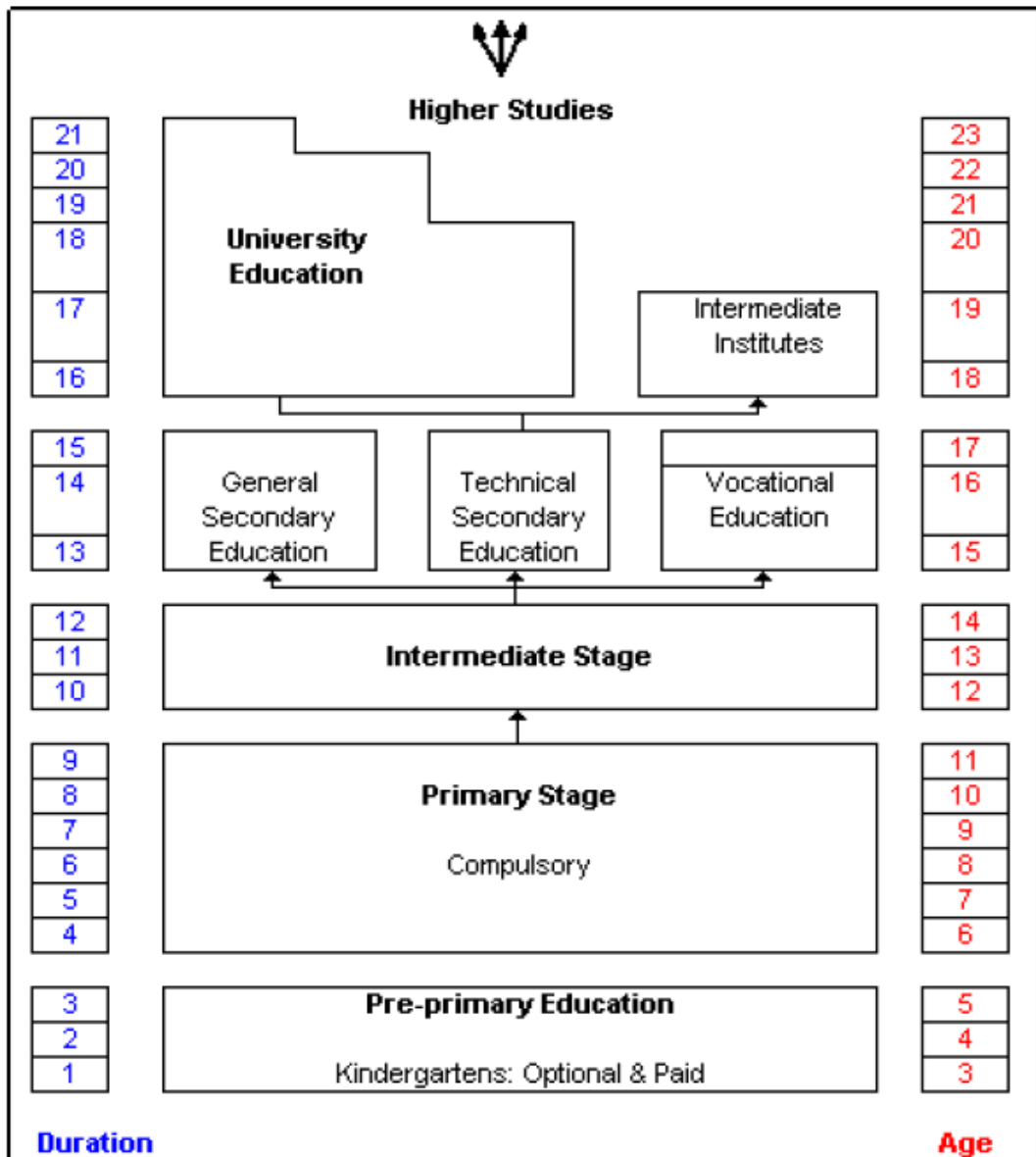
Although Syria is considered a low-income country, education is highly valued. It is controlled, supervised and run by the central government. The Syrian Ministry of Education (MOE) is charged with policy planning, finance, innovation and the implementation of educational reforms. It is also responsible for the curriculum and providing teaching material and support to educational directorates based in the country's 14 governorates. Each educational directorate is responsible for the schools in its governorate.

According to MOE statistics, the majority of schools in Syria (95%) are run by the government, so the private sector is comparatively small (MOE, 2008). Education in state schools is free of charge and compulsory from the Grade 1 till Grade 9 (Basic Education). In Grade 9, the final exams are set nationally and they determine whether students move to 'general' or 'vocational' secondary schools.

In vocational schools, male students can choose to do agriculture, industry, communication, or commerce, whereas female students can do nursing, crafts or arts. Both male and female students in vocational schools can do computer science. In general secondary schools at the end of Grade 10, students (males and females) can choose to move to study 'literary' or 'scientific' subjects. The school year in Syria is made up of 32 weeks (excluding exam periods) and is split into two equal semesters.

Secondary schooling, both vocational and general, ends at the 12<sup>th</sup> Grade National Baccalaureate examinations. Like the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade examinations, the Baccalaureate is set nationally. The Baccalaureate determines which university or college the student can attend. Most post-secondary education is regulated and administered by the Ministry of Higher Education. However, Syrian legislation determines that lessons in governmental schools and universities must be taught in Arabic, with English and French taught as the first and second foreign languages (UNESCO & IBE, 2011). The Syrian school curriculum, uniform and nationwide, is regulated and developed by the MOE Department of Curriculum and Research (DCR). Figure 2.1 illustrates the hierarchy and the structure of the education system in Syria.

Figure 2.1 The hierarchy & organization of Syrian educational system adopted by the World Data on Education (2011)



For cultural and social reasons, teaching in Syria is a popular profession among women. Like other Arab countries, it is viewed as one of the most appropriate jobs for women (Shihiba, 2011). In Syria, the statistics show that the majority of the teachers in kindergarten and primary education are females. In secondary stages, the percentage of male and female teachers is 48% and 52% respectively (MOE, 2010).

### **2.2.1 Challenges within Syrian education system**

According to several commentators, the main barriers to raising educational quality in Syria are teachers' subject and pedagogical knowledge (i.e. knowledge of how to teach a subject) , arising from the poor initial training of teachers and the lack of continuing professional development (Albirini, 2006; Chapman & Miric, 2009; Edstats, 2010). Albirini (2010, p. 40) sums the situation by stating that 'the rule for Syrian teachers was to stick to the curricula and for the students to focus on the material provided to them'. He also notes that teachers are often unable to cope with a new educational reform as they lack proper training to put these new initiatives into practice. The reliance on a centralized, top-down approach to reform (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992) is due to the bureaucratic legacy of a heavily centralised system of government in Syria.

Another challenge has to do with private tutoring or the 'ghost curriculum' which is common in Syria, due to the low government salaries for teachers (Bray, 2009). Although private tutoring is officially discouraged, many teachers do it to supplement their incomes. The demand for such provision is fuelled by the examination-driven orientation of the Syrian education system. Parents and students are keen to cover the textbooks for the national examinations and most teachers (Daoud, 1999) tailor their teaching practices to prepare students to pass the high-stake tests at Grades 9 and 12.

### **2.2.2 The physical arrangement of the classroom**

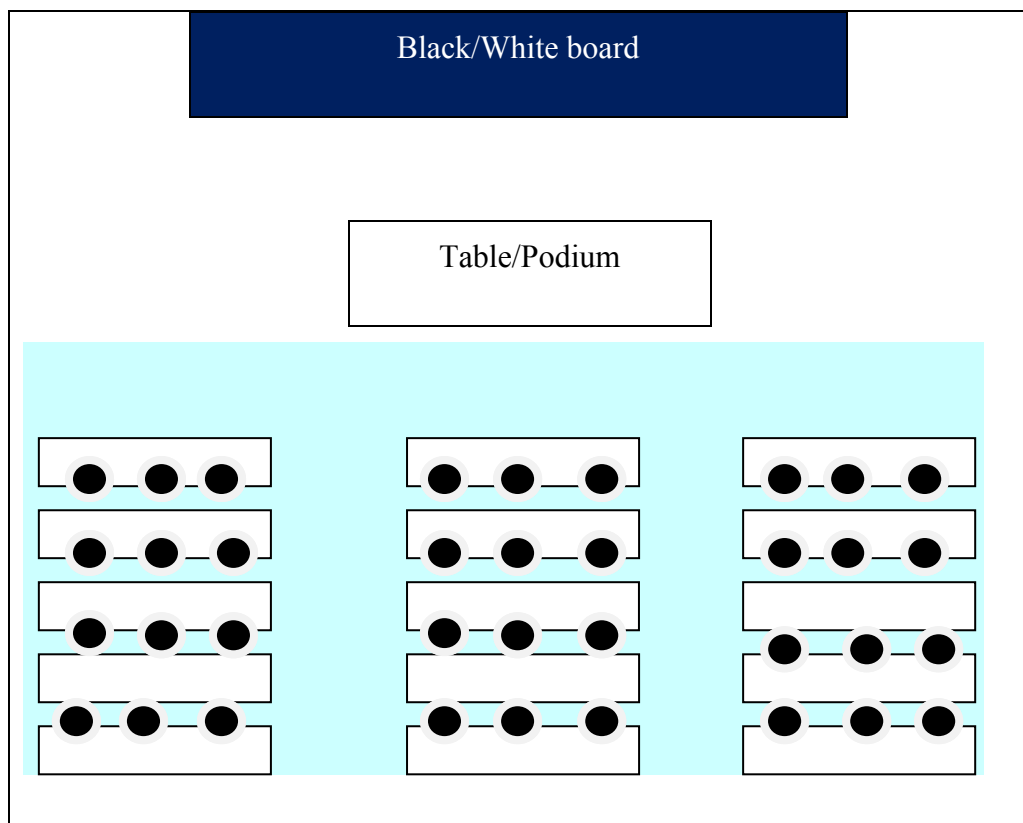
Like many other contexts, classrooms in Syria are mainly teacher-fronted, in which the physical layout is uniform with fixed double desks and attached chairs (Daoud, 1999). Students sit in rows facing their teachers, who normally stand behind their table and position themselves in the middle of the platform in the front of the class. Most Syrian secondary level classes usually accommodate from 30 to 36 students (MOE, 2008). Figure 2.2 represents a typical layout of a secondary school classroom in Syria. Teachers rarely change the seating arrangement. They keep it for a number of reasons, including a lack of space, time and awareness of alternative ar-

rangements. Shamim's (1996a) description of a typical Pakistani classroom is almost identical to that found in Syria:

The classrooms in Pakistan are mainly teacher-fronted for a number of reasons. The effect of culture, whereby the teacher is traditionally seen as an authority figure and given respect for his/her age and superior knowledge where teaching is viewed as transmission of knowledge. Being also physically overcrowded, with limited space for teacher movement, the common pattern in the majority of classrooms is that of an active teacher and passive learners. (p.124)

As a result of large class sizes and the teacher-fronted delivery, the classrooms are often split into two 'zones': the front and the back. This point has particular relevance for language teaching as, Muijs and Reynolds (2001) and Nunan (2004) argue that seating arrangements can either facilitate or hinder student talk. That is, students occupying the front two rows tend to be at the centre of teacher attention and consequently the hub of participation, unlike students sitting at the back.

Figure 2.2 A typical layout of school classes in Syria





## **2.3 EFL in Syrian schools**

The English language enjoys a significant status in Syria. Historically, in the 1940s English and French were introduced as subjects in secondary schools. French continued to be the predominant foreign language of study until the 1950s when English started to gain more ground, depriving French of its monopoly in Syrian schools (Khoury, 1986; Samhoury, 1965). Since the middle of the 20th century and until this day, English in Syria has received unprecedented popularity, constituting the most important foreign language in the areas of tourism, commerce and science (MOE, 2010).

Given its importance as a world language, a major decision was made to adopt a CLT-based curriculum in 2004 to improve the quality of English language teaching. English was introduced in Grade 1 instead of Grade 7 and as part of resourcing, many secondary schools were provided with computers and language labs (Syrian Commission Family Affairs & UNICEF, 2008).

### **2.3.1 EFL in the secondary level**

Under the Syrian educational system, English is taught as a compulsory foreign language at all levels of schooling and as a university subject (UNESCO & IBE, 2011). At secondary level, classes range from four to five classes of fifty-minute periods per week.

Daoud (1999) found that although the English period represents the primary source of exposure to English for Syrian secondary students, their expectations are often met with frustration. There is a continuing dissatisfaction with EFL periods on the part of students, parents, policy-planners and makers at this particular stage and age. Similarly, Tharawoot (2009) found that many students in EFL classrooms think that English is too challenging for them to be competent. This was because of interference from the mother tongue, particularly in pronunciation, and idiomatic usage, a lack of opportunity to use English in their daily lives and unchallenging English lessons.

## 2.4 Teacher education in Syria

Unlike many other Arab countries, English teaching in Syria is almost totally reliant on local staff (see Daoud, 1999; Al-Halwachi, 1990). The MOE Training Directorate is in charge of all aspects of teacher education, and it aims to improve teacher performance and competences by organizing teacher training programmes. Training for staff at the pre-secondary levels is ensured by both the teacher training schools and by the intermediate training institutes (see Table 2.1). However, to teach at secondary level, all teachers, including EFL teachers, are trained at university level. EFL teachers are thus usually university graduates with a degree in English Language and Literature. The following table (2.1) shows the qualifications required for teaching at the different levels in Syria:

Table 2.1 Required teacher qualifications at different levels

Stage		Required Qualification
Basic Stage	Primary Schools	Primary/Intermediate Teaching Certificate (teacher training schools and institutes)
	Intermediate Schools	Intermediate Teaching Certificate (BA or BSc- with a Diploma in Educational Studies)
General Secondary		BA or BSc (Preferably with a Diploma in Educational Studies)
Vocational Secondary		Intermediate Institute Certificate, BSc in electrical & mechanical engineering, (Preferably with a Diploma in Educational Studies)
Intermediate and Higher Institutes		University degree
University		MA or PhD

In 1997, a governmental decision recommended that the training of teachers and assistant teachers (including EFL) should be provided by the Faculties of Education at university level. However, this decision did not come into effect until 2002 when the Faculties of Education were given the responsibility for upgrading teacher qualifications. From 2002 onwards, teachers were offered the opportunity to upgrade their qualifica-

tions to a university degree by enrolling on a 2-year programme with the Syrian Open University (UNESCO & IBE, 2011). Because EFL teaching is at the heart of this study, the next section describes in more detail the training of EFL teachers at the pre-service (PRESET) and in-service (INSET) stages.

### **2.4.1 EFL teacher pre-service training and qualifications**

As stated above, most EFL teachers in secondary schools are typically graduates of English Language and Literature departments from one of the five government universities. During their four-year study at undergraduate level, students are typically introduced to a variety of English literature (British and American) genres such as drama, prose, poetry, literary criticism, comparative literature and world literature. In addition to their literary studies, students are also introduced to English language-based subjects, including grammar, composition-comprehension, linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and translation (MOHE, 2010).

Because such English degrees are designed to prepare students for further studies and research, the syllabus does not include any teaching practice or teaching methodology modules. However, in Syria, graduates with a degree in English Language and Literature are deemed competent enough to teach English. In light of the growing concern over the quality of English teaching, as part of English degrees new academic subjects have been introduced, like research methods and teaching methodology, and under the new plan students are expected to work on their English language skills by themselves (MOHE, 2010).

The general situation with regard to EFL in Syria is summed up by Daoud (1999) when she states:

There is no certificated study in ELT at university level. The teachers' social and economic situation has a role to play in hindering their growth and increasing their isolation. Rhetorically, teachers are "Generation builders" and "architects of the future". They have a "Teacher's Day", which is a public holiday for all teachers. In practice, however, teachers are overworked and underpaid. As their salaries have not kept up with inflation, many are experiencing real hardships and suffering from low morale. To

make ends meet, a great many teachers find themselves forced to work overtime and/or do jobs other than teaching. This phenomenon is mostly found among male teachers in a culture where males are supposed to be the "bread winners". (p. 32)

For many years, degrees in English Language and Literature were seen (and sometimes stigmatized) as 'feminine' degrees. As a result, the majority of school teachers used to be female teachers (Daoud, 1999). Recently, this has dramatically changed, with many male students studying for a degree in English language and literature. However, as noted above, because teaching is a low-paid profession in Syria, male teachers often have a second job or do private tutoring.

Although the post-graduate Diploma in Educational Studies (DES) has been in existence for many years, it is not an obligatory pre-requisite for English language teaching. The one year DES is supposed to help student EFL teachers develop a range of pedagogic approaches. However, the model of teaching that the students are presented with is lecture-based stressing a hierarchical learning of knowledge and conventional teacher-fronted classroom organisation, with little blending of theory and practice in the classroom (Daoud, 1999).

While the DES is thus inadequate as a form of preparation for teaching, the majority of English teachers in Syria receive no formal educational teacher training before starting their career. However, teacher recruitment in Syria has lately been tightened to raise the quality of teaching standards. Teachers are now recruited on the basis of their application, their university Grade Point Average (GPA), and two language assessments, written and oral (MOE, 2010).

#### **2.4.2 In-service training**

After being recruited as English language teachers, novice teachers are required to serve the first five years of their employment away from their hometowns and cities, in the 'less educationally-developed' areas. These areas are mostly the impoverished rural areas in the northern-eastern part of the country.

In Syria, the MOE Training Department is responsible for providing teacher trainers, organizing and executing educational programmes in schools (UNESCO-IBE, 2011). The Training Department has training centres across the country. However, INSET provision appears to be ‘erratic and rather responsive’ (Rajab, 2008). That is, it is only arranged as and when pedagogic needs arise, rather than a systematic approach to continuing professional development (Hardman et al, 2011). As a result, following the 2004 initiative for introducing a new English language curriculum, little provision was made to upgrade teacher pedagogical skills to teach the curriculum.

## **2.5 New Syrian national curriculum of English**

In Syria, the MOE Curriculum Department is responsible for adapting, approving and implementing new curricula including the foreign language textbooks (MOE, 2010). Until the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the various English language curricula in Syria were structurally-oriented and designed around a nationally prescribed textbook. This practice had the adverse effect of teachers slavishly following the textbook. Recognizing this problem, the Syrian MOE in 2004 replaced the traditional structurally-oriented textbooks with a new national, communicatively-based curriculum, making it compulsory from the early years of schooling. The textbook is called *English for Starters (EFS)*, and was developed in collaboration with a publisher, York Press in the UK (Syrian Commission Family Affairs & UNICEF, 2008). The new curriculum is designed to place a heavy emphasis on communicative methods where students are expected to play an active part in their English language learning. A detailed description of *English for Starters* is given below.

### **2.5.1 English for Starters: The guidelines**

The new English language curriculum in Syrian schools from the basic to the secondary grades is designed to be a ‘learner-centred’ curriculum. Building on a CLT approach, *English for Starters* urges teachers to use communicative strategies and skills inside their classrooms. Although the modules in each course book outline the main list of objectives and provide teachers with a work plan, the textbooks appear to leave room for teachers to innovate by drawing on locally available teaching and learning

materials. *EFS* has been designed to provide for a wide range of language activities ‘to maintain student’ interest and to offer materials relevant to the different disciplines in secondary education (Mugglestone, 2006, p. 4).

The curriculum consists of a course book spread over 9-10 modules (according to the level) followed by a section devoted to supplementary readings, a mini-dictionary section and a grammar guide. There is also an ‘activity’ book with exercises corresponding to the themes in the main course book. Each module draws on local and international themes.

A close look at the internal module structure of *EFS* reveals that each module starts with the unit objectives that precede the warm-up exercises. Warming-up activities include motivating students to guess the meaning of new key words by having them match the vocabulary with photos. In the warming-up tasks, the pronunciation of the new vocabulary is also emphasised. Each module has at least 2 lessons for reading and comprehension. The lessons are followed by a grammar focus. The last part of a module is the ‘communication workshop’, where listening, speaking and writing tasks are presented. Some modules contain language problem-solving section. Table 2.1 outlines the structure of a typical module.

Table 2-1 The modular structure of *English for Starters*

MODULE TITLE (CULTURE)		
LESSON	LANGUAGE	SKILLS
Warm-up	Vocabulary: (nationalities) Pronunciation: (stress)	Listening Speaking
Lesson 1 Title (Lifestyles)	Vocabulary: (animals) Grammar: (Present perfect) Pronunciation: contractions	Reading and listening
Lesson 2 Title (Britain Today)	Vocabulary: food and drink Function: being polite	Reading: (website) Listening: (dialogue) Speaking: (describing)
Communication Workshop	Reading & writing, speaking strategies Linking: (however) Example: after listening, discuss these questions-what do you think? What do you do?	

The EFS guidelines state that the mother tongue should be used if deemed necessary, with the aim of ensuring that students are aware of the objectives behind each module. Teachers are also encouraged to check the understanding and the achievement of the objectives with their students at the start and the end of each module (Mugglestone, 2006, p. 4).

As for grammar sections, *English for Starters* is designed to ‘teach grammar in context, in the form of a short dialogue or text’ (p. 5). Students are encouraged to ‘pick up’ and work out the grammar rules. A mini-grammar appendix at the back of the Activity Book is meant for students to refer to while doing their homework (Mugglestone, 2006, p. 4). Further, the ‘Grammar Focus’ lessons provide grammatical input with strategies for dealing with lexical and functional input. Language problem-solving sections are provided, focusing on grammatical points that often cause problems. Students are expected to analyse the language in context and to notice key differences in usage.

In the listening sections, students are expected to do role-play and speaking activities, using suggested language structures, and in the writing section teachers are encouraged to get students to check each other’s drafts before handing their pieces of writing to teachers. Peer-correction is emphasised, as it is supposed to increase ‘awareness of common problems’. Talkback activities are used to get students to read and react to the content of what has been written, and this is seen as helping students to see the communicative importance of writing and not just to produce compositions for the teacher (Mugglestone, 2006, p. 5).

In the speaking sections, teachers are advised to allocate students plenty of time to develop their ideas using the key words and phrases from ‘Key Function’ parts. Within each lesson, there is a variety of whole-class, pair-work and group work activities. Teachers are encouraged not to correct student mistakes, or let other students interrupt or correct them. It is recommended that teachers pinpoint mistakes and go through them with the whole class after the speaking activity. The last part in each module is the ‘Communication Workshop’, comprising writing and speaking sections. Recogniz-

ing, rewarding, and praising student participation and effort in speaking activities are specially highlighted throughout the textbook.

The basic premise of *English for Starters* is that students learn English best when they are dealing with meaningful content and when they are using it (Mugglestone, 2006). It is argued in the guidelines that thematic input provides a context for language and communication, and supplies a series of cognitive ‘anchors’ for learning which are crucial in a monolingual environment. Another stated advantage of *English for Starters* is that, throughout the course, there is a clear direction to learning. It is argued that the modules, lessons and tasks all have clear communicative outcomes.

Communicative activities in the book are intended to be clearly staged and all skills are all closely integrated. In the curriculum, reading, writing, listening and speaking are integrated through a wide variety of text types such as e-mails, websites, questionnaires, newspapers articles, menus, instructions, and fact-files; all presented as monologues, dialogues or phone conversations. In most activities, teachers are recommended to have the students working in pairs to discuss the new information presented at the beginning of each module and then to report back to the class or another pair their understanding.

While the new curriculum has been in place for the past 9 years, no systematic evaluation by the MOE has been conducted to assess its impact on the quality of ELT in Syria. As discussed in sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2, teachers have also been given little training in implementing the 2004 curriculum.

## **2.6 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, a brief description of the educational context of Syria has been presented. It suggests that a greater understanding of what is going on inside the Syrian EFL classroom will provide the best starting point for educational reform in the teaching of secondary English, particularly with regard to teacher education and training. The next chapter sets out to locate the study within the wider context of international research into the teaching of English as a foreign language, with a focus on the centrality of classroom talk in the act of teaching.



# **C** **HAPTER** **Three**

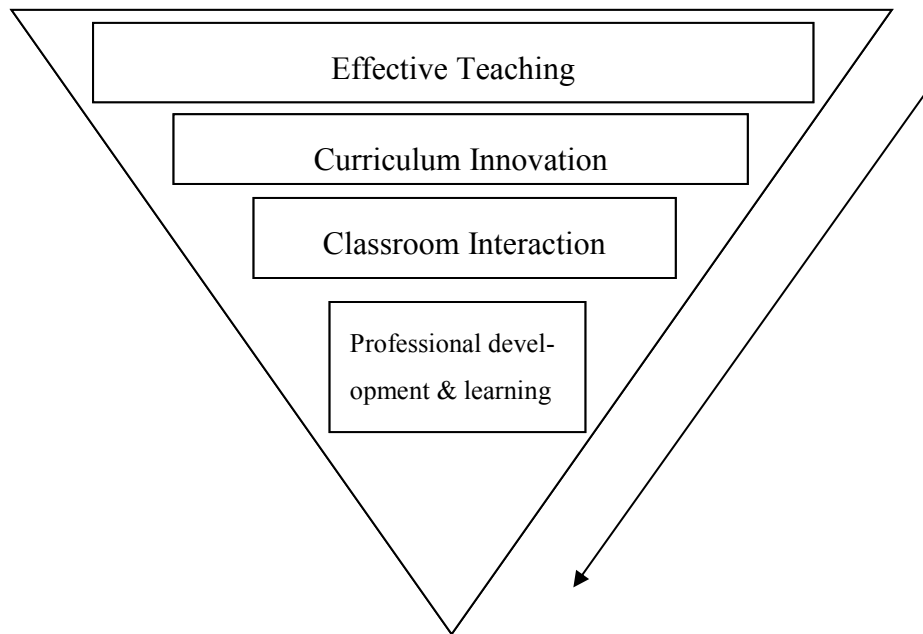
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## **Literature Review**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the study's theoretical underpinning by reviewing the relevant literature on effective teaching, curriculum innovation in EFL teaching, classroom interaction and teacher professional development. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of how the current chapter is organized.

Figure 3.1 Outline of the literature review chapter



### 3.2 Study goals re-stated

This study aims to explore the pedagogical practices of Syrian EFL secondary school teachers by analyzing patterns of interaction inside the classroom. The way in which the present research is framed highlights three important things: firstly, the significance of analyzing the teacher's actual pedagogical practices in response to an educational reform; secondly, the centrality of classroom interaction in the act of teaching; and thirdly, the role of context in determining how teachers' beliefs are translated into practice. Long (2005) argues that in foreign and second language teaching, the different variables of roles, beliefs, practices and cultures should be taken into consideration when conducting a study on classroom practices and effective instruction.

### 3.3 Quality in language teaching and learning

It is widely accepted that the ultimate goal for a national MOE is the pursuit of higher standards in its educational services. The Syrian MOE is no exception to this rule as the different schemes adopted by the Ministry have aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in the country with the National Education Initiative,

involving the implementation of a national CLT-based textbook, being the latest in a series of initiatives to improve the quality of ELT in Syria (see section 2.5).

Towards the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the then Minister of Education stressed the importance of rectifying weaknesses in the prevailing teaching and learning practices in Syria (MOE, 2010). The MOE interpreted ‘quality education’ in terms of:

Motivating students’ quality teaching and learning through cultivating students’ minds, developing their practical competence in solving problems, updating the new exam-oriented education system and increasing learners’ communicative competence in the foreign language education. Further, teachers are required to use active learning strategies and to enhance students’ ability to use learning strategies to extend their communicative competence. (MOE, 2010, p. 6, *my translation*).

Such ambitious reforms required a shift in the teaching paradigm, moving from teacher-centred to more learner-centred approaches.

However, defining the term ‘quality education’ has been problematic and multifaceted, especially when it is concerned with several aspects of education such as policy-making, funding, accessibility, accountability, safe learning environment, supportive community, inclusiveness, classroom quality and teacher training. Adams (1993) argues that ‘quality education’ is usually associated with terms like ‘effective instruction’ and ‘best practice’. For the purpose of this study, ‘quality in education’ will be conceptualised in terms of teaching and learning processes. Within this, Crabbe (2003, p. 9) points out that an understanding of the quality of learning opportunity is central to the process of learning as ‘quality is important, not only for those who are paying for instruction, an issue of value for money, but also for those undertaking the task of designing and implementing a curriculum, and an issue of professional achievement’. In an attempt to provide a holistic view of the ‘quality’ concept, several frameworks for understanding quality in education have been proposed.

Alexander (2008) believes that most approaches to defining quality in education have mainly focused on outcomes, neglecting the role of process. Likewise, Crabbe (2003,

p. 11) maintains that the emphasis on 'outcomes or objectives has been a central feature of curriculum development for most of the 20th century.' Outcomes exemplified by students' attainment and exam results have been for a long time viewed as the main criteria for defining the level of quality in an educational system. It is believed that outcomes promote quality by channelling effort in a specific direction 'through assessing how well the learner has achieved the outcomes specified' (Nikel & Lowe, 2009).

However, the achievement of educational outcomes requires a focus on classroom processes so as to broaden, in the present case, the range of pedagogical practices in the Syrian secondary schools within distinctly teacher-centred classrooms. In this way, dialogue and discussion can be included alongside the more traditional drilling, closed questioning and telling, thereby raising cognitive engagement and understanding (Hardman & AbdKadir, 2010).

Other approaches to quality learning have focused on the input offered to students (e.g. Krashen, 1998). 'Input' here refers to the curriculum, learning materials and pedagogical practices. However, pedagogical processes have received the least attention in studies of educational change despite their vital role in defining the quality of education in a particular system. Unlike input- and output-oriented approaches, studying the teaching and learning processes in the classroom context empowers researchers as well as policy makers to make informed decisions about the direction of any education innovation. Stones (1994), accordingly, argues that the best starting point to achieve quality is through examining the pedagogical processes that happen inside the classroom.

Unlike Stones, Crabbe (2003) suggests that it is not sufficient to focus entirely on classroom processes, as there are other domains of enquiry that need to be considered in order to fully understand the issue of quality in a language learning context. Firstly, there is a need to research what conditions need to be met in order for language learning to occur. Secondly, the cultural context needs to be considered as contextual factors interact with pedagogical practices depending on the traditions, cultural mores, policy environments and school conditions. Rote learning, for example, so eschewed

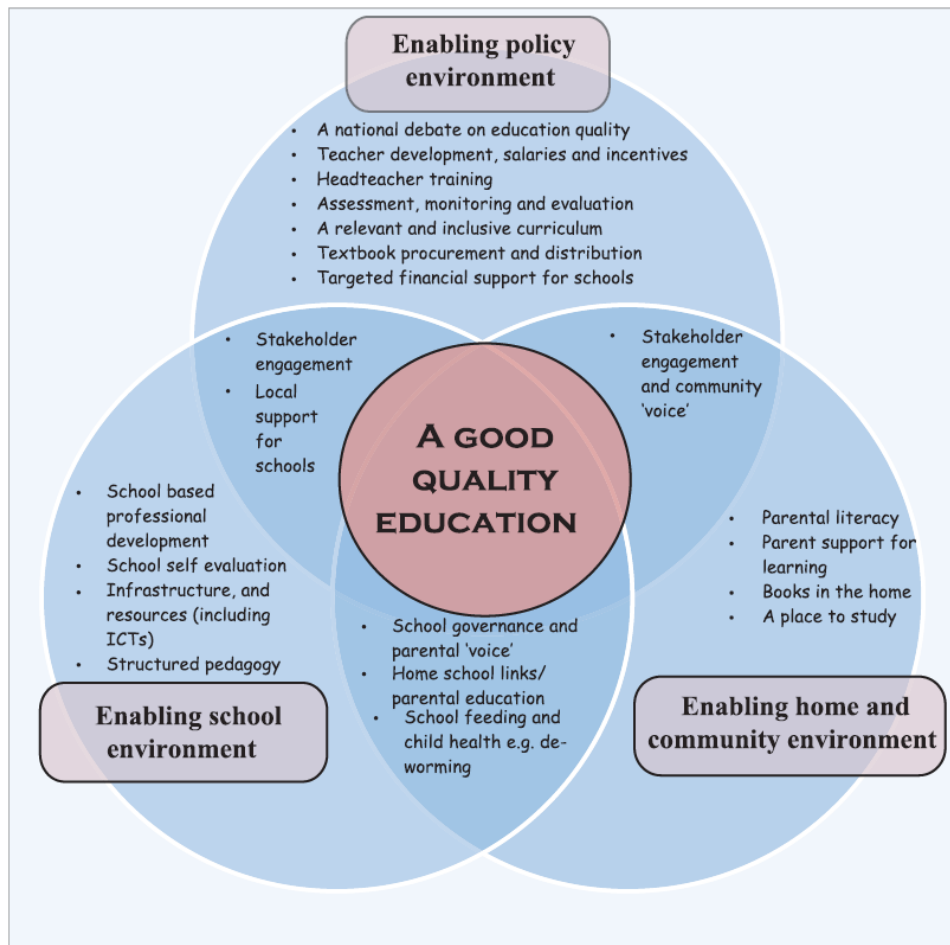
in Western approaches, may have a positive effect in certain contexts. For Crabbe (2003), cultural enquiry seeks to understand the specific contexts in which language learning and teaching are taking place. The principal task of cultural enquiry, then, is to understand current language learning and teaching practices, and the values and beliefs that underlie those practices. The final enquiry is a management enquiry, which should focus on how good practice can be established and fostered in a particular context, so that there is a constant search for improvement in the teaching and learning that takes place.

Alexander (2008) examines the notion of ‘quality education’ from a critical perspective. He criticizes the different ‘measures and criteria’ that have been employed, arguing that ‘the specific problems of monitoring the quality of pedagogical process [...] are problems of conception and evidence as much as procedure’ (Alexander, 2008, p.6). It is therefore essential that language teachers develop their awareness of what is actually going inside their own classrooms. For him, and for other researchers, what and how teachers teach closely reflects the pedagogical skills they possess (Alexander, 2010; Johnson, 1995; Tsui, 1997).

Nikel and Lowe (2009) argue that quality in an educational system is achieved when teachers maximize student learning opportunities and when students demonstrate higher levels of ‘cognitive achievement’. Similarly, Tikly (2011, p. 11) proposes a framework for education quality shown in Figure 3.2. His model reflects the complexity of the issues ‘surrounding what constitutes a good quality education’. The compounding elements of the model are arranged in a way that emphasises the interrelatedness of home, policy and school environments.

Despite the macro focus of this model, the elements of ‘teacher professional development’, ‘structured pedagogy’ and the ‘relevant curriculum’ places the classroom at the very heart of achieving good quality education. This will, as argued, eventually lead to improvements in teaching practice and student engagement.

Figure 3.2 Tikly's (2011) framework for understanding education quality



For Lockheed and Verspoor (1991), however, enhancing the quality of education implies improving both curriculum and teaching through increasing students' learning faculty and prolonging instructional time. However, their model for enhancing the quality of education looks at the macro level (i.e. accountability, cost and effectiveness) rather than the micro-level of the education (i.e. issues to do with improving the curriculum, providing learning materials, time for learning and effective teaching). In this regard, O'Sullivan (2006) argues that what ultimately matters for enhancing the quality of education is the teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom. In her view, what is required is a close examination of the practices which are 'effective and feasible in their context and that bring about effective learning' (p. 244). O'Sullivan suggests that classroom observation can provide illuminating insights into the current state of educational quality in schools. She argues that:

The “why” questions have to be supported with other data, most notably teacher observation data, in order to more fully understand the teaching and learning processes currently being used and the extent to which particular processes are likely to be implemented. This leads to the area of teacher thinking, which is also critical to improving quality (O’Sullivan, 2006, p. 245).

Drawing on the importance of classroom observation to identify the quality of teaching, several studies have used classroom observation to measure the quality of teaching inside the classrooms (e.g., Ackers & Hardman, 2001; Moyles, 2003). Ackers and Hardman (2001) analyzed the recordings of 102 lessons from Kenyan primary schools in order to define the quality of classroom processes. The study was designed to serve as a baseline for improving the quality of teaching in Kenya through the provision of in-service education and training for primary school teachers. The study stressed the importance of training teachers in the use of more active approaches to teaching and learning.

Although predominantly Eurocentric in nature, most studies into effective teaching have highlighted the importance of teaching in an interactive way. For example, Muijs and Reynolds (2010) view effective teaching through the lenses of direct instruction in which interactive teaching and classroom management are at the core. They believe that ‘good’ or successful teaching is 'discursive, characterised by high quality oral work' (p.43). Likewise, Hardman et al. (2009) also considered successful teaching as being interactive and expecting, extending and building on pupil contributions. Focusing on the communicativeness of teachers, Ellis (2005b) and Brown (2009) assumed that an effective language teacher should be able to:

- Present a range of communicative situations creating real situation from the environment
- Preserve and maintain high level of motivation among learners and handle learners' errors tactfully and provide for habit formation and real life use of the target language
- Prepare, use and evaluate appropriate materials
- Produce supplementary materials and teaching aids
- Provide for cross-cultural insights content

In the same vein, several researchers (e.g. Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Claxton, 1990; Dillon & Maguire, 2007; Kyriacou, 1997) contend that the qualities that contribute to effective teaching cover a range of qualities such as being well prepared, establishing a good pace and flow to the lesson, encouraging pupil contribution during the teacher-pupil interaction and building spontaneity into the discussion. Teachers should also be seen as subject experts, facilitators, motivators, and upholders of moral standards. By taking such personal dimensions into account, other researchers suggest that the profile of a good teacher assumes appropriate personal qualities including the development of a high level of intercultural communicative competence (Sowden, 2007).

Burns and Myhill (2004) consider interactive teaching as being the main ingredient that brings about effective teaching and learning. Interactive teaching, in this regard, is defined as engaging students with challenging questions and feedback on their answers, and involving them in problem solving and collaborative activities. Along these lines, Beard (2000) defines interactive teaching as falling into three phases of questioning in which teachers use: (a) questions of increasing difficulty to solve an initial problem to assess skills; (b) rapid recall questions to assess students' knowledge; (c) slower paced higher-order questions within whole class discussion to promote higher order thinking. Nunan and Bailey (2009) also argue that the use of high-order questions is central to interactive teaching.

I have found that most studies tended to look at the affective and conceptual aspects rather than procedural aspects of pedagogy. In line with Alexander (2008), it can be argued that the previous models have assessed quality from an input-and-outcome perspective. Therefore, there has been a 'history of ignorance' of context and of the actual process at the expense of examining input and outcome. Alexander stresses that research on the 'process' aspect in pedagogy remains a 'no-go area'. Cameron-Jones (1991) argues that it is not sufficient for language teachers to show that they have an academic qualification to teach English properly. What they should show is that they are equipped with the right pedagogical skills and are professionally well-prepared and developed in a recognized way to deliver quality language teaching.



Hence, the present study places ‘process’ at its heart, arguing that unless we understand teachers’ actual practices, policy makers and teachers in Syria are likely to carry on reinforcing the status quo. Although the argument presented here is that interactive teaching should constitute the main ingredient to any quality teaching, English as foreign language (EFL) classes present particular challenges that need to be addressed carefully when examining the notion of quality education.

### **3.3.1 Quality in EFL contexts**

Many researchers acknowledge that quality in the context of the English language teacher education literature has received and is still receiving relatively little attention (e.g., Ellis, 2005a; Savignon, 2007; White, 1998; Widdowson, 2003). The problem of defining quality in English language teacher education is compounded by the fact that some researchers link it to the idea of ‘excellence’, whereas others associate it more with the ‘professional competence’ of teachers, (Muijs & Reynolds, 2001; Seedhouse, 2005; White, 1998).

Crabbe (2003, p. 10) argues that the term ‘quality’ is now used more frequently, as English language teaching becomes ‘more business oriented and more accountable to funding agencies.’ Therefore, there is a need to clarify the ‘quality’ aspects of language use in EFL classrooms if we are to arrive at a set of guidelines which will eventually add up to ‘good practice’ in the language classroom.

For Walsh (2002), teachers’ awareness of their use of the target language inside the EFL classroom is crucial in achieving quality. He suggests that teachers can improve both the quantity and quality of learner output by using language more carefully and by understanding the nature of classroom discourse. This can be achieved through recognizing the important relationship between language use (i.e. teacher talk inside classroom) and pedagogic purpose (e.g., enhancing interactive ELT). This inevitably implies improving academic outcomes and empowering students to continue to learn and to engage effectively with the complexities of the ‘outside’ world. On the other hand, Ellis (2005a) stresses the importance of theorizing how a language is learnt inside the classroom, otherwise language teaching will not take place. For example, in

learner-centred pedagogies, teachers are required to understand what and how they are teaching within their educational context (e.g., Ackers & Hardman, 2001).

In foreign language classrooms, many researchers believe that effective teachers are those who give their students the floor to speak in the target language by using ‘a’ language that facilitates students’ output (e.g., Cullen, 2002; Mackey et al. 2001; Mackey & Oliver, 2002). Instead of dominating the verbal utterances in the classroom, depriving students of opportunities to speak, the good teacher should allow his or her students to participate in conversations and even initiate topics for discussion. Nystrand et al. (1997) summarize the issue by stating that:

ultimately the effectiveness of instructional discourse [in EFL] is matter of the quality of teacher-student interactions and the extent to which students are assigned challenging and serious epistemic roles requiring them to think, interpret,, and generate new understandings. (p. 6)

Overall, it seems that while there is an on-going concern about the quality of EFL, there is relatively little empirical evidence of what goes on inside language teaching classrooms. Teaching, in many secondary school systems, is believed to be dominated by traditional teacher-centred methods. While more learner-centred methods are encouraged during teacher training there is often little evidence that these are being implemented in practice, even by newly qualified teachers. Hence, the purpose of this research is to investigate the actual practices of Syrian EFL teachers to provide empirical evidence about what is going inside such learning contexts.

### **3.4 Curriculum innovation as an indicator of quality**

It is a common knowledge that one factor that drives educational innovations is strong societal pressures for reform. Curriculum innovation (CI) at national level has always been central to the idea of quality in education. Mackey and Philp (1998) attribute this ‘centrality’ to the influence of business concepts of quality, as curricula represent the ‘means’ that lead to delivering the ‘ends’ i.e. the learning objectives or outcomes.

As discussed in 3.3.1, research suggests that improving the quality of teacher-student interaction will raise learning achievement. However, research also suggests that in many classrooms around the world a teacher-dominated discourse promoting rote learning and recitation is to be found (Hardman & Abd-Kadir, 2010). Such interaction often takes the form of lengthy recitations made up of teacher explanations followed by questions, and brief answers by individual pupils or the whole class. This therefore raises the question of why teachers are slow and/or reluctant to change their well-established classroom interaction routines and techniques. In order to consider this question, this section will briefly review research into curriculum innovation and the barriers faced by those charged with implementing educational reforms.

Following a number of other writers, the terms ‘innovation’, ‘change’ and ‘reform’ will be used interchangeably in this thesis (e.g., Fullan, 1993; Kennedy, 1987). Markee (1997) defines curriculum innovation as ‘a managed process of development whose principal products are teaching-testing materials, methodological skills, and pedagogical values that are perceived as new by potential adopters’ (p.46). He views CI as a ‘qualitative’ change not only in pedagogical values, but also in the materials and approaches used by teachers. However, other scholars view CI as a link within a chain of improvements. For instance, White (1993, p. 244) views CI as ‘a deliberate effort, perceived as new and intended to bring about improvement’ but points out that CI cannot by itself bring about radical educational reforms unless accompanied by a plethora of other improvements (e.g. school leadership, decentralizing education...etc.).

In contrast, Crabbe (2003, p. 10) views CI from the perspectives of the means and ends dichotomy where he perceives a curriculum to be the organisation and facilitation of learning opportunities (the means) to achieve particular learning outcomes (the ends). In essence, for Crabbe, CI is not only about introducing new educational materials, it is a process that requires collective efforts from all stakeholders.

As a process, CI goes through different stages of an overlapping progression. For example, Fullan (2005) differentiates between three stages of the CI process, namely adoption, implementation and institutionalisation. Given the context of the present

study and the limitations of space, the ‘implementation stage’ will be the focus of discussion. According to Carless (2001), there are three approaches to curriculum implementation. Firstly, there is the Fidelity Approach which focuses on the degree to which a particular innovation is implemented in accordance with the intentions of its developers. This approach assumes that curriculum change is a linear process in which teachers carry out what has been developed and planned (see Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Snyder, 1992). The fidelity perspective is concerned with identifying the factors which facilitate or hinder implementation, e.g., the variables which impact on faithful implementation.

Secondly, there is the Concerns-based Adoption Approach which focuses on the assumption that classroom change is a process and ‘*not*’ an event that is carried out by skilled individuals. The approach focuses on describing individuals' perceptions, feelings and motivations as they progress through different stages of implementation (Hall & Hord, 1987).

Thirdly and lastly, there is the Mutual Adaptation perspective which focuses on considering change as a non-linear or a mechanical event, as a recursive process of negotiation, experimentation and adaptation. This approach assumes that the exact nature of implementation cannot and should not be specified precisely in advance, but should evolve as teachers at various points decide what is best for their classroom context (Fullan, 1991). As far as this study is concerned, the Fidelity and Mutual Adaptation approaches have informed and influenced the study design (see section 4.3) in the light of the first research question which aims to identify the extent to which Syrian EFL teachers are implementing (or not implementing) effective ELT practices.

As with any educational process, curriculum innovation and implementation are challenged by a number of obstacles and barriers. Three major categories of barrier are identified and discussed in the literature: psychological barriers, teachers' attitudes and beliefs, and educational-cultural obstacles.

To begin with, the psychological barriers are thought to be grounded in the human tendency for stability and the need for security, and peoples’ resistance to change or modify their beliefs, values, and established routines (Maslow, 1972; Schumann,

1994). Writers on innovation, therefore, stress the importance of voluntary participation in an innovation and of involving the teacher in the decision-making processes (see Ellis, 2006; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Palmer, 1993; Sikes, 1992; Stoll, 1992).

Closely related to the psychological barriers are teacher attitudes and beliefs. They are one of the most significant potential obstacles in any educational innovation, as teacher perception of learning and teaching theories is one of the biggest determinants of classroom behaviour and teaching approach (Bennett, 1976; Gayle, 1979; Nunan, 1990). Karavas (1993) and Kennedy (1987) argue that teacher attitudes are context-specific and influenced by the values and philosophy of the educational system of which the teacher is a part. Hence, the knowledge and understanding of the principles of an innovation, as much as its practical implications, is frequently a neglected element by curriculum developers as Kennedy maintains.

Finally, there is the educational-cultural barrier which is defined as ‘the way we do things and relate to each other around us’ (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992, p. 83). Holliday (1994) stresses that a CI needs to be ‘culturally appropriate’ in order not to suffer what he calls ‘tissue rejection’ materialized by superficial and detrimental implementation.

Nunan (2004) and other researchers emphasise that, given the existence of these various barriers, curriculum change is extremely challenging, demanding and even intimidating for many teachers. He maintains that many teachers will naturally show resistance towards changes or will feel incapable of meeting the new requirements imposed upon them by the new curriculum, unless they are professionally trained and supported (e.g., Fullan, 2001, 2005; Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991; Markee, 1997).

Although a CI is faced with barriers, there are a number of generally applicable factors that facilitate and accelerate the implementation of a CI. These include good communication amongst stakeholders, positive teacher attitudes, the practicality of a CI, sufficient resources and most importantly the quality of INSET. It is the innovations that are perceived by teachers as having a greater relative advantage, compatibility with current aims and practices, and less complexity that are most likely to be adopted (Fullan, 1991).

In his review of the relationship between curricula and teachers, Crabbe (2003, p.10) argues that ‘the curriculum is brought to life by the main actors (the learners and the teachers)’. It is therefore governed by their own beliefs and values, which themselves are subject to influences from the broader social context — from parents, sponsors, institutional management, and professional communities. The teacher's role and contribution is essential because teachers are the instruments of change and without their willingness, participation and cooperation there can be no significant change (Brown, 2009; White, 1998). In the same vein, Stenhouse (1980, p. 69) places teachers at the heart of a CI. He urges teachers to extend their roles, develop research curiosity and become teacher-researchers. In his view, teacher ‘extended professionalism’ is essential for well-founded curriculum research and development (Crabbe, 2003). Without qualified and competent teachers, it is impossible to implement any educational reform and build a high quality education system. Moreover, qualified competent teacher will not be able to carry out their duties professionally without the proper conditions that support their teaching.

So far in the discussion, it appears that changing or updating the curriculum in a country cannot by itself bring about educational innovation. The curriculum is one amongst many other factors that contribute to bringing about improvement in student achievement, attainment, engagement and motivation. Ultimately, it is teachers who undertake delivering the curriculum and who are responsible for raising the standards for teaching and learning in a context. They take on the responsibility of transferring the curriculum content to the students. Curriculum innovation, therefore, is unlikely to be said to be successful unless it is coupled with three things: a shared understanding of the reasons behind the change; a truly committed staff willing to uphold and execute such change; and the provision of professional training for staff so they can interact more effectively with their students.

### **3.5 Classroom interaction as an indicator of quality**

The discussion above indicates that teacher-student interaction inside the classroom needs to be seen as a crucial indicator for measuring and determining the quality of teaching and learning. In this respect, Alexander (2008) proposes that ‘interaction

needs to be central to indicators of quality' (p. 34). Walsh (2003, 2012) calls for placing classroom interaction at the heart of teaching and learning process. He argues that

[Developing] teachers' Classroom Interactional Competence, defined as teachers' and learners' ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning, will have a positive impact on learning, especially where learning is regarded as a social activity which is strongly influenced by involvement, engagement and participation (Walsh, 2012, p. 1).

In EFL contexts, Allwright (1983, p. 152) argues that 'interaction in the classroom is not just an aspect of modern language teaching methods, but must be seen as the fundamental fact of classroom pedagogy — the fact that everything happens in the classroom through a process of live person to person interaction'. Focusing on teacher discourse, Ellis (2005b) argues that successful outcomes depend on the type of language used by the teacher and the type of interactions occurring in the classroom. Similarly, van Lier (1996, p. 5) points out that classroom interaction 'is a key element in teacher development'. He believes that 'curriculum innovation [...] can only come about through the fundamental change in the way educators and students interact with one another' (p. 158).

According to Alexander, a set of quality indicators for monitoring classroom interaction should systematically focus on a wide range of interactive features that cover both the context and teacher talk. Moreover, the characteristics of teacher talk need to be examined within the context of whole class, group-based and one-to-one talk. In this study, interaction is used as an umbrella term for all kinds of teacher-student talk in whole class, group and one-to-one encounters.

So far, the discussion has underscored the role that teacher-student talk plays in raising quality standards. In the following sections, the focus will be on the theoretical frameworks used for exploring classroom interaction. These include the position that classroom interaction occupies within the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature, Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

### 3.6 Classroom interaction: An SLA perspective

According to Gass and Selinker (2001), Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to the ‘process of learning another language after the native language has been learned’ (p. 5). That is, SLA studies how learners create a new language system with only a limited exposure to a second (and/or foreign) language. Within SLA, teacher talk has been looked at through three prominent perspectives: Krashen’s Input hypothesis, Long’s Interaction hypothesis, and Swain’s Output hypothesis. In the following sections, each of these hypotheses will be discussed in detail with classroom interaction in mind.

#### 3.6.1 Input and interaction hypotheses

Ellis (1985, 2005a) defines input in SLA as ‘the language that is addressed to the L2 learner either by a native speaker or by another L2 learner’ (1985, p. 127). He stresses that SLA is strongly aided through employing comprehensible input. For Krashen (1982), the comprehensible ‘Input Hypothesis’ suggests that opportunities for SLA are maximized when language learners are exposed to language input which is just a little beyond their current level of competence. According to his theory, learners will be able to acquire the underlying linguistic structures of language if provided with input just ‘a bit beyond (their) current level of competence ( $i+1$ )’ where  $i$  is the learner’s current level of language competence (Krashen, 1982, p. 21). The internalization of linguistic structures will occur ‘with the help of context or extra-linguistic knowledge’. The hypothesis specifically states that:

Humans acquire language in only one way, by understanding messages, or by receiving ‘comprehensible input’... We move from  $i$ , our current level, to  $i+1$ , the next level along the natural order, by understanding input containing  $i+1$  (Krashen, 1985, p. 2)

The hypothesis suggests that as long as learners are exposed to comprehensible input, their oral productive skill, i.e. speaking, will emerge automatically and the necessary grammar will be automatically provided. Despite the fact that such a hypothesis has been criticized for lack of precision and for being difficult to test, Ellis (2003, 2005b)



insists that for successful language teaching, message-oriented input should be provided. That is, teachers should not use language that is far beyond students' current levels of linguistic competence, as this will only lead to accumulated frustration on the students' part. Negotiating meaning in the form of interaction is thought to be the best way of generating such input. However, negotiation of meaning involves modifications and simplifications in all aspects of the language involved, including the grammar (syntax), pronunciation (phonology), vocabulary (morphology) and even discourse (Schmitt, 2010).

For its supporters, the 'input hypothesis' offers a platform for subsequent interaction. From this, a new line of discussion came into prominence with Long's 'interaction hypotheses'. Long (1983) and later studies argue that simplifying the linguistic elements does not represent the key value of interaction. Instead, it is the modifications in the interaction patterns (e.g. clarifying, paraphrasing, and repeating) that bring about language acquisition (Schmitt, 2010). This idea later became known as Long's Interaction Hypothesis, which suggests that two-way information-gap tasks raise learners' involvement in learning and naturally maximize their learning opportunities. That is, the more the input is recycled and refined, the greater is its potential usefulness as input. In this way, the input will become 'tailored' or fine-tuned to suit the learner's particular developmental needs. Fine-tuning occurs as learners obtain feedback on the language they are producing in the form of repetition, confirmation check, comprehension check or clarification requests (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Figure 3.3 illustrates Long's view of the progressive relationship between the type of interactional tasks (e.g., conversation, or classroom negotiation of meaning) and language acquisition.

Figure 3.3 Interactional task and language acquisition



In addition, Gass and Selinker (2001) highlighted the role of interaction in SLA, stating that ‘in conditions where learners received only pre-modified input but where no opportunities were allowed for interaction, development was not noted’ (p. 298). Gass and Varonis (1994) also acknowledged the importance of negotiated interaction in second language when the learner pays sufficient attention to notice any gaps in the interaction. Such a perception of the gap might lead to grammar restructuring. Mackey’s (1999) study yielded significant evidence that if learners get opportunities to interact and negotiate for meaning, their second language development (acquisition and production) will be facilitated and boosted more easily.

### 3.6.2 The output hypothesis

Taking another perspective, Swain (1985, 1996) argues that input alone cannot be given the credit for language learning proficiency, as it mainly contributes to the grammatical competence of learners rather than their communicative competence. The lack of proficiency of second language learners, coupled with an apparent lack of productive use of the target language, led Swain to flag up the crucial role that output could play in the development of second language. For language acquisition, input is not sufficient because ‘hearing a language alone cannot account for producing syntactic structures’ (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 277). Swain and Lapkin (1995) explain that the comprehensible output refers to the ‘learner need to be pushed toward the delivery of a message that is not only conveyed, but that is conveyed precisely, coherently, and appropriately’ (p. 249).

It is through language production that learners become faced with the fact that they have to manoeuvre their language, come up with alternatives, and negotiate meaning to push the limit of their communicative competence. Hymes (1972 cited in Richards, 2001, p. 157) defines ‘communicative competence’ as the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately. Elaborating the same concept, Swain (1985) identifies four dimensions of ‘communicative competence’: grammatical competence (i.e. mastering syntactic and lexical forms appropriately), sociolinguistic competence (i.e. placing communicative purpose of interaction in the proper social context), discourse competence (i.e. interpretation of individual message elements in terms of their interrelatedness), and strategic competence (i.e. using strategies for initiating, terminating, maintaining, repairing, and redirecting communication).

Although Krashen (1998) argues that advanced levels of linguistic competence are possible without output, the output hypothesis stresses the communicativeness role involved in the development of language. Unlike the input and interaction hypotheses, Swain acknowledges the language development of learners while trying to produce the target language and their attempts to gain feedback. While Krashen argues that speaking develops after learning, Swain observes that speaking is by itself a source of language learning.

### 3.6.3 Input, interaction and output

In the previous sections, language acquisition hypotheses have been summarized and reviewed. However, there is still an unanswered question that concerns to the interrelatedness of these hypotheses when it comes to teaching and learning of a second or foreign language. Walsh (2002, 2006b) points out that there now exists a substantial body of research evidence highlighting the interdependence of interaction, input, output and the need for negotiation of meaning. Besides highlighting the importance of communicative competence, Walsh calls for ‘L2 Classroom Interactional Competence’ which involves examining teachers’ use of language in relation to stated pedagogic goals as this obstructs or co-constructs interaction. Walsh also calls for exploring the extent to which teacher language use is ‘congruent’ with the pedagogic goals, and whether or not teachers are able to promote opportunities for learning by more careful, more conscious language use.

In addition, van Lier (1996) argues that language learning is a process in which ‘input flows from an external source (e.g., teachers or peers) to the learner, who processes it and then makes it available to produce output’ (p. 50). van Lier emphasises on the role of the co-construction of knowledge through interaction. He contends that students are expected to co-construct their knowledge through interacting with other people either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writing.

Having reviewed theories on second language acquisition, it becomes clear that classroom interaction, metaphorically speaking, resembles the mortar that brings language learning components together. The aforementioned hypotheses on SLA in relation with classroom interaction imply amongst other things the following:

- Language teachers should produce comprehensible input with the aim of eventually making learners produce extended discourse in the target language.
- Language teachers should provide learners with ample opportunities to inter-communicate in the target language, negotiate meaning with peers and/or teachers, and develop learners’ different aspects of communicative competence

Based on what has been discussed, it becomes clear that quality EFL teaching needs to be interactive, dialogic and of co-constructive in nature.

### **3.6.4 Talk in SLA**

It is probably not an exaggeration to say that most classroom interaction is carried out by the means of teacher talk. Therefore, teacher talk is central to second (or foreign) language acquisition. What matters the most is the ‘quality’ of this talk rather than the quantity. Nunan (1991, 2001) argues that classroom management and teacher-student interaction are integral to sound methodological practice in SLA. Nunan is in favour of using ‘elaborative’ language through the use of repetition, paraphrase, and rhetorical makers instead of using ‘simplified modified’ language. He comes to the conclusion that students will improve more rapidly if they are actively engaged in interaction.

## **3.7 Classroom interaction: A SCT perspective**

Taking a psycholinguistic viewpoint, the previous discussion centred on the role that input, interaction and output play in the cognitive development of a learner. It has become clear that the institutionalized talk of a language classroom derives much of its richness or poorness from the quality of the teacher talk. In the following sections, the discussion will target teacher talk from a socio-cultural viewpoint. It starts by examining the tenets of socio-cultural theory. Then it discusses classroom interaction and teacher talk in detail.

### **3.7.1 Socio-cultural theory**

Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of learning and development states that learning is a form of language socialization among individuals. It is not merely a process for exchanging information. Rather, it is a socially situated activity. According to Vygotsky, there are two stages needed for language learning to happen. Initially, a child or learner is given help in a social setting by a more knowledgeable person (expert) through using language; after a while this learner will be able to transform or internalize this

form of knowledge to become autonomic in (re-)producing it. This is summarized in Vygotsky's rule for cultural development:

Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or in two planes: first, it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane; first it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts and the development of volition (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 163).

Ohta (2000) argues that under the SCT 'social processes allow the language to become a cognitive tool for the individual' (p. 52). Language, thus, plays an important role in not only the transmission of culture, but is also the means by which individuals learn from one another. Language learning is mediated by talk (i.e. language) and this happens within the zone of proximal development (see section 3.7.2). Socio-cultural approaches thus emphasise the interdependence of social and individual processes of co-construction of knowledge (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Individual development is derived from interaction with the vast number of experiences of others within a person's life. The key assumption is that human activities take place in cultural contexts. They are mediated by language and other symbol systems and can be best understood when investigated in their historical development (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

### **3.7.2 Zone of proximal development**

The distance between what the learner is capable of achieving unaided and what s/he is able to accomplish with the help of an expert is referred to by Vygotsky (1978) as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD plays a central role in Socio-Cultural Theory, which specifies that knowledge is embodied in actions and interactions with the environment or culture. The participation on the part of the learner is made available by the teacher's assistance in various forms. For example, it can be manifested by adjusting teacher talk to a level that is comprehensible to the learner, by offering linguistic resources when the learner gets 'stuck' or by extending the learner's attempts. This assistance or guidance is referred to as 'scaffolding' (Wood et al., 1976). A major attribute of the ZPD is its 'dialogical structure' where participants of

varying proficiency engage in dialogic utterance exchanges in order for the novice to reach contextual meaning and capability. What also characterizes the ZPD is that development cannot occur if ‘too much assistance is provided or if a task is too easy’ (Ohta, 2000, p. 53). It sets the limits for the adjustments of the amount of help and needs accommodation done on the part of the more proficient towards the learner.

### **3.7.3 Scaffolding**

Based on Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development, scaffolding or ‘assisted performance’ usually refers to the distance between the actual developmental level of the learner and the level of potential development through collaboration with, and guidance by, a more capable person. Therefore, scaffolding lies at the heart of learning and the act of teaching. Educationally speaking, scaffolding can be described as assisting a student to step beyond their current capabilities or understandings to a higher or new level (van Lier, 2004). Inside the classroom, the teacher plays a key role as scaffolder, implicitly and explicitly. However, it is not an easy job to keep the balance and not ‘slipping’ from a scaffolding teacher role into controller, actor, dictator, thinker, and main doer. Students will then be viewed as vessels to be filled.

van Lier (2004) argues that scaffolding is by nature ‘multi-dimensional’ and not mono-functional. In other words, scaffolding in the classroom not only comes through appropriately timed and ‘dosed’ assistance from the teacher. Scaffolding also happens when students interact with classmates who are less capable or more knowing. Through processes of appropriation, negotiation of meaning, problem-solving, and sharing resources, students’ cognitive growth and expansion occurs. Scaffolding, as Ellis (1990, 2005b) suggests, would appear to be most constructive and helpful when learners are not very different from each other in terms of language and learning proficiency levels.

Maybin et al. (1992) contend that ‘scaffolding’ does not refer to just any assistance from the teacher. Instead, scaffolding has to be a conscious helping technique whereby teachers enable the students to complete a task they cannot handle alone. It is meant to

enable learners to reach a higher level than they can attain by themselves. In other words, in order for teachers to achieve the best results out of the interaction process, they should be aware of the need to empower students to take a significant level of responsibility for their own learning through guiding students to tackle the parts of the task which they can potentially handle.

However, teachers need to offer just enough support and/or guidance for the parts of the task which lie beyond their immediate abilities. Alexander (2010) stresses the importance of scaffolding in the form of staged elicitation, where teachers are attempting to help pupils to learn how to think through the medium of conversation. Related and central to scaffolding is the concept of ‘mediation’ which is key to a child’s transformation into an active, communicative participant in socio-cultural exchanges (e.g. Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981; Cole, 1998; Cortazzi, 1996; Halliday, 2003; van Hees, 2011).

### **3.7.4 Socio-cultural theory and interaction**

As mentioned above, the importance of interaction in learning finds its roots in the SCT which assumes that learning is a social activity mediated by interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). From a Vygotskian perspective, children’s interaction with others through language is what strongly influences the level of ‘conceptual understanding’ they can reach. The Vygotskian view of language development challenges Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, which places emphasis on individual action rather than on interaction (Piaget, 1971).

In SCT, it is interaction that lies at the core of learning, and it is the formal or informal instruction performed by more knowledgeable people that is the main tool for transition of the knowledge of a particular culture. In the classroom, interaction takes different forms. It is not, for example, confined to verbal interaction. Interaction also works on the non-verbal side, through teachers communicating using their body language. However, for the purposes of this study and for space limitations, verbal interaction (i.e. teacher talk) is the focus.

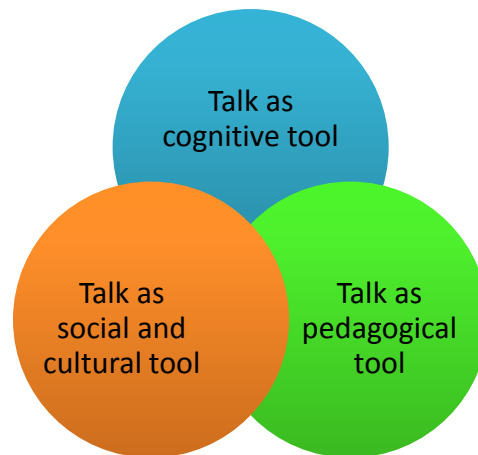


Bailey and Nunan (1996) argue that talk is embedded in mutual teacher-student thinking and problem-solving strategies that offer the teacher the opportunity to discover the interests, purposes and current states of understanding of students. By the same token, this knowledge enables the teacher to tune his/her talk and the cognitive demands of classroom activities to suit student ZPDs. Thus, it is teacher talk that mediates the assistance given to the learner so as to ensure his or her cognitive development. Donato (2000) argues that the verbal utterances of a teacher and other students in a foreign language class are more than ‘linguistic input to be made comprehensible’ (p. 46). They are essentially social practices of assistance that shape, construct and influence learning within interactional and instructional contexts.

### 3.7.5 Talk in SCT

Rogoff (1990) and Mercer et al. (1999) argue that talk in SCT has three interrelated functions. It serves as a cognitive tool, as a socio-cultural tool and as a pedagogic tool, as shown in figure 3.4. When functioning as a cognitive tool, talk can be employed to enable children to process knowledge. It serves as a tool mediating individual mental development leading to the internalization of the language.

Figure 3.4 The function of talk in Socio-Cultural Theory



In the classroom context, it facilitates language development through using discourse tools such as paying attention, recalling and paraphrasing which in turn mediate cognitive operations such as ‘remembering, thinking, and reasoning’ (Wells, 1999, p. 136).

Later, such cognitive processes will be internalized to construct the individual knowledge enabling autonomic learning.

In short, learner's engagement with classroom activities through participation and communication with teachers or other learners contributes to student language development. Thus, the social dimension of talk inside the classroom serves as an integral, complementary factor facilitating learning. Added to this, the joint participation of a learner with the more skilled person, a teacher in the classroom context, implicitly involves absorbing the cultural norms governing the classroom context. On the whole, this will create cultural norms of shared knowledge and values amongst teachers and learners. In parallel with the cognitive and social roles, talk also serves as a pedagogical tool. Scaffolding is a key factor here since the teacher offers help to the learner through providing intellectual guidance and/or adjusting their talk to the current learning demands of learners within their ZPD. Having been scaffolded appropriately by their teachers, learners will become able to work independently if faced with a similar area of knowledge.

It is also clear that within SCT, teacher talk serves as a social and cultural tool allowing students to share knowledge amongst themselves and with the teacher. It also serves as a pedagogical tool where teachers provide intellectual guidance to students, and as a cognitive tool that allows students to process knowledge provided.

### **3.7.6 Dialogic talk**

The SCT view of learning suggests that talk inside the classroom is ineffective unless learners play an active role in their learning through what Barnes (1976) calls 'exploratory forms of talk'. Classroom observational research from many parts of the world has revealed the following picture: 'classrooms are full of talk, but [there is] little collaborative talk between learners' (Lyle, 2008, p. 225). It has also been found that a monologic style of discourse, dominates classroom talk between teachers and students. It constitutes up to 60% of the teaching and learning process inside classrooms including EFL (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992). Research has also revealed how when teachers interact with students in whole- class, group- based and one-to-one situations,

one kind of talk predominates: the so-called ‘recitation script’ of closed teacher questions, brief student answers and minimal feedback which requires students to report someone else’s thinking, rather than to think for themselves, and to be evaluated on their compliance in doing so (Hardman, 2011, p. 36). As first revealed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1992), in its prototypical form a teaching exchange consists of three moves: an Initiation ‘I’, usually in the form of a teacher question, a Response ‘R’ in which a student attempts to answer the question, and a Follow-up move ‘F’, in which the teacher provides some form of feedback (very often in the form of an evaluation) to the student's response (from now on referred to as IRF).

Monologic discourse usually focuses power on the teacher and tends to reproduce a pedagogy based on the transmission of pre-packaged knowledge (Lyle, 2008). Empirical studies have pointed to the continued persistence in practice of monologic recitation in which the teacher does most of the talking (Skidmore, 2006; Wells & Ball, 2008). For example, Hardman (2011) found that open questions (designed to elicit more than one answer) made up 10 per cent of the questioning exchanges and 15 per cent of teachers did not ask any such questions. Probing by the teacher, where the teacher stayed with the same pupil to ask further questions so as to encourage a sustained and extended dialogue, occurred in just over 11 per cent of the questioning exchanges (Hardman, 2011, p.40). Uptake questions (building a pupil’s answer into a subsequent question) occurred in only 4 per cent of the teaching exchanges and 43 per cent of the teachers did not use any such moves. Only rarely were teachers’ questions used to assist pupils to more complete or elaborated ideas. Most of the pupils’ exchanges were very short, lasting on average five seconds, and were limited to three words or fewer for 80 per cent of the time. It was also very rare for students to initiate the questioning, making up less than 5 per cent of the questions asked in the class, and most were of a procedural nature seeking information from the teacher (Hardman, 2011, p.40).

In whole classroom teaching contexts in different parts of the world, it has been found that the dominant form of classroom practices emphasises whole-class monologic interaction which constructs pupils as respondents only and limits their discourse (Hardman et al., 2003, Nystrand et al. 1997). However, Skidmore (2000) found that

the recitation script is not only evident in whole-class teaching. He found that even when teachers work with small groups to lead guided reading, the IRF structure predominates. He argues that monologic talk precludes 'genuine dialogue'. It was Bakhtin and Holquist (1981) who drew a distinction between monologic and dialogic pedagogies, arguing that any understanding of classroom pedagogy will depend on analysis of classroom talk to discuss its dialogic/monologic quality.

From this research, the concept of a dialogic pedagogy has developed where teachers are helped to break out of the limitations of the recitation script through higher-order questioning and feedback strategies which promote a range of alternative discourse strategies. Dialogic approaches to teaching and learning find their roots in the works of Vygotsky (1978), Bakhtin and Holquist (1981) and Bruner (1986) who stressed that all learning is operated in a social, cultural and historical context. They recognised that language is the driving force behind learners' cognitive development. While monologic talk stifles dialogue and interactions between pupils and their ideas, dialogic talk creates a space for multiple voices and discourses that challenge the asymmetrical power relations constructed by monologic practices. It aims at promoting communication through authentic exchanges. Interactive teaching (or dialogic inquiry) is viewed as a tool for learning operating using socially mediated practices which are permeated by socially defined rules, norms, values, beliefs and perspectives (Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Rogoff, 1995; Wells, 1999). Knowledge, in this sense, is viewed as flowing both ways in a bi-directional relationship between pupil and teacher.

Alexander (2008) has described the essential features of 'dialogic talk' as being *collective* (teachers and students address the learning task together), *reciprocal* (teachers and students listen to each other to share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints), *supportive* (students articulate their ideas freely without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers and support each other to reach common understandings), *cumulative* (teachers and students build on their own and each others' ideas to chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry) and *purposeful* (teachers plan and facilitate dialogic teaching with educational goals in mind) (Hardman, 2011, p. 36). Most importantly, it can take place in whole-class, group-based and individual interactions between teacher and students.

Wells (1999) refers to this focus on collective dialogue and participation in learning as dialogical inquiry. Unlike monologic discourse where teachers initiate the majority of the questions (Cazden, 1988), in dialogical engagement learners become responsible for their learning and for generating the questions they want to explore. That is, learners become ‘active epistemic agents and participants in their own knowledge’ (Skidmore, 2006). A dialogical approach to learners’ use of questions should be encouraged by teachers through ‘appropriate facilitation’. Teachers should be trained in using questions that prompt learners to think more deeply, not ones to promote recall or provide ‘right’ answers. Wells (2000) argues that the ‘evaluative’ follow-up move tends to deter student extended participation, whereas ‘negotiatory’ questions are encouraging and do not have a negative effect. Cullen (2002) recommends teachers to view the F-move as a platform on which to build and extend the student responses. Hardman (2011), Lyle (2008) and Black (2007) all conclude that the first step to promoting dialogic engagement in the classroom demands understanding the professional development strategies that will best support teachers in making the change from monologic to dialogic teaching.

### **3.8 SLA vs. SCT view of language learning and teaching**

Having considered the tenets of SLA and SCT, it is noticeable that there are salient differences in their approaches to language learning and teaching. Based on the works of Hammond (2001), Donato (2000) and van Lier (2004), a summary of these differences is illustrated in Table 3.1:

Table 3-1 The differences between SLA and SCT

SCT	SLA
Language learning is a developmental process mediated by semiotic resources. It is an assisted performance	Language learning is an internal mental process. Learners process the adjusted input to produce it as an output
The individual is defined in terms of participation in socially-mediated activities	The individual is defined as the sole channel through which knowledge is gained
Language is simultaneously the tool and the object of learning and is socially constructed	Language is a 'conduit'. It is the object of learning and is internally intrinsic
Culture helps shape our cognition as human activities can only be understood within their cultural settings	Cultural and contextual variables are important but not essential for learning
Teacher's role is that of 'scaffolder' and facilitator of knowledge	Teacher's role is to provide knowledge in less interactive style
Students are gradually supported to become autonomous active learners	Students are inactive receivers of knowledge

In SCT, both learners and teachers are seen as being involved in the process of co-construction of knowledge. This in turn assumes people are interacting while doing shared activities such as solving problems. The co-construction of knowledge will eventually lead to an internalization of knowledge, which in turn leads to independent thinking (Hardman, 2008). In the SCT approach to language learning, L2 learners advance to higher levels of linguistic knowledge 'when they collaborate and interact with speakers of the second language who are more knowledgeable than they are' as suggested by Lightbown and Spada (1999, p. 44).

### 3.9 Classroom interaction: A CLT perspective

Classroom interaction forms the main pillar upon which CLT was founded. Under CLT, language is viewed as a system for the expression of meaning that is primarily used for the purpose of communication and interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Language is seen as social tool that both speakers and writers use to make meaning.

Savignon (2005, p. 639) argues that ‘in CLT, language teaching is based on a view of language as communication’. In this sense, CLT is rooted in the belief that genuine language use through the medium of the target language should be the primary focus of language teaching (Brumfit, 1984).

In the language classroom context, granting learners extensive opportunities to engage in contextually-rich and meaningful communication is the key for the development of what is widely known as ‘communicative competence’. Hymes (1972, p. 13) defines communicative competence as the ‘overall underlying knowledge and ability for language use which the speaker-listener possesses’ (see also 3.6.2). In order for communicative competence to be developed, the emphasis should be on developing students' capacity to interact, interpret and negotiate meanings rather than on students' ability to memorise and ‘practice forms in isolation’ (Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

CLT theorists have always insisted that there should be a shift of focus from form to meaning, from dictation to communication, from a teacher-based approach to a learner-based approach, and from reception-oriented learning to production-oriented learning. Hence, CLT emphasises maximizing the opportunities for learners to speak in the target language. Maximizing learning opportunities in the second or foreign language is thought to be facilitated when learners are actively engaged in what Nunan (1991) calls ‘attempts to communicate’. Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 157) reiterate this, arguing that at the level of language theory ‘CLT entails that the primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication’. The learning and teaching activities supported in such approach include activities that enable learners to be engaged in communication and require the use of communicative processes as sharing information, negotiation of meaning, and interaction.

In this respect, deciding the nature of any proposed communicative activities has created a continuous debate on how to set the right balance between form-oriented activities (i.e. accuracy, written, drills) and meaning-oriented ones (i.e. fluency, spoken, improvising). According to Brumfit (1984), a learner-centred approach is attainable, insofar as language teaching focuses on fluency. Yet, does this represent a radical shift of emphasis from ‘form’ to ‘meaning’? In response to this, Savignon (2005) argues

that the prevailing impression is that CLT proponents are in favour of a focus on meaning approach ‘without regard of form’. She attributes this to the influence of Krashen’s (1982) and Prabhu’s (1990) studies which advanced the view that ‘acquisition’ of L2 knowledge is best learnt when the learner is geared to focus on meaning in the process of using language for communication. In recent years, however, there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of grammar teaching in the development of communicative ability (e.g., Brumfit & Mitchell, 1990; Ellis, 1993; Savignon, 1991).

In general, research suggests that knowledge of grammar, being an indispensable part of communicative competence, is essential for effective instruction. Communication cannot exist without structure and therefore within the communicative classroom a balance between form- and meaning-focused activities should be maintained (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; McDonough & Shaw, 1993). It is argued that for activities to qualify as communicative, they need to:

- Provide students with a desire and need to communicate, with the focus on the message and on the content being communicated and not on the form (Clarke, 1994; Ellis, 2005b; Harmer, 1991).
- Include authentic materials and activities, which are regarded as the *sine qua non* of the language classroom (Clarke, 1994).
- Have an information gap where the two interactants communicate in order to bridge it (Ellis, 2005).
- Emphasise pair/group work activities, as they allow more student participation than any teacher-fronted activity could ever hope to achieve (Doughty & Pica, 1986).
- Encourage negotiation and cooperation between students and facilitate the creation of a supportive classroom atmosphere.
- Promote the development of accountability (commitment to providing quality programs), autonomy and self-direction (Legutke & Thomas, 1991).
- Present language as discourse rather than isolated words and sentences; this includes tolerating errors, and finally integrating the four skills.



Notwithstanding the above, communicative activities are not enough to create competent and fluent users of the language. It has been argued that it is the teacher-student relationship that is the single most important variable in successfully implementing a communicative learner-centred approach (Cazden, 1988; Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996; Littlewood, 2007).

Inasmuch as most communication entails bridging an information gap with a genuine need and goal to communicate, in foreign language classrooms, which lack this ‘genuineness’ and ‘naturalness’, real communicative intentions do not naturally arise. It, therefore, depends on the ingenuity and skill of the teacher to create a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to communication, where students feel free to take communicative initiatives and experiment with the language and are motivated to do so (Littlewood, 2007; Nassaji, 1999). As Dolle and Willems (1984, p. 147) put it: ‘if a foreign language teacher is unwilling to invest himself in real communication with his learners he can never hope to be a successful communicative teacher’.

However, it seems that CLT is not without its critics. Seedhouse (1996), for example, contends that the aims of the CLT approach in making ELT replicate genuine or naturally occurring language, rather than typical or traditional classroom communicative interaction, is both ‘paradoxical and unattainable’. He calls for adopting a sociolinguistic approach to communication in the classroom. This entails recognising that classroom talk is an institutional discourse whose approach should match the pedagogical goals of an EFL classroom. For him, it is impossible for teachers to replicate conversation in the classroom as part of a lesson and it follows that it is not possible to train teachers to do so. He suggests that classroom discourse should be viewed as a variety of an ‘institutional discourse’. Therefore, without understanding the interactional patterns inside the classroom, language teachers will not be able to establish and maintain good communicative practices. For him, investigating the features of the teachers L2 classroom discourse should be the first step in understanding the interaction patterns.

Taking a more radical stand, Bax (2003) proposes that CLT should be abandoned, since the methodology fails to take into account the context of language teaching.

Likewise, Ellis (1996) casts doubts on whether CLT is a ‘culturally appropriate’ approach for some countries, as a large number of teachers feel worried or guilty about the nature of communication in their own classrooms. Such teachers are thus suspicious of researchers wanting to investigate how communicative they are inside their classrooms. However, ELT teachers who produce ‘typical’ ELT classroom interaction should not, in fact, have anything to feel guilty about as suggested by Seedhouse (1996) who argues that it would be more productive for ELT classroom research to give attention to understanding the ‘possibilities inherent in a variety of institutional discourse, than to aim at [the] impossibilities’ (p. 18).

Other researchers take another view on how communication should be treated in CLT. For example, Walsh (2002) and Hardman (2008b) consider communication inside the classroom as an ‘institutional discourse’ especially in EFL contexts. They argue that participants in an EFL classroom are to a large extent restricted in their choice of language by the prevailing features of that context as teachers principally initiate, terminate, dominate, state, and evaluate talk (e.g., questions, discussions).

Unlike conversational talk, where participation is open to all participants with shared rights of communication, van Lier (1996) argues that much of the talk in the L2 classroom does not follow the rules of general conversation. Rather, it is controlled in some sense and follows highly predictable paths and routines conducted in the form of a ‘dyad’ between the teacher and a pupil, or when the teacher switches from one pupil to the next.

A number of studies have examined the CLT innovations in EFL contexts. The majority of accounts have recognized the obstacles that EFL countries face in adopting CLT. For example, Chang (2011) found that EFL teachers in China failed to implement CLT for several reasons that include: the context of the wider curriculum, traditional teaching methods, class sizes and schedules, resources and equipment, the low status of teachers, teachers’ deficiencies in oral English and sociolinguistic and strategic competence, lack of properly trained teachers, students not being accustomed to CLT, and difficulties in evaluating students taught via CLT. Ellis (1994) also identified gram-

mar-based examinations, and lack of exposure to authentic language as constraints on using CLT in Vietnam.

Further, research on CLT has also shown that most EFL and ESL teachers produce interaction which features examples of the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) cycle and display questions (see section 3.10) as a typical traditional classroom interaction mode, failing to come up with genuine or natural communication (Dinsmore, 1985; Long & Sato, 1983; Nunan, 2004). In order to develop full competence in an L2, learners are likely to need to receive extensive input, participate in interaction, produce extensive output, rehearse language forms and communicative routines, get direct or indirect feedback on performance, and have access to knowledge about language and its learning (Ellis, 2005b; Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

### **3.10 Classroom interaction: Philosophy versus practice**

As demonstrated in section 3.7.6, international research into classroom pedagogical behaviours suggests the IRF structure is central to all classroom teaching (Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Hardman, 2008a; Nystrand et al., 1997). IRF is prevalent in directive forms of teaching and often consists of closed teacher questions, brief students' answers and superficial teacher non-constructive feedback. What is more, international observational research has shown that the interaction which many learners actually experience in classrooms does not help in maximising their cognitive engagement and growth (e.g., Alexander, 2008; Moyles, 2003; Nystrand et al., 1997). In fact, three kinds of teaching talk have been identified by Alexander (2001) as prevalent internationally in many classrooms:

- Rote, or the drilling of facts, ideas and routines through constant repetition.
- Recitation, or the accumulation of knowledge and understanding through questions designed to test or stimulate recall of what has previously been encountered, or to cue students to work out answers from clues provided in the question.
- Expository instruction, or imparting information and/or explaining facts, principles or procedures.

In addition to this, Hardman (2008b) links the discourse patterns that teachers use in the classroom to their prevailing contextual pedagogical beliefs and strategies. His research has found ‘[a] persistence of the teacher-led recitation approach and that without managing the quality of classroom discourse there will be no genuine dialogic teaching’ (p. 26). This highlights the role that context plays in shaping pedagogical perceptions and practices.

Nassaji and Wells (2000) argue that in the IRF structure questions mainly take place during the ‘I’ move which is overwhelmingly dominated by teachers. For teachers, questions are probably the most crucial and reliable technique that invites students’ participation as it implies continuous dialogue in the teaching process (Rajab, 2012). Through questions, teachers can check students’ understanding, promote their interaction, gauge the depth of their learning, and stimulate their motivation. In language classrooms, questions are used for pedagogical purposes particularly for assessment practices. Black and Harrison (2001, p. 58) state that questioning is ‘an important tool for assessment which can be used to promote classroom interaction’ and as a basic technique for testing understanding and improving learning.

However, during classroom interaction, several types of questions are used. The most common classification of teacher questions contrasts open and closed questions. Yet, this classification is not comprehensive, as questions in studies of classroom interaction can be classified as:

- Closed questions: mostly designed to: recall knowledge, produce answers that are pre-determined and known to teachers.
- Open questions: mostly designed to: stimulate thinking, investigate opinions and prompt effective communication.
- Display questions: require students to display their knowledge by providing information already known to the teacher.
- Referential questions: require the learner to provide information, give an opinion, explain or clarify. They allow for more meaningful teachers-students interaction.

Although open questions are more effective than closed ones, studies on questioning techniques reveal that open referential questions are not frequently used in classrooms, despite their potential communicative usefulness. Ellis (2003) points out that closed questions are much more common than open referential questions as the former require much shorter 'wait time' than referential questions. Similarly, Long and Sato (1983) and Nunan (1992) reported that the number of closed display questions initiated by teachers was far greater than that of referential questions in language classrooms. The literature documents the same findings in different geographical regions (Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Smith et al., 2004).

Similarly, Nassaji and Wells (2000) point out that display questions are typical of teacher-fronted lessons in which transmission of knowledge from teacher to student is the expected form of interaction. Even in foreign and second language classes, teachers seem to rely almost exclusively on the use of display questions to elicit contributions from their students (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

On the whole, effective questioning entails factors like timing and frequency of questioning, strategic thinking, a non-evaluative positive interactive atmosphere, and a high percentage of open and process questions (Cazden, 1988). Nunan (2004) found out that when language teachers increased their use of referential questions, the quality of language produced improved, becoming richer and more dialogic in nature. For Clifton (2006), referential questions allow for:

- More meaningful interaction between the teacher and students.
- Encouraging students' initiative and oral-interaction between participants, promoting greater learner output.

The use of such questions serves to modify the interactional structure of the discourse, thereby facilitating both participants' attempts to reach a mutual understanding. Closely related to the choice and use of questions in the classroom is 'think-time' and 'wait-time'. The length of wait-time between the 'I' move and the 'R' move inevitably affects student input in terms of 'quality of response and as an indicator of the pedagogical mores in which the teacher and student operate' (van Hees, p.16). That is, it was

found that when think-time and wait-time are increased, students become less hesitant in expressing their feelings, more confident about formulating their thoughts, and more conscious of the language they use (Cazden 2001; Cotton, 2001; Stahl, 1990).

### **3.11 Classroom interaction: Empirical perspectives**

Given the scarcity of research studies into Syrian classroom pedagogical practices, I had to look at ‘similar’ contexts in other Arab and non-Arab countries, and at other international comparative research. Thus, the focus in this section will be on empirical studies that investigate classroom interaction. In this regard, Pica (1994) draws attention to the importance of collaborative research that can contribute to bridging the gap between research and the actual language classes. International comparative research into language classrooms shows that, in practice, pedagogy combines the culturally or nationally ‘unique’ with the universal. For example, Benavot et al. (1991) argue that the ‘basics’ of literacy and numeracy are prioritised almost everywhere. In the same vein, both rote learning and the closed initiation-response-feedback (IRF) structure of exchange have a widespread currency as the default mode of teaching in many public education systems regardless of local pedagogic tradition (Alexander, 2006).

Although the international literature on classroom talk shows ‘slight’ variations in pedagogical practices, overall, they reveal many universal features. In my review below of several doctorate studies both in the Arab world and the wider relevant international contexts, there appeared to be one consistent trend: the implementation of CLT curricula in most contexts shows a mismatch between what the theory entails and what is actually practiced. For example, it has been found that ESL teachers continue to emphasize form over meaning and accuracy over communication (Long & Sato, 1983).

In the following section, different research studies, particularly doctorate theses investigating different cultural contexts, will be reviewed in the hope of placing the current study within the wider context as well as gaining more insights on classroom interaction and curriculum innovation in EFL contexts. These studies were chosen based on contextual relevance considerations. The Arab studies cover Egypt, Bahrain, Palestine,

Qatar, and Tunis. The other international studies cover Greece, Pakistan, Japan, China, Kenya, and other sub-Saharan African countries.

### **3.11.1 Overview of related international literature**

Gahin's (2001) study of 120 EFL **Egyptian** preparatory teachers found that large class size was thought by teachers to be the primary obstacle to student participation in curricular activities and in pair and group work. His findings support the assumption that a shift in orientation in both the language teaching syllabus and the teaching materials does not necessarily induce a change in the Egyptians teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices. He attributed this to the fact that teachers' practices are influenced by the beliefs or the assumptions they hold about the nature of learning and teaching in general and about 'the nature of language learning and teaching per se' (Gahin, 2001, p. 17).

Although Gahin's study focused particularly on teachers' beliefs and not their actual practices, the implications for ELT research and language teacher education are worth consideration. In the study, it was found that informants held negative views of both their university teacher education programmes and their in-service teacher education in terms of the applicability of the theory into practice. Teachers did not draw on the theoretical knowledge they were exposed to in their education programmes. Rather, they believed in 'what is workable in their classroom' (Gahin, 2001, p. 282). It is important to highlight in this regard that the educational systems in both Syria and Egypt are similar in many respects, as the two countries were once united politically and educationally. Gahin's research found that classes were largely teacher-centred. They were dominated by the use of textbooks and the pervasive use of drills and examinations for testing the recall of information. Gahin summed the situation up by stating that:

The dominance of both the skill-based view of language teaching and learning and the grammar-translation methodology orientations highlights the fact that the communicative movement is still a policy on paper and is not yet having an impact in the EFL classroom in Egypt. (2001, p. 253)

Similarly, Yamchi (2006) highlighted the fact that EFL teachers in **Palestine** failed to apply the new CLT curriculum effectively, as they modified their teaching methods so as to comply with the unified exams for Grade 12 of the schooling system. Like the Syrian nationally-unified Baccalaureate Exam, the Palestinian Grade 12 Exam is designed to test students' knowledge of grammar, writing and reading skills. Therefore, teachers in both contexts, Syria and Palestine, face tremendous pressure to teach linguistic dimensions that are useful for the final examination, which is mostly structure-oriented rather than interactive or dialogic. Even worse, school principals encourage teachers to prepare students for the examination to improve the ranking of their schools (Yamchi, 2006). Yamchi also observed that teachers relied hugely on the textbook as the sole source for teaching, with no additional materials to promote communication inside the classroom. She concludes that the Palestinian teacher training programmes have failed to empower teachers to think and re-evaluate their belief systems with respect to the newly adopted CLT curriculum.

In **Pakistan**, Shamim (1996a) carried out a pioneering study of classroom interaction in Pakistan. Using a sample of 25 randomly-selected classrooms at secondary level, she generated 50 sets of observations using Flander's Interaction Analysis system. In keeping with Flander's 'two-thirds' rule, Shamim found that at both secondary and tertiary level, more than two-thirds of the classroom time was dedicated to talking, and that for more than two thirds of the talk time teachers played the dominant role. More than two-thirds of the teacher's talk was also directive, thereby reducing teacher-learner interaction to the minimum.

Shamim (1996b) reported on an interesting study where there were attempts to introduce interactive methods into a Pakistani university classrooms. On one occasion, as part of her study, Shamim asked students (i.e. her actual participants) to discuss one classroom task in pairs or groups. Students were reluctant, unsure and even seemed bewildered. Instead of working in groups, they worked indifferently and individually. Neither in her presence nor when she (intentionally) left the classroom did this situation change. However, when Shamim restored her authority and physical presence in the classroom, students accomplished the task quicker. Such an incident suggested to her that her Pakistani students preferred an authoritarian teaching style to a 'Western



student-centred approach' and she concluded that this can be linked to the role of the 'hierarchic obedient culture' prevailing in that context. In another study, Shamim (2008) conducted a study over six months in six government secondary schools in Karachi. She analyzed a total of 232 classes and interviewed 25 different EFL teachers. She concluded that classrooms in Pakistan are mainly teacher-fronted because of large class sizes, coupled with teachers' lack of awareness and /or feelings of insecurity in using other types of classroom organization.

Shamim, in her studies, highlighted the effect of culture, whereby the teacher was traditionally seen as an authority figure and was given respect for his/her age and superior knowledge. Teaching in such a context was viewed as a transmission of knowledge. The location of teachers and learners in the Pakistani classroom seemed to be role-determining, whereby teacher-student interaction was diminished to what Nunan (1991) called the 'action zone'. Student participation was significantly linked to the location of the students in the room. Students at the front were usually selected by the teacher to read or answer questions and this accounted for the majority of the in-class student participation. Furthermore, it was noted that question-answer exchange was often the only form of teacher-learner interaction.

Similarly, Hiep (2007) found most EFL **Japanese** secondary school teachers were unsuccessful in realizing 'Western' techniques such as pair work and group work. However, they did not reject the communicative approach, believing that learning can best take place when the learning task is meaningful. In line with Hiep's study, Li (1998) found that the **Korean** secondary teachers reported several problems when applying CLT-based methods. This included student deficiency in spoken English, deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English, lack of training in CLT, few opportunities for retraining in CLT, and misconceptions about this approach. Both Hiep and Li concluded that teachers aspiring to implement CLT should go through a process of becoming reflective and should become conscious of their own instructional practices.

As far as the role of culture and context is concerned, Holliday (1994) noted that teachers in Arab countries saw it as their responsibility to deliver knowledge to stu-

dents, rather than to involve them in the use of language through participation in communicative activities. He suggests that this characterizing mode of interaction results in a distant relationship between teacher and students.

Elaborating on the last notion and addressing the question ‘are CLT methods culturally inappropriate in Arab countries?’, Al-Khwaiter (2001) undertook his research on a group of **Qatari** EFL teachers. He found that attempts to introduce CLT methods were unsuccessful in the Qatari context. Indeed, these attempts were met with considerable resistance from teachers despite an extensive in-service training programme devoted to introducing such methods. Al-Khwaiter aimed to find answers to the factors underlying this failure. Using questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations, the study suggested that the classroom culture in Qatar, and by extension other Arab countries, was incompatible with CLT methodology due to an authoritarian teaching style stemming from the hierarchical nature of Arab society.

In another Arab country, **Bahrain**, Al-Halwachi (1990) attempted to find out why, after studying English language for more than 11 years, many Bahraini students were unable to communicate effectively in English and could not even write a single English sentence correctly. He concluded that one of the main reasons for the low level of achievement, as well as of interaction could be attributed to the ineffective teaching of the Bahraini English language teachers, suggesting the need for more powerful in-service education and training programmes.

In general, it can be argued that research studies into the patterns of classroom interaction in Arab countries are still in their infancy. However, Abdesslem’s (1987) study of the interaction patterns of **Tunisian** EFL secondary school teachers is one exception. Abdesslem analyzed in detail the classroom discourse of eight English lessons in Tunisian secondary schools. He reached the conclusion that a typical teaching exchange was made up of IRF moves dominated by the teacher. During the teacher-fronted talk, the patterns of participation were identified to include announcements and instructions, teacher elicitations, teacher-learner 'recitation', Socratic dialogue, summaries, teacher-led discussions, and short, highly disciplined answers. This last aspect was re-

ferred to as 'polite conversation' (van Lier, 2004). The result was that Abdesslem found no 'genuine' teacher-student or student-student interaction.

Not far away from Syria, Ali (2008) conducted a study to investigate the oral correction techniques used by sixty five **Libyan** EFL secondary school teachers. The findings of his study suggested that less experienced teachers believed that accuracy was the most important element in learning a language. This group of teachers were also strongly influenced by the methods and techniques they learnt when they were students and tried to apply them. In contrast, experienced teachers were found to encourage students to build their self-confidence by establishing the meaning of communication rather than focusing on its accuracy.

In **Kenya**, through the analysis of 102 video-recorded primary lessons in English, mathematics and science and using systematic observation, discourse analysis and a time-line analysis, Ackers and Hardman (2001) found that transmissional forms of teaching (drilling, recitation, and rote learning) resulted in 'dull and repetitive' lessons. Drawing on this baseline study, Abd-Kadir and Hardman (2007) reported on the impact of a national school-based teacher development programme on learning and teaching in Kenyan primary schools. The programme aimed at improving the quality of the teacher-pupil interaction in order to enhance the teaching and learning process. The study primarily centred its attention on investigating the impact of school-based teacher development on the underlying pedagogy of teacher-pupil interaction. Central to the school-based teacher training was the concept of the 'reflective teacher', encouraging critical reflection on beliefs and classroom practice (Hardman et al., 2009). The main conclusions of the study were that the absence of in-service training and inadequate learning resources contributed significantly to the overall poor pedagogical practices. It was also found that there was little variation in whole class teacher-pupil interaction across the three subjects.

Focusing on the interactional patterns in **Singaporean** English classrooms, Vaish (2008) argued that while the guidelines of the English language syllabus in Singaporean primary and secondary schools emphasized and encouraged 'critical thinking and language for social interaction through extended oral narratives' (p.374) on the part of

the students, there was often a mismatch between the goals of the syllabus and pedagogic practices. By analyzing 273 audio-recorded English language lessons from 51 schools, it was found that the overriding interactional pattern in Singaporean English classrooms was made up of teacher-led recitation, resulting in minimal responses from the students. In both primary and secondary school, three quarters of the time was spent on curriculum related talk which was done by the teacher. Vaish (2008, p.375) recommended that unless ‘concomitant changes in assessment and curriculum design’ took place coupled with teachers being trained in using more open-ended questions and taking advantage of the feedback and uptake move, there could be no guarantee of any change in the current pedagogical practices.

Lahlali (2003) looked at the interaction patterns within **Moroccan** classrooms at the secondary school level. After conducting a structured interview analysis and analysing transcripts of audio-recordings of lessons, it was found that IRF structure was prevalent in the classroom. Initiation and follow-up moves were used predominantly by the teacher, while responding moves were restricted to the students. Lahlali concluded that the IRF pattern was an index of power and control.

In her extensive ethnographic study of two EFL **Chinese** secondary school teachers, Xie (2008, p. 269) found out that the participation structures revealed a traditional textbook-directed, teacher-controlled transmission mode of teaching with the ‘focus on rote learning, vocabulary, mechanical practice, recalling from memory and knowledge rather than on language skill, meaningful interaction, understanding and method.’ She also noted that teachers dominated, controlled and monopolized both topic and content, leaving students with fewer opportunities to participate meaningfully in classroom interaction. Teacher-student interaction was largely made up of the teacher-initiated IRF sequence, with the ‘I’ move mainly being used to initiate display or closed-ended questions, and the ‘F’ move being used to both evaluate and carry on with more instruction.

### **3.11.2 International perspectives: Summary**

Taken as a whole, the following conclusions can be drawn from the studies reviewed above:

- A gap has been repeatedly identified between what CLT curriculum guidelines promote and actual EFL pedagogical practices across a range of country contexts.
- The international studies into classroom discourse also indicate the ubiquity of the Initiation, Response, and Feedback (IRF) pattern. This structure has been found to be dominant across the different stages of schooling.

In the Syrian classroom, however, there is no empirical evidence to prove or disprove the existence of such pattern, hence the need for the current study.

### **3.12 Professional development of EFL teachers**

In the previous discussion, it has been established that helping teachers transform classroom talk from the familiar rote recitation and exposition, to include a wider repertoire of dialogue, will require training them in alternative classroom interaction and discourse strategies through professional development programmes. This section will therefore place teacher training at the heart of the discussion. It will start with a definition of the concept of ‘teacher development’ looking at the different approaches to teacher professional development along with its challenges. Following this, examples from empirical studies will be presented, to illustrate the importance of teacher training provision. The section concludes by arguing that systematic teacher professional training in Syria needs to be established if pedagogical practices and student achievement in the learning of English are to improve.

Guskey (2002, p. 16) defines teacher professional development as ‘those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students’. As a term, teacher development (TD) has often been used interchangeably with ‘continuing professional development’ (CPD). Thus, Head and Taylor (1997, p. 67) emphasise that

'teacher development is a continuous process of transforming human potential into human performance, a process that is never finished'. Building on the definition, many researchers argue that TD is linked at least with one of the following: reflective mentoring, interactive professionalism, distance learning, self-directness, action research, teacher-as-researcher (e.g., Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Guskey & Sparks, 2004; Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Richards & Roe, 1994; Stenhouse, 1975; Tomlinson, 2003; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Though there is a great deal of overlap among these concepts, there seems to be little consensus as to which constitutes the optimal approach. Two prominent approaches to TD will be considered in this brief review: the applied science approach and the reflective practice approach.

The 'applied science approach' is believed to be the most prevalent approach and often associated with the heritage of positivism (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Wallace, 1991). Within this approach, theory-based input is generated and provided by university academics, to be handed to the teachers on pre- and in-service courses. Afterwards, teachers need to be trained in how to apply it 'correctly' and to be kept up-dated periodically through in-service programmes (Ur, 1992). Within this approach, knowledge flow is seen as a 'one-way' process; that is, from theory to practice (Wallace, 1991, p. 9). However, this methodology is often criticized for being anti-educational and 'threatening' to teachers, as its practices frequently reveal divergence between theory and practice (see Day, 1993; Day & Calderhead, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994). Many teacher educators, however, argue that a theoretical component should remain basic for teacher education (Brumfit & Finocchiaro, 1983; Kelly, 2009). For example, Krashen (1983, p. 261), advocates acquainting teachers with different tested theories, believing that teachers educated in this way will be better prepared to change and introduce changes. Krashen argues that without theory there is no way to distinguish effective teaching procedures from ritual, no way to determine which aspects of the method are helpful and which are not.

On the other hand, the 'reflective approach' evolved as a reaction to the 'applied science' approach. Dewey, a key originator of the term 'reflection' (Dewey, 1904), perceived teachers' reflection as a deliberate problem-solving activity that requires intense thinking (Calderhead, 1989; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Day & Calderhead,

1993; Hatton & Smith, 1995). The teacher reflective approach has had a major influence on teacher education in both mainstream and language education. Bartlett (1990, p. 202) examined reflective teaching as ‘teacher's thinking about what happens in classroom lessons and ... about alternative means of achieving goals or aims ...’. Bartlett extends this view to involve critical analysis of matters beyond the classroom, ones that affect teaching and learning. For him, reflective teaching involves ‘critical reflection’ that encourages teachers to move away from ‘how to’ questions to ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions. It is argued that such questions can lead to new understandings that have the potential to redefine and transform practice (see also Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Most teachers find themselves naturally critiquing conditions in the wider context and discussing implications for their work. If this is done formally within proposed TD programmes, it is argued that it will be an enriching experience towards better pedagogical practices.

Drawing on this, there has been a call for dialogue between theory and practice and for collaboration between teachers and researchers (Richards, 1996). This kind of collaboration is needed in EFL contexts, as argued elsewhere in this thesis (see sections 4.3.7; 4.4.3; 8.6.1). Daoud (1999) believes that the controversy over the theory/practice divide is not representative of EFL teachers in the case of Syria for the following reasons: a) the majority of teachers have not been trained or formally qualified in ELT; b) teachers do not have resources which give access to theory; and c) little research has been carried out in an EFL context to substantiate teachers' responses or reactions to theory. Drawing on this, she calls for a selective application that is sensitive to the local context and to the teachers' training needs.

Because a teacher's job is complex, training will inevitably help them do their job better. However, training and upgrading teachers is by no means a simple task, as it needs to take place over several years. Hayes (1997) argues that the concept of change in the act of teaching should not be examined narrowly, because change does not necessarily mean doing something radically differently. Rather, it refers to ‘a change in awareness or even the affirmation of the current practice’ (Hayes, 1997, p. 4). The ‘awareness’ of one's teaching practices equals what Alexander (2008) refers to as the consistent improvement in ‘standards of teaching’.

Hardman's (2008) research into professional development of teachers suggests that monitoring and self-evaluation will need to become a regular part of in-service training so as to give teachers 'a degree of ownership of the process of school improvement' (p. 261). The moral would seem to be that teachers are often slow to change their pedagogical practices as change involves time, anxiety, and uncertainty. Teachers should be encouraged to theorize their teaching to help them make confident and professionally informed decisions about the way they interact with students so as to encourage greater participation of higher levels of cognitive engagement.

Hardman (2008) and Moyles (2003) argue that using video clips of lessons selected by the teacher can be a powerful means of promoting critical reflection on professional practice. They found that the video project, entitled 'Video-stimulated Reflective Dialogue', encouraged British teachers to articulate and demonstrate their own understanding of their interactive styles and provided opportunities for monitoring and self-evaluation. They also found that the outcome of training depends to a great extent on the degree of teacher involvement in the practices which make teacher professional development especially important. Therefore, a good instructor and a communicative partner are needed for improving teaching quality in a given context.

In another study, Wall (2008) explored the support needs of a group of Thai high-school EFL teachers. Teachers' needs were explored by conducting a semi-structured interview and a brief questionnaire. It was found that teachers asked for more in-service training. More importantly, the teachers had observable needs, of which they seemed largely unaware, with regard to both their English and their understanding of communicative lesson planning. The researcher came to the conclusion that while it is important to ask teachers what they need, they cannot tell what they do not know, and more objective assessments should be conducted.

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), transforming schools and improving academic achievement cannot be achieved unless professional learning for educators is further improved. Professional learning can have a powerful effect on teacher skills and knowledge and on student learning if it is: 1) sustained over time, 2) focused on important content, and 3) embedded in the work of professional learning communities

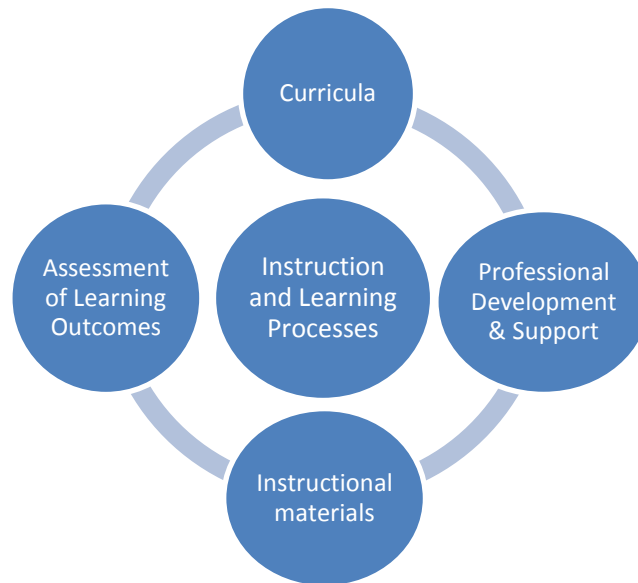


that support ongoing improvements in teachers' practice. In this regard, professional learning is closely linked with continuing professional development. In her review of teacher professional learning, Villegas-Reimers (2003) identified lifelong learning as a central process that begins from initial teacher education to retirement. Besides lifelong learning, Guskey (2002) added several other defining characteristics of professional learning, namely 'intentional', 'systemic', 'practical' and 'collaborative'. These features will be discussed in more detail.

Given the fact that teaching is a complex activity where timely decisions are shaped by teacher beliefs and theories about what is (and what is not) effective teaching, theory and practice must be intentionally integrated. Such intentional integration allows teachers to use their theoretical understandings as a basis for making ongoing, principled decisions about practice. Improving student outcomes necessitates the integration of teachers' knowledge about the curriculum, how to teach it effectively and how to assess whether students have learned it (Hardman, 2012). Therefore, there is a need to train teachers on a variety of ways of assessing students' progress. This should go beyond standardised testing, to include formative assessment tasks, systematic analysis of student work, classroom observation and interviews with students.

Challenging and changing beliefs and classroom practices also requires the development of self-regulatory skills that enable teachers to systematically monitor and reflect on the effectiveness of the changes they make to their classroom practices. Such change appears to be promoted by a cyclical process of professional learning, in which teachers have their current assumptions challenged by the demonstration of effective practice, develop new knowledge and skills, make small changes to practice, aided by classroom observation, and observe resulting improvements in student learning outcomes. It also requires teachers being brought together in professional learning communities and informed by expertise external to the group of participating teachers.

Figure 3.5 Integrating knowledge and skills into the teaching and learning process



Commenting on the notion of ‘practical’ training of teachers, Guskey (2002) questioned the effectiveness of the traditional approach of CPD, which regards professional development as a special event that is restricted to three or four days during the school year, along with other events such as graduate courses and qualifications to attain better paid salaries, and the accumulation of time-based activities. Many studies have illustrated the shortcomings of the occasional, one-shot workshops that many school systems tend to provide, which generations of teachers have derided (e.g., Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

Therefore, one important defining feature of new modes of teacher professional learning is that learning needs to be practical in nature and be closely linked to, and integrated in, day-to-day work. Guskey (2002) observed the tendency for educators to adopt a narrow view of professional training, which does not link professional development with the day-to-day work of teachers. This implies that if professional development does not address the practices of classroom teaching, changes in learning outcomes for students and teachers' attitudes and beliefs will not be translated into good practice.

The literature on professional development reflects the importance placed on notions of collectivity, collaboration and community (Day & Sachs, 2004; Lester, 2003).

Teachers who collaborate with each other are more likely to have the opportunity to discuss concepts, skills and problems that arise during their professional development experiences. Hence, Wenger's Communities of Practice (CoP) presents a theory of learning that starts with this assumption: engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we learn and so become who we are (Wenger, 1999). In CoPs, learning is understood as social participation, which is said to shape what we do and how we interpret what we do.

To conclude, the huge surge in demand for achieving better education has led many low income countries to move away from a largely college-based provision to a more long-term sustainable vision of continuing professional development that involves systematically updating the key competences that teachers require in the classroom. School-based models of training supported by distance learning materials and school clusters have been strongly advocated as a way of closing the gap between theory and practice, and of raising the quality of teaching and learning in basic education (see Figure 3.5 above). Educators and policymakers increasingly recognize the importance of providing high quality learning opportunities to help transform teaching (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992).

As Syrian students are expected to learn more complex analytical skills in preparation for further education and work in the 21st century, Syrian EFL teachers must learn to teach in ways that develop higher-order thinking and performance. Ensuring such student success requires a new kind of teaching, conducted by teachers who understand learning and pedagogy, who can respond to the needs of their students and the demands of their disciplines, and who can develop strong connections between students' experiences and the goals of the curriculum. Efforts to improve student achievement can succeed only by building the capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practice and the capacity of school systems to promote teacher learning.

### **3.13 The role of context**

Crabbe (2003) argues that defining the quality of language learning requires an understanding of the cultural context in which language teaching and learning are tak-

ing place. Thus, the role of context cannot be overlooked in such studies. For example, contextual considerations such as class time allocation, student numbers inside the classroom, and the predominant culture of teaching, should be taken into account when speaking about teacher talk, because they broadly shape the quality of teacher talk. Contextual considerations also have a large impact on both teachers' and students' expectations and systems of beliefs. From a discourse point of view, Brown and Yule (1984) argue that the interpretation of a text (spoken or written) cannot be accurate if context is not taken into consideration. They view the role of context in interpretation as either limiting or supporting the range of possible or intended interpretations especially when talking about western and non-western contexts (Brown & Yule, 1984).

Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) acknowledge that schooling in developing countries takes place under conditions that are very different from those in western industrial countries. These conditions are referred to by Holliday (1994, 2005) as 'the cultural incompatibility' challenge which encompasses social, religious and cultural elements. In the case of unplanned curriculum innovation, the challenge often results in disinterest or resistance on the part of those teachers who hold strong beliefs about the efficacy of their traditional teaching approaches. This resistance inevitably occurs when the implementation of the proposed innovations requires a change in teachers' conceptions about teaching and learning and involves a shift in their classroom instructional approaches from teacher-centred into learner-centred.

Croft (2002) and Holliday (2005) are very critical of the notion that 'learner-centredness' is often used and treated as a superior 'Nativespeakerist' methodological prescription. They point out that its meanings are deeply imbedded in Western cultural and educational values and therefore should not be blindly implemented in other cultures without consideration or valuing of the other's cultural traditions or legitimate conditions. Holliday accordingly recommends that in the development of new materials for overseas projects there emerges the necessity of adapting innovations to the local classroom and societal context, taking into account the culture of the local classroom.

### 3.14 Chapter summary

A number of key points essential to this study emerge from the review of the literature on effective teaching, curriculum innovation, and classroom interaction patterns. First, the chapter has emphasised the complexity of the process of change as well as the centrality of the teachers' role in this. Teachers' attitudes, past experiences, their pre-service and in-service training, and their emergent understandings shape their response to an innovation and the extent to which they teach effectively.

Second, if the dominant classroom pedagogy encourages students' participation in extended two-way conversational exchange, students are more likely to have opportunities to develop their language proficiency. Conversely, if classrooms are minimally dialogic, students will be reduced to a culture of individuals responding to teacher questions, prompts, and response expectations. Procedural questions, open-ended, exploratory questions help open up students' thinking and expression. However, there is a dominance of low-level cognitive questions and the majority of students act in response to teacher-initiated display questions. Furthermore, students' classroom engagement and participation is mostly minimal in language classrooms. Yet, the quality and quantity of students' responses and contributions can be hugely improved if better questioning techniques are used and extended periods of think and wait time are adopted.

Finally, the review of relevant literature also reveals that there is still a need to find out much more about what goes on in classrooms during the implementation of a curriculum innovation (Carless, 2001). Only by sustained observation of teachers and pupils, preferably longitudinally, and through focused discussion of issues emerging from these observations can we understand the crucial teacher perspective on change. The need to bring forth changes in the current teaching practices of Syrian EFL teachers raises questions about the direction the reform should take. From my own observations and discussions with language teachers in Syria, it is apparent that they are in urgent need of professional training in language pedagogy and theory. School-based in-service education and training is crucial in raising the quality of teaching and learning in schools, as ultimately educational quality is obtained through pedagogical processes

in the classroom. If we accept Hayes' (1997) calls for 'systematic' identification and promotion of best practice, it becomes clear that the first step to be taken is the identification of what is actually going on the ground, i.e. how teachers are doing their job inside the classroom. This is exactly what this study has set out to do.

# **C** **HAPTER** **Four**

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## **Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

It has been argued in the previous chapter that the quality of an education system in a country like Syria depends to a large extent on the quality of its teachers, as they are the key source of knowledge and skills. International research into classroom processes also recognises that managing the quality of teacher-student interaction is one of the most important factors in improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in contexts where learning resources and teacher training are limited. Such research suggests that it is possible to identify universals in teaching and learning, such as teacher-pupil interaction, which must be attended to so as to improve the quality of education. Helping teachers to transform classroom talk into a purposeful and productive dialogue, through a pedagogy and curriculum which is relevant to the lives and the linguistic profile of the communities from which the pupils come, can therefore be seen as being fundamental to improving the quality of education and improving learning achievement.

It has also been argued that intervening at the school and classroom level through school-based in-service education and training is crucial in raising the quality of teach-

ing and learning in schools, as ultimately educational quality is obtained through pedagogical processes in the classroom. Studies of pedagogy in secondary schools from around the world show that teachers often rely on a single method made up of teacher-fronted ‘chalk and talk’ promoting the transmission of knowledge and rote learning. Such interaction often takes the form of lengthy recitations comprising teacher explanations and questions, and brief answers often chorused by the whole class or by individual pupils. The international research reviewed suggests that changing such a narrow repertoire of pedagogic practices by managing the quality of classroom interaction can be a cost effective way of improving classroom pedagogy.

In this way, the teaching repertoire can be expanded so that dialogue and discussion can be included alongside the more traditional drilling, closed questioning and telling, thereby raising cognitive engagement and understanding. Such an approach can also build on the traditional model of whole class teaching which is found in many classrooms but avoids the simplistic polarization of pedagogy into ‘teacher-centred’ versus ‘child-centred’ that has characterised much of the educational discourse in the international donor community. It will also help to ensure there is a better balance and blending of local cultural practices with internationally informed teacher education reforms. However, helping teachers transform classroom talk from the familiar rote, recitation and exposition to include a wider repertoire of dialogue and discussion in whole class, group-based and one-to-one interactions will require providing in-service education and training in alternative classroom interaction and discourse strategies that are more student-focused and dialogic in nature.

The present chapter outlines the research design and methods used to conduct the study with a detailed description of the techniques used for data collection. It begins by outlining the scope of the study restating the research question followed by the rationale for using the mixed methods in the study. After this, the chapter presents a detailed description and discussion of each method used in study, namely classroom observation, computerized observation, interviews and questionnaire survey. How each method was developed, piloted, applied and analysed will also be presented in this chapter. The chapter finishes by drawing attention to some data collection constraints and ethical considerations.



## 4.2 Scope of the research

Given the lack of empirical evidence on whole-class teaching in Syria, this study set out to investigate the nature of teacher-student interaction in secondary EFL classrooms in order to shed light on the underlying pedagogical approaches currently in use and to understand the contextual issues that shape such patterns of interaction.

As stated in chapter one, the study was designed to explore the following research questions:

- 1) What interactive and discourse practices do Syrian secondary level EFL teachers currently use in their whole class teaching?
- 2) To what extent do teachers feel equipped to implement interactive approaches in the classroom as advised by the Syrian MOE and the guidelines of the newly adopted national Syrian curriculum?
- 3) What can be done to address the training needs of Syrian secondary level EFL teachers in order to promote a wider repertoire of interactive and discourse practices in whole class teaching?

In order to fully address the complexity of the research questions, a mixed methods research design using both quantitative and qualitative methods was used. This allowed for methodological triangulation to achieve greater validity and reliability in the study. Each of the research methods was designed to be closely related to each other method to ensure a fully integrated research design with a central focus on classroom processes.

Classroom observation together with stimulated recall using critical moments selected by the teachers was identified as the most effective of answering the first research question. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with the observed teachers to explore their beliefs, about their classroom practices and what facilitated and inhibited their teaching of the subject. The second and third questions were investigated through the use of a structured questionnaire as well as interviews.

### 4.3 Rationale for using mixed methods

Over the last decade, mixed methods research has emerged as asserted itself as an emerging and progressively growing paradigm in educational research with a noticeable rise in the number of ELT researchers using it in their studies (Bryman, 2006, 2008). Most researchers argue that the selection of research approaches and methods of data collection should always be influenced by the nature of the inquiry, the nature of the population, the nature of the hypotheses and variables and by the research questions (e.g. Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al. 2007; Creswell, 2008; Gay & Airasian, 2003). Denscombe (2008, p. 280) adds that the selection is also in practice guided by ‘career interest, funding opportunities, training and personal skills rather than a purely ‘rational’ choice based on the respective merits of the available alternatives’.

As an approach, ‘mixed methods’ is defined as ‘procedures for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study...’ (Creswell, 2008, p. 62). In mixed methods research, a researcher collects and analyses data using both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study. It is argued that such an approach is capable of integrating and bridging the gap between the quantitative and qualitative paradigms, as mixed methods can answer research questions that the other methods cannot. Therefore, a major advantage of mixed methods is that it enables the researcher to simultaneously answer confirmatory and exploratory questions, and verify and generate theory in the study. It allows for a high degree of reliability as well as ‘flexibility’ which could not be achieved without using inter-related methods (Bryman, 2008, p. 24). This derives from an epistemology that views knowledge of the world as a social construct rather than as a given, external reality. More importantly, mixed methods helps in cross-validating the various instruments employed in the study to strengthen the validity of the results/findings through ‘triangulation’ (see Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Bryman, 2008; Dörnyei, 2007; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Sandelowski, 2001; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010).

A mixed methods approach using observation, interviews and structured questionnaires was therefore adopted as the most appropriate way of addressing the three research questions investigating teacher beliefs classroom practices and training needs.

What adds to the distinctiveness of the study, from a methodological perspective, is the fact that no single study conducted in Syria within the field of ELT has investigated classroom interaction and teacher talk in Syrian secondary EFL classrooms using a combination of research methods for the data collection and data analysis. The following sections discuss each of the chosen methods in more detail.

#### 4.4 Data collection methods

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, data were collected from classroom observations (computerized observation and video-audio recording), semi-structured interviews, stimulated-recall protocols and questionnaires. Table 4.1 summarizes the main data collection methods adopted in the study. It also presents a detailed breakdown of each method's purpose, scheduled date, and targeted population.

Table 4-1 Summary of data collection methods and schedule

Method		Purpose	Scheduled Date	Target & Total
Interviews		Identification of perception and beliefs about teaching and learning	February 2010	Teachers 12 interviews
Classroom Observation	Note-taking	Identification of the nature and types of classroom discourse. Contextual information	Feb-March 2010	Teachers 6 x 40 minutes
	Computerized	Analysis of the process of teaching and learning, audio-recorded	March 2010	Teachers 6 x 35 minutes
	Audio-video	(Para)-linguistic information to supplement the data obtained by audio recording.	March 2010	Teachers 6 x 30 minutes
	Stimulated-recall	Promotion of teachers' critical reflections on professional practice	March 2010	Teachers 10min x 2
Questionnaire		Identification of attitudes and perceptions towards English teaching & learning	February 2010	33 Questionnaires Distributed: 57 Returned: 38 Discarded: 5

In the following sections, each method will be discussed in further detail. In presenting them, the same sequence adopted in the analysis chapters will be followed, i.e. the questionnaire survey will be discussed first followed by interviews and then classroom observation.

## **4.5 The questionnaire**

A questionnaire was designed to help in answering the second research question, which concerns itself with the extent EFL teachers in Syria feel equipped to implement interactive approaches in their classrooms. Data concerning teachers' attitudes through a questionnaire would eventually feed into answering the other research questions. On the top of that, exploring teachers' attitudes towards their own practices constitutes an important dimension of the self-awareness and self-conceptualization of one's teaching (Bryman, 2008). The sample for the questionnaire comprised 33 Syrian EFL secondary school teachers in the Governate of Homs.

### **4.5.1 The rationale**

The survey, typically in the form of a questionnaire, is one of the most popular methods of collecting data on opinions, attitudes, beliefs, motivations or reactions to teaching and learning and classroom instruction and activities from a large group of participants (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Gass and Mackey (2007) defined questionnaires as:

Written instruments that present all participants with the same series of questions or statements, which the participants then react to either through providing written answers, marking Likert-style judgements or selecting options from a series of statements (p. 148) .

One advantage of using questionnaires is the ease of administration. They can, for example, be administered through emails allowing a great degree of flexibility in the data gathering process. Although some researchers argue that questionnaires do not allow the researcher to approach a topic in much depth, they can prove useful if used in

combination with other research methods like interviews and classroom observation, as is the case in this study (see Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, the uniformity of measurement of groups of items in the closed questionnaire involves a greater degree of reliability (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Therefore, I grouped the items in the questionnaire in order to achieve a higher degree of reliability (see section 4.5.5).

In this study, a close-ended questionnaire has been adopted to explore the conceptions held by a sample of convenience of Syrian EFL secondary school teachers in connection with their talk inside the classroom. Amongst the advantages of choosing a cross-sectional design is that it enables the researcher to collect data at one point in time asking teachers the same question (Gass & Mackey, 2007; Bryman, 2008).

Mackey and Gass (2005) argue that whenever possible questionnaires should be administered in the subjects' native language to give them ample time to specify their answers. Because of the concern that responses might be inaccurate or deviate from the intended answers due to lack of L2 proficiency, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic.

#### **4.5.2 Constructing the questionnaire**

Building the questionnaire required several steps. To start with, an extensive review of studies in similar contexts was done. In attempt to avoid 're-inventing the wheel', some of the questionnaire items were based partially on Al-Khwaiter's (2001) study of Qatari English language teachers. Every effort was made to make all items in the questionnaire unambiguous, answerable, and simple with uncluttered format, with no leading questions, prestige questions, embarrassing or biased questions, following Brown & Rodgers's (2002) recommendations. Every item of the questionnaire was chosen with a purpose in mind, as will be illustrated in sections 4.5.5 and 4.5.7 where I provide further details about these efforts.

Further, Yazigy's (1991) study on Lebanese teachers and learners' attitudes was deemed relevant as it involved the administration of questionnaires on participants' opinions of prevailing teaching methods inside Lebanese English classrooms. Al-Khwaiter's (2001) study appeared to deal with similar issues and similar participants.

However, his study was particularly dedicated to studying Qatari teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards the applicability and effectiveness of communicative language teaching methods in Qatar. The study was designed to function as the basis for recommendations concerning syllabus design. However, the current study's focus is different in that it lends itself to examining teacher talk and classroom discourse within the Syrian EFL classroom. The participants in these studies were found to have some commonalities with the participants of the present study, therefore, several items could be validly and usefully borrowed from them (see section 4.5.5).

### **4.5.3 Title and headings of the questionnaire**

Bell (2005, p. 145) argues that the appearance and the layout of a questionnaire can have 'a significant positive impact on leading the participants to complete it'. Therefore, every attention was given to the format of the survey. For example, the questionnaire was entitled 'English Language Teachers' Attitudes towards Whole-Class Interactive Teaching'. It also contained two main parts: the first dealt with biographical information relating to the respondents, and the second with the attitudes and practices of the participants. The questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter and a consent form. The logos of the University of York, Ministry of Higher Education and Tishreen University (the sponsor) were placed on as the heading of every page of the questionnaire (see Appendix A).

### **4.5.4 Questionnaire covering letter**

The covering letter introduced the research and the researcher. It also informed the respondents that the purpose of the survey was to collect data about their attitudes towards the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. It also made clear that the responses would be used only for research purposes. In order to encourage frankness in the responses, participating teachers were not asked to reveal their names, but *were* requested to answer all the items. They were thanked at the end of the questionnaire. The results from the piloting stage (see section 4.5.7) emphasised that the covering letter was useful for understanding the aims and the instructions of the ques-

tionnaire. Thus, the participants of the main study were strongly advised to read the covering letter before completing the questionnaires.

#### **4.5.5 Structuring the questionnaire**

As mentioned above, the questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part asked for bio-data information about participants, like age, gender, qualifications and teaching experience. Mackey and Gass (2005) point out that collecting bio-data is an integral part of one's database as it allows the reader to determine the extent to which the results of the study are indeed generalizable to a broader context.

The second part of the questionnaire constituted the main substance of the questionnaire. It included 30 statements and questions designed to explore the teachers' attitudes and practices inside the classroom. The 30 items were used to construct six scales:

- Scale 1: General attitudes
- Scale 2: Teaching methods
- Scale 3: Teacher initiation
- Scale 4: Teacher feedback
- Scale 5: Interactive teaching
- Scale 6: Teacher training needs

A five-point Likert-type bipolar scale of agreement was used for several items, Q11 through Q18, asking about attitudes. It is important to mention that not all items were based on a Likert scale. In the context of the present study, bipolar Likert scales had the particular advantages that they were easily answered by respondents and could be administered to relatively large numbers of participants. According to Mackey and Gass (2005), for a Likert scale to be valid it is important that the items in a given subscale should be conceptually related and could be conceived as ranging along a single continuum from negative to positive. The construction of the scales in the questionnaire was guided by this principle with the wording of the items carefully looked at to maintain a balance of positively and negatively worded items (See Appendix A for the

full questionnaire). In scales 1, 2, 3 and 4, only one answer was allowed. However, in the last two scales, multiple answers were allowed.

#### **4.5.6 Translating the questionnaire**

Mackey and Gass (2005) recommend that researchers in foreign language contexts should administer questionnaires in the participants' native language. Therefore, an accurate translation of the questionnaire from English into Arabic was produced. My translation was double-checked by Dr Maisa Tanjour, an Arabic-English translator and researcher. The cultural references of some phrases were taken into consideration and carefully treated. The same layout of the original questionnaire was kept intact. This helped later at the analysis stage. However, it is worth mentioning that the scale of agreement changed in the Arabic version of the questionnaire. For example, in the original questionnaire the scale of agreement went from left to right starting with 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. However, this order was reversed because in Arabic writing goes from right to left. Teachers were informed of the existence of an accurate Arabic translation version and were handed two versions of the questionnaire; the English with its Arabic counterpart. Teachers were given the freedom to choose the more convenient to them.

#### **4.5.7 Piloting the questionnaire**

Piloting is pivotal to check the suitability, validity, and practicality of any research tool (Neuman, 2010). Therefore, after finishing the first draft of the questionnaire and before administering it to the full sample, a pilot study was conducted. The questionnaire was first piloted by two peer researchers, reviewed by experts, and lastly piloted by two EFL Syrian teachers. To start with, peer piloting was conducted on my colleagues in the research base at the Department of Education. Specifically, two of them had completed the questionnaire while commenting on the wording, itemization and order. It was very insightful process generating considerable useful feedback. After that, the questionnaire was 'microscoped' by three experts in the Department, namely Dr Paul Wakeling, Dr Vanita Sundaram and Dr Graham Low. Because of the limitation of scholarship and time, I could not travel to Syria to do the piloting on Syrian



secondary school teachers. So, I compensated by making use of the email and MSN messenger. I asked two friends, both EFL teachers at secondary schools in Syria, to help me pilot the questionnaire. We arranged for a voice-chat over MSN messenger where they were required to think aloud while answering the questionnaire items. They were prompted to tell me about the vagueness and difficult wording of any items. This yielded very important feedback. As a result, I re-phrased several items (e.g. items 8, 12, 13, 16, and 22, see Appendix A), and deleted or re-ordered others.

#### **4.5.8 Administering the questionnaire**

Gay and Airasian (2003, p. 102) suggested that defining the population should be the first step for a sample selection. Therefore, the study questionnaires were administered personally to 57 teachers working in Syrian secondary schools in Homs and Hama Governate. In return, I received 38 items. Five questionnaires were completed carelessly (e.g. no bio data, double markings for one-answer scales) so I decided to exclude them. This brought the final number of analysed questionnaires to 33 (see table 4.2). When collecting the questionnaires back, three respondents agreed to discuss their responses in follow-up interviews.

#### **4.6 Interviews**

Bryman (2008) argues that interviews are probably one of the most widely employed and most attractive methods of data collection because of the flexibility they offer to the researcher. Interviewing is an important qualitative data collection method which can be effectively used for exploring and describing educational problems and practices. Mackey and Gass (2005, p. 148) argue that classroom observation in its own right is a good method but would be ‘better’ if scaffolded with pre- and post-observation interviews. Corbin and Strauss (2008) support this in that the observation should be followed by interviews or questionnaire until the research arrives at the point of ‘theoretical saturation’ (p. 89).

While structured interviews are typically inflexible because of the need to ‘standardize the way in which each interviewee is dealt with’, semi-structured interviews, by con-

trast, are flexible and give both researchers and interviewees more room for probing issues (Bryman, 2008, p. 340). Bearing this in mind, I decided to use in-depth semi-structured interviews with both the observed teachers and some of the questionnaire respondents. The interviews reflected both the participants' viewpoints and the researcher's research aims.

#### **4.6.1 Interview sampling**

Each teacher who got involved in the classroom observation was interviewed prior to and after the observation in order to build a clear picture about teachers' practices and perceptions. The post-observation interviews employed the stimulated recall technique as discussed in section 4.6.4. Teachers were told to feel free to choose either English or Arabic for the interviews. This was because two interviewees in the piloting stage (see section 4.6.5) failed to express their ideas fluently and clearly in English. In these situations, they were encouraged to use Arabic to talk about what they could not express in English. Others spoke in alternating mode, i.e. switching between Arabic and English. Learning from this experience, the interviewees in the main study were encouraged to conduct their interviews in Arabic and they did choose to speak in Arabic. In either case, nine interviews were audio-recorded and backed-up for transcribing, translating, and analysis as accurately as possible. For those (eight people), who did not agree to be recorded, their interviews were managed by shorthand note-taking as recommended by literature (Chapelle & Duff, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007).

#### **4.6.2 Initial interviews**

After official consent forms had been signed and prior to the classroom observation, semi-structured introductory interviews were held to enhance the sense of closeness between the researcher and the participating teachers. Each interview lasted for about 15 minutes. During the interview, I explained the broad outlines of my study, its purpose, its methodology and the expected implications. Selected teachers were briefed about the intended plans of observing their classes. They were told that I would be looking at their teaching practices. I was keen not to mention that I was particularly looking at their interaction behaviours with their students. Teachers were re-

assured of confidentiality in the sense that they would not be identified by name, and that their data would not be passed to the school or government authorities. Mainly, the interviews collected bio-data about them, and received a verbal briefing of their lesson plans. The aim was to establish a sense of relationship and co-operation with them.

### **4.6.3 Follow-up interviews**

Bryman (2008) argues that post-observation interviews are an essential part of the process if observation to be an effective means of improving the quality of English teaching and teachers' self-development. The post-observation interviews were designed to explore the teacher's perceptions of interactive teaching and effective talk. Teachers' responses were audio-recorded from the start to the finish of the interview. Each post-observation interview took around 20 minutes altogether.

The first part covered the following questions:

- In what respects do you think the new curriculum is different from the previous one, (e.g. teaching style, learning objectives, content)?
- What do you think makes for effective teacher talk? In the light of your experience of English teaching, could you please explain what the 'communicative learner-centred approach' means to you?
- Some teachers think that student-student interaction is less effective in teaching English, while others think that teacher-student interaction is more effective. So what kind of classroom atmosphere do you aim for in your class by the way you talk?
- Some teachers use English most of the time, while others use English and translate some tasks into Arabic. What do you do/ think?
- Do you think that a degree in English Language and Literature is not enough qualification to teach, as there are no modules on teaching methodology?

While writing these items, every effort was made as not to use technical terms, difficult phrases, or leading questions. I also tried not to put words in the participants' mouths. The second part of the interview used the stimulated recall technique.

#### **4.6.4 Stimulated recall**

In order to investigate teacher perceptions of what was going on in the observed lessons, the study made use of a stimulated recall technique. In the stimulated recall, I played back parts of the recording of the participant asking them to reflect on their behaviours (e.g., why they behaved like they did, what was in their minds and so on). Through this technique teachers can comment upon their interactive decision-making processes to elicit to what extent their classroom judgments and decision were shaped by their assumptions and knowledge of language learning (Nunan, 1992).

Several studies have made use of stimulated recall for professional development. For example, in their study of Chinese ELT teachers, Wang and Seth (1998, p. 37) identified the following four advantages in using stimulated recall as a teacher development tool:

- It can lead teachers to recognize that they have a responsibility for their own development;
- It gives the teachers insights of their own classroom experiences;
- It introduces the teachers to a more developmental approach to teacher training;
- It is helpful in building a more supportive and trusting relationship between the teachers and the researchers, and to 'realize the mutual benefits that would accrue from this.'

In the UK, Moyles (2003) also found that using video clips of lessons selected by the teacher to be a powerful means of promoting critical reflection on professional practice. The very act of asking teachers to point to the most interactive teaching moments through a video-stimulated reflective dialogue provided them with opportunities for self-monitoring and self-evaluation.

Similarly, Walsh (2003, 2006a) suggests that teachers can find out about their language use in the classroom by making audio- and video-recordings of their lessons. By working with their own data, teachers are able to modify their classroom verbal behaviour. Walsh stresses that teachers' listening to recordings or analysing transcripts can significantly raise their awareness of their interactions with students, resulting in more appropriate language use. In his study of 8 ESP and EAP British teachers, Walsh (2006a, p. 54) argued that the reflective practices and collaborative process of interpreting data and 'meaning-making' in a reflective feedback interview empowered teachers to uncover the interactive features of their classes and 'make conscious changes to classroom actions'. In the present study as shown in Table 4.1, only two observed teachers subscribed to the stimulated recall, namely Mr Beta and Mr Zeta. The other teachers were too busy to sit for further interviewing. The piloting of the stimulated recall protocol was arranged with Mr Bill Soden from the Department of Education (Centre of English Language Teaching - CELT) at the University of York as discussed in section 4.6.5.

In the stimulated-recall interviews, teachers were asked to watch their video-recorded lessons and were asked to give me their opinions about their behaviours. I used the following prompts to probe the participants: 'Could you please talk me through what was going on in class at this time?' and 'Could you tell me more about it?' However, I avoided constraining the participants' thinking and tried not to be intrusive. Teachers were told to choose the language they wanted to use, i.e. Arabic or English. The stimulated reflection interviews were carried out with the teachers as soon as practicable after the relevant class session in order to enhance the reliability of the data

#### **4.6.5 Piloting the interviews**

One way to enhance the reliability of interviews is careful piloting of interview schedules (Silverman, 2006). Hence, a Syrian PhD colleague who was a former EFL secondary school teacher was interviewed to test the interview schedule. As a result of the feedback she provided, there was a review of the duration of the interview and the number of questions. It was decided that two questions must be removed or substituted with others to help the interview run smoothly. For example, certain key concepts such

as ‘teacher talk’ and ‘effective teaching’ were re-positioned at the centre of the set of interview items. It was also realised that some questions were not clear enough to be understood and they required further clarification. So, these questions were also modified (e.g. question two in the interview).

The modified interview schedule was re-piloted to make sure there were not misleading or unclear points. In late December 2009, a Skype conference was arranged with two EFL Syrian teachers with the aim of re-piloting the interviews. As a result of this piloting, several items were re-phrased, re-structured and fine-tuned to ensure that the interviews would be conducted in a tactful way so as to encourage the interviewees to speak freely and provide genuine responses.

#### **4.7 Classroom observation**

Silverman (2006) argues that classroom observation is a powerful data-collection tool and a self-explanatory process that enables a researcher to gain insights to what happens inside the classroom. He adds that we can understand events only when they are situated in the wider social and historical context. Thus, data obtained by observation are considered attractive as they afford the researcher the opportunity to gather ‘live’ data from ‘live’ situations of teacher-student encounters. One key characteristic of classroom observation is the possibility of investigation of the interaction patterns inside classrooms.

In the current study, the main bulk of data was collected through classroom observation. This choice was governed by four critical factors. First, teachers’ actual use of interactive approaches inside the classroom cannot be caught without using observation. Second, among the different aims of the study is the generation of a database for further research on pedagogical processes inside Syrian EFL classroom (see section 1.3). Third, observation can be used as an effective tool for teachers’ self-development as will be shown in section 4.7.14. Fourth and lastly, Kennedy (1999) argues that observation enables researchers to gather naturalistic data in the sense that the interaction and discourse to be observed are not ‘set up’ or pre-organised, but occurring dynamically in the context of teaching and learning in hand at the time.

In keeping with a predesigned plan for classroom observation, four lessons by each of the six participating teachers were observed. Teachers were observed on an alternative concurrent basis i.e. I, in the same week, observed more than one teacher. I went into the first classroom to see the first teacher in February 2010. In the following sections, I present detailed information on the schools and teachers who took part in the research. Such information is derived from responses to the interviews that I conducted with participants and school headmasters before and during the observation period.

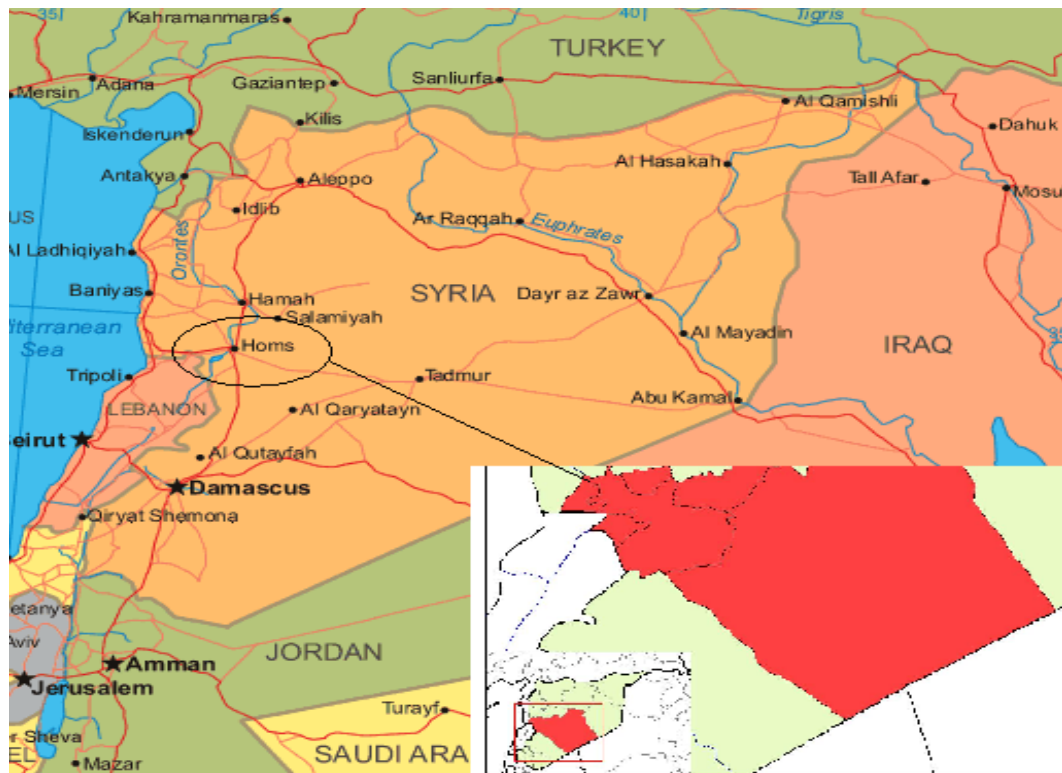
#### **4.7.1 Participating schools**

Two urban schools located in the City of Homs, the centre of the Governate of Homs, were chosen for the research (see Figure 4.1). These two schools were categorized amongst the best in the Governate. The criteria for classifying them amongst the ‘best’ were particularly connected with the number of top-scoring students in the Baccalaureate year, qualifying for university entrance, in both literary and scientific branches. I also chose these schools based on my familiarity of the context where I used to be an English language teacher. Added to this, the research site provided me with a rich mix of programmes and interactions as suggested by (Cohen et al., 2007). Both schools were government-owned and government-run. Government schools in large urban areas like Homs were characterized by overcrowded classrooms with a size of around thirty-five students (see section 2.2.2).

Both schools selected are boys-only schools. The first school, Rawi (pseudonym) Secondary School, accommodated 850 students with a total of five English language teachers. It is one of the most popular and renowned schools in the whole city. It takes pride in a long history of recruiting the best teaching and administrative staff. This school is designed for average students who are studying general secondary schooling in literary and scientific branches. The second participating school, Khali (pseudonym) Secondary School, accommodated 911 students with a total of five English language teachers. The school is also famous for its highly-disciplined and high-achieving students. In both schools, the criteria under which students are admitted to secondary school relate to their marks in the examination of the 3<sup>rd</sup> preparatory class (see section 2.2). The vision of both schools is to principally qualify students to attain high scores

in their Baccalaureate year. In addition to these two urban schools, I observed two teachers in a third school, Ghori (pseudonym) Secondary School. It is in the rural areas of Homs and accommodates 570 students with three English language teachers. Unlike the two other schools, Ghori is a mixed-sex school.

Figure 4.1 The Governate of Homs



#### 4.7.2 Participating teachers

For the classroom observation (and most interviews), six teachers took part in the study. Another teacher sent me his lessons audio-recorded via email. As shown in table 4.2, four of these teachers used to teach in urban schools in the City of Homs, whereas the other two worked in rural schools. All teachers and their schools were given pseudonyms and every effort was made to avoid any personal reference to them. Apart from teachers Zeta and Eta, all teachers had a wide experience in teaching English in the Syrian schools. For example, Mr Alpha was the most experienced teacher with more than 26 years of teaching. One predicted advantage of working with experi-



enced teachers is that they are more likely to theorize their verbal behaviours and describe their teaching practices and decisions (Bryman, 2008).

Table 4-2 Profile of participating teachers

<b>TEACHER</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>TEACHING EXPERIENCE (YEARS)</b>	<b>TYPE OF SCHOOL</b>
<b>ALPHA</b>	MALE	28	SECONDARY SCHOOL URBAN
<b>BETA</b>	MALE	19	SECONDARY SCHOOL URBAN
<b>GAMMA</b>	MALE	21	SECONDARY SCHOOL URBAN
<b>DELTA</b>	MALE	23	SECONDARY SCHOOL URBAN
<b>ZETA</b>	MALE	3.5	SECONDARY SCHOOL RURAL
<b>ETA</b>	MALE	5	SECONDARY SCHOOL RURAL

It is perhaps not surprising that all six participating teachers were male. The female teachers within these schools explicitly rejected being observed, let alone video-recorded. Being in a very male-dominated and culturally-conservative environment, female teachers felt there is, as one of them said, ‘no need to jeopardise my image’.

### **4.7.3 Gaining access to locations and participants**

Gaining access to schools and teachers was not a completely straightforward and easy process. As stated in the first chapter, the research was carried out in the City of Homs which lies in the middle of Syria. This necessitated me to get informed consent from teachers and from the local Directorate of Education. In May 2009, I made my first contact with the MOE to get permission to start the fieldwork. However, I did not receive any response to my emails and faxes. Then, I contacted the Directorate of Education in the Governate of Homs in September 2009 in the hope of getting their approval. I got the approval from the local Directorate in early February 2010. Unlike the Ministry, people in the Directorate were more helpful and understanding. They warm-

ly welcomed my research efforts and provided me with an official letter asking secondary schools in the Governorate to cooperate with me as much as needed and however possible.

Because of the scarcity of social research studies in Syria in general and on ELT in particular, there used to be a culture of rejection and suspicion that made it more difficult to seek quick approval from schools and teachers to participate in the observation part of the research. To a large extent, Syrian school teachers seem suspicious or apprehensive of social researchers and this has to do with a lack of understanding of the nature of research work and what it implies about involving participants in the process. In the back of teachers' minds, there are serious worries that the research process or the findings of the research, might be used to evaluate their practices. Some fear that this might affect their professional status. However, after gaining the consent from the Directorate, I went to the schools to get their consent.

As expected, the hardest part was with schools themselves, as the head-teachers seemed reluctant about and apprehensive of the idea of classroom video-recording. Although I sent them the Information Sheet beforehand, they asked for more explanation and a firmer confirmation of the anonymity of both schools and participating teachers. I re-assured them on both counts. With their consent secured, I had to speak to my actual points of contact: the teachers who would let me in to their classrooms. I went to talk to them expecting this to be a difficult mission. However, the phone calls that I made with four of them two months beforehand seemed effective and helped in breaking the ice between them and my data-collection plans. Although I handed an Information Sheet to them along with Consent Form (see Appendix A), they asked for an informal interview to hear things from 'my mouth'. I sat with them and explained the nature of the research and the benefits of taking part in the research. The notion of professional development was something I kept reinforcing. They felt more comfortable with this. However, they wanted me to audio-video record them for approximately 35 minutes of each lesson. After these ethics procedures were resolved, it became possible to make frequent visits to classes at specific times.

#### **4.7.4 Timing of data collection**

The timing of the collection of data was a key factor that had a great influence on the findings of the research. Data were collected at the beginning of the second academic semester of 2010 which started in the mid-January. Importantly, data were intentionally collected neither at the beginning of the first semester nor at the end of the second semester because teachers at these two particular times do not usually pace their teaching as normal. At these times, teachers in my experience become concerned with completing the published teaching plans and covering the textbook. Besides, exams which cover the whole textbook remain, again in my experience, the biggest concern of both teachers and learners and they directly affect their performance inside the classroom. In short, the nearer exams are, the more exam- and textbook-oriented the teaching performance and vice versa.

#### **4.7.5 The data collection procedure**

The classroom observation schedule was constructed to gather data on the interactional patterns of the EFL teachers with regard to the effectiveness of their implementation of the CLT curriculum in six Syrian secondary school classrooms.

A multiple observational strategy was applied, involving the observation of the four lessons of each of the six teachers over two months, generating a total of 24 observed lessons. Observations were carried out as follows:

- First lesson: taking field-notes
- Second lesson: taking field notes (audio-recorded)
- Third lesson: systematic computerized observation
- Fourth lesson: digitally video & audio recorded observation

The last session was also intended to cast light on the importance of using observation as a means of self-development. The following sections will give a description of the computerized classroom observation which was adopted in the observation of the third lesson of each of the six participating teachers.

#### 4.7.6 Computerized classroom observation

Traditionally, most observational studies on classroom behaviour used to be associated with qualitative methods. However, advances in the field of observational methods have made it possible to generate both qualitative and quantitative data. For example, computerized classroom observation is basically an observational technique where a researcher can feed into computer software the immediate pre-defined ‘codes’ of observation. This process can quantify data, making it easier and faster for a researcher to observe a lesson in real-time; using software, data is collected and instantly stored ready for analysis. Unlike computerized observation schemes, the laborious observation schemes (such as Flanders Observation Tables) are becoming less popular or appealing to researchers, as they involve considerable effort and are time-consuming (Bryman, 2008).

There are several important studies that used systematic observation to collect data on the teacher’s pedagogical practices. For example, Smith et al. (2004) gathered their data by using the Classroom Interaction System program where they looked at some British teachers’ pedagogical practices and perceptions while teaching literacy and numeracy strategies. The researchers logged the number of different types of discourse move made by teachers and pupils, using a hand-held device. This method proved effective, reliable and time-saving.

For my research purposes and taking advantage of the technological advances in the field of computer-aided observational coding schemes, Maclin and Maclin’s (2005) Observational Data Coding System (ODCS) software was adopted for collecting and coding the data in the third session. Choosing ODCS software was guided by various factors. Essentially, it is flexible, customizable, free, user-friendly, efficient, and Windows-based. Added to this, it can read a variety of media files such as audio and video recorded data. It can also be used in real time while collecting data on field observations. As highlighted in this study, ODCS offers much potential in terms of observational research and as teacher professional development and analysis tool, especially in the Syrian context. The use of such software undoubtedly resulted in a much better understanding of classroom aims and events, particularly in terms of teacher talk and

student talk. The program consists of a control panel that trained observers can code with a variety of variables and factors via buttons on the screen. A detailed description of the software is available online.

#### **4.7.7 Analyzing computerized systematic classroom observation**

The ODCS software was set to focus on teacher question–answer–feedback sequences, i.e. IRF structure. Within the control panel of the software there are 10 main categories and 10 subcategories corresponding to each main category. The subcategories in turn have 10 extra-subcategories for more coding options. Prior to the beginning of any coding session, the researcher needs to fill in an information window about the time and data of the session, the name of the coder, and the name of the school (see Maclin & Maclin, 2005).

For the present study, the main categories were set as Teacher-Initiation (T-i), Student-Initiation (S-i), Response (R), and Feedback (F) and Other (for any other behaviour). ‘T-i’ was subcategorized as elicitation, probe, and closed, open, display or referential questions. ‘S-I’ was also subcategorized into student-question and student-elicitation. ‘Response’ was divided into ‘teacher-response’ and ‘student-response’ which in turn was further subdivided into ‘choral’ or ‘individual’ response. Feedback was categorized to ‘evaluation’ which was further subdivided into ‘accept’, ‘comment’, ‘accept-and-comment’, ‘reject’, and ‘praise’. Other codes used were ‘prompt’, ‘nominate’, ‘clue’, ‘prompt’, and ‘uptake’.

The software was downloaded on the researcher’s laptop, a Dell Vostro. The output file was a text file (.txt) which documented the date and time of the session, the teacher’s name, and the research. A sample of the data looked like this:

```
0,22/02/2010,85653.31,4.6252586,Initiation,T-Questions,0, Closed Q, 0, 0
1,22/02/2010,85674.01,6.4775942,Resoponse,S-answer,Individual, 0, 0, 0
2,22/02/2010,85689.84,12.0122495,Feedback,accept,0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0
3,22/02/2010,85711.59,17.1940613,Initiation,T-Questions, Closed Q, 0, 0
4,22/02/2010,85720.36,22.5722177,Initiation,T-Questions, Closed Q, 0, 0
5,22/02/2010,85728.02,27.4377846,Resoponse,S-answer,Choral, 0, 0, 0, 0
```

Last, piloting the programme with Mr Bill Soden at the University of York (see section 4.7.9) enabled the researcher to review the choice of some codes and enabled him to work with ODCS quickly and efficiently.

#### **4.7.8 Video recording and transcribing lessons**

Video-recording was selected because it enabled me to capture the complexities of classroom interaction and discourse, and micro-analyse potentially rich evidence from the contexts of classroom and students (Nuthall, 2004). Teachers were not given any guidelines to work with while I observed. In each lesson, one video camera held by myself was used to record the interactions and language expressions of the six case study teachers. The teacher's interactions and verbal expressions throughout each lesson were video-recorded. Nuthall (2004) argues that video-recording generates dense, rich data, with the extra advantage over audio-recording of capturing more contextual data. However, there are limitations, such as some teachers' fear of standing in front of a camera.

The oral text production of the six case-study teachers and their students was transcribed. Silverman (2006) claims two main advantages for transcripts: the first is that they enable researchers to make repeated scrutiny checks and to have constant and frequent access to data. The second advantage is that other researchers can access the data for further investigations. All video files were coded and transcribed by the researcher, and 5% of the same files were checked by a research assistant who was trained by the researcher

#### **4.7.9 Piloting the observation**

Due to scholarship restrictions on the period I was allowed to stay outside the UK, piloting the classroom observation (both video-recording and computerized and stimulated recall) was done at the University of York. A classroom observation schedule was arranged with Mr Bill Soden, an academic lecturer on the MA TESOL programme, at the Department of Education in York in January 2010. The piloting served

three purposes; to enable me to use the equipment, namely the camcorder and the ODCS, to better identify the codes in the computerized observation and to help me minimize the effect of what is known as the ‘observer paradox’.

An unfortunately common problem with observation is ‘reactivity’ or the ‘observer paradox’, where the situation meant to be observed is likely to change owing to the researcher’s presence (Labov, 1972). Because reactivity decreases significantly after the teacher has been observed for a while, the research design, informed by the piloting stage, limited the first two sessions with each teacher to note-taking. I used to enter the classroom a few minutes before the lesson started and sit in the back of the room with a copy of coursebook in my hand. This helped to create a better atmosphere with both teachers and students, as students and teachers behaved more normally in the following sessions. Through this procedure, I could gain the trust of teachers participating throughout the process of data collection.

Because of my awareness of the many risks that might evolve due to the adoption of the case study method, I chose to conduct systematic observation in order to enhance the internal validity of classroom observation (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2011). The ODCS was piloted with Mr Bill Soden in December 2009. Finally, in order to objectively analyse the patterns of naturally-occurring classroom interaction, a system of analysis has to be adopted. The importance of analysing classroom interaction stems from the fact that there is a need to look below the level of teaching techniques. As a result, systems of analysis are powerful tools for describing what is going on inside the classroom. The most widely known approaches to analysing classroom discourse include Discourse Analysis (DA), Conversation Analysis (CA) and Systematic Classroom Observation (SCO).

#### **4.7.10 Systematic classroom observation**

Disappointed with the subjective interpretations made by some researchers working on effective teaching, several researchers developed systematic observational schemes whose data are more objective, representative and reflective. A good example of this is Systematic Classroom Observation (SCO) which refers to the different

schemes that lend themselves to quantifying and measuring the behaviours within the classroom environment, for instance teacher-student verbal encounters. They usually involve a predetermined system of categories in order to reflect the myriad classroom behaviours. The vast majority of SCOs are reliable, effective, efficient, simple to use, and easy to quantify and codify. On top of that, an SCO empowers researchers to describe the current status of instructional norms and to identify the interaction patterns. It also helps diagnose any instructional problems and collect naturally occurring teacher talk, drawing a precise yet detailed picture of the ‘inner workings’ prevailing in a classroom (Chaudron, 2000).

There are several SCO schemes. The range includes Moskowitz’s (1970) Foreign Language Interaction (FLINT), Flanders’ (1976) Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC), Ullmann and Geva’s (1982) Target Language Observation Scheme (TALOS), Spada and Fröhlich’s (1995) Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT). In most of these schemes, the observer sets out to obtain authentic data in real-time through employing a low-inference checklist; a category system, or sign system. A category system (e.g. COLT) requires the observer to mark the frequency (how many times) of an observed behaviour, whereas a sign system requires the observation to be made at regular intervals of time (e.g. TALOS) (see also Dörnyei, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2005).

However, CSOs are not immune from criticism. To mention some, there are concerns that systematic observation researchers could fall in the trap of singling out certain behaviours, isolating them from their preceding and succeeding moves. To resolve the problem in this study, triangulation of data with discourse analysis was chosen. Mackey and Gass (2005) point out that:

Whether customized or pre-existing schemes are used, additional data-gathering methods may be helpful in order to triangulate classroom data and provide multiple perspectives by accessing the learners’ insights into the events that have been observed. (p. 201)

A methodologically-related problem concerns the effect of the researcher’s presence inside the classroom. The presence of an obtrusive observer in the classroom with a



recording device might alter or affect the degree of naturalness of the teachers' and students' behaviours inside the classroom (Ackers & Hardman, 2001; Mackey & Gass, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2006). Bearing these fears in mind, the observer paradox effect was reduced by my undertaking two field-note sessions before bringing in an audio or video recording device (see section 4.6.1). Consequently, teachers seemed to behave more naturally.

Nevertheless, it is widely known that analysing observational data which looks into social interactions is both time-consuming and laborious, as data needs to be transcribed, coded, and later processed by using some statistical analysis program. Traditionally in the above mentioned observational schemes, researchers used to manually take data by either checking the appropriate corresponding boxes, or by stroking how many times an event took place. Besides being a tiring process, researchers could either miss numerous important behavioural aspects or record too much. However, collecting and analysing observational data can be significantly improved through using computer software (Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Farrell, 1991).

#### **4.7.11 Conversation analysis**

Emerging out of Garfinkel's (1994) studies on ethnomethodology and later developed by the works of Schegloff (1993) and Sacks et al. (1974), Conversation Analysis (CA) focuses on investigating the organization of everyday interaction and describing the linguistic utterances produced by people during a social interaction. In the classroom context, CA documents the linguistic forms used by both students and teachers, and the meanings jointly constructed by them during whole class, group and one-to-one talk. CA also concerns itself with turn taking and turn repair, conversational openings and the adjacent pairs of talk and 'the effect of institutional talk on ordinary conversation' (Silverman, 2006, p. 168).

Often in the preparation for the analysis, transcripts recorded within CA are subjected to sequential analysis and a recycling process to investigate how significant features of the talk, such as turn-taking, co-construction of topic and repair (recast, reformulation and clarification requests) are handled by the participants (Edwards & Westgate, 1994;

Hardman et al., 2011). Thus, the data undergo an initial subjective intervention on the part of the researcher and cannot be considered ‘raw’ any longer. Moreover, CA has been criticized for its overemphasis on studying institutional talk (e.g., court trials, emergency calls to fire stations) and that it involves a mechanical system ignoring the role of context of interaction (Goffman, 1983). Another major problem with CA is its emphasis on adjacency pairs in that any pair of turns should be of the same genre. That is, greeting-greeting, apology-acceptance and so on (Schmitt, 2010). Such pairs are more frequently attested in everyday life rather than the classroom context. Moreover, CA is not as easy and straightforward a system of analysis as Discourse Analysis (DA). For these shortcomings with CA, this study adopted DA as a system of analysis.

#### **4.7.12 Discourse analysis**

DA occupies a very important position in applied linguistics and language education since it enables researchers to analyse and understand the meaning as well as the structure of real-life language data. It specifically refers to the analysis of language in its social context (Schmitt, 2010). It also seeks to discern the rules that define the actual mechanisms by which communication, understanding and interaction are maintained in a string of language utterances. In effect and according to Eggins and Slade (2005), DA is an umbrella term that covers a broad range of approaches affiliated with different academic disciplines. For example, in sociology it is *mostly* associated with Conversational Analysis (CA) whereas it is affiliated with Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS) in sociolinguistics. In linguistics, it is linked with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for social semiotic studies, but affiliated with the Birmingham School for structural-functional studies of language (Eggins & Slade, 2005). In this study, the term Discourse Analysis will be used to refer to Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1992) modified model of the Birmingham School. Schmitt (2010) and Seedhouse (2005) emphasise that the advances in the Birmingham School played an important informing role in boosting the move towards CLT.

#### 4.7.13 Sinclair and Coulthard's system of analysis

Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) first proposed DA to analyse teacher-pupil talk in the classroom. According to them, the classroom setting is linguistically rich and 'well-defined'. As a matter of fact, it was Sinclair and Coulthard who established the notion of a 'teaching exchange' consisting of an initiation-response-feedback sequence. Thereafter, DA has become very popular in studies looking at the classroom interaction patterns in L2 classes from a structural-functional point of view. Because it is a well-established, simple-to-use and comprehensive analysis system, DA was the preferred choice of several important studies of L2 classroom interaction patterns (e.g., Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Hardman et al., 2005).

Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) proposed that the lesson is the highest unit of classroom discourse. Lessons are made up of a series of transactions and exchanges. Precisely, a lesson can be analysed at five levels or 'ranks': lesson, transaction, exchange, move, and act. A lesson consists of several transactions which are composed of several exchanges that in turn have moves, which are composed of acts. Seen as the fundamental unit of discourse in the classroom, exchanges are divided into two major classes: boundary exchanges and teaching exchanges. Unlike with CA, Sinclair and Coulthard 5-level system is claimed to be exhaustive and accounts for all the data.

In the system, the boundary exchange is composed of framing moves and focusing moves, often occurring together with the framing move. According to Coulthard and Sinclair, 'the function of a boundary exchange is to signal the beginning or end of what the teacher considers to be a stage in the lesson' (1992, p. 25). Boundary exchanges are often signalled and/or realized by the use of discourse markers such as 'well', 'ok', and 'so' or 'at last'.

On the other hand, the 'skeleton' of a teaching exchange contains initiation, response, and follow-up 'vertebrae' (i.e. moves). Willis (1992) contends that teaching exchanges and moves are the most complete and representative elements out of the hierarchy of five (i.e. Lesson, Transaction, Exchange, Moves, and Acts). Teaching exchanges usually (but not always) have the IRF structure, which matches the potential of an open-

ing move, followed by an answering move, which in turn followed by a follow-up move.

Further in the system, there are two sub-categories of teaching exchange; 'free' and 'bound'. The free exchanges are composed of six teaching moves according to their function. The main functions of the free exchanges are Informing, Directing, Eliciting and Checking. If the possibility of student initiation and elicitation is allowed, Free exchange categories include: Teacher Inform, Student Inform, Teacher Elicit, Student Elicit, Teacher Direct, and Teacher Check. These are distinguished by the types of act which forms the initiating move (see Table 6.1).

To begin with, a Teacher Inform exchange occurs when the teacher delivers facts, opinions, and information to the students. When the student offers relevant information, this is deemed to be Student Inform. Sinclair and Coulthard acknowledge that this exchange rarely occurs inside the classroom. Unlike Teacher-Inform, Teacher Direct happens when the teacher asks students to do something, rather than say it (e.g., 'open at page 54' or 'close the window'). In the Teacher Check exchange, the teacher usually checks the students' progress, their understanding of the point under discussion, and/or his/her teaching pace (e.g. 'did you get the last point?' or 'am I going too fast?'). Teacher Elicit is proposed to get students to produce verbal utterances and say things. Although in the classroom environment, the teacher can already predict the students' response to the question raised in the initiation move, this does not belittle the importance of the feedback that students expect from the teacher.

On the other hand, the Bound exchanges usually do not have an initiating move and consist of five types: four attached to the Teacher Elicits and one to a Teacher Direct. So, the Bound exchanges include: Re-initiation (i), Re-initiation (ii), Listing, Reinforce, and Repeat. In the system, Re-initiation (i) occurs when there is no student response to a teacher's elicitation. In this case, teachers might restart by either rephrasing, simplifying or giving hints (i.e. the teacher uses acts like 'clue' (cl), 'prompt' (p), or 'nomination' (n)). However, Re-initiation (ii) occurs when there is a wrong answer to the teacher's elicitation and the teacher tries to spend some more time with the student(s) to get the right answer. Because of the complication that might result from

those two exchanges, they were conflated in this study to a single category 'Re-initiation'. The Listing exchange occurs when the teacher holds back an evaluation until some more answers are given. The Reinforce exchange happens when the teacher re-explains or re-states something. Finally the Repeat exchange occurs when the teacher asks for the answer to be repeated for some reason or another (see Table 4.1).

Willis (1992) argues that the distinctive feature of Sinclair and Coulthard's system is that the elements of the structural description should be rigorously defined. This means that descriptions which are based on the same 'structural criteria are directly comparable' (p.112). This will enable researchers to discern similarities and differences between different discourses. It has also been assumed that teaching styles, together with their variations, would be revealed in the quantification, distribution and patterning of the teaching exchanges. In the present study, quantifying naturally occurring (or quasi-naturalistic, given the observer paradox effect) interaction will help in drawing an accurate picture of the Syrian language classroom. In the Syrian language classroom context, no study has to date employed DA to investigate teacher-student interactional patterns and no other studies have attempted to define the internal structures of teacher talk in the Syrian classroom

Table 4.3 Sinclair and Coulthard’s system of analysis

Exchanges		Moves	Acts
Teaching	Free	Teacher-Inform Teacher-Elicit Student-Inform Student-Elicit Teacher-Direct Teacher-Check	Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF)  Marker (m) Starter (s) Elicit (el) Inform (i) Direct (d) Reply (rep) Comment (com) Clue (cl) Aside (z) Loop (l) Nomination (n) Accept (acc) Metastatement (ms) Conclusion (con)
	Bound	Re-initiation Listing Repeat Reinforce	
Boundary		Framing Focusing	Framing (Fr) Focusing (Fs)

Given our current state of knowledge, Sauntson (2007) suggests that discourse analysis provides the best insight into the relationship between linguistic and cognitive development. According to Sauntson, DA along with speech act could be used to study how students are given the opportunity to develop linguistically and cognitively.

#### 4.7.14 Self-development through classroom observation

Generally speaking, there is a negative association attached to observation in the teaching profession because of its subjective, judgmental, and impressionistic nature as Wang and Seth (1998) note. As a result, classroom observation has often been viewed as a discouraging experience, at times giving rise to bitterness on the part of teacher participants.

This study, however, aimed to turn classroom observation from a discouraging experience into an effective means, by employing, Silverman’s (2006) ‘teacher development

through stimulated recall' technique. Stimulated recall is the technique of playing back video recordings to participants and asking them to report their behaviours (see section 4.6.4). Through this technique, teachers comment upon their interactive decision making to establish to what extent their classroom judgments and decisions were shaped by their assumptions and knowledge of language learning (Nunan, 2004).

It was hoped that the teachers in this study, particularly those who participated in the stimulated recall interviews, would adopt a more developmental attitude towards classroom observation by providing opportunities for self-development through self-assessment. The post-observation discussions with Mr Beta and Mr Zeta were carried out interactively whereby teachers talked about their understanding of the situations and reflected on their practices as maintained by Edge (1992). This was much valued by both teachers who liked the experience of reflecting on their own practices. They reported that the classroom observation helped them get to know their weaknesses as well as their strengths. In general, classroom observation was viewed by teachers as a positive tool to help improve their teaching rather than as a means of judgement.

#### **4.8 Reliability**

The reliability in qualitative and quantitative research is achieved when there is a real reflection between what is being observed and what is there in real world (Denscombe, 2008; Wray & Kumpulainen, 2010). This will lead to the validity in data collection to show how findings truly represent the phenomenon we are claiming to measure.

In order to achieve reliability in my observation schedule, I used a mixed methods approach. Triangulating the data during the different stages of data collection and data analysis enabled me to cross-validate emerging findings. It also helped in minimizing the degree of subjectivity or bias. As for the interviews, they were carefully designed and carried out, so as to minimize any sort of misleadingness or ambiguity, or vagueness to the interviewees. I piloted all the tools to make sure that there were no technical problems.

As motioned before, the ‘observer paradox’ and ‘systematic bias’ can affect the reliability of a study, causing distortion to the data obtained through classroom observation (Labov, 1972). Particular care was taken to avoid both. Classroom observation was preceded by two sessions of note taking before introducing the video camera. Added to this, piloting of the study methods revealed that a number of interview and questionnaire questions were misleading and unclear (see sections 4.6.5 and 4.5.7).

The interview and questionnaire were piloted to make sure they were not misleading or unclear. The interviews were also conducted in a tactful way so as to encourage the interviewees to speak freely and provide genuine responses. I piloted all of the tools to make sure there were no technical problems.

#### **4.9 Ethical considerations and methodological limitations**

The study was conducted in secondary schools in the Governate of Homs over a period of two months between February and March 2010. It is important to highlight that I was sponsored by the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) whose regulations put time limitations on the period a researcher is allowed to spend outside the UK during one academic year. Two months was the maximum length of time defined by the Syrian MHE for doing fieldwork. Therefore, I could not prolong my stay in Syria to collect more data.

Ethical responsibilities towards teacher participants and schools are derived from the University of York, Department of Education code of ethics for social science and every attempt has been made to meet it. This includes voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Before starting observation or interviews, participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study, including its time period, anticipated benefits and confirmation that all information would be confidential.

Confidentiality of data provided by participants and/or gathered from classroom observation and interviews was guaranteed. All teachers and schools participating are referred to by pseudonyms (For example, as shown in table 4.1 ‘Teacher Alpha from school Rawi’).



Data in all forms, transcriptions, video-audio tapes and other notes have been kept in a safe place. Both the information sheet and the consent form were worded carefully so as to answer the most of teachers' main worries or fears. For example, teachers were frequently re-assured of confidentiality and were twice reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any point in the data collection. In addition, it was clearly stated that data, i.e. video and audio recordings, would be destroyed upon successful completion of the research. Although the study is on and about teachers, students are an inseparable part of it. A consent form containing enough details of the nature of study was accordingly distributed to them and was signed and returned (see Appendix A).

#### **4.10 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I have presented a detailed account of the mode of inquiry adopted for this study, the rationale for choosing a mixed-methods approach, the process of fieldwork, the procedures involved in the data collection and analysis, and the strategies used to enhance the quality of this study. This chapter has also given an overview of the data analysis tools provided. The brief review of different systems showed that Sinclair and Coulthard's (1992) system of analysis is a reliable and effective tool of analysis. I now proceed to present the findings of this study in the three chapters which follow.

# **C** **HAPTER** **Five**

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## **Questionnaire Analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Having discussed the design of the study in chapter 4, the research findings will be presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7. The current chapter focuses on analysing and presenting the findings of the survey. The conceptions and misconceptions which emerged from the questionnaires were further investigated during the interviews — questions were devised to elicit clarification and more explanations for the ideas and the conceptions reported in the questionnaires (see section 4.6). The interviewees were selected based on a) their willingness to be interviewed and b) their survey responses. This mixed approach to data collection and analysis offered the opportunity for moving back and forth between the data of the questionnaires and the data of the interviews. As will be seen in chapters 6 and 7, I will also be referring to the interview data in my analysis of the classroom observations.

It should be noted, however, that while analysing the questionnaire responses, it was predicted that there would be an overlap between the findings from the other research methods (interviews, classroom observation) and the questionnaire, for the purpose of cross-checking the results of each instrument. This can help in revealing the strengths and weaknesses of each method and the extent of its exploratory and/or descriptive powers.

The questionnaire investigated the views, understandings and attitudes a group of Syrian EFL teachers concerning the CI. It also explored their teacher training provision /needs and the difficulties of teaching innovative methods (see Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire). This aim is related to the research problems mentioned in the introductory chapter where there is a predicted mismatch between theory and practice and teachers show resistance to the implementation of the officially promoted teaching method, CLT. A detailed description of the rationale behind building and administering the questionnaire has been provided in section 4.5.1.

In the following sections of the chapter, the first part outlines the responses and return rate of the questionnaire; the second part presents the main analysis of the items. Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion of the results of the questionnaire.

## **5.2 Scope of the questionnaire**

The questionnaire was primarily designed to partially answer the second research question and to directly address the third research question as both are concerned with, firstly, the extent to which EFL teachers in Syria feel equipped to implement interactive teaching approaches in their classrooms and, secondly, the identification of their training needs. It also takes into account how teachers were conceptualising their teaching, to arrive at a broader understanding of their classroom interaction practices.

The questionnaire was distributed to 57 EFL teachers in the Governate (or District) of Homs in February 2010. Of these 57, 38 were returned. Unfortunately, five of the 38 were classified as invalid for different reasons: in two cases, the questionnaire were left unanswered, in one case, an item had more than one answer while in the other two cases no bio-data was provided. Thus, only 33 of the questionnaires were analysed.

Twenty four of the respondents were female teachers. The average length of experience for the female teachers was 7 years, while the figure for the male teachers was 10 years. All respondents had been teaching the new curriculum since it was first implemented, that is to say for about five years. By the time the study was carried out, they were all well acquainted with the content, structure and demands of the materials.

### **5.3 Methodology of analysis**

Each item of the questionnaire was given a number, so that it could be referred to when applying a content analysis. In analysing the data, the general pattern or trend within the scale was focused on.

It is important to highlight in this section of the analysis that the variables of gender, teaching experience and qualifications did not have a significant effect on teachers' views and this was confirmed during the interviews (see sections 5.6 and 5.9). Åkerlind (2005) argues that conceptions held by the group are more interesting than those held by individuals. This is supported in the analysis of the questionnaire and interview. Both male and female participants in the questionnaire followed the same trends in responding to each question.

### **5.4 Results of the questionnaire**

The following sections present the results of the questionnaire. The results are grouped into the following main scales: attitudes to teaching and learning, teaching methods, teacher initiation (& questioning), teacher feedback, interactive teaching and teacher training needs.

### **5.5 Attitudes to teaching and learning**

When asked about the biggest influence on their teaching style, the majority indicated that they had been influenced by the way they were taught by at university or at school, as illustrated in Figure 5.1. Eleven teachers reported that they were influenced by the teaching approach of their colleagues in the same school. When interviewed about this finding, two teachers who filled the questionnaire said that 'shadowing their

colleagues' classes' inspired them to adopt similar teaching techniques and strategies. However, the influence of pre-service training on their pedagogic practices remained the most influential factor.

Nonetheless, a couple of respondents choose to add their own answers regarding what informed and influenced their teaching methods. For example, one teacher wrote on her questionnaire that she had developed 'her own way of teaching to allow most of students to understand what [she] explains'. This notion was further elaborated on by one of the interviewees, who stated that she came up with her current 'teaching methods as a result of the training that was provided to her when she was in Kuwait' (Item13 Respondent, *my translation*).

Figure 5.1 Q1: Biggest influence on teaching style

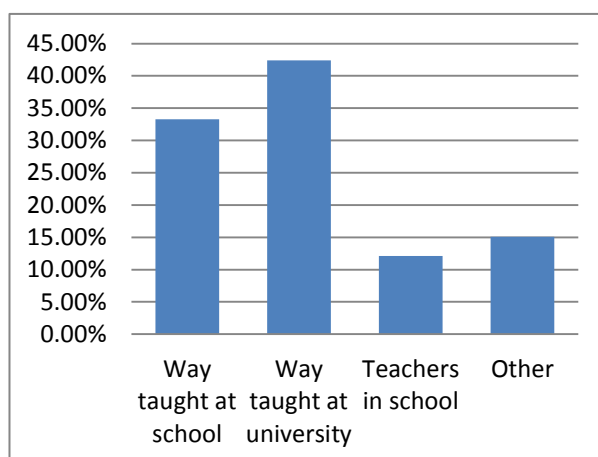
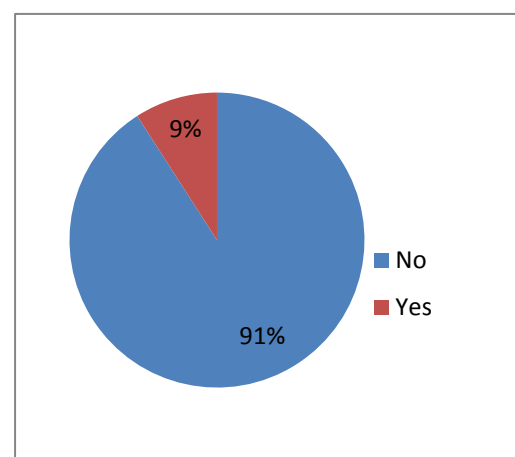


Figure 5.2 Q8: Teaching in the same way taught by



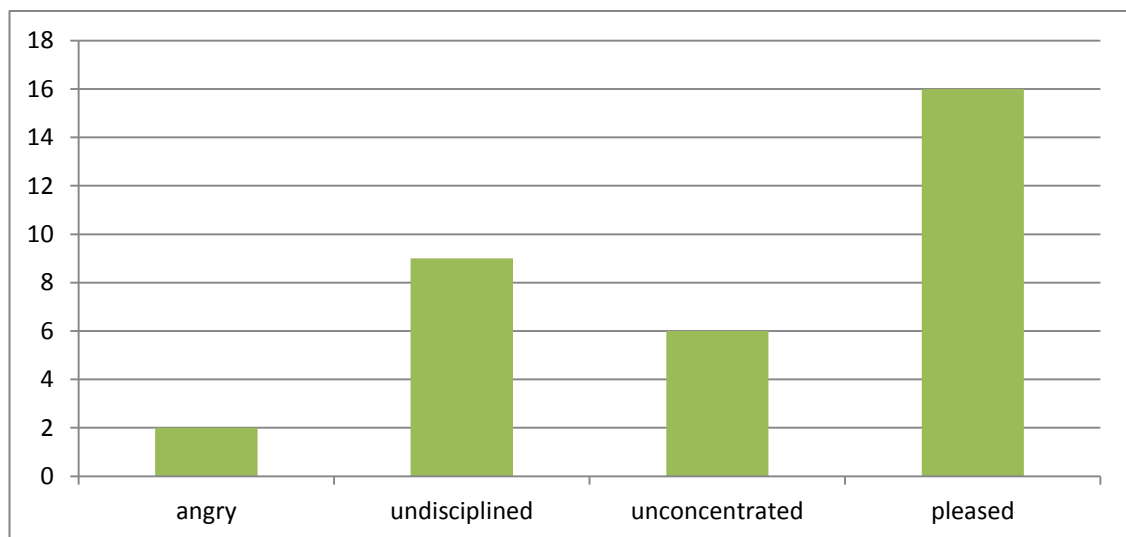
However, these results were at odds with the answers of another tactically-designed question that asked whether teachers followed the same teaching approach they were subjected to as students. As shown in Figure 5.2, the majority of teachers replied that they did not follow the same teaching methods they were taught by.

One possible interpretation of such inconsistency between the two items is that teachers may have reflected on their recent ELT training which the ministry provided. It just so happened that the distribution of the questionnaire synchronized with a round of training workshops on the new curriculum provided by the MOE. It seems that teach-

ers do not necessarily ‘use’ what they are/were ‘influenced’ by. Teachers’ perceptions of teaching and learning are by nature ‘influenced’ and shaped by their past experiences, but they could be modified by professional training. Those two items suggest there is a difference between teacher perceptions and actual practices, a finding supported by the classroom observations and the interviews conducted with observed teachers.

Another mismatch between what teachers perceived and what they practised is exemplified in item four of the questionnaire which aimed to explore how teachers felt when students talk to each other on classroom tasks. The results show that most teachers ‘feel pleased’ when students talk to each other while doing their tasks (see Q4, Appendix A). However, three teachers, females, stated that they often lost control of the classroom when/ if students talked to each other and they felt the class was ‘undisciplined’ (see Figure 5.3). One possible explanation for this has to do with the role that teachers are expected to play in the classroom and on the type of task involved. Such views were expressed by several of the interviewed teachers who said that they would feel angry if students speak to each other without permission.

Figure 5.3 Q4: Feelings when Students talk to each other on tasks. e.g. 16 = number of respondents



Contrary to the above view, classroom observation suggested that teachers were visibly not ‘pleased’ to see students talking to each other during the class. In reality, teachers played an authoritarian role determining when students could speak or should

keep silent (see for example sections 6.2.7 and 6.3.1). Students in turn complied with these rules unquestioningly.

In response to a question about the advantages/disadvantages of student group work, the majority of teacher responses (42.42%) considered ‘noisiness’ as the main disadvantage. The same opinion was shared by the observed teachers who emphasised that they needed the class to be quiet in order to achieve their lesson goals. Obviously, this result does not correspond with the item that asked ‘how do you feel when/if the students talk to each other about their classroom tasks in the lesson?’ whose response shows that teachers felt ‘pleased’ when students work in groups.

The second reported disadvantage with group work had to do with students ‘copying’ each other’s work. Only one teacher thought that an advantage of group work was that teachers did not have to do all the talking inside the classroom.

Figure 5.4 Q6: Disadvantage of student group work

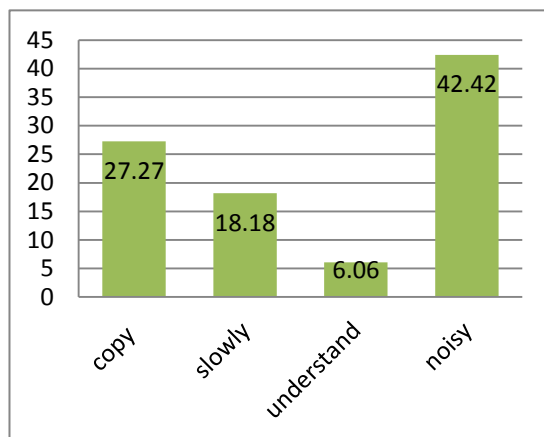
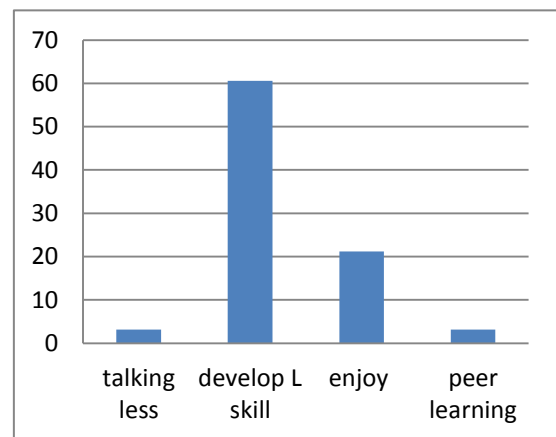


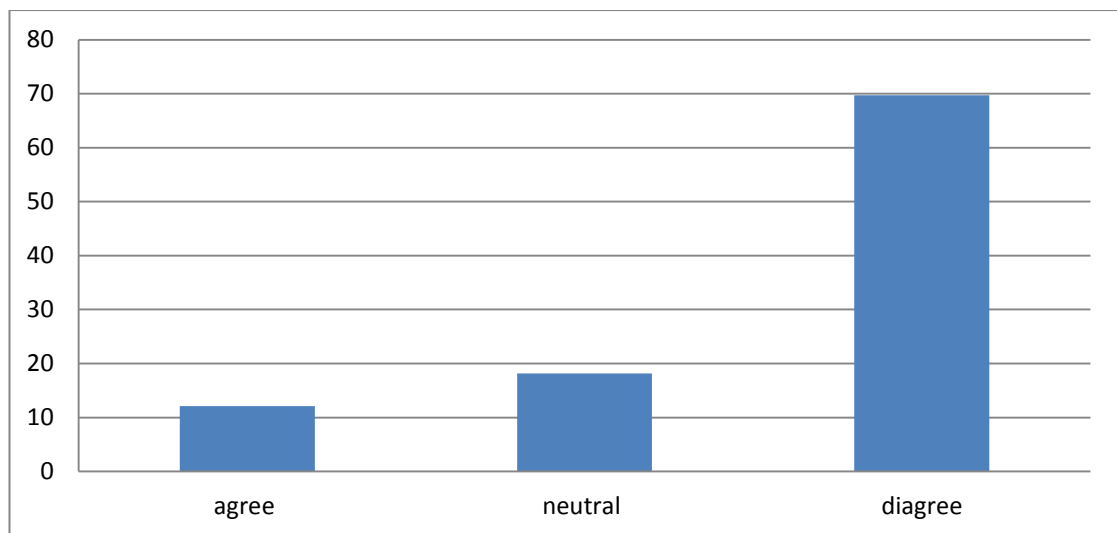
Figure 5.5 Q7: Advantage of group work



Question seven asked about the advantages of group work. As shown in Figure 5.5, 17 teachers (60 %) thought that group work could be a positive experience, as students can learn from each other and develop better language skills. Teachers also acknowledged that group work could be enjoyable with students ‘exploring a new territory of learning’ as one teacher put it (Item7 Respondent).

Because pair-work is closely linked with group work, teachers were asked about how they viewed its use inside the classroom. Despite the complete absence of such techniques in the observed classrooms, the majority of teachers stated that pair-work was not a waste of time as illustrated in Figure 5.6. However, not all of the teachers subscribed to the idea that pair-work was not a waste of time. For example, only 4 (11 %) of the interviewed teachers agreed that within the Syrian classroom context paired work is not an effective teaching strategy. One teacher stated, ‘our students cannot even answer a simple question like ‘what does he look like?’. He continued that ‘it will be too ambitious to ask students to get into pairs to work on a classroom activity as this falls beyond their capabilities’ (Item7 Respondent, *my translation*).

Figure 5.6 Q13: Pair-work in classroom is a waste of time



A degree of uncertainty could be traced among some of the interviewed teachers, who questioned the practicality and usability of such teaching techniques in contexts where students have always been asked to follow instructions, memorize rules, and recite what has been taught to them. It was feared that they would waste this time by chatting, gossiping, laughing, or even keeping silent, and thereby leaving less time to cover the curriculum. One teacher commented that he once wanted his students to work in pairs. So, he asked them to turn to the person next to them and spend some time talking about the given task. What he ended up with, he said, was students looking at each other laughing or wondering what to say to each other (Item7 Respondent, *my translation*).



tion). What these two questions show is the fragility of the concept of group work in teachers' minds.

## 5.6 Interactive teaching practices

In the questionnaire, teachers hinted that 'interactive teaching' implies engaging learners in broad classroom participation. Based on this 'simplified' clarification, teachers were asked about their 'interactive' practices. Then, they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that they taught in a communicative style via the wording: 'I do not teach in a communicative style' (Q18, Appendix A). As shown in Figure 5.7, the majority of teachers disagreed with this negatively-phrased statement, implying that they followed a communicative 'recipe' in the classroom. Only a few of them agreed or 'confessed' that they did not teach communicatively. In reality, the overwhelming majority of teachers agreed that it is important to encourage learners to communicate in English (see Figure 5.8). Again, the gap between what teachers believe and what they in reality do is best manifested when teachers are video-recorded (see section 6.4.7). In the present case, the result was that teachers hardly followed, tried or even encouraged communicative practices such as pair or group work. They largely followed a traditional teaching and learning approach centred on the grammar-translation method. Most of the time students were silent, obedient, and passive. A give-and-take process was completely absent from classrooms.

Figure 5.7 Q18: Not teaching communi-  
catively

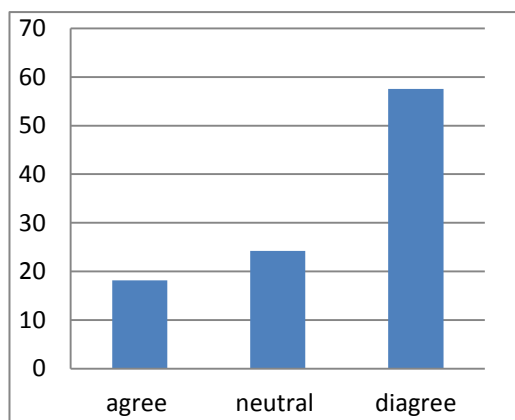
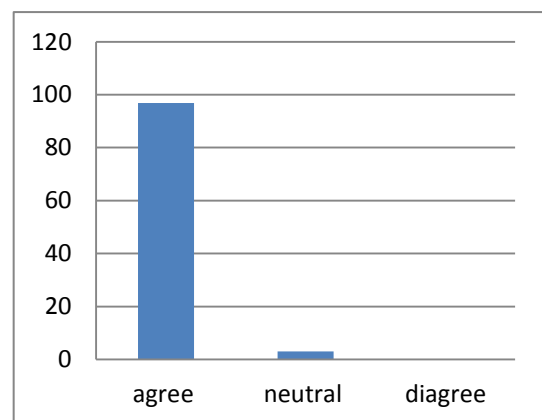
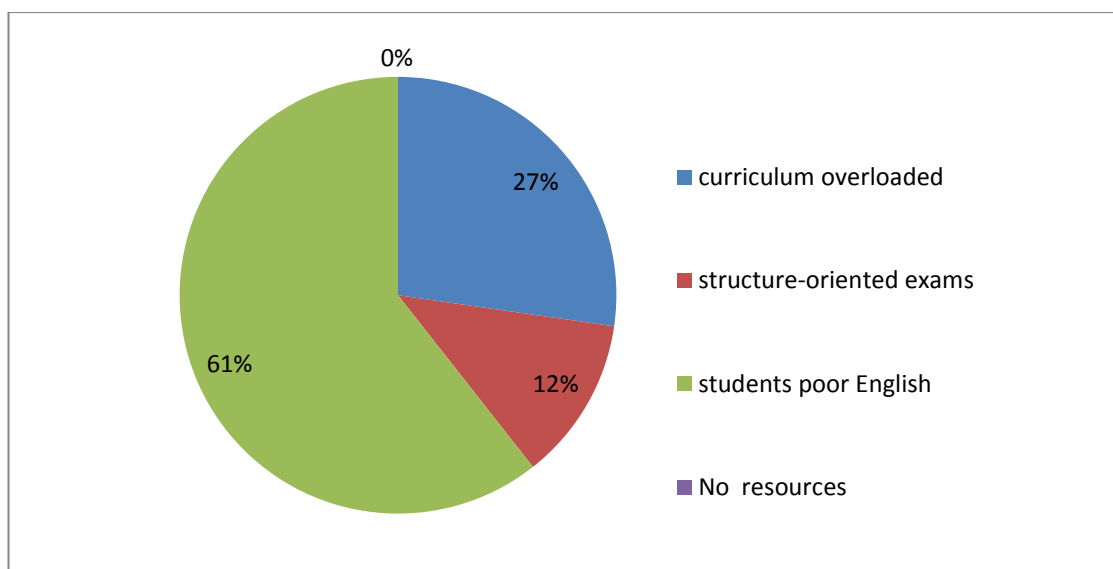


Figure 5.8 Q12: Encouraging communi-  
cating in English



Question 10 asked teachers about what made it hard for them to teach communicatively. A few teachers believed that the overloaded, exam-oriented curriculum was to blame; the majority considered that the main problem had to do with students' low proficiency in English (see Figure 5.9). Placing the 'blame' on students could be read on two levels. The first was that teachers often struggled to introduce or apply communicative strategies in the class due to students' poor English language skills. The second was the teachers' belief that their students were not good enough or even prepared to be taught in a communicative style. The last point was supported in the teacher interviews when some teachers complained that students 'do not even deserve to be in their current grade' due to their levels of English proficiency

Figure 5.9 Q10: It is hard to teach in a communicatively:



Other teachers, four of them, in the questionnaire stressed that they could not teach communicatively because *English for Starters* is such a dense curriculum that it would become unmanageable if group work techniques were to be adopted. This belief partially explains why all the teachers who were observed skipped the listening exercises on several occasions (see sections 6.1.7, and 6.5.7). This was usually excused with statements such as 'there is no enough time for this kind of exercise' (Item3 Respondent, *my translation*).

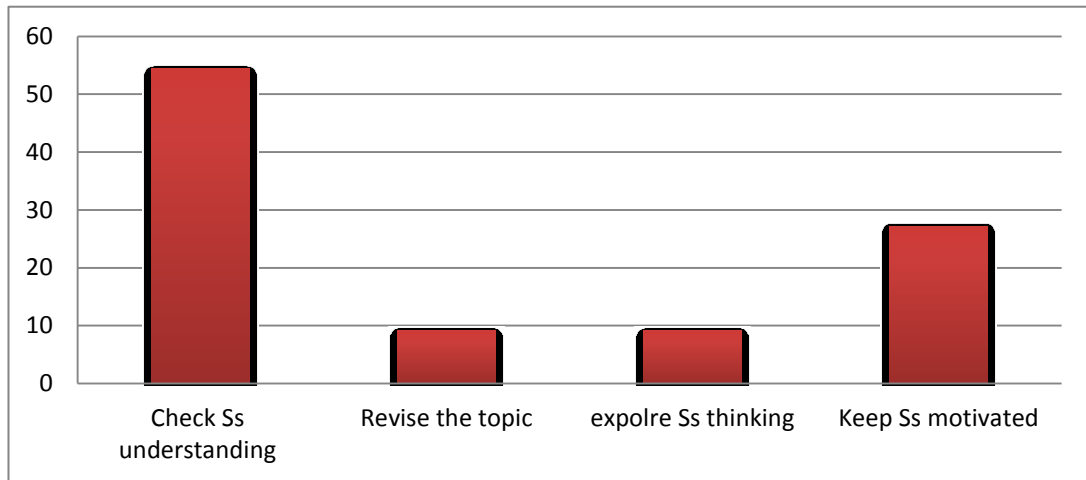
None of the teachers commented on the availability of resources. However, this issue was raised during the interviews. Some teachers commented that they wanted to use cassette players. However, the unavailability of either the cassette tapes or the players was their fault. Others commented that the rooms should be fitted with overhead or digital projectors so that teachers can make use of these multimedia utilities.

I followed the comments up with the English Principal Supervisor in the Governate who refuted the claims by the teachers. She said it is ‘the teachers who are lazy’ as they had not bothered to ask for the cassettes when getting their copies of the course books (see Appendix E). Moreover, she said that the Ministry provided each school with at least one copy of the cassettes for each level as well as cassette players.

## **5.7 Teacher questions**

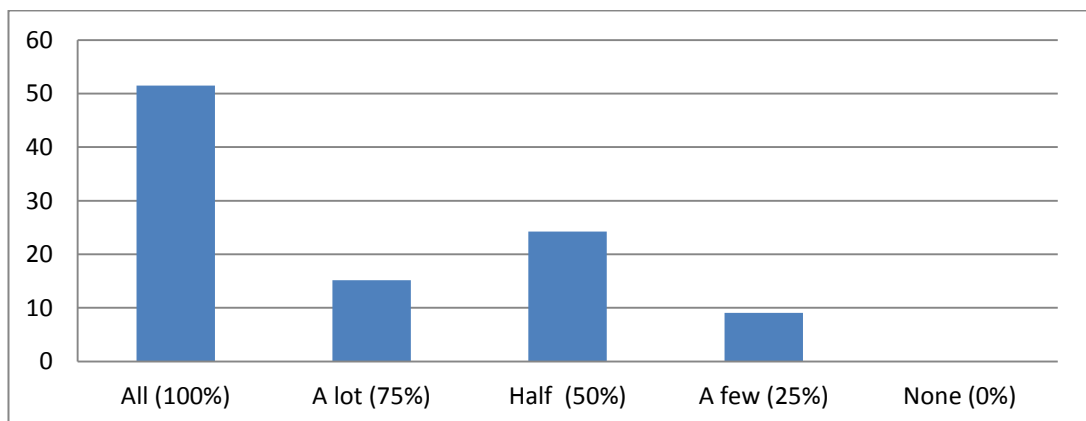
Because of their significance in teacher classroom talk, several items in the questionnaire asked about the nature, amount and type of questions used by Syrian EFL teachers. For example, Item nine asked whether teachers designed their questions mainly to check students’ understanding, revise the topic, or keep students motivated. As shown in Figure 5.10, the results showed that the majority of teachers said they tended to use questions essentially to check students’ understanding. Using questions to find out what students think appeared to be the least important for them. Thus, questions were explicitly employed as an outcome checking tool (here checking for predetermined answers). Questions that check processes, i.e. the cognitive course of action, were rarely used by any teachers. Classroom observation validated this finding, as questions aiming to probe students’ thinking or build on their answers were scarcely used (see section 7.4). The most frequently used questions were those closed-ended display questions that sought a preconceived answer.

Figure 5.10 Q9: Questions in the classroom are mainly designed to 60 = 60%, words abbreviated for space (Ss: students)



Because the quantity and quality of teachers' questions are particularly important in either curtailing or expanding students' responses, teachers in Item 20 of the questionnaire were asked about the nature of their questions. The question read as follows: 'Of the questions you ask in the classroom, how many do you know the answer to?' The results, illustrated in Figure 5.11, show that the majority of the teachers knew the answers to their questions. Few of them, eight teachers, said that they sometimes raised questions to which they did not know the answer.

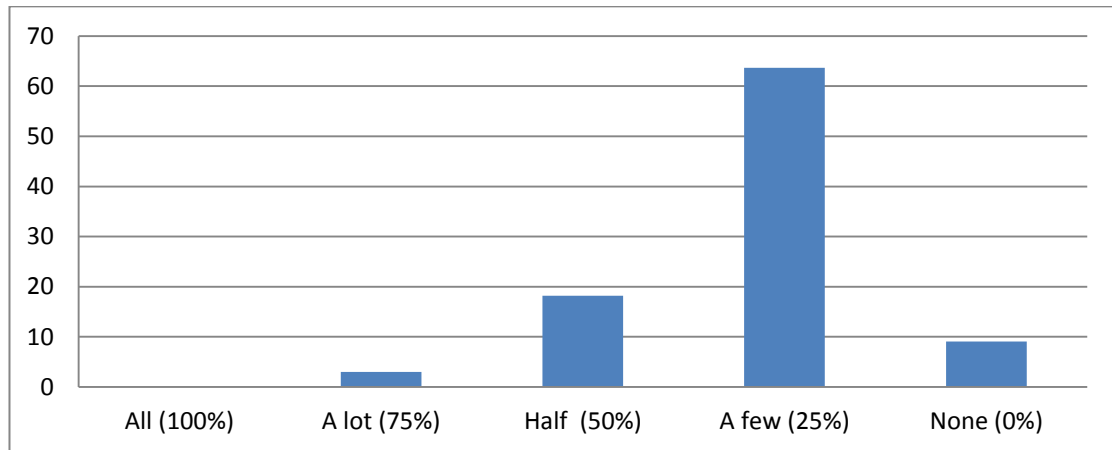
Figure 5.11Q20: Of your questions, how many do you know the answer to?



This question was purposely linked with Question 22 which investigated in more detail the nature of questions: whether they required an individual/ choral response. As shown in Figure 5.12, the teacher responses revealed that the most teachers thought

that a few of their questions were designed to invite choral responses. However, the classroom observations did not support this belief (see sections 7.4 and 7.5).

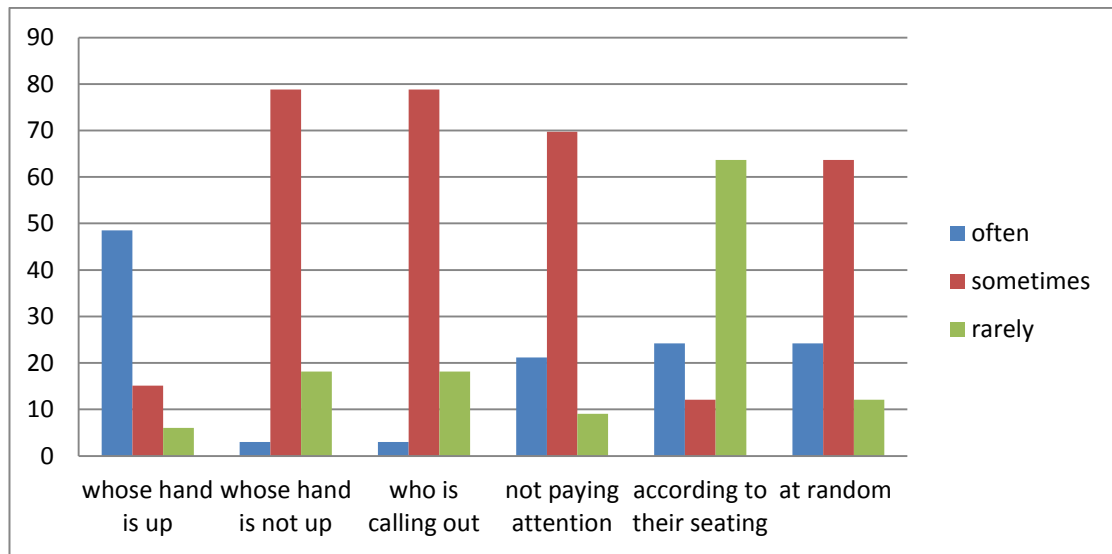
Figure 5.12 Q22: Questions requiring choral responses



## 5.8 Teacher feedback

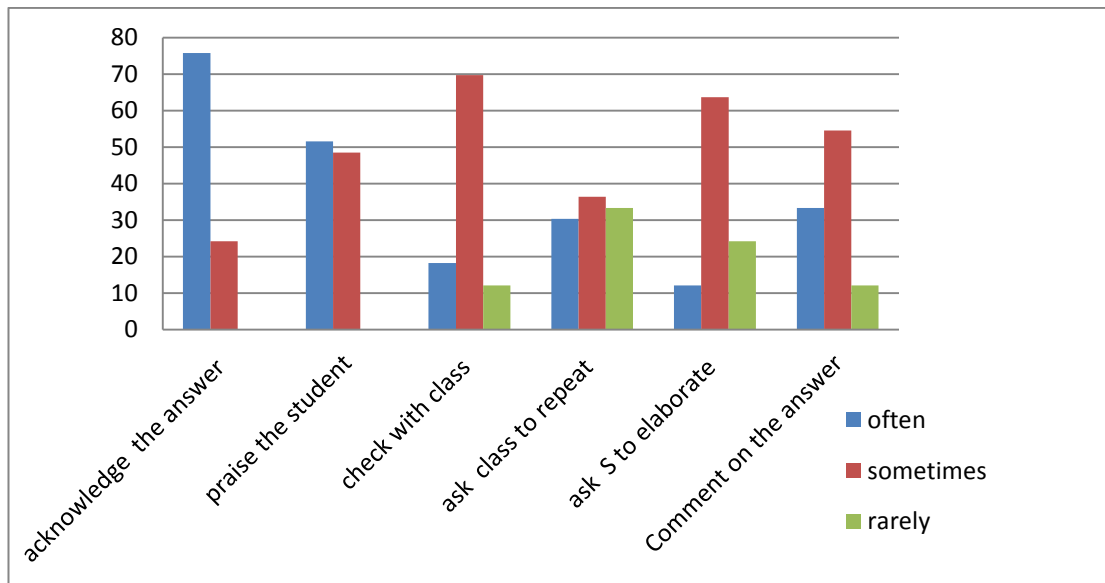
This section of the questionnaire concerns itself with the way the teachers reacted to student responses. As shown in Figure 5.13, the results show that teachers in Question 23 believed they selected students at random without obvious favouritism on the basis of seating arrangement. It also appears that the teachers were more inclined to pick students who did not ‘often’ have their hands up than those bidding to give answers. In this way, teachers believed that they managed their classes effectively and inclusively such that every participant was given an equal opportunity to participate in the class talk. However, this was not reflected in the lessons observed, as teachers mostly chose the more able and more linguistically confident students, at the expense of the less able students who were usually hesitant to raise their hands or volunteer an answer (see sections 6.5.5 and 6.6.5). On the other hand, it was observed that more able students seemed eager to attract teacher attention to show off their skills. One interesting observation is that some teachers tended to pick inactive students from the back, particularly those sitting in the corners.

Figure 5.13 Q23: When I ask a question, I usually select a student 0= no answer is given



Selecting a student to answer is vital in determining the kind of interactional move that will follow. Item 24 asked about the feedback techniques that teachers used when following up a right answer. The options included acknowledging the answer, praising students, checking the student’s answer with the class, or asking the class to repeat or comment on the answer. The results, illustrated Figure 5.14, showed that most of the teachers, 75.75%, often acknowledged the student’s answer with one of these words ‘yes’, ‘ok’, ‘right’ and this was supported by the classroom observations (see sections 6.2.6, 6.3.6 and 6.5.6). The classroom observation also showed it was also common to follow up the acknowledgement with a repetition of the student’s answer.

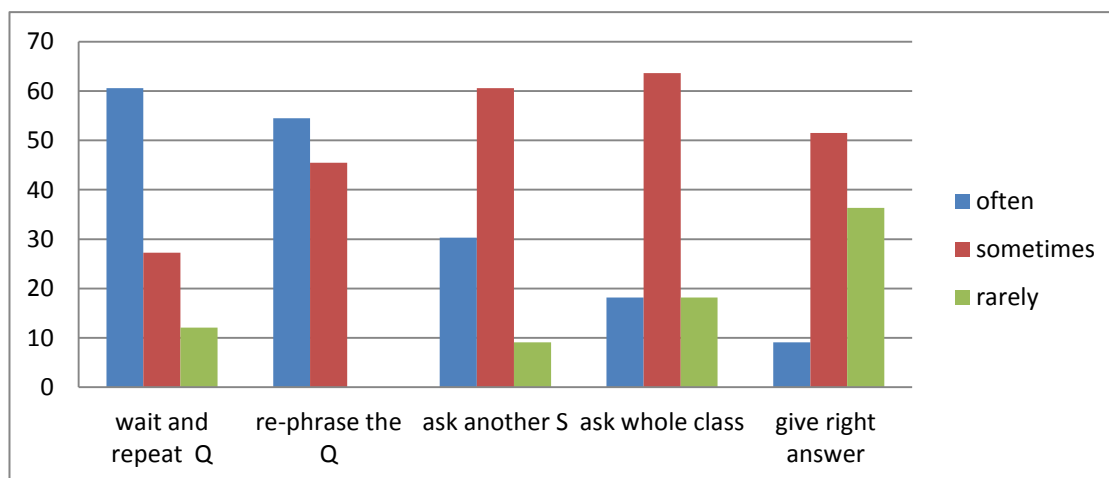
Figure 5.14 Q24: When a student gives the right answer, I usually (80=80%)



Teachers also reported that they ‘often’ praised students for their responses. When interviewed, teachers stated that they usually said ‘good’, ‘right’, ‘bravo’, or ‘excellent’ to students when they gave the right answers (see sections 7.7 and 7.8). Checking the students’ answer with the whole class seemed not to be widely practiced, although teachers in the interviews said they sometimes did do this.

The observations, however, revealed that teachers rarely asked the class to comment on an answer given by a student (see sections 6.3.7 and 6.5.7). 14 teachers said that if they followed this technique, the pace of their teaching would slow and they would not be able to complete the topic within the given time. The same pattern could be identified in their response to the option asking whether they asked students to elaborate on their answers. In spite of the importance of doing so, the observations showed that teachers rarely probed a student’s answer.

Figure 5.15 Q25: If I ask a student a question and he/she does not answer, I usually



Similar results emerged from Question 25 which asked about what teachers usually did when a student gave the wrong answer. The results shown in Figure 5.15 revealed that most of the teachers said they were unlikely to give the correct answer immediately. Rather, they resorted to other techniques, such as rephrasing the question to the same student or even repeating it.

Interestingly enough, two of the interviewed teachers (Item 3 and 7 Respondents) reported that they sometimes probed the student’s answer to figure out the process that led the student to come up with the answer. However, this perception is not supported by the classroom observations, where there was little evidence of teacher probing (see section 7.8). Teachers usually told the student the answer was wrong, then moved on to another student or, more commonly, gave the answer themselves. Some teachers justified this on the grounds that dedicating more time to each student would mean they would run out of time.

## 5.9 Teacher training needs

This section of the questionnaire asked teachers to reflect on the concept of interactive teaching as they understood it in the context of the new EFL curriculum. Question 28 introduced and conceptualized the term ‘interactive teaching’. In answering this question, the majority of responses felt unhappy with the way they were teaching.

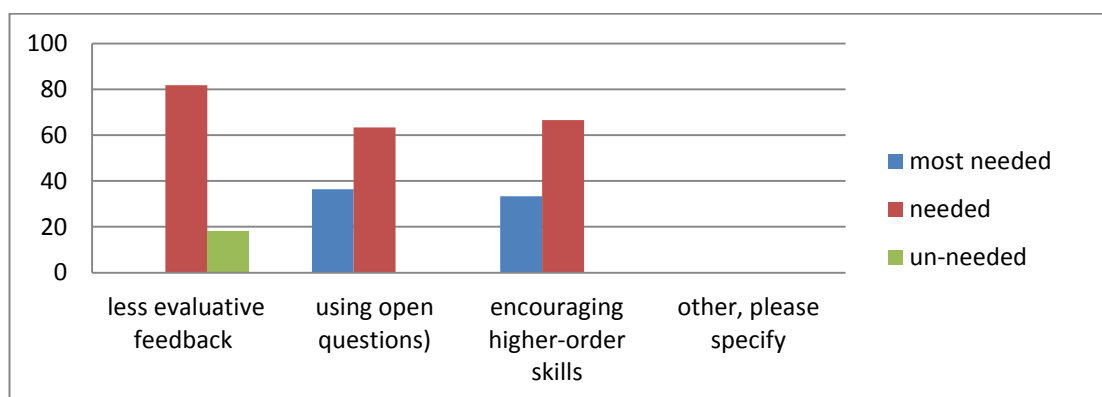


When asked about how they could improve their teaching practices, they reported that they needed to do more group and paired work. The interviewed teachers pointed to the lack of training as one of the main obstacles they faced when applying the new curriculum. They reported that the lack of systematic training led to a fragmented understanding of the new teaching requirements and this made it difficult for them to leave the security of their traditional methods and take a risk in trying new, unfamiliar methods.

In Item 5, which asked ‘How often do the students in your classroom work together in groups’, teachers’ responses suggested that they were doing both whole class discussions and group work on a regular basis. This was reiterated by teachers who attended the interviews. They talked about a ‘burning desire’ to implement the techniques of group work in classes, in spite of the wide range of difficulties associated with doing so. For the teachers, class size, disciplinary issues and curriculum coverage represented the most daunting challenges to group work.

Similar results were found when teachers responded to Question 28, which asked about which teaching strategies were needed for promoting communicative EFL practices. Teachers thought that using less evaluative feedback while diversifying the type of question asked were amongst the ‘most needed’ strategies for interactive teaching, as illustrated in Figure 5.16. However, as discussed above, they were cautious about taking on the challenge. Even so, the data show that teachers said they were keen to improve their teaching and follow modern techniques for language teaching (see section 5.16).

Figure 5.16 Q28: The most needed strategy for best application of interactive



Teachers, in item 29, were asked about what kind of in-service training they would need for implementing innovative teaching methods. Most replied that ‘Training that enhances and boosts English language proficiency’ was the most needed option. Teachers also thought that they needed courses that increased their pedagogical knowledge of how to use collective teaching methods such as group or paired work. In other words, they seemed eager to take part in training that would lead to developments in their teaching skills, as illustrated in Figure 5.17. However, in the interviews, some teachers abhorred the idea of theoretical training, as they wanted practical input and models of good practice. One teacher summed this up by saying ‘simply we need something practical and easily applicable in the classroom’ (Item 7 Respondent). He added that short training courses were not ‘enough’ to equip teachers with necessary skills.

Figure 5.17 Q29: What is needed for in-service training?

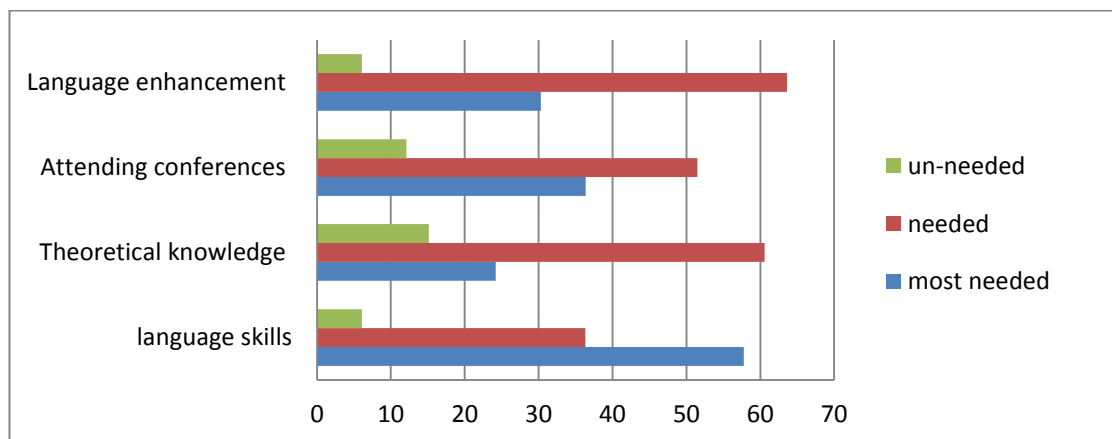
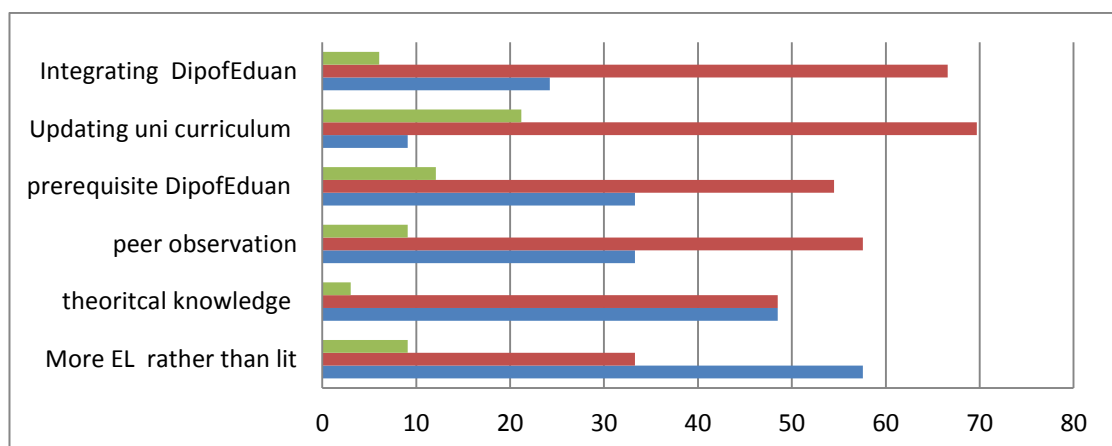


Figure 5.18 Q30: What is needed in pre-service training stage?



As for the training needs at the pre-service stage, teachers reported that they would prefer to learn more English language than literature at university (see Figure 5.18). In the interviews, some teachers commented that learning about English literature is ‘good’ but it had little to do with their career as teachers. They thought that modules on teaching methodology, language acquisition and composition would be far more important and relevant to their careers. What needed, from their perspective, is a scheme that integrates the Diploma in Educational Studies into the degree of English language and literature. This would necessarily entail changing the university curriculum by injecting more language-related subjects at the expense of literary subjects.

### **5.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented the results of the survey concerning the attitudes, views and perceptions of teachers regarding the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in secondary schools in Syria. They included attitudes towards the teaching methods, questioning behaviours, the difficulties of using interactive methods, and teacher training needs.

It was found that the variables of gender and years of teaching experience did not reflect noticeable differences concerning their understanding of the principles and practices of the new CLT-based curriculum. It seems that the teachers’ classroom instructional approaches were influenced by their conceptions of CLT as much as the way they were taught. While teachers held positive views about the principles of CLT, they stated that they were unable to translate their views into classroom practices. Amongst the major obstacles that the teachers identified were the poor language proficiency of students, the overcrowded curriculum and exam-oriented education system. While there seems to be a lack of harmony between teacher pre-service education and training and the needs of secondary school teachers, the teachers considered that language skills training was one of their major needs. Building on teacher perceptions of their current practices, the following chapters will probe classroom practices in greater depth.

# **C** **HAPTER** **Six**

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## **Observation & Interview Data Analysis**

As discussed in previous chapters, the study aims to explore the extent to which the Syrian secondary school EFL teachers are using interactive whole-class teaching methods in their classrooms. This inevitably involves examining the teaching and learning patterns within teacher-fronted talk. In order to address the first and third research questions, which look at the interactive practices used by Syrian EFL teachers and the training needs required, a multiple analysis system has been adopted involving discourse analysis of transcripts and computerized data observation.

Therefore, the current chapter presents the findings of the classroom observation where the teaching approaches of six teachers, as revealed in the analysis of their teaching exchanges, are presented and compared. Where appropriate, excerpts from

the interviews held with the teachers are also included in the analysis to further investigate teachers' views and perceptions of ELT.

The presentation of the analysis will be as follows. Each of the six observed teachers will be dealt with as an individual 'case' study. Each case will be made up of: a) introductory bio-contextual data on the teacher and the lessons observed; b) a discussion of the teacher's views on teaching as expressed in the pre-filming interviews; c) the findings of the note-taking sessions; d) the quantified findings of the computerized observation; e) and finally, a detailed analysis of the teachers' verbal output with the aim of capturing the patterning of teaching exchanges inside the classroom. The last part involved editing, transcribing, translating and coding the data in accordance with the conventions adapted from Sinclair and Coulthard's (1992) work, as illustrated in section 4.7.13.

## 6.1 Teacher Alpha

With 28 years of teaching experience, Teacher Alpha is the most 'experienced' teacher in the sample. He holds a BA in English Language and Literature from one of the Syrian governmental universities. However, Mr Alpha does not have a Diploma in Educational Studies. Throughout most of his career, he has been teaching English language at both preparatory and secondary school stages. After merging the preparatory stage with the primary stage to form the Basic Level, Mr Alpha moved to teach exclusively at the secondary level.

Like other Syrian teachers, Mr Alpha has been teaching *English for Starters* for the past five years. Before that, he was teaching the *English Language Textbook* for more than 15 years. Ahead of my travel to Syria to collect data, Mr Alpha's agreement to take part in the research was arranged over the phone. He welcomed the idea of being involved in the research. Upon my arrival and prior to my observation and filming, an introductory meeting with him was arranged.

In the interview and in accordance with the University of York's code of ethics, Mr Alpha (as with the other teachers) was given a copy of the Information Sheet and the Consent Form to read and sign before commencing the research. Although he said that

there was no need for such ‘formalities’, I stated it was necessary as part of the research process. We worked out a time-plan for the interviews and classroom observation. However, Mr Alpha highlighted the fact that he was very busy and his time schedule was tight as he also taught English in a private institute in the evening alongside his teaching in the governmental school. From the very start, I made it clear to Mr Alpha, and to the other participating teachers, that they were free to choose whichever language they liked for the interview: Arabic or English. Unsurprisingly, Mr Alpha kept switching between Arabic and English during his interview.

In the interview when asked about perceived differences between the current curriculum and the previous one, Mr Alpha thought that there were ‘significant’ differences between the two curricula in terms of content and form. Unlike most of the other teachers, Mr Alpha thought that the new curriculum was more ‘learner-centred’. As a result, he thought that the new curriculum had had a noticeable impact on his teaching, given the fact that he also taught a similar curriculum when he was teaching in the Gulf. Mr Alpha thought that Syrian students were not prepared for the ‘challenging textbooks’ developed as part of the new curriculum, as they involved students taking responsibility for their own learning. Such a view echoes what was found in the questionnaire, where teachers reported that students’ poor English prevented them from using communicative approaches (see section 5.6). Mr Alpha expressed the need to constantly ‘guide’ the students through the most ‘difficult’ subjects using different tactics and strategies. The following extract captures his thoughts on the matter:

The new book, *English for Starters*, is significantly different from the old one. This one seems to be neat and nice with coloured photos and themed units. The old one [textbook] had long reading excerpts or even short stories by English poets and novelists. More than that, our focus then was heavily centred on reading and grammar. You know there was no speaking and no listening. This curriculum, however, is new and it encourages students to speak. On a couple of occasions, I tried to push my students to talk in English either with me or amongst themselves but this unfortunately did not work well. In fact, it wasn’t practical at all as we couldn’t cover one page on that day. (*My translation*)

Mr Alpha's last point reflects the ever increasing debate about the suitability and 'practicality' of importing western-designed curricula to non-western contexts especially in EFL classes (e.g., Nunan, 2001; Seedhouse, 1996; Walsh, 2002, 2006b).

In response to my question on the impact of the new curriculum on his teaching approaches, Mr Alpha thought that the new curriculum put more emphasis on teachers using more group work alongside whole class teaching. Although he referred to several distinctive pedagogical differences between the current curriculum and the old one, he acknowledged that *English for Starters* had to be taught 'radically differently'. This can be illustrated in the following excerpt:

Erm; I know that I have to teach in a different style encouraging my students to work in pairs or in groups but you may ask me why we cannot do this. Okay the answer is that most of our students have very very low standards of English. Some of them do not even know more than 50 English words and a few structures, you see what I mean? They are literally obsessed with just getting the final passing mark. We, I mean the teachers, need to make them attain high marks in the exams, otherwise we will come under fire by both parents and the school administration. You see what I mean. I explain the lesson to the whole class bit by bit and in both Arabic and English making sure not to miss anything important. From time to time, I encourage students to speak out, but unfortunately the majority do not have enough self-confidence or language-competence. Engaging students and encouraging them to speak to each other is very important but, Mr Taha, if you consider the loss in time span of the period, which is only 50 minutes, you would prefer to do it in the traditional methods of teaching or even choose your own way. (*My translation*)

In explaining why it was difficult to implement new teaching methods in the Syrian secondary English classroom, Mr Alpha stated that he faced time constraints and that the students low levels of English proficiency made it difficult to implement such approaches. Other studies of the EFL classroom show that it is common for teachers to place the blame for their lack of use of more active teaching and learning methods on the students' poor language and cognitive proficiency in English (e.g., Ellis, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 1999; Peacock, 1998). These studies suggest that in such EFL contexts there is a considerable mismatch between learner and teacher beliefs. Peacock

(1998) asserts that the wider the gap, the lower the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes.

Mr Alpha thought that what makes a teacher's talk more effective is the ability to 'simplify' the information for the 'students' minds'. To achieve this, Mr Alpha saw no harm in mixing English and Arabic in the classroom. He commented on this by saying that:

Believe me there is no single teacher [English language teacher] in Syria who would like to use Arabic during his classes. However, you are often forced to do so because our student is neither confident nor competent in English. I do not want to generalize though because students, some, students are very good in English. Yet, I generally love to simplify things for my students. I explain to them the grammar in detail translating everything for them. (*My translation*)

In response to my question on whether he had received training on the new curriculum, Mr Alpha stated that he had only received a manual to accompany *English for Starters*, with a short briefing on the new curriculum from a teacher who was trained on this curriculum. It has to be mentioned that even after the introduction of the new curriculum, a limited number of in-service teacher training programs have been offered for EFL teachers.

Finally, in his reply to my question asking if he wanted to add anything more, Mr Alpha commented on the decision by the MOE to make French a compulsory second language besides English. He thought that students were not 'doing well enough in one foreign language to cope with another one.' Mr Alpha also thought that the Diploma in Educational Studies is not an essential pre-requisite for the teaching profession. He thought that he had developed his own teaching techniques and strategies which, he thought, aligned well with the new communicative approach.



### 6.1.1 Field notes

In the third week of February 2010, I walked into Mr Alpha's classroom for the first time. Before that, Mr Alpha had informed his students about the classroom observation. Students were asked by Mr Alpha to behave well and act normally. The class consisted of 37 students who were in the first year of secondary level. I chose to sit at the very back of the classroom in the row that aligned with the teacher's table. Sitting there enabled me to view the whole class and particularly the teacher. For the first 10 minutes, students often turned around to look at me and to check on what I was doing. Soon after that, they forgot about my presence and returned to their normal behaviour. This effect is commonly known in the literature as the observer's presence influence or 'observer's paradox' (Labov, 1972) as discussed in section 4.3.

More importantly and to my surprise, Mr Alpha did not seem nervous or phased by my presence. I was keen to keep him fully informed of what I was going to do inside the classroom through chatting informally with him for a few minutes before the start of a lesson. This seemed to create a positive relationship with him. I had a copy of the course book with me. For the first session in our plan, I told the teacher that I would sit in silence observing his lesson while taking some notes.

Mr Alpha started off his lesson by greeting the students, taking the register, and directing the students to open their books on a particular page. The lesson focused on doing exercises from the activity book of *English for Starters*. These exercises corresponded to the readings of Module Three whose theme was 'Civilization' (see Appendices C & E). The teacher began by checking that everyone had brought their activity book. Then, students were asked to share their answers with the whole class. The same thing happened in the next session, where the students and the teacher appeared more relaxed about my presence.

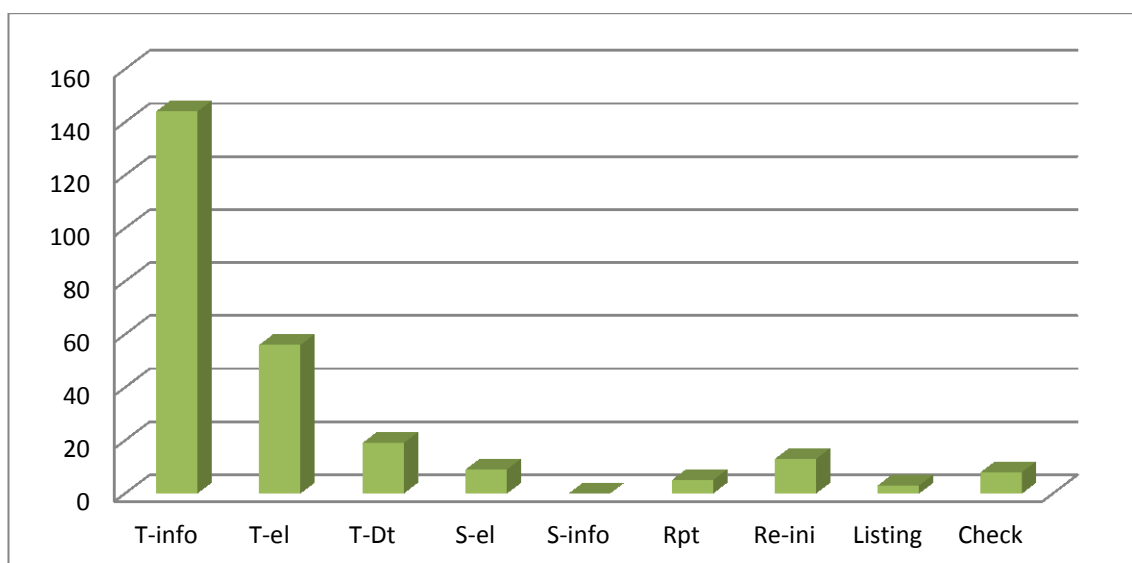
My intentions in the first two visits were twofold: firstly to establish a rapport with both teacher and students and secondly to prepare the class for the systematic and video recording observation sessions.

## 6.1.2 Systematic observation

The ODCS observation took place in the third visit to Mr Alpha's classes. As discussed in section 4.7.6, systematic observation enables researchers to quantify the data gathered from classrooms and to study the emerging interaction patterns of interaction. It can then be represented in the form of numbers and graphs to illustrate teacher-student interactional behaviours. As a result, the prevailing interaction patterns for each teacher can be identified and compared across the whole sample.

Figure 6.1 below shows the distribution of the teaching exchanges occurring in Mr Alpha's lessons using the ODCS pre-identified categories. The results show that teacher informing *acts* are by far the most frequently occurring teacher exchange: 144 initiated from the teacher compared to nine from students. The second most frequently occurring pattern was teacher elicitation in the form of cued elicitation followed by display questions. Teacher Alpha monopolized the classroom talk creating little space for student initiations. Another salient feature of Mr Alpha's classroom discourse was the giving of disciplinary or managerial directions urging students to open books, look at a paragraph, or order the class to be quiet. The less frequently occurring acts and moves were repeating words, re-phrasing a question, or 'checking' that the students had got the right meaning or the translation of a word, phrase or sentence.

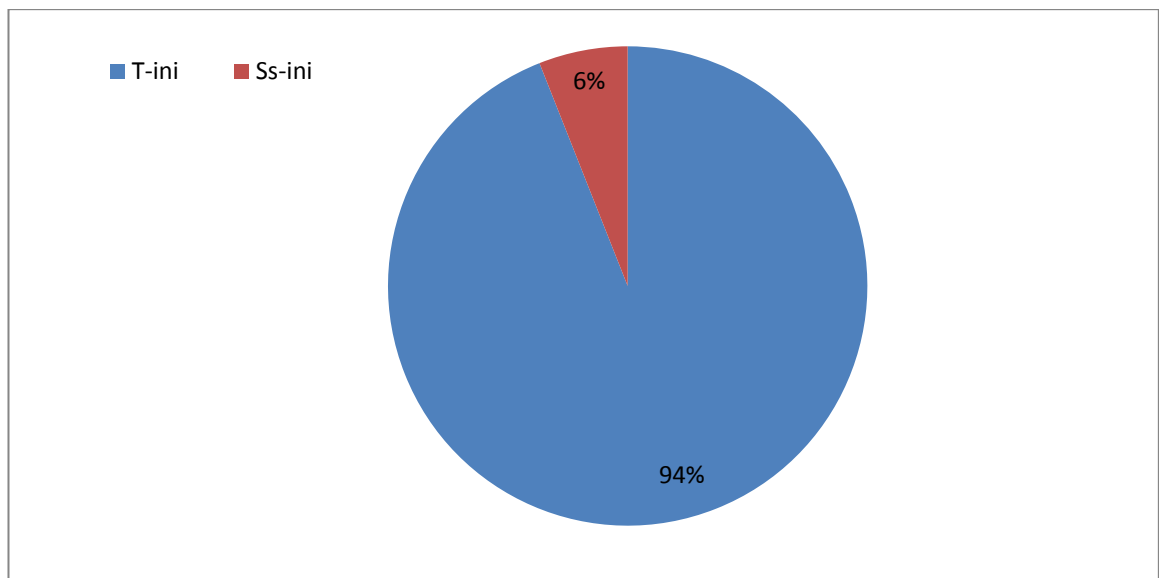
Figure 6.1 Distribution & patterning of teacher Alpha's teaching exchanges (160= occurrences)



### 6.1.3 Initiation moves

As illustrated in the pie chart below (Figure 6.2), teacher initiations made up 94% of the classroom initiation moves with only 6% being initiated by students. The teacher's domination of the initiation exchanges resulted in a lack of symmetry in the lesson with the teacher viewed as being the main source of knowledge. This is a typical feature of transmission-based teaching. Teachers' tight control of the 'I' move inevitably leads to a curtailing of student turn-taking and contribution to the lesson (Wells, 1999).

Figure 6.2 Teacher Alpha initiation move types, as percentages



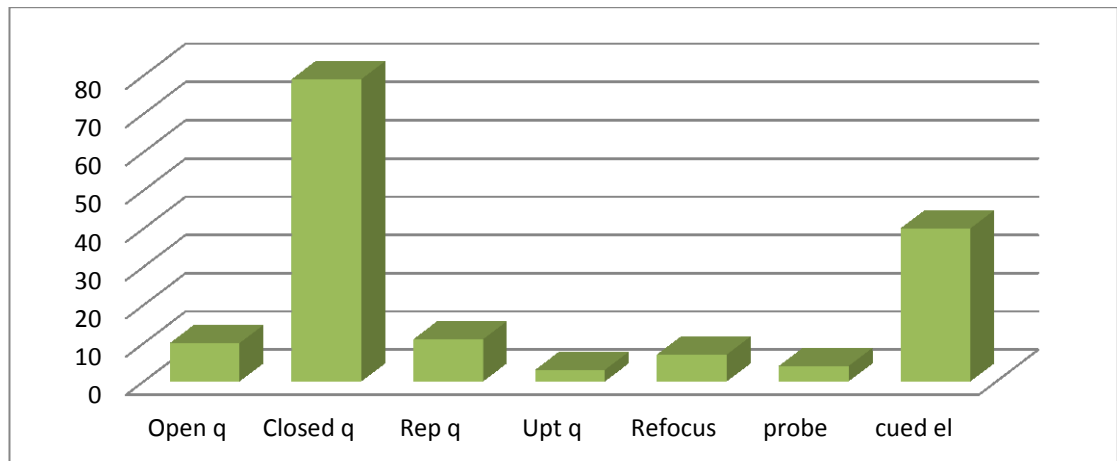
### 6.1.4 Questioning moves

A distinctive feature of Mr Alpha's initiation moves was the use of display questions which required students to display their knowledge by providing information already known to the teacher. As shown in Figure 6.3, display questions are by far the most frequent type of initiation. One possible reason for their repeated use is the predisposition of the teacher to avoid the use of non-textbook questions. In his interview, Mr Alpha stated that he needed to be 'hasty' so that he could cover the curriculum.

The next most frequently used initiation was the cued elicitation, often used for rehearsing purposes. It was often signalled by a rising intonation where a teacher would

cue a choral response. The least used initiation type was the uptake, as it happened only once throughout the lesson. An uptake happens when the teacher takes a student's response and builds on it another initiation. The aim is often to create an extended dialogue that builds on a student idea. Related to this was the use of probes where the teacher investigated a student response by asking for further elaboration. Mr Alpha rarely extended student oral contributions by using the probe or uptake moves.

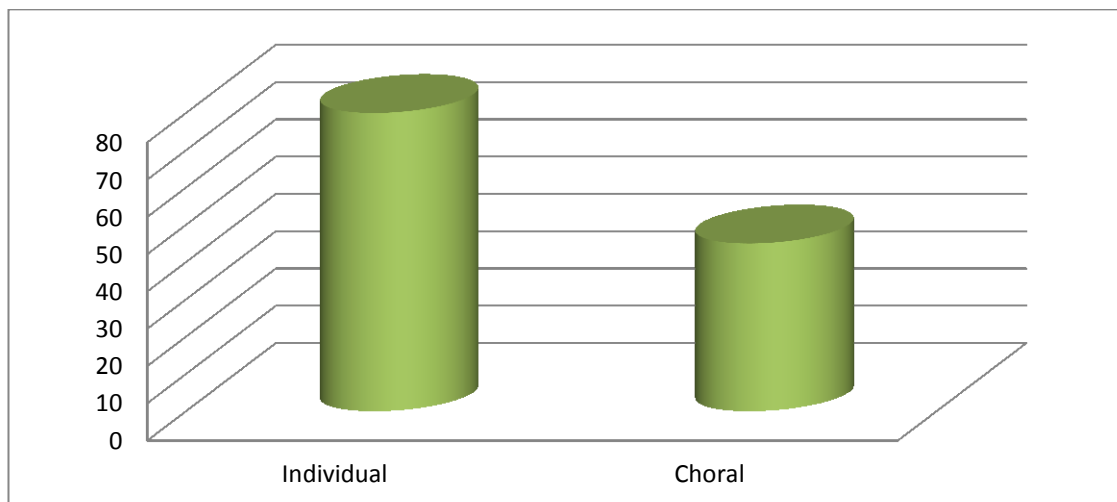
Figure 6.3 Teacher Alpha's question types



### 6.1.5 Response moves

Teachers' questions are meant to invite responses from students. From Figure 6.4, it can be seen that students' individual responses exceeded the choral responses. Most student choral responses occurred as a repetition to a phrase uttered by the teacher and as such they usually required little cognitive demand on the students. Very few students participated in the whole class interaction. Jones (1990) argues that practically one-third of classroom students do not participate in 'whole-class interactions' and keep almost silent. In the individual responses, Mr Alpha mainly relied on the more able students, four of them, to quickly answer his questions. By doing so, he ensured there was a rapid pace in the teacher-student exchanges.

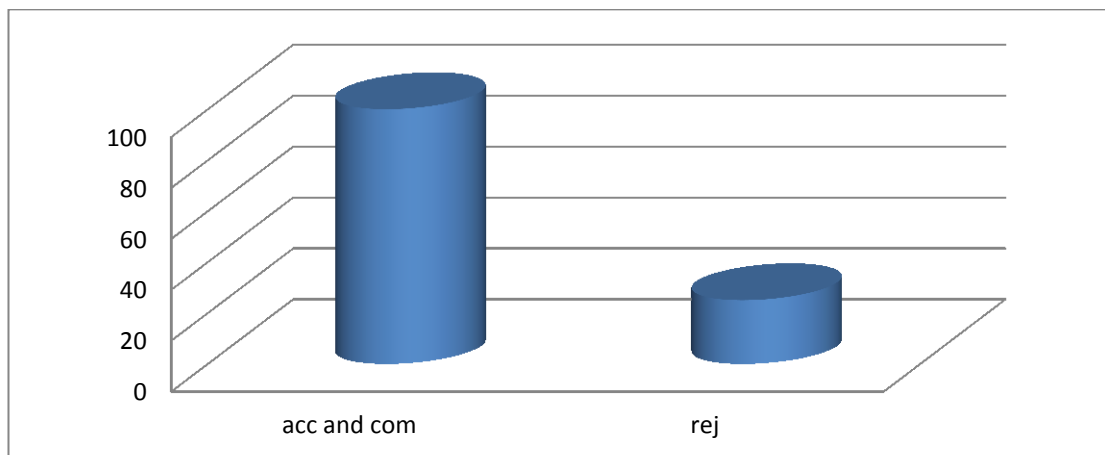
Figure 6.4 Students' responses to teacher's questions



### 6.1.6 Feedback moves

Another interesting finding obtained from the ODCS analysis concerns the type of feedback that the teacher gave to student responses. Figure 6.5 shows that the overwhelming majority of teacher feedback moves were evaluative in nature. The teacher usually accepted a student response and followed it up with a brief comment. 'Acceptance' here refers to the teacher's use of words such as 'ok', or 'right'. It also covers the affirmative repetition by the teacher of a student answer to a closed question. In a few cases, the teacher rejected the student answer on the grounds that this was not the answer he was after. Instead of trying to get the student to work out the answer through the use of probes, Mr Alpha either nominated another student or opened the question to the whole class in a bid for another answer.

Figure 6.5 Teacher Alpha's feedback type



### 6.1.7 Discourse analysis

In this section, teacher's Alpha spoken discourse will be analysed building on Sinclair and Coulthard's (1992) system of analysis. All together 53 pages of Mr Alpha's interactions were transcribed and analysed (see Appendix C for transcription). Accordingly, the extracts below were chosen to illustrate the general patterns prevailing in his classroom.

The lesson that was observed was entitled A Matter of Taste (Appendix E). It formed part of module 4 of *English for Starters 8*, whose theme was 'Design' and looked into architecture, fashion, and printing. The lesson observed was a reading and comprehension class discussing Japanese art (EFS, 2009, p. 54). The grammar focused on the prepositions of time, place and movement. In a previous class, students had been introduced to the module and given a list of the new vocabulary they would encounter.

Although the lesson lasted 45 minutes, teaching in effect occupied only 40 minutes of the class time. Taking the register, side conversations and class management took up the rest of the lesson. As in the previous lessons observed, Teacher Alpha was predominantly teaching the whole-class standing from the front of the classroom. The

structure of each lesson observed was virtually the same. It consisted of teacher explanations and recitations. The overriding mode of instruction was that of the teacher asking questions and students answering them. Because of the tight control that Mr Alpha exercised over the ‘I’ and ‘R’ moves and his control of the ‘wait-time’, student responses were often limited to one or two word answers. Their utterances were often text-based and reflecting back to what had been read in the class.

Across the whole lesson observed, Teacher Alpha’s teaching approach showed little variation in terms of its delivery. For example, he communicated with the whole class such that students were all working on the same activities at the same time under his tight class management. This structure was replicated across the sessions that preceded the filming. The analysis of Mr Alpha’s discourse was marked by a heavy use of directive teaching. The teaching exchanges consisted of the teacher passing information on to the students, coupled with question-answer exchanges and student note-taking. Apart from checking that the page number was correct, students scarcely initiated any questions. All turn-taking was framed within the IRF structure that is typically found in directive teaching (e.g., van Hees, 2011; Walsh, 2006; Hardman, 2011; Skidmore, 2000; Ellis, 2003). The IRF use can be seen in following extract taken when Mr Alpha was speaking on *Japanese Prints*:

<b>Exchange</b>			<b>Moves</b>	<b>Acts</b>
<b>Teaching</b>	T	TAYYB (okay) look at the foreground of the picture we have the foreground^	I	m d el
<b>2</b>	Ss	MUKADDEMEH (foreground)	R	rep
<b>3</b>	T	EEH EL MUKADDEMEH (foreground) okay and background of the picture the background is the depth of the picture OUMK ELSOURA (picture depth)	F  I	e m s s
<b>4</b>	T	now what do you see in the background?	I	m el

5	S	forests	R	rep
6	Ss	trees	R	rep
7	T	yeah and in the foreground^	F I	e el
8	Ss	bridge	R	rep
9	T	yes we can see bridge	F	e/acc
10	T	this is called the Ohashi Bridge in Japan		com
11	T	some workers are coming back	I	s
12		from factory or from the fields^ what do you think?		el el
13	Ss	fields	R	rep
14	T	yes fields because they are women, children and old man	F	e/acc com
15	T	they are coming from the fields what fields? what do they grow?	I	s el el
16	Ss	rice	R	rep
17	T	yes, rice fields of course <i>MO3THAM AKLON RUZZ WSAMK</i> (most of their food is mainly rice and fish)	F	e/acc com
18	T	<i>TAYYEB</i> (alright well) in the water you can see a...fisherman in his boat and in the background of the picture what can we see^	I I	m s s el
19	S	jungle <i>not heard by Teacher</i>	R	e
20	T	next to them		cl
21	T	what		el
22	S	forests	R	rep
23	T	yes jungle forests dense trees	F	e



		dense vegetation		com
		<i>KHUDAAR YA3NEE</i> (dark green)		
		and it is hazy not very clear		i
<b>24</b>	T	<i>KHALLONA NE'ERA SHWE</i>	I	s
		(Now let's read a little about these two paintings )		
		first before we read about the two paintings		
		these are shown in Aleppo		s
		they are Japanese paintings but they are		I
		shown in Aleppo		I
		Why		el
		How come shown in Aleppo		el
<b>25</b>	S	gallery	R	e
<b>26</b>	T	well	F	e
		<i>AWAL SHU MA3NA HOW COME</i>		el
		(first what is the Arabic meaning for 'how come')		
<b>27</b>	T	what is that occurring?	R	rep
<b>28</b>	Ss	Erm, no comment	I	s
	T	<i>it means 3AJABAAN</i> (how come or happening)		i
		<i>ELLWHAAT YABANYIEH BAS MA3ROODA B HALAB</i>		i
		(The paintings are Japanese but shown in Aleppo)		
		there is some occasion		
		it is an exhibition of the Japanese art		
		held in Aleppo		i
		I want you to pay careful attention		
		to the use of prepositions especially prepositions of time and also prepositions of place.		i

		prepositions of place could be either static or dynamic		i
		<i>YOU3ED SHARAH AHRUF ELZAMAN FEHMNA</i> (re-explain it)		
		So place or prepositions of place can be static or^		el
<b>29</b>	Ss	<i>HARAKYAA</i> (dynamic)	R	rep
<b>30</b>	T	Yes dynamic	F	e

(Teacher Alpha, Extract 1a, EFS Transcript, pp: 69-70)

As shown above, the IRF structure is tightly controlled throughout the extract. At the core of this structure is the teacher's choice of pedagogical questions. Most questions belong to the category of closed display questions whose answers are already known to the teacher. Such questions demand little cognitive effort from the students in their answers. For example, the questions in turns 4, 7, 12 and 15 of extract 1a substantiate this fact as the teacher attempts to elicit the students' answers using low-order closed questions whose answers are completely text-based. More specifically, turn 7 illustrates how the teacher steers his students to the required answer to his question on 'what is seen in the foreground of the picture?' For this, he used the 'cued-elicitation' technique, whereby he raises his pitch in a bid for students' participation (see Mercer & Littleton, 2007). It was not difficult for the students to recognize that the answer was 'forest' (turns 5, 7 and 9, Extract 1a). This technique was used by the teacher many times during the course of the lesson where the high pitch intonation at the end of a phrase served as an indicator for students to answer, repeat, or re-state what has been already said (e.g., turns 1 and 28, Extract 1a).

Few cases of reformulation of questions were present. In turn 24, for instance, Mr Alpha rephrased the question to 'simplify' it to the whole class, so as to invite more students' participation. Reformulating questions morphologically or syntactically is a common technique that EFL teachers use in order to move students towards the required answer, especially when following a grammar-translation approach (see also Seedhouse, 1996; Nunan, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Extract 1a also shows that student responses are regularly judged, evaluated and commented on by Mr Alpha, who has the authority to determine what is relevant within his pedagogic agenda. In his feedback in the above extract Mr Alpha principally relied on the following strategies: response approval, repetition and translation (see turns 9, 17, and 23, Extract 1a). Chaudron (1977, p.31) groups these strategies under ‘corrective feedback’ which refers to ‘any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner utterance’. However, Mr Alpha resorted to ‘implicit’ feedback techniques such as ‘recasts’ where he implicitly reformulated some of the ill-formed utterances made by the students, mainly pronunciation (see also Panova & Lyster, 2002; Ellis et al., 2006; Long, 1996). Mr Alpha’s feedback seemed to a large extent to be made up of repeating and recasting student answers as in the following example:

T: what do you see in the foreground?  
 Ss: bridge  
 T: yes, we can see a bridge (*with the right pronunciation*)

Tight control of the classroom discourse was also achieved through the giving and repeating of information, leaving little space for students to contribute ideas. His lengthy informing exchanges take on the appearance of a small lecture (see turns 24-28 above and turn 2 below).

The extract below (2a) further illustrates the rapid speed of teacher’s question and answer exchanges. Mr Alpha’s extensive elaboration is once again brought about through the use of *starters* (s) and simplifying the questions (rephrasing) them while the students’ responses continue to be brief, simple, and wholly predictable. This is best seen in the turns 4, 5, and 6 below.

Exchange			Moves	Acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	TAYYEB (okay)	Fr	m
		IZAN LUGHAWYAN SHU RAA7 NESHATEGL B I		s
		AHRUF EL JAR W ELMOUDOO3 3AN EL FANN		
		ELYABAANI		

		<i>ELYABAANI</i>		i
		(so linguistically, we will be working on prepositions but the subject matter is going to be on the Japanese art)		i
		<i>EMM EL3ENWAAN B SAHEFEEH MAKTOOB</i>		
		(erm the title is in a newspaper corner saying Japanese Prints)		i
		Who is ready willing to read?		el
2	T	<i>MEEN</i> come on	I	el
		<i>YALLAH</i> (come on)		p
3	S	reads from the text book	I	read
		The exhibition starts on 1 July at the Japanese Prints Gallery in Aleppo and ends on 15 September. At 6:00 pm on Friday 3 July there will a talk on Japanese painting by Dr Laila Diab. In August there will be talks on Japanese culture		
		The opening times are: Mon-Sat from 10am to 6 pm. Admission: free		
4	T	<i>TAYYB</i> (alright)	Fr	m
		‘admission free’		s
		this means you do not have to pay any money to enter you do not have to pay any money or if you want to go there		i
		<i>SHU YA3NEE</i>		
		(what does that mean in Arabic)		el
5	Ss	<i>MAJJANAN</i> (free entrance)	R	rep
	T	yes <i>SAHEEH MAJANAN</i> (admission free)	F	e/acc
6	T	okay	I	m
		‘admission’ is the noun from the verb^		el
7	S	admit	R	rep
8	T	yes admit <i>YAKBAAL</i> (admit)	F	e/acc
9	T	<i>ELHA MA3NA TANI^</i>	I	el
		(does it have another meaning)		

10	S	erm (no clear reply)	R	rep
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(Teacher Alpha, Extract 2a, EFS Transcript, p. 73)

When examining the above extract, it becomes clear that the student voice was only heard at any length when the teacher assigned them a passage to read. Throughout the lesson, no student elicitation or informing exchanges were observed. This contrasts sharply with the teacher domination of the questioning and informing moves. The only exception happened when a student asked for more information about grammatical points such as the prepositional point in Extract 3a.

In teaching grammar, Mr Alpha adopted a deductive approach, whereby he explained the rule and then invited students to come up with examples that fit the rule. This required the constant cuing, clarifying and simplifying of grammatical terms for the ‘students’ brains’ so that the teaching largely followed the Grammar-Translation Method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The extract below illustrates how the teacher drills the students to fill in the right grammatical case for time prepositions (see turns 4, 5 and 6, Extract 3a).

The last turns in the extract clearly show how the teacher controlled the exchanges. He not only read the question to the exercises, but also read the individual items asking students to just fill in the right preposition as in the following extract:

Exchange			Moves	Acts
1	T	Okay	Fr	m
		now let’s do some grammar work on preposition		s
		<i>IZAN SHABAAB KULNA LAGHUIAN W FANIAAN W THAQAFIAN HAKINA</i>		s
		(so guys we are done with the artistic side of the lesson let’s do some grammar)		
		Go to page 55 to complete the		s
		exercise in your textbook on time and place preposition		z
		<i>LAHALOW EL KALAM BEKTOOOB</i>		
		(your pen will write by itself, i.e. it is so easy)		d

2	Ss	Laughter		
3	T	Okay <i>HUSss</i> (silence)	I	d
		Time and place prepositions		s
4	T	August	I	el
5	Ss	in	R	rep
6	T	yes in August	F	e/acc
		because it is the name of a month		com

(Teacher Alpha, Extract 3a, EFS Transcript, pp: 83-84)

Elaboration in the form of starters is another feature that characterizes Mr Alpha's class (See turns 1 and 2, Extract 3a). Starters, sometimes called 'preformulations' according to French (1979), are used as a preparing tactic for students to get the meaning or guess the answer for the proposed questions. These questions are rapid fire with predictable answers for the most part. They are usually textbook-based, leaving little room for other forms of student input.

Another notable feature in Mr Alpha's teaching is his overuse of Arabic in the class as will be shown in Extract 4a below. His rationale for using Arabic alongside English is that he believes student understanding of the content of the lesson would be 'maximized'. Atkinson (1987) contends that using the mother tongue in classes gives students the opportunity to say what they really want to say when they might be feeling frustrated or too intimidated to express it in the L2. Step by step, the teacher can encourage students to 'find a way of expressing their meaning in English or, if necessary, help out' (Atkinson, 1987, p. 245). Using Arabic in Mr Alpha's class mainly served for translation purposes. Despite his good level of English proficiency, Mr Alpha kept translating almost every single word and sentence into Arabic for the students as shown in turns 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 below. The following extract showcases the use of Arabic in class:

Exchange			Moves	Acts
Teaching	T	<i>TAYYEB YALLAH</i> (Okay)	Fr	m
2	T	<i>YALLAH SHU SHAEFEN</i>	I	el

		(what do you see)		
3	Ss	Japanese prints	R	rep
4	T	Yes Japanese prints and paintings	F	e/acc
5	T	So we will be talking about the Japanese paintings, drawings and prints , come on <i>ELOUYOM MNEHKI SN ELLAWHAT</i> <i>W ELFANN ELYABANI</i> (we'll talk about Japanese art) In this lesson I want you you also	I	m s m i i
6	T	also let's focus on the use of prepositions <i>YA3NI SHU PREPOSITIONS</i> (What are 'prepositions)	I	s el
7	S	AHRUF ELJAR (Arabic Equivalent AE)	R	rep
	S	yes <i>AHRUF ELJAR</i> (prepositions)	F	e
8	T	<i>TAYYEB</i> (Okay) Ok let's look at the first picture on the bottom of	I	m s
9	T	the left hand side <i>SHUFTUU</i> (did you see it)		el/ch
10	Ss	yes	R	rep
11	T	<i>METEL KAANNO MUGHALLAF</i> (as if it is wrapped ) A student, late, interrupts the class and enters the classroom to take his seat	I	s
12	T	Also one of the boats is at the front of the pic- ture it is engulfed with a big wave 'engulfed' <i>BET3RFO SHU MA3NAA KELMET 'GULF'</i> <i>KHALEEJ K2ANOO</i> <i>MUGHLAAF K2ANNOMUGGHALLAF</i> <i>BEDADA TETBEQ 3ALEEH EL MAWJEH</i> (Do you know the Arabic meaning for 'en- gulfed)	I	s i el el cl

13	Ss	Confused (inaudible)	R	rep
14	T	wrapped like a sandwich	I	i
15	T	<i>TAYYEB</i> (okay)	I	m
		another boat at the background of the picture near the Fuji ^	F	el
16	S	mountain	R	rep
17	T	Fuji mountain	F	e

**(Teacher Alpha, Extract 4a, EFS Transcript, p. 96)**

Mr Alpha's translation into Arabic also functioned as a feedback move in the form of a recast, a response to an ill-formed utterance in the L2 (Panova & Lyster, 2002). Mr Alpha used to both translate and repeat his feedback to students.

Overall, the analysis of Mr Alpha's classroom discourse shows a heavy reliance on explanation and teacher-led recitation. Although Mr Alpha was aware of the importance of encouraging students to speak more in the classroom, his tight control of the exchanges, mainly through the 'I' and 'F' moves, deprived the students of an opportunity to play a more active role in the classroom discourse. No paired or group work was observed in Mr Alpha's class and students were offered few opportunities to contribute ideas in the tightly controlled IRF structure. Although the teacher tightly controlled the discourse inside the classroom, many students participated in the lesson activities even with limited responses. Most of Mr Alpha's feedback to students' answers was evaluative by nature. According to Swain (1985), evaluative input is not enough for EFL students to be equipped with the skills needed to improve their English.

## 6.2 Teacher Beta

Teacher Beta taught in the same school as Mr Alpha worked in. He had been teaching English language at the secondary stage for the last 13 years. Before that, he taught in the preparatory stages for six years in a rural less educationally-developed area before moving on to teach in the City of Homs. Unlike Mr Alpha, Mr Beta holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Studies from the same Syrian university that granted him a BA in English Language and Literature. Like the other teachers, I talked



with Mr Beta in general about the objectives of each observation session. For example, I informed him that my focus would be on the students' verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

Before entering his classes and during his interview, Mr Beta said that he 'welcomed' the arrival of the new *English for Starters*, as it was 'radically' different from the old textbook in terms of the content and the methodology of teaching. He thought that the new textbook could help students communicate better in English. When asked about his perceptions of the new curriculum and whether he encountered any contradictions in its goals and aims, Mr Beta answered in a diplomatic and reserved way, stating that:

This move by the MOE [the curriculum innovation] is really welcomed and should have taken place a long time ago as we need to keep up-to-date with the latest English language teaching methods. What I'm trying to say is that our students and our teachers really deserve the better. Of course, the old textbook was good at one time but it couldn't continue to cater for the new demands of English language teaching. I mean we should help students to gain more practical English to communicate better instead of relying on old-fashioned literary or scientific English textbooks. (*My translation*)

To probe beyond Mr Beta's cautious answers, I asked him specifically about differences in teaching approaches between the old and the new curriculum. In discussing this, Mr Beta stated he had doubts about the effectiveness of group work inside the Syrian language classroom:

Well, I'm not quite sure if I feel I need to detach myself from the old teaching style as I've always taught communicatively trying always to bring life to my classroom through adding my own spirit to the content of the class. I always try to engage the whole classroom with different activities. True, the new book advises us to use pair or group work, but from my point of view this isn't always workable because our students aren't brought up in this culture, are they? However every now and then during my classes, I ask students to do pair and group-work and encourage them to speak to each other. Sometimes, this works but at other times, I mean, other times, you know (laughter). You are from this culture Mr Taha and

you know it all. But you know that we can't cover everything in 40-50 minutes, can we? (*My translation*)

Mr Beta thought that he was in a transitional stage between the old and new teaching methodologies: while he spent most of his teaching time using teacher-fronted talk, he believed he did 'encourage students to do group work'.

When asked about what makes teacher talk more effective, Mr Beta stated that teachers should use a 'blend' of teaching techniques if they wanted to develop students' skills and knowledge. This would include using body language to help in conveying the meaning of new vocabulary, repeating the new vocabulary 'over and over again', resorting to mother language if students were 'stuck', and finally challenging students by making them work out the answers by themselves. Most importantly, he thought that students should be encouraged to practice their use of the language in class by being given an opportunity to answer questions in English:

I think teachers can make their classes more successful when they emphasise the new vocabulary in the lessons. In other words, they have to make students understand the meanings of the new words by using their body language or by explaining the meaning of these words in simpler English words. If students don't guess the meaning, teachers can then use Arabic as a last resort. Maybe you think that this looks old-fashioned and out-of-date, but trust me our students won't learn better than this way. [...] Also, I think we don't give our students enough space to speak in the classroom. I therefore encourage them to speak English, even if they make mistakes.  
(*My translation*)

Like Mr Alpha, Mr Beta commented on the time pressures that he faced while teaching the new curriculum. For example, he said that he 'deliberately disregarded' exercises that required 'complicated arrangements', as in the listening tasks. He also thought that the classroom seating arrangements would not help much if he were to do group work. He also thought the exam-driven system made it harder to implement new teaching methods. However, neither Mr Alpha or Mr Beta used or referred to 'teaching through discussion'.

Moreover, Mr Beta could not conceal his frustration with the way the new curriculum initiative was being implemented and how the teacher training was being organized. He said that he had received no training on the new curriculum, but his name was on the list for the next round of training workshops.

Mr Beta concluded his interview by confirming that although he welcomed the new curriculum he had doubts that it would improve students' English soon. He believed that a more constructive relationship between the educational administration and teachers was needed to raise the quality of education. In a sense, Mr Beta seemed a typical traditional Syrian teacher. He seemed to love to follow a teacher-fronted approach and this was endorsed by observation.

### **6.2.1 Field notes**

In February 2010, Teacher Beta first allowed me into his classes. This was in the same week that I started observing Mr Alpha. In general, classes were observed alternately. This was not my own arrangement because participating teachers were given the freedom to choose which lesson I would observe. After being introduced to the students, I was offered the teacher's chair; however, I preferred to sit at the back of the classroom.

As with Mr Alpha, Mr Beta's class was made up of 38 students. The lessons observed were for the 2<sup>nd</sup> secondary stage. By this stage, students had already been split into scientific or literary streams (see section 2.2). The classroom I observed was following the scientific pathway. After taking the register, Mr Beta wrote on the blackboard the date and the title of the module and positioned himself on a step in the middle of the class facing the whole class. He kept moving backwards and forwards like most of the teachers. While the first lesson was taken up with exercises from a previous lesson, the title of the corresponding module was 'The Telephone' (Mugglestone, 2006, pp. 11-13) and it talked about Alexander Graham Bell. The lesson was fifty minutes in length, and 45 minutes were spent on actual teaching.

In the first lesson, students were asked to open their books at a specific page and told to follow the teacher as he was reading from the textbook. At first, Mr Beta looked at

me every time he asked the class to do something and this also prompted the students to turn their heads and look at me. After a while, however, Mr Beta began to forget about my presence and started to act more naturally. Throughout the lesson, the teacher tightly controlled the classroom interaction and talk.

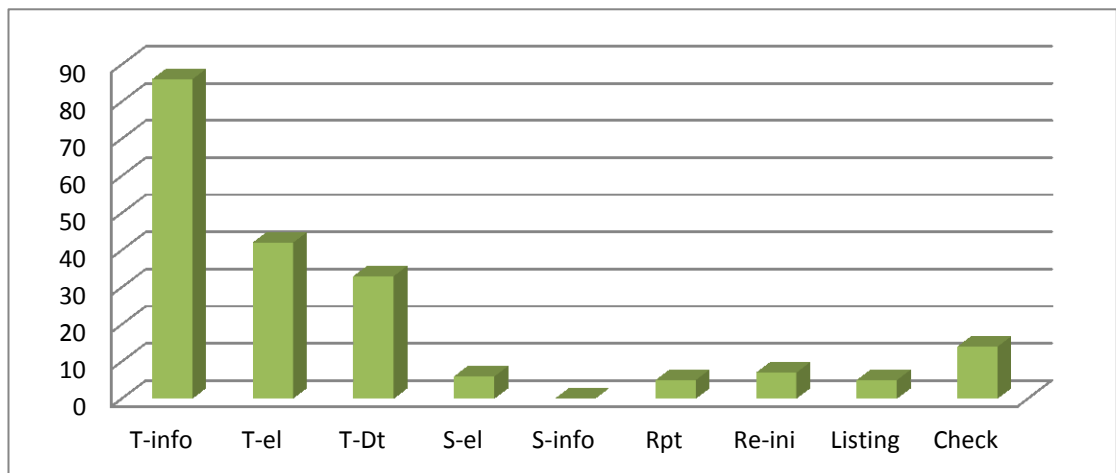
The routine in the first session went like this: the teacher read the instructions for each exercise, giving a brief and quick explanation of what the students should do. This led him on more than one occasion to switch between Arabic and English to get his message across to students. The grammar focus of the lesson was the Present Perfect Simple and Continuous Tense (see Appendices C & E). For each exercise, Mr Beta wrote on the chalk board the correct answer while the students copied/ corrected their work. The teacher called on specific students to voice their answers to the grammatical exercises. This routine continued till the end of the lesson. Before the lesson finished, Mr Beta asked students to come to the next class better prepared, reminding them that the next English class was scheduled to use the Course book and not the Activity book.

At the second visit, the teacher introduced students to a new module whose theme was 'Computers' (Mugglestone, 2006, pp. 14-16). Mr Beta quickly introduced the theme of the new module making no reference to the previous lesson. The warm-up stage was overlooked for the sake of listing the new vocabulary items of the new module on the board. Students were asked to work out the meaning of the new words. The teacher repeatedly used body language to provide students with clues to the meanings of the new words and phrases. Often, when students gave the correct Arabic equivalent, the answer was acknowledged and confirmed by the teacher. Then, the whole class was asked to chorally repeat the accurate pronunciation of the new vocabulary. Following this, the teacher gave the students a summary of what had been covered in the lesson. By the end of the second lesson, I had established a good rapport with the students and the teacher and my presence seemed to be less intrusive. This paved the way for the systematic observation.

## 6.2.2 Systematic observation

As shown in Figure 6.6, the ODCS data revealed that teacher initiations in the form of prolonged explanations, elicitations and giving directions were the most common forms of teacher-student interaction. The lesson largely consisted of verbal elicitations that were tightly controlled and led by the teacher. Students only made 9 initiations, in the form of checking the translation or through side comments and conversations. The informing and elicitation moves centred round reading the text and commenting/elaborating on its content, structure and vocabulary. Like Mr Alpha, Mr Beta asked questions on the relevant text, making sure students had an accurate translation and understanding of the passages. The lesson was therefore largely made up of teacher-directed question-answer exchanges, with the more able students answering the teacher's questions, and reading some paragraphs in the lesson. However, other students were randomly picked by the teacher to read.

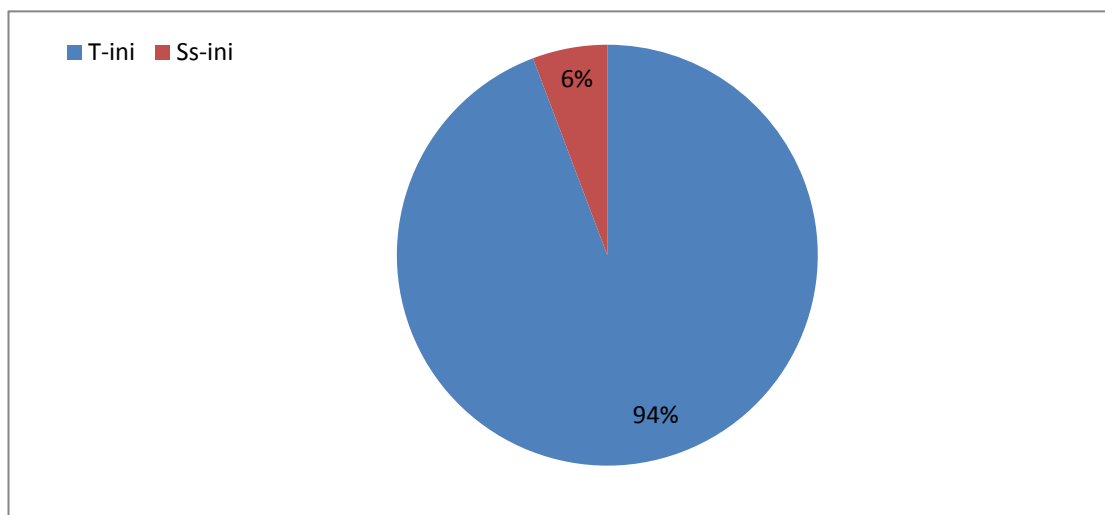
Figure 6.6 Distribution & patterning of teacher Beta's teaching exchanges



## 6.2.3 Initiation moves

There is little difference between the initiation patterns of teachers Alpha and Beta, as both of them overwhelmingly dominated the classroom talk time. From Figure 6.7, it can be seen that only 6% of lesson initiations were made by students and most of these were to do with procedural matters rather than academic matters and most were spoken in Arabic.

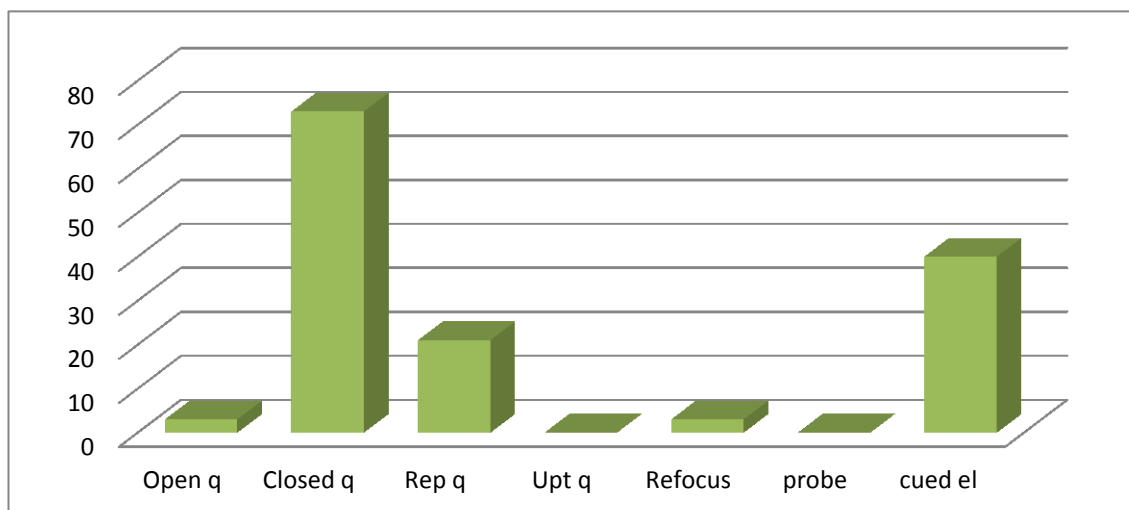
Figure 6.7 Teacher Beta's initiations move types



#### 6.2.4 Questioning moves

Figure 6.8 shows the type of questions that Mr Beta used in his classes. As with Mr Alpha, the analysis revealed that the majority of his questions were closed and display ones. 60 per cent of the questions asked by Mr Beta were concerned with translating the new English vocabulary items into Arabic. However, his translation questions did not allow much room for negotiation of meaning. As there were no attempts to start discussion-stimulating questions, Mr Beta's questions and elicitations were primarily intended for the students to display their knowledge of the material being studied. However even in translation, words can carry more than one possible meaning and teachers can get students to discuss other possible meanings. Unlike Mr Alpha, Mr Beta used the technique of repeating and cuing questions so frequently in the hope that students would come up with the desired answer. When a student failed to come up with the correct answer, the teacher re-directed the question to the whole class.

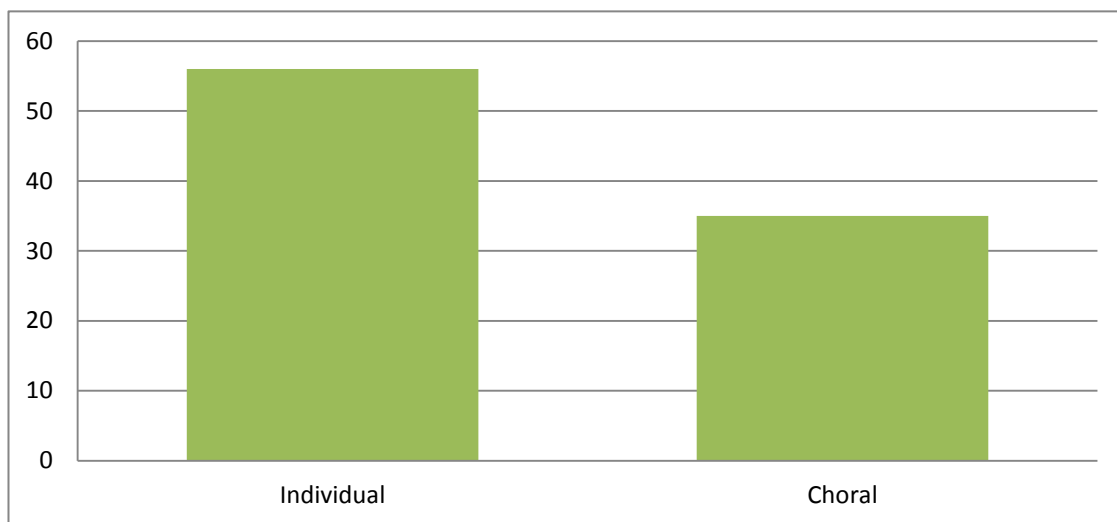
Figure 6.8 Teacher Beta's question types



### 6.2.5 Response moves

Like with Mr Alpha's lessons, individual responses were higher than the choral ones inside Mr Beta's class as illustrated in Figure 6.9. This is largely due to the fact that Mr Beta picked on particular students to provide answers to his questions and most were at the centre of his attention in the middle of the class. Those active students tended to raise their hands more frequently than those on the periphery of the class and therefore tended to be chosen by the teacher. The choral responses were usually sought by the teacher when he raised his intonation, so that the students knew he wanted them to voice out the translation of a vocabulary item or repeat an answer. Students' responses were generally brief and limited to one or two words. They were all text-based answers. Students were given little time to respond after being asked a question. By contrast, Mr Alpha seemed to have a slightly longer wait-time. Whether individual or choral, students' responses were usually evaluated (negatively or positively) by Mr Beta based on their grammatical accuracy.

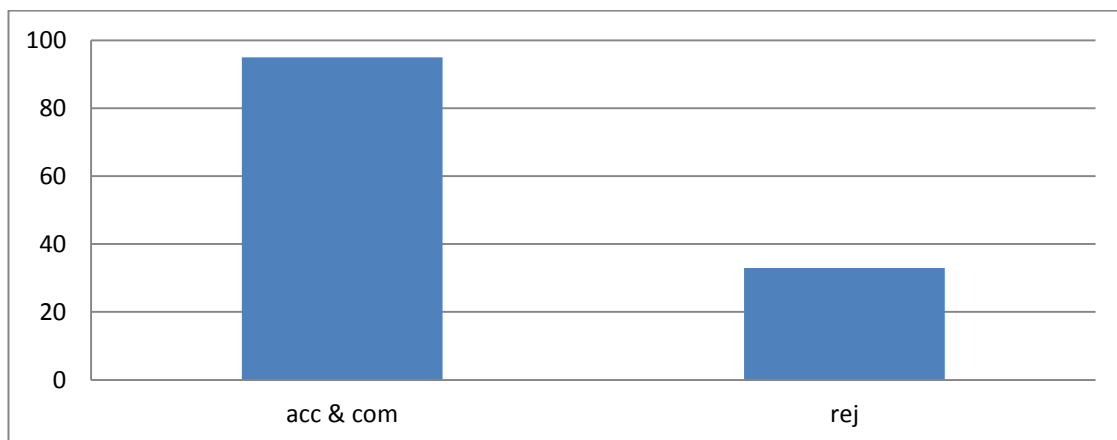
Figure 6.9 Students' responses to Beta's questions, 60 = occurrences



### 6.2.6 Feedback moves

As with Mr Alpha, Mr Beta's feedback on students' responses was largely evaluative in nature. As seen in Figure 6.10, the teacher tended to accept the student(s) responses with an acknowledgment or by repeating the actual utterances. However, the teacher rarely used Arabic when repeating the student's answer, preferring English as the medium of interaction.

Figure 6.10 Teacher Beta's feedback type, 90 = occurrences





### 6.2.7 Discourse analysis

The lesson observed for discourse analysis was a reading class. It was entitled 'Respiratory System Problems' which was part of the Smoking and Your Health module (EFS, 2009, p.17). As with the other teachers in the study, the listening exercises in the book were overlooked and skipped by the teacher for the sake of 'speeding up' the teaching. Teacher Beta's classes lasted for 50 minutes. Side conversations and silent reading took a significant amount of time. The format of the lesson was similar to the previously observed lesson: the teacher took the register, read the lesson assigned, checked certain important text-related vocabulary, gave a lot of text explanations and read the text alternately, while students took notes. At the end of this cycle, the teacher checked student comprehension. The comprehension-check consisted of short and quick question-answer exchanges. It was at the comprehension-checking stage that students got more involved and provided one- or two-word responses to teachers' closed display questions. Like Mr Alpha, most questions were teacher-directed and strictly text-based, with no room for discussion.

Throughout his lessons, Mr Beta worked with the whole class and tightly controlled the turn-taking. The discourse analysis of his lesson transcript showed that he worked rigidly within the IRF framework. As found in the systematic observation (see section 6.2.2), the overwhelming majority of initiations were teacher informing and eliciting moves, making up more than 90 per cent of the teaching exchanges. In the following extracts, Teacher Beta focuses on steering students to guess the Arabic meanings of the words 'suffer', 'addiction' and 'blood pressure'. The first extract is taken from the first ten minutes of Mr Beta's class on 'smoking and health' where students were asked to come up with a list of smoking health problems. The extract shows that the teacher-student interaction was largely made up of informing and elicitation sequences controlled by the teacher. It is also the case that the feedback provided by Mr Beta was largely evaluative in nature:

Exchange			Moves	Acts
1	T	What do you mean by 'suffer'?		el
2	Ss	YU3ANI (suffer)	R	rep
3	T	yes suffer means YU3ANI	F	e
	T	Suffer^  He asks the whole class to repeat the meaning in Arabic and write it on the board  Loudly		el
4	Ss	YU3ANI (suffer) chorally	R	rep
5	T	Yes	F	e
		if you smoke, what do you err get	I	el
6	S	You can get ill... <i>inaudible</i>	R	rep
7	T	stand up		d
8	S	You can get badly, because your health is bad	R	rep
9	T	your health is bad	F	e
		How can you breathe	I	el
10	S	Your heart is weak	R	rep
11	T	Yes you  pointing to another student		n
12	S	the hear, the hea..., the ...the heart beats more becomes more fast	R	rep
13	T	the heart beats^	F	e/el
14	Ss	faster	R	rep
15	T	faster	F	e
	T	Yes and^	I	el
16	S	It will cause cancer	R	rep
17	T	ooh yes  cancer, heart beats faster, cancer  teacher writes these on board	F	e  com
	T	yes	I	s

18	T	And... and... what else if you... Students are looking for answers in their textbooks and raising their hands bidding for answers		el
19	S	blood pressure	R	rep
20	T	yes What? yes, speak up	F	e check d
21	Ss	blood pressure	R	rep
22	T	speak up, blood pressure yes blood^	F	e/acc
23	S	blood pressure		rep
24	T	yes and ...? what else?	F I	e el
25	T	speak up And... and... and Students are flicking through pages, scanning the text to find the answers		d check
26	S	it has bad smell and weak defenses	R	rep
27	T	yes and what else	F I	e el
28	S	addiction (mispronounced)	R	rep
29	T	Yes, of course <i>addiction</i> writes on board	F	e
30	T	What is the meaning of 'addiction' in Arabic?	I	el
31	Ss	<i>IDMAN</i>		el
32	T	Yes and can you tell me it in English What is the meaning of addiction, yes, addict, addiction, addictive... addict, addiction ... what is the meaning of it?		el el

(Teacher Beta, Extract 1b, EFS Transcript, pp.104-106)

In the above extract (1b), the first initiation made by Mr Beta asks students about the Arabic meaning of a specific English word 'suffer'. After a student gave one possible translation, the teacher ended the exchange by acknowledging the answer saying 'yes suffer means YUANEE' (turns 1-5, Extract 1b). From the teacher's viewpoint, the student did his job by giving this one-word response. Accordingly, he did not build on the student answer. Rather, he moved to a new vocabulary item. In turn 28 of Extract 1b, a student who mispronounced the word 'addiction' was evaluated and corrected by the teacher. The students' brief answers were evaluated by the teacher in the light of what he wanted the students to respond with. In other words, as an 'expert', the teacher had the right to control the discourse by asking questions to which he already knew the answer and establishing the parameters for a correct answer. Because of the teacher's claim to prior knowledge of the subject content and right to control the pacing and sequencing of its transmission, students rarely managed to impose their own relevance outside the teacher's frame of reference.

What made Mr Beta's lesson different from that of Mr Alpha's was the quantity and quality of code-switching between Arabic and English. As shown in section 7.1.3, Mr Alpha tended to translate almost every single sentence from English into Arabic, in line with the grammar-translation approach (see Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Mr Beta, on the other hand, used less Arabic in his classes and only resorted to it when explaining difficult vocabulary as in turns 28-32 in the above extract. Generally speaking, Mr Beta made a special effort to keep Arabic to a minimum. In my first interview with him, Mr Beta commented that 'actually' he would use Arabic only when explaining difficult vocabulary and expressions, although he strived whenever possible to avoid using L1 inside his classes.

The extract below (Extract 2b) illustrates the way Mr Beta introduced new vocabulary items into his lessons: he recited them chorally with the whole class and then read the passages. While reading, the teacher kept stopping whenever a new word appeared. Then he asked students for its meaning. When students gave the required meaning, the teacher commented on the response and continued reading. Thus, the teacher worked within a tight IRF structure, as he kept asking questions and evaluating student answers. The teacher used both closed questions and cued elicitation technique to steer

student responses, as shown in turn 4 of extract 2b. A similar type of interaction happened in turn 20, where the teacher used cued elicitation rather than a direct question to get the answer from the student. These predictable teacher-student exchanges were brief and fast and typify much of Teacher Beta's interactions with his students:

Exchange	Moves	Acts		
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	What is it Yes Khaled pointing to a Student raising his hand	re-i el n	
2	S	<i>ELSHU3ERAAT FEE EL REATEEN</i> (blood vessels)	R	rep
3	T	yes In the respiratory system there we have for example here we have cilia (drawing an illustration on board)	F	e com i
4	T	What is the importance of cilia (Writes What is the importance of cilia^ on board) the importance of cilia^ raising hands bidding to be chosen		el el
5	T	Yes tell me Write down this question on your notebook and answer it		el d
6	T	Yes Write down this question on your notebook and answer it...yes...Write down this question and answer it Wait time 4 sec		s s
7	T	yes they trap substances...the dangerous		el
8	S	substances	R	rep
9	T	trap dangerous substances	F	e
10	T	Yes^ pointing to another student	I	el
11	S	the cilia and nasal organs trap some aliens	R	rep
12	T	some aliens	F	e/ac

		Yes		c
		And^	re-i	s el
		Repeat... repeat again they or it		
13	T	repeat again, repeat again		el
14	S	they or it in the reparatory system, cilia it is useful to sweep away the aliens	R	rep
15	T	useful to^	I	el
16	S	it is useful to sweep away the aliens	R	rep
17	T	Yes sweep away.... Sweep away because here Referring to the drawing on the board we have movement .... Movement or vibration that sweep away the aliens or the dangerous substances or the dangerous materials	F	e i i i
18	T	but when you smoke what will happen^		s el
19	S	cilia get stitch and s yes	R	rep
20	T	and what cla^ Gives clue to complete	I	el
21	S	clamp	R	rep
22	T	yes cilia will clamp and these substances will go past... go past to your... what	F	e i el
23	S	Respiratory system	R	rep
24	S	lungs	R	rep
25	T	yes, lungs, it will clamp	F	e/ac c

(Teacher Beta, Extract 2b, EFS Transcript, p.108)

The extract above shows that Teacher Beta's questions were predominantly closed and designed to check that students followed his explanations and that they knew the Arabic equivalents of the new English words. These questions occupied a middle ground between confirmation checks and comprehension checks (Ellis, 1993). An example of this case occurred in turn 4 of extract 2b where the teacher posed the question 'what is the importance of cilia?' The teacher, however, did not attempt to *probe* a student answer. In the above extract (2b), the teacher was the one who initiated, checked, nominated, directed, and evaluated student responses. Students naturally followed these pre-established rules of interaction. That is, they spoke only when they were invited to by the teacher. The lesson was a combination of teacher presentation and elicitation in the form of closed questions and cued questions.

Added to this, the strict management of the classroom discourse was an important element of Mr Beta's lessons. For example, he would nominate students to answer a question, and tell students when and what to write down. As a consequence, student initiations were rare, except for checking the translation of some words, as shown in turn 2 in Extract 2b. In Syria, teachers are officially required to cover the whole lesson otherwise they are in trouble. However, teachers can still make a difference if they encourage student input through pair or group work. Neither Mr Alpha nor Beta thought this was an option.

Being the expert, Mr Beta frequently and abruptly stopped the students to correct their mispronounced vocabulary, as in the case of 'participation' and 'vigorous' (turn 3, Extract 3b). It can be argued that the teacher's frequent interruptions do not contribute to language learning — Pica (1996) for example maintains that it is 'uninterrupted communication' that facilitates language acquisition. Not only did Mr Beta give immediate corrective feedback in the form of direct repair, but he also frequently stopped the students from reading to comment on the specific meaning of words. By imparting his grammatical knowledge through a grammar-translation method, Teacher Beta appeared to believe that this would make the class more interactive as illustrated in this extract:

Exchange			Moves	Acts
1	T	yes speak up again, go on, continue sir	I	d
2	S	smokers may not be able to Participate in vigorous sports. Long-term or heavy smokers (T: interrupting, MUDAKHENON HASHASHON) may be short of breath during life span.		rd
3	T	correct mis-pronounced words 'participate', 'vigorous' read it like this	I	d
4	T	Do you remember this <i>look at this</i> word 'breath' 'breathe' what is it? Do you remember this What is it Some students are raising their hands to deliver the answer	I	el el
5	S	'breathe' is a verb 'breath' is N and	R	rep
6	T	yes and in grammar^	F re-i	e el
7	Ss	confused	R	rep
8	T	we have 'th' for the verb and is pronounced like in 'the' but 'th' for the noun and is pronounced as in 'thin'		i i
9	T	okay what do we have new words here we have 'vigorous' sports like climbing mountains, running a long... a long distance,	I	m el
10	T	the smoker will be very tired, why^ The smokers will be very tired why		el el
11	S	searching for answers in the text book	R	rep
12	T	Look at the paragraph and tell me why	I	d el
13	T	Yes from the passage		p clue



		from the text we just read		el
14	S	because the oxygen decreases	R	rep
15	T	Because^	I	el
		It is in the text under your nose <i>BELNAS MAWJEDEH</i>		
16	S	because they are not getting enough oxygen	R	rep
17	T	Aha, well.	F	e
		Now repeat this again because		d
18	S	they are not getting enough	R	rep
19	T	enough oxygen	F	e

(Teacher Beta, Extract 3b, EFS Transcript, pp.111-112)

It is also noticeable from the above extracts (2b and 3b) that at no point in the teacher-student interaction did student responses exceed four or five words in length. Their responses were often followed by an evaluative comment by the teacher whose interpretations of the text and explanations were not open to debate. In his feedback, the teacher used reformulating techniques, such as recasting, repetition and translation, rather than feedback that would prompt students to think through a self-repair (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002).

Overall, the analysis of Teacher Beta's teaching exchanges shows the teacher mainly focused on imparting morpho-lexical knowledge about the English language. He kept working within the IRF structure controlling both the initiation and response moves. This stands in contrast to his stated belief that he frequently encouraged students to communicate in English. As seen in the extracts above, there is little in the way of interaction or negotiation of meaning between teacher and students and students to students.

### 6.2.8 Stimulated-recall

Mr Beta and Mr Zeta were the only two teachers who agreed to be interviewed for the stimulated recall sessions. As stated in 4.6.3, Mr Beta was played back his video-recorded lesson and was asked to comment on his teaching and on the interactive deci-

sions he made in the class. While watching his video, Mr Beta kept smiling while smoking. When probed about what he was doing in the middle of the class, the teacher responded (clip paused):

Here I'm explaining the meaning of 'cilia' to students and that's why I first illustrated this with my body language. As you can see, Mr Taha, it was only the student (*NAMED*) and this student who were active. They're my best students in this class, clever and committed [...] Anyway, because the other students could not get the meaning, I drew the picture on the board, please play the video to see how this made the whole class understand the vocabulary item and so on. (*My translation*)

Mr Beta thought that he had to keep talking because he is the expert in the language and if 'he does not speak, whoever is going to talk in the class?' However, the teacher thought that his students should speak more. He commented on one of the bright students in his class praising him. When I asked him how helpful this technique was in reflecting on his practices, Mr Beta thought that it was very inspiring and informing although he thought it took lots of his time.

### **6.3 Teacher Gamma**

With 21 years of teaching experience, Mr Gamma was the third most experienced teacher after Mr Alpha and Mr Delta. After graduating with a degree in English Language and Literature, Mr Gamma obtained his Diploma in Educational Studies from the same governmental university. Upon recruitment, Mr Gamma was delegated to teach in an educationally under-developed rural area for 5 years. He began teaching in the then preparatory level, Years 7-9. After that, he had the chance to teach in the Gulf before returning to Syrian secondary schools in the mid-1990s. Since then, he has been teaching English in one of the most prestigious and ancient schools in Homs. When he knew that one of the teachers apologized for not taking part in the study, he volunteered to participate in the research. Unlike other teachers, Mr Gamma was reluctant to be filmed, although he 'appreciated the importance of classroom research'. However, he agreed to the filming on the condition that it would not exceed 25 minutes.

In his interview about the new curriculum, Mr Gamma thought that *EFS* was completely different from the old one in both in content and pedagogic approach. He thought that the new curriculum required more group and pair work. He also thought that the introduction of the new curriculum was very constructive and would lead to advances in the field of teaching English language in the Syrian classrooms. He said:

Our new book (*EFS*) is good and timely because the previous one was a very old-fashioned book. Of course our wise leadership did the right thing in replacing the old book as it no longer copes with the spirit of the current age, although this move is at least 10 years late. We all know that the new wave of teaching is for communicative curricula. Traditional books and old teaching mentality's gone now. Actually, when I was teaching in Saudi Arabia a few years ago, I received some training in the form of workshops on teaching similar curricula to *EFS*. We used to do group work and extensive listening exercises. In general, people in the administrative offices did the right thing in updating the curriculum although this should be coupled with other procedures [...] such as setting up language learning labs for computer assisted learning of languages. (*My translation*)

In his comment on what was the biggest influence on his teaching practices, Mr Gamma thought that pre-service training had shaped his current practices and that of other teachers. He criticized this, stating that:

Let's be frank with ourselves, Mr Taha, most teachers graduated from our universities with little knowledge of pedagogy whatsoever. For example, you and I did more literature and less pedagogy of teaching in our BA degrees didn't we? I can still remember that one lecturer was teaching us translation and linguistics while his doctorate was in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Fiction, see? No wonder that most of us focus on grammar and translation. Therefore, you can say that we accumulated our experience year by year. Some teachers have a natural instinct for teaching and might have been inspired by some older teachers. The majority, though, develop their skills over the course of time learning from their own mistakes for instance. In general I remember that the quality of Syrian teacher wasn't that bad compared to what I saw in the Gulf. At least our pronunciation was far better than many other Arab teachers (laughter). (*My translation*)

This answer seemed typical of the generation of Syrian language teachers who had had the opportunity in the 1980s and 1990s to teach in the Gulf. When asked about his understanding of the methodology for teaching the new curriculum, he disagreed with those who thought that *EFS* was inappropriate for both teachers and students at the secondary level. He thought it was suitable because it was based on the ‘latest studies in this field’. When I probed about the use of group work, he said that:

Look, our students are clever but he lacks motivation to learn English. They view English as the most difficult challenging and boring subject. The new books are colourful and made them view it more cheerfully than the old dry-as-dust instruction style. I taught in similar books in the Gulf and yes we are now emphasising more on the learner not the teacher. For example, in my class I don’t use Arabic at all because students have to hear English only. From time to time, I urge my students to work using group-work stuff. This doesn’t always work because our student is not accustomed to such techniques. You well know that most of our students want only to pass in English. (*My translation*)

Teacher Gamma thought his teaching approach was also heavily influenced by the examination system which focused on grammar, translation, and reading comprehension. In this regard, he thought that his teaching would be more effective if he explained the grammatical rules fully to the students. He also thought that ‘simplifying the information to the students’ mind would make students love English more and more’.

He thought that spoken English could not be achieved without establishing a solid grammatical base. He stated that:

If we want to develop ourselves here in Syria, then we should equip our students with the necessary grammatical base in English. Believe me, until now students’ English basics are very weak. Look around you, students in the private schools or even kids in Lebanon can speak English and French so much better than even our university graduate students here in Syria. This all has to do with the early stages in learning. You cannot come to the secondary stage and try to fix student grammar and all that went wrong in the previous years. The students’ minds wouldn’t be as flexible and elastic as when they were in the primary stage would they? (*My translation*)

When I asked Mr Gamma if he had attended training sessions on the new curriculum, he replied that he had not been nominated for the two scheduled training sessions. He said that he had not received any direct training from the Teachers' Training Centre in Hama City. Rather, the English supervisor in the educational district briefed him and other teachers about the aims of the MOE with regard of the newly-introduced teaching methodology and their 'philosophy and policy of curriculum innovation'.

In general, Mr. Gamma held positive views about the new English language curriculum. He thought that despite the current low levels of student competence in English, the new *EFS* would cater for both teacher and student needs. Mr Gamma thought that it would lead to the greater use of communicative teaching practices and help teachers move away from memorization and recitation.

### **6.3.1 Field notes**

In the fourth week of February 2010, I made my way for the first time into Mr Gamma's classroom. Like the other teachers, Mr Gamma introduced me to his students who were in the 10<sup>th</sup> Grade. The students had previously been informed about my plans for observing their classes. I checked with Mr Gamma if we needed to get further consent from the students. The teacher then turned to the students and said in Arabic: 'Again, would anyone mind Mr Taha observing this class?' Chorally, students replied 'no Teacher'. After that, I sat at the back of the classroom facing the teacher who was working on Module 4, which was entitled '*Design*' (see Appendix E). The module deals with aspects of culture ranging from arts, architecture, fashion, lifestyles and historical monuments. The lesson was on the ancient and modern buildings in Europe and the Middle East; the vocabulary section was integrated with the listening part.

Two lessons were observed with the purpose of breaking the ice and putting both Mr Gamma and the students at ease with my presence. In the first lesson, the teacher briskly asked students to open their books and he went through the list of the new vocabulary items explaining their meanings in English and in Arabic. Because many stu-

dents failed to come up with the Arabic equivalent of the vocabulary, the teacher directly translated them into Arabic.

In both classes, Mr Gamma repeatedly moved from the front of the classroom to stand closer to the students' desks and went down to the middle of the aisle between students' desks while doing his whole-class teaching. 90 per cent of his teaching time was spent on explaining the lesson content. He kept holding the course book in his hand. A few words were written on the blackboard as he orally explained the study points slowly and repetitively. In comparison with Mr Alpha, Mr Gamma used less Arabic during his classes.

Mr Gamma was the only teacher who asked students to work in pairs. However, this practice only happened twice during the whole observation schedule: in the first and the last observed lessons. Mr Gamma wanted to give the impression that he was implementing the communicative techniques that *EFS* and the ministry guidelines advocated. However, this was not systematic and was not appropriately done. For example, the dialogue between students was far from being natural and these interactions seemed both rehearsed and artificial (see section 6.3.7).

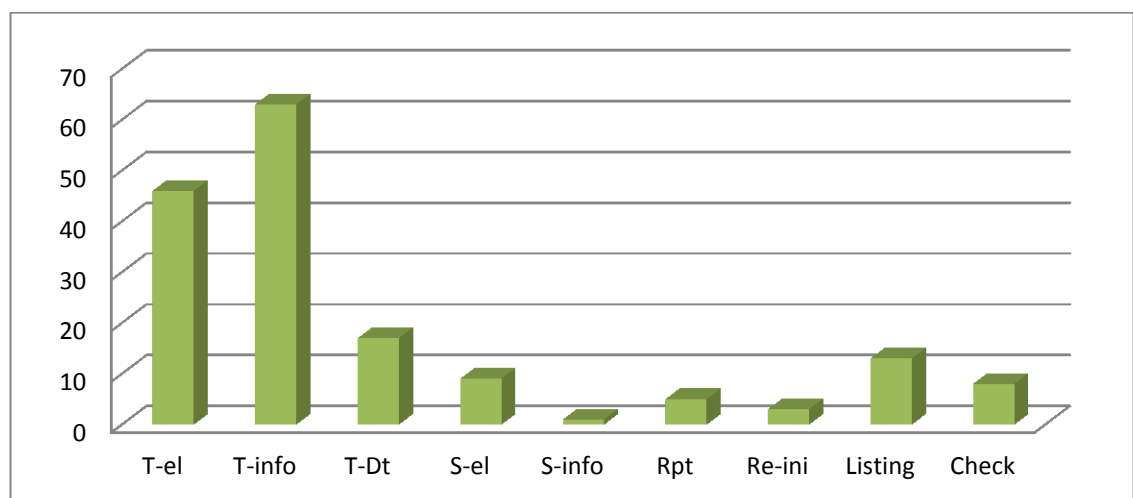
What characterized Mr Gamma's teaching approach was his friendly relationship with his students. For example, he hardly changed the tone of his voice and remained kind and approachable to everyone with an apparent positive attitude to all students. He also had a sense of humour in the class, unlike Mr Beta who was more serious. It needs to be highlighted that Mr Gamma was fully aware of my presence in the class and on several occasions he talked to me when making jokes or when explaining important study points.

### **6.3.2 Systematic observation**

As shown in Figure 6.11, the distribution of Mr Gamma's teaching exchanges revealed that the teachers' informing moves were the most frequently occurring exchanges. This was due to the fact that the teacher frequently imparted knowledge to students in the form of reading textual passages, commenting and explaining their content. The teacher would pause after reading a sentence to comment on its form and

content. For him, informing students through simplifying the rules was an important pedagogical strategy. Similar to the other observed teachers, teacher elicitations were the second most frequently occurring of Mr Gamma's patterns. However, what distinguished Mr Gamma's teaching was the fact that students' initiations were slightly more frequent than in the other teachers' classes, especially at the start of the class where students raised some simple questions regarding the translation of some words. In general, it can be said that Mr Gamma's class was marked by more explanations than elicitations.

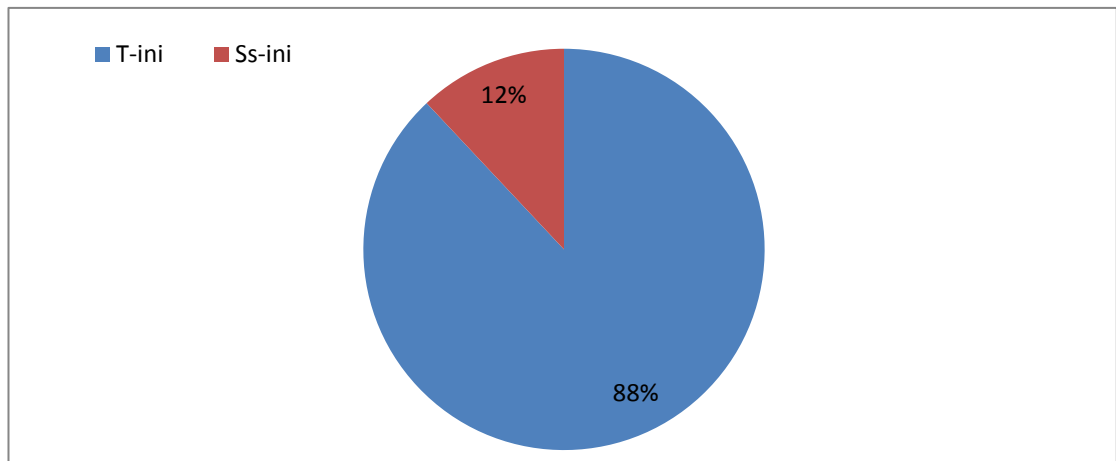
Figure 6.11 Patterning of Teacher Gamma's teaching exchanges



### 6.3.3 Initiation moves

Figure 6.12 below shows that by far the majority of initiations inside the classroom are made by Mr Gamma. This observation is consistent with the findings from the other observed teachers. Students only contributed 12 per cent of the total number of initiations and only when invited by the teacher. As stated in the previous section, students were encouraged and invited to speak at the beginning of the lesson. However, as the lesson progressed, student input fell from nine to three per cent of initiations.

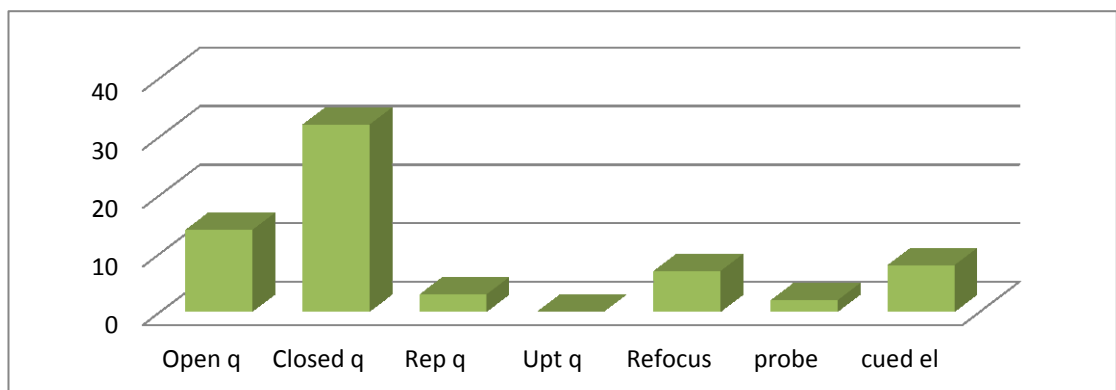
Figure 6.12 Teacher Gamma's initiations (as percentages)



### 6.3.4 Questioning moves

In common with the other three teachers, Mr Gamma used closed display questions seeking students' answers to text-related content, as shown in Figure 6.13. However, the percentage of open questions in his classes was slightly higher than with Teachers Alpha and Beta. The content of the lesson, dealing with aspects of Syrian culture and traditions, might have had an impact on this. The topic enabled the teacher to ask questions that were relevant to the Syrian context and to seek student perspectives on the topic. Open questions took the form of general questions about known issues such as 'Why do you smoke?' or 'When did you first smoke?' The answers to such questions did vary slightly amongst the students. Their responses seemed to be rehearsed. There were no examples of uptake or probe questions.

Figure 6.13 Teacher Gamma's question types

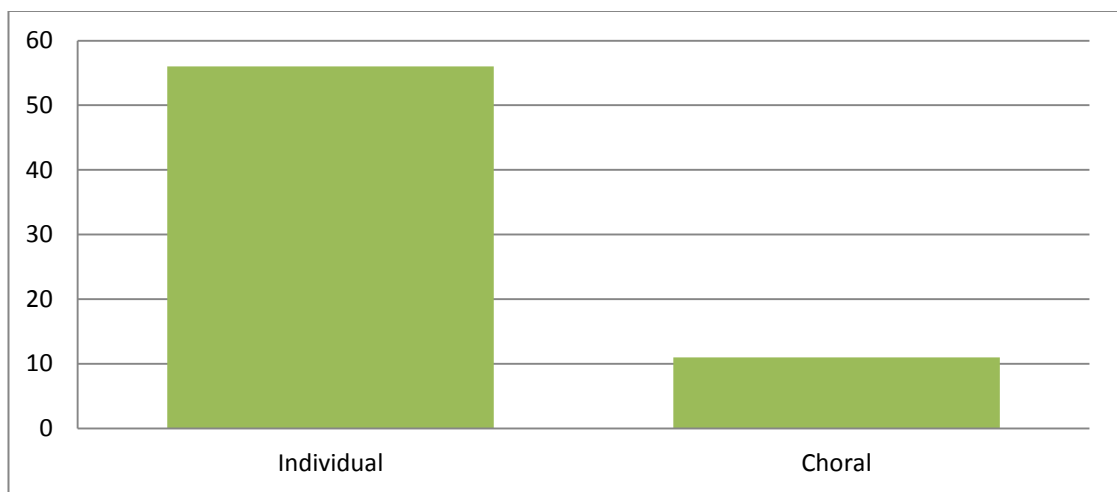




### 6.3.5 Response moves

The individual responses in Mr Gamma's outnumbered the choral responses as indicated in Figure 6.14. The few examples of choral responses took place when the teacher checked with students their understanding of some grammatical points. A few choral responses were also given when the teachers asked a general question inviting students to comment or to answer. Nonetheless, inside Mr Gamma's classroom the tough discipline meant few choral responses.

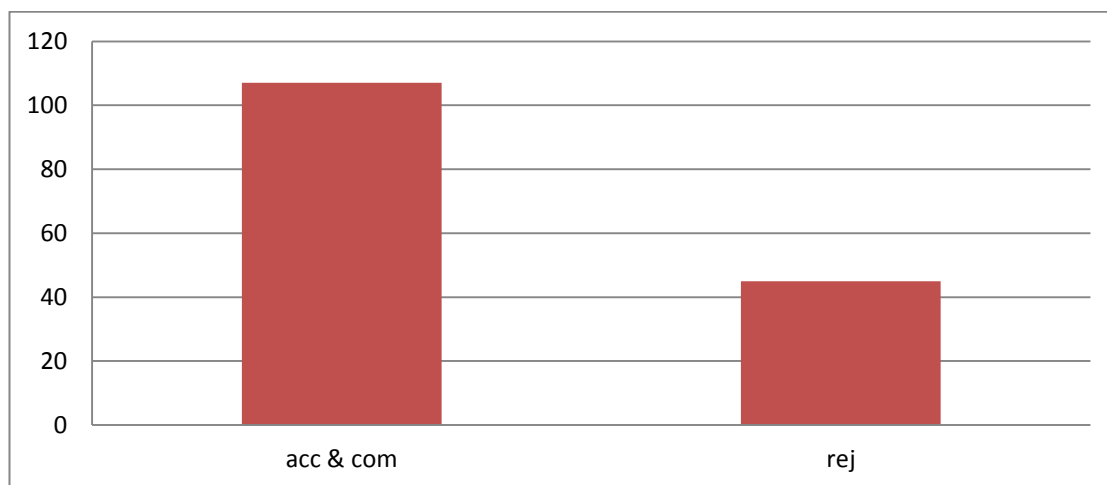
Figure 6.14 Teacher Gamma students' responses



### 6.3.6 Feedback moves

Because of the nature of Mr Gamma's questions, the feedback that was given to students tended to be entirely evaluative in nature. For most students' responses, the teacher either nodded his head agreeing with the answer, or verbally approved the answer in order to move on to a new point. A rejection of student answers usually occurred when answers were completely or partially 'wrong'. In this case, the teacher simply said 'no', turning to another student to get the right answer (see Figure 6.15). It was rare to see the teacher probing the students' answers whether they were right or wrong.

Figure 6.15 Teacher Beta's feedback type, 120 = occurrences



### 6.3.7 Discourse analysis

In Mr Gamma's class, there were only 28 students. Even with such a relatively small class size, there was little variation in the patterns of interaction, compared with those teachers in the study who taught much larger classes. The analysis of Mr Gamma's spoken discourse revealed the domination of the IRF interaction structure in his whole-class teaching. The patterning of the exchanges showed that he dominated the initiation and feedback/evaluation moves. Students, therefore, were given few opportunities and little space to make contributions to the lesson, by asking questions, commenting on content, discussing or sharing views with peers in class, as shown in the extracts 1g and 2g below.

The extracts in this section were taken from lesson 16 entitled 'Dream House' which was derived from *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (see Appendix E). It was a skill-focus class that was composed of a reading section followed by vocabulary and comprehension check questions. The text instructions encouraged students to develop their reading strategies by using an accompanying picture to figure out the meaning of new words.

In conducting his lesson, Mr Gamma followed a traditional grammar-translation approach. For example, and as reflected in extract 1g below, the teacher began to do

comprehension check questions on the passage. Unlike Mr Beta and Mr Alpha, Mr Gamma did probe a few of the student answers, e.g. turns 4-7 (Extract 1g), and this was done as part of the textbook questioning in which students were asked to elaborate on their responses. In other words, the teacher wanted the students to give fuller answer to the question using the exact string of words found in the reading passage:

Exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
<b>1</b>	T	Okay	I	m
		how many places has the girl lived in,	I	el
		has she lived in one place or has she moved from one place to another?		el
<b>2</b>	T	yes		n
<b>3</b>	S	She moved from one place to another	R	rep
<b>4</b>	T	Why moved from one place to another?	re-i	P
<b>5</b>	S	because they were poor	R	rep
<b>6</b>	T	EHA, (Teacher Corrects, completes, comments and continues the answer himself)	F	e
		their house was not their own and it was a rented house		com
<b>7</b>	T	thank you very much		e
<b>8</b>	T	where did they live before Mango St	I	el
<b>9</b>	S	before that, she lived on Loomis	R	rep
<b>10</b>	T	They lived on Loomis	F	e
		Thank you very much		e
<b>11</b>	T	and where before Loomis^	I	el
<b>12</b>	S	before it they lived in Keeler	R	rep
<b>13</b>	T	Thank you very much	F	e/acc el
		and before Keeler	I	
<b>14</b>	S	before Keeler it was Paulina	R	rep
<b>15</b>	T	Yes and thanks	F	e

		and before that could She remember	I	el
16	Ss	no	R	rep
17	T	Because she was <sup>^</sup> ...	I	el
18	Ss	very small	R	rep
19	T	very small yes	F	e/acc
20	T	Cannot you see	I	s
		that this girl spent all her life	I	i
		moving from a house to a house		

(Teacher Gamma, Extract 1g, EFS Transcript, pp: 122-124)

Another salient feature of Mr Gamma's lesson was his use of positive encouraging feedback. For example, in turns 7, 13, and 15 in the above extract, the teacher used phrases like 'thank you very much', 'this is correct, thanks' and so forth. However, the teacher at no point explained or commented 'why' a student answer was good. In turn 10, the teacher did recast a student answer by repeating it with the correct pronunciation of the word 'Loomis'.

Like the other observed teachers, Mr Gamma used the cued elicitation technique in the form of raising his intonation in an interrogative tone as in turn 17 in extract 1g. What distinguished Mr Gamma's practices, however, was his mix of both direct questions and the cued-intonation questions as shown in extract 1g. As with Mr Alpha and Mr Beta, the majority of the teacher questions were text-based questions whose answers were anticipated and known. The teacher could have made his questions more engaging if he had questioned the students about their experiences. Such questions therefore closed down opportunities for discussion about the passage.

Providing extensive language explanations was a notable feature of Mr Gamma's discourse. On several occasions, he commented on vocabulary, distinguishing between the American and British English words. One example is present in extract 2g (turns 1-3) below where the teacher drew attention to the difference between 'yard' and 'garden', explaining that the former is used in American English while the latter is used in British English. The same case was repeated with the words 'cellar', 'basement', 'flat' and 'apartment'.

As shown in extract 2g, Mr Gamma hardly changed his use of IRF structure. Students only responded when invited by their teacher. A close examination of the student responses shows they were short and (as before) text-based. Students were asked to read the text after he read it for the first time. Whenever a new, un-translated word appeared, Mr Gamma would interrupt the student to either translate it or explain its meaning both in English and Arabic (see turn 15). Such patterning is evident in the following extract, where the teacher makes the majority of the initiations while the students' utterances are largely restricted to a few words:

Exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	what does 'yard' mean	I	el
2	S	garden	R	rep
3	T	yes garden 'yard' is used in American language, 'garden' in British English	F	e/acc com
4	T	now 'cellar' what does it mean^	I	el
5	S	it's a room under the house	R	rep
6	T	yes, under the house yes, celler is in American English in American way while 'basement' is in British	F	e/acc com i
7	T	'flat' what does it mean^	I	el
8	S	it is an apartment	R	rep
9	T	apartment yes flat in British English apartment in American	F	e/acc com
10	T	'underground' means a cellar too		i
11	T	Now read the first paragraph	I	rea
12	S	we do not always live on Mango		
13	S	We did not always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived in Plymouth and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler, it was Hawrena and before that I cannot remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot. Each time it seemed there		i

		would be one more of us. By the time we got into Mango Street we were six, Mum, Dad, Carlos, Kiki, my sister Nana, and me.			i
14	S	The house on Mango street is ours. We do not have to pay rent to anybody or share the yard			
15	T	interrupting Underline the word 'yard'. It means space around the house <i>SAHA (space)</i>	I		d  i
16	S	resumes reading With the people downstairs or to be careful not to make too much noise and there is not a landlord hanging on the ceiling with a broom. But even though it is not the house we felt we would get. They always they told us that one day we would move into a house a real house that would be ours so we would not have to move each year.			i
17	T	yes (Another student is reading the text)	I		n

(Teacher Gamma, Extract 2g, EFS Transcript, p. 125)

Reading the text closely occupied the main body of the lesson. The teacher and the students took turns reading the passage. The relatively low percentage of Arabic use in the lesson remained a noticeable feature of Mr Gamma's teaching style, as shown in the extracts (e.g. Extracts 2g, 3g). Several possible factors might have played a role in this. For example, Mr Gamma was at some points aware of my presence in the class and could have actively tried to keep Arabic to a minimum. The second possible factor was that the vocabulary and structure were well matched to the students' current level of language proficiency. This could be noticed from the level of student participation in reading and answering questions. Many of them showed an observable sense of enthusiasm in the class.

When looking at the quality and nature of the questions used in Mr Gamma's class, they mostly belonged to the category of low order questions whose function was to test student understanding of vocabulary. Extract 3g below illustrates this point. For example, the majority of questions in turns 7, 8 and 12 were closed as in: 'Was the

house on Mango Street like what the mum dreamed of?’ or ‘Do you know the meaning of ‘frustrated?’ or even ‘What do we call the tense?’ these questions do not provoke heavy cognitive demands. The following extract also demonstrates how students worked within the teacher's frame of reference:

Exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	Okay now let us do some more exercises	I	s
		Was the house on Mango Street like what the mum dreamed of?	I	el
2	S	no	R	rep
3	T	okay	F	e
		Then what does the house on Mango Street look like?	I	el
4	S	err (looking for answer in the text)	R	rep
	T	look at the fourth paragraph and you will find the answer	I	d
5	S	the house it is small and red	R	rep
6	T	yes, thanks	F	e/acc
7	T	Was the story teller in Mango street frustrated with her house, Why?	I	el
		Do you know the meaning of ‘frustrated’		el
		Yes		n
8	S	unclear inaudible	R	rep
	T	Frustrated means <i>AAAH</i> not happy		i
		So was the girl frustrated?		el
9	Ss	yes	R	rep
10	T	yes	F	e
		Who knows why?		el
		Come on		p
		Easy answer err easy question		p

		try to look for it in the text		
11	S	the house is not big	R	rep
12	T	because the house is different from what mama told them Yes thank you Now How many people are there in the story? Now let's do some grammar What is the tense in this story Look at the verbs. Yes what do we call the tense?	F  I  I	e  el  el
13	S	Past tense	R	rep
14	T	Yes, past tense	F	e/acc

(Teacher Gamma, Extract 3g, EFS Transcript, pp: 124-125)

As with other teachers, commenting on grammatical points formed an indispensable element in Mr Gamma's lessons, as it put the teacher in his comfort zone. Like other EFL teachers in Syria, for Mr Gamma 'good communication in English started with building a solid base in grammar', especially tenses. Across the classes observed, the grammar-translation approach was valued. Grammar was taught deductively where the rule preceded the example, as shown in the extract (4g) where the discussion was on the formation of negation in English.

However, few students were capable of applying this grammatical rule correctly. For example, in turn 2 of extract 4g, the student used the right auxiliary verb 'did not' for the negative but failed to convert the verb 'lived' into the infinitive 'live'. The teacher intervened to remind the student of how to do it correctly. Students knew the rule in Arabic as the teacher reminded them of the word 'infinitive' which they re-call as the 'MASDAR', the Arabic equivalent. This indicates that students had a superficial understanding of the grammar, since it was only memorized but not correctly applied. Mr Gamma, however, repeatedly 'scaffolded' student answers through reminding them of the necessary grammatical point. Unlike other teachers, the teacher allowed his students more time to think about such grammatical points, as shown in this extract:



Exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	okay who can make negative from this I mean this sentence Before that we lived in Plymouth and before that we lived on	I	m el
2	S	Before that we did not lived in Plymouth...	R	rep
3	T	you forgot to make the verb in the infinitive you know what is infinitive^	F I	e el
	S	<i>MASDAR</i> (infinitive)	R	rep
4	T	yes <i>MASDAR</i> (infinitive) it is the... the first form of the verb	F	e com
5	T	So the sentence will be like what?		el
6	S	before that we did not live in Plymouth	R	rep
7	T	yes, we did not live thank you very much	F	e
8	T	okay now please look at the second paragraph the first line, yes, look at the first line please what it says		d el
9	S	our house would have running water	R	rep
10	T	yes here The sentence I mean the tense is what?	F	e el
11	S	future	R	rep
12	T	Okay, it is a kind of future what is the negative for it?		el
13	S	would not have	F	e
14	T	yes, our house would not have running water okay now	F	e
15	T	Now I want you to open your book and read the passage silently again.		d

(Teacher Gamma, Extract 4g, EFS Transcript, p. 130)

Overall, the analysis of Mr Gamma's discourse revealed that there was little variation in his teaching style as he worked within the narrow IRF pattern. He produced the ma-

jority of questions and directions. His feedback was mostly evaluative. However, he used positive evaluative feedback, like acknowledging and praising students, but without commenting on its content. This kind of feedback is referred to as ‘explicit positive assessment’ (Seedhouse, 2004). Teacher Gamma’s feedback can be categorized mainly as pedagogical feedback, as opposed to interactional feedback (Coulthard & Sinclair, 1992; García, 2005). He did not use the acknowledgment moves to make the talk ‘progress more logically and demonstrate the speakers’ more explicit engagement with each other’s contributions’ as Sauntson (2007, p. 312) put it. Arabic was used minimally in Mr Gamma’s classes. In short, the teacher used to focus on teaching grammar deductively relying on textbook and close reading of various parts of it.

#### **6.4 Teacher Delta**

Mr Delta had been teaching for the last 23 years, and was the second most experienced teachers after Mr Alpha. He held a BA in English Language and Literature, but did not have a Diploma in Educational Studies. Mr Delta served as the head of a secondary school for five years and then moved to work in the local educational authority in Homs. Besides his job, Mr Delta used to teach English in a private school. He openly blamed the low salaries paid by the government for working in the private sector, although he admitted that they had become better in recent years. He said that in the private school he only taught students in the Baccalaureate year.

In his interview, when asked about the differences between the new and the old curriculum in terms of pedagogic content, aims, and delivery approach, Mr Delta thought that there were significant differences between them. He pointed out that the new textbook put more emphasis on communication skills, whereas the old one focused on grammar. However, he thought that the new textbook was ‘too ambitious’, especially when taking students’ current level of proficiency into consideration, as shown in the following extract:

It is fair to say that the new textbook has modern information and its focus is on speaking and talking. Generally, I’d say it’s better than the old one. But I think there are lots of ‘stuffed unwanted materials’ in this new course book. Anyway, our problem, Mr Rajab, still lies with students. I mean, this

generation of students is different from ours. In the past, there used to be a high sense of responsibility towards everything, not like these new generations. Well, back to your question, yes I think this curriculum hopes or aims to develop the different language skills of our students and particularly as I mentioned earlier, the speaking bit. Many exercises ask us to do pair work. But, as we all know, any foreign language that's not used beyond the classroom will be seen as something less important and boring. *(My translation)*

Mr Delta thus thought that the current generation of youth lacked motivation and discipline to learn foreign languages. He even called students 'careless and indifferent'. To avoid putting words in his mouth, I asked Mr Delta to reflect on how he could make his teaching more effective even for such population of students. He replied saying that:

Erm, effective or let's say good teaching [*LAZEM*] needs to be achieved in the middle of a suitable atmosphere. The general atmosphere is important here. By this I mean that students should be quiet and disciplined and of course teaching will be most fruitful if it's done in the early part of the morning, between 8-11am, not later when our students lose liveliness and become exhausted. In the morning, our students come to school with an appetite for learning; unlike at other times of the day. Also I think the good teacher should explain the entire lesson to students bit by bit. Students should understand the grammar and vocabulary items and be able to solve exercises by themselves. The teacher who can't simplify the information to his students is a 'crap' teacher. Also, our biggest problem with the pupils in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> secondary grades is that they think that it isn't as important as the Baccalaureate [3<sup>rd</sup> Grade] when they apply for the national general secondary schooling exam. That is exactly why they don't take things seriously with all subjects including English. *(My translation)*

When I asked the teacher to reflect on a typical lesson delivery and whether he changed his teaching methods moving from the old textbook to the new one, Mr Delta said:

I usually introduce my students to the topic of the lesson by explaining it at the outset in simple English words, as if making the lesson look like a story for them. You know that our pupils like stories, yeah? Then I move to

explain the meaning of the new vocabulary. Sometimes when students are completely unable to guess the English meaning I give it in Arabic. After that, we usually read the text and comment on it either by doing more translation or elaboration of the key points. I mean I do like what all teachers do. And if students have questions we answer them. This, of course, includes discussing the grammar with my students. (*My translation*)

From this extract, Mr Delta can be seen as ‘traditional’ in his teaching methods and hugely influenced by the Grammar-Translation method of teaching and learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, Mr Delta thought that he was responding to the new curriculum after ‘absorbing the essence’ of *English for Starters*. He thought that he was in the process of modernizing his whole-class teaching.

In his response to my question on the training sessions offered by the Training Unit of the MOE on the new curriculum, Mr Delta said that he did not attend the training as there was a ‘long waiting list’. He also pointed out that there was a lot of resentment and criticism by some of his colleagues on the timing, location and organization of the training. Mr Delta also referred to the fact that introducing another foreign language, like French, made it harder for students to cope with language learning as the new periods for French meant fewer hours of English teaching in the week. The teacher concluded the interview by stating that an effective teacher in ‘our culture’ is viewed as ensuring that students gain high marks in exams. As a result, communicative approaches, for him, were seen as a ‘luxury rather than a necessity’ for the effective teaching of English.

#### **6.4.1 Field Notes**

In the fourth week of February 2011, I first entered Mr Delta’s class which was for students in the 10<sup>th</sup> Grade. His students in the 11<sup>th</sup> Grade could not be observed because they were reviewing past classes over the week and there would be little teaching in those classes. The observed class was a reading and comprehension lesson. Before the observations, the teacher informed his students about the observation and got their consent. As happened with the other teachers, Mr Delta introduced me to students and I was offered a seat at the back of the classroom. There were again 38 stu-

dents. The students' curiosity lasted for the first few minutes: after a few minutes they stopped looking at me. Mr Delta also became less anxious and/or aware of my presence.

The title of the lesson observed was 'The Incas'. It was part of Module Three, whose title was Civilizations (see Appendix E). The module consisted of three reading lessons, a listening lesson, a writing task, and a communication workshop. The lesson was part of a skills focus that included listening sections as well as speaking. The focus was on 'asking for, giving and refusing permission'. The second lesson I observed was a reading lesson and was entitled 'Ibn Battuta' which was followed by reading comprehension exercises. There were also vocabulary focus and speaking sections.

Mr Delta used whole-class teaching to drill and explain the key words both in English and Arabic. Students repeated the pronunciation of the key English words. Then, the teacher read out the main reading passages which contained gap fill exercises. The teacher did not make any effort to try other instruction techniques such as pair or group work. Thus, Mr Delta's teaching pattern was characterized by dictating information and reading passages while reciting and recycling the information given to students. Arabic was widely used in the classroom. At the beginning of the lesson, Arabic was used for discipline and 'house-keeping' purposes. Later, it took on a functional role such as translation, communication, repetition of specific words and discipline.

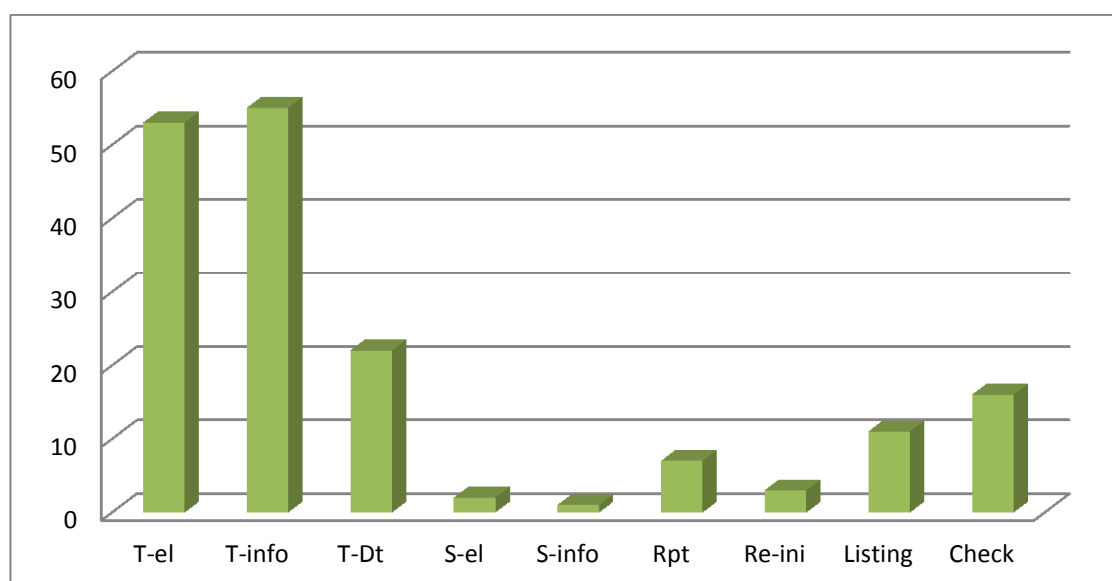
Discipline was an observable issue in that Mr Delta had some discipline problems. Unlike the students of the other teachers observed, Mr Delta's students were really chatty and kept making non-academic side comments. That is why the teacher kept asking the students to be quiet and to stop laughing or making irrelevant comments. One reason for this had to do with the fact that Mr Delta was in his late fifties. Switching between Arabic and English doubled in the second half of the lesson as the teacher realized the time pressure. This made him read out English texts followed by the Arabic translation while checking students' understanding. The student voice was only heard when they were asked to answer the comprehension questions after the passages had been read. At no point in the lesson did the teacher ask students to start a discussion or work outside his frame of reference.

### 6.4.2 Systematic observation

The third visit to Mr Delta's classroom was intended to record the different teaching exchanges in the lesson using the ODCS. Entitled Sightseeing, the lesson was designed to have a grammar focus dealing with the future arrangements and intentions (Appendix E, p. 44). It included reading a section from an authentic Syrian tourism brochure. Unfortunately, due to the real-time challenge (on my part) of feeding in the different moves manually for both the teacher and the student, data was lost at the beginning of the lesson.

Nevertheless, the ODCS data showed that Mr Delta's teaching patterns were to a large extent in tandem with the patterns found in the other participating teachers. For example, Figure 6.16 below presents a breakdown of the salient patterns of the teaching exchanges. It shows that teacher elicitation and explanations took up most of the lesson talk. Mr Delta extensively explained the content of each section. The explanation moves took the form of commenting on the key words and on the grammatical cases. The use of elicitation, direct and checking moves were also apparent as the teacher employed these moves to re-claim the discipline inside the classroom. The students' participation was, unsurprisingly, minimal, as they hardly contributed to the input (questions) or output (responses) in the lesson. There were a few times when students made various comments whose nature was non-academic. The teacher spoke slowly and that is presumably why he did not repeat a lot in the lesson.

Figure 6.16 Distribution & patterning of teacher Delta's teaching exchanges

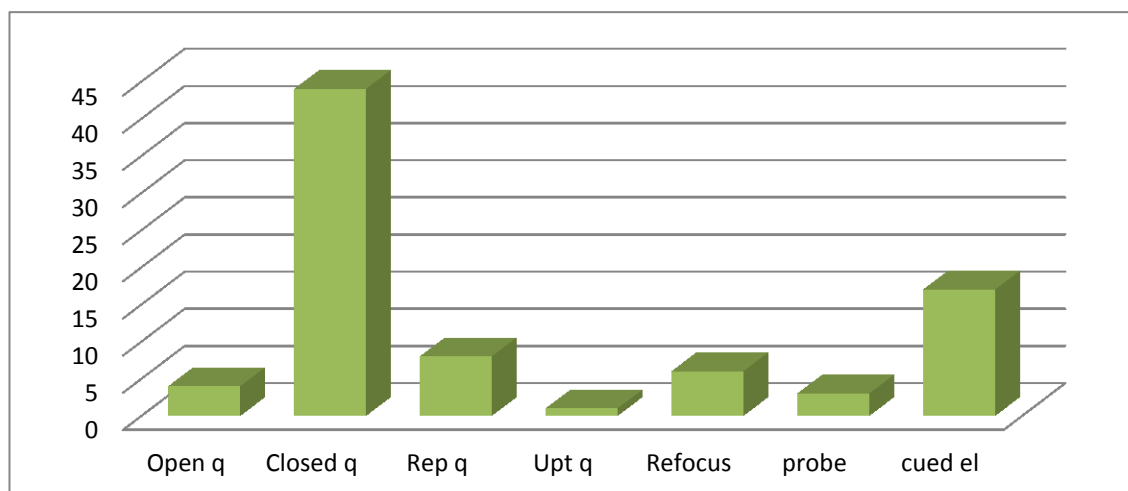


### 6.4.3 Questioning moves

Inside Mr Delta's classroom, closed questions were used to check student comprehension. They were the most frequently used type of question as shown in Figure 6.17. The teacher knew all the answers to these questions. When asking a question, the students usually looked for the answer in the textbook. A typical closed question on translation was 'Who knows the meaning of this word?' or 'What is the meaning of this?'

Cued elicitation in the form of raising intonation was also a common technique employed by Mr Delta to check for student understanding and participation. As mentioned in section 6.4.1, Mr Delta did not repeat his questions like other teachers, as he generally spoke slowly. When students gave answers, the teacher rarely followed up these answers in the form of probing or uptake. Accepting or rejecting the students' answers was the typical response on the teacher's part.

Figure 6.17 Teacher Delta's initiation moves types as percentages

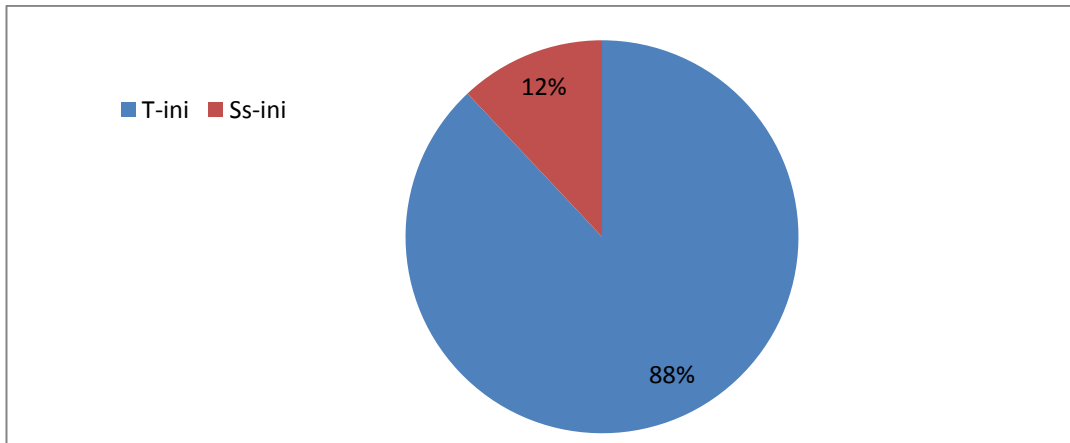


#### 6.4.4 Initiation moves

Teacher initiations took the form of cued elicitations, passing information, checking students' understanding, classroom management, and reading the texts. On the other hand, students' contributions came in Arabic and were geared towards checking the meaning of new vocabulary. As illustrated in Figure 6.18, 88 per cent of initiation moves were made by Mr Delta whereas only 12 per cent were uttered by students (e.g. checking translation). As in Mr Gamma's class, students' motivation, attention and retention significantly declined in the second third of the lesson. By that time, most vocabulary had been translated and the text had been closely read. The last third was for comprehension questions on the text. The ratio of student initiations went up slightly but continued to concern the accuracy of translation or checking that the students had heard the right answer.



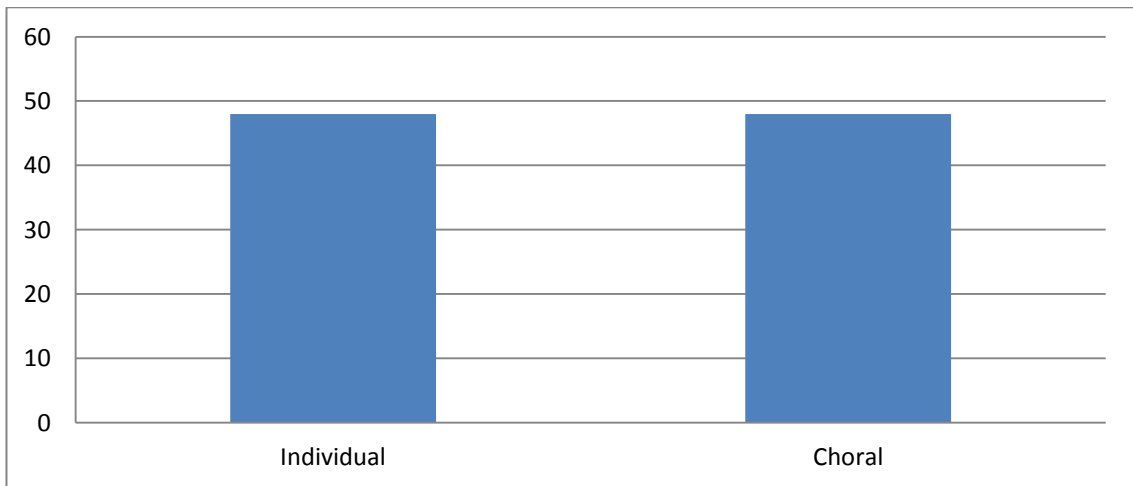
Figure 6.18 Teacher Alpha's question types (as percentages)



### 6.4.5 Response moves

The percentages of the individual and choral answers were relatively similar, as shown in Figure 6.19. Mr Delta used to open his questions to the whole class, so that students would listen to him and stop the side comments. On other occasions, the teacher nominated particular students to answer his questions.

Figure 6.19 Students' responses to Teacher Delta's questions

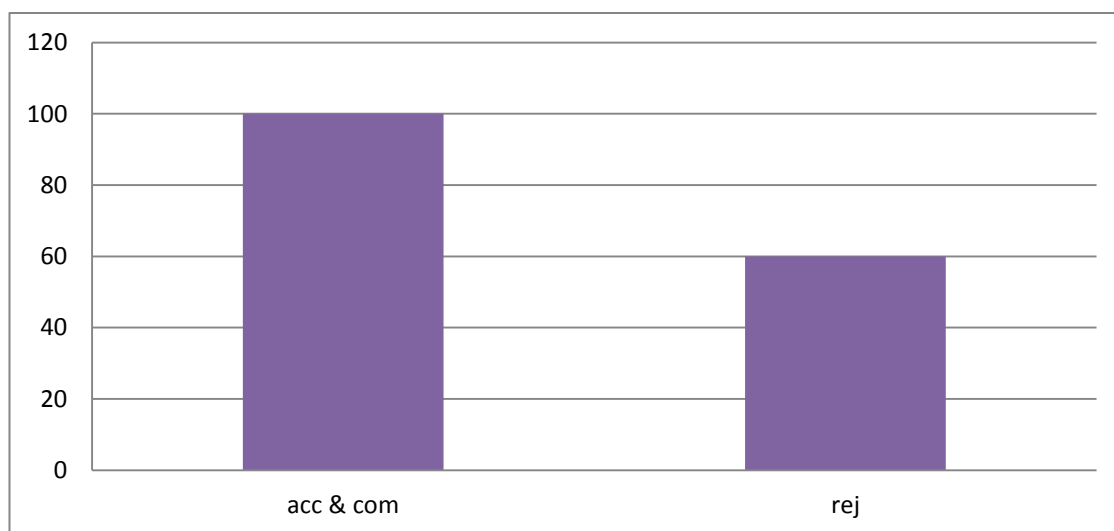


### 6.4.6 Feedback moves

Figure 6.20 below shows the evaluative nature of Teacher Delta's feedback to student responses. Unlike the other teachers, Mr Delta did not accept many of the students' answers. This was due to the fact that students were not closely following the

teacher's explanation. However, when choral questioning was used, he tended to accept the responses. He commented on these responses by either repeating the exact words or recasting the answer (changing certain parts), what Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) refer to as 'evaluative feedback' which usually consists of the acts of accepting, evaluating and commenting.

Figure 6.20 Teacher Delta's feedback types



### 6.4.7 Discourse analysis

The transcripts in the tables below were taken from the last observed lesson of Mr Delta. They belong to a module entitled 'Civilizations' from *English for Starters 8* (see Appendix E). It was a reading comprehension lesson where the discussion centred on libraries. In particular, the lesson concerned itself with Egypt's ancient Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Similar to the other observed lessons, Mr Delta started the lesson with a warming-up activity. This mostly covered the intended learning outcomes, the topic of the lesson, the grammatical points, and the new key words to be found in the reading text. After introducing the new words, through translating them into Arabic, the teacher embarked on reading the lesson, elaborating and commenting on each paragraph. After this, students were invited to do their part of re-reading the text (reading passages) before doing comprehension checks. Therefore, the teaching mode was predominantly whole-class teaching with no pair or group work whatsoever. The IRF structure dominated the interaction patterns in the classroom.

The first extract below (1d) was taken from the beginning of the lesson after the teacher took the register in the first few minutes. The analysis of exchanges showed how the lesson started slowly, with students ‘fine-tuning’ their heads to the English language period. Although Mr Delta was less authoritarian in his classes, the patterns of the teaching exchanges did not differ from those of the other teachers. That is, the teacher consistently worked within the IRF framework of interaction with his students. In many places, however, it was noticeable that the teacher did not comment on the students’ responses, i.e. he used the IR structure as shown in turns 1-3 of extract 1d. The teacher kept controlling the discourse by constantly imparting language information to students. Taken altogether, the teacher’s use of the IRF format dominated his interactions with the teacher informing and elicits exchanges making up nearly 85 per cent of the whole teaching exchanges in the lesson, as this extract reveals:

Exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
<b>1</b>	T	Today we speak about the library of Alexandria	I	s
		you know Alexandria in Egypt^	I	el
<b>2</b>	S	<i>YA3NEE HEE MADENEH SHA6AEH BE MASER 3ALA BAHE ELMOUTAWASE6</i> (it is a coastal city in Egypt that looks out on the Mediterranean, very big, very nice city)	R	rep
<b>3</b>	T	okay		m
		Anyone visited Alexandria^	I	el
<b>4</b>	Ss	nod heads with no	R	rep
<b>5</b>	T	Nobody^	F	e
		okay neither me		com
<b>6</b>	T	Long... long time	I	s
		ago Alexandria had the biggest the largest library in the world		i
		It was not only library it was also science scientific and learning centre for all sorts of knowledge		i
<b>7</b>	T	Clear^		el
<b>8</b>	Ss	confused but nod heads with yes sign	R	rep

		In Arabic, teacher asking students about their knowledge of libraries around		
9	T	Who visited a library? Anyone visited any library here in Homs or in Syria? Come on	I	el el p
10	T	Yes Majed		n
11	S	<i>ANA RE7ET 3ALA ELMARKAZ EL THAKAFEE W SHUFT 2ASDEE KREET KUTB HUNEEEK</i> (I went to Homs Cultural Centre and watched sorry read several books there.)	R	rep
12	T	<i>AHA</i> good the lesson today is very is very simple lesson	F I	e com
13	T	so keep silent and follow me Alright before we begin reading the text I want you to look at these words here on board	I	d m s d
14	T	It I mean they are in the text in your book Teacher reads the new vocabulary and asks students to repeat them after he translates them	I	s

(Teacher Delta, Extract 1d, EFS Transcript, pp: 134-135)

The extract above was typical of the teacher's use of the IR, as in turn 2 where he asked if students knew anything about the city of Alexandria in Egypt. For this, he got a complete response in Arabic from a few students. The teacher, however, did not acknowledge, comment or even evaluate the answer. Rather, he moved on to the next question. As a direct result of his use of the IR/F structure, Mr Delta felt that students did not get his message. Therefore, he began to speak slowly and solely in Arabic explaining that the lesson would be about libraries. His attempt to reflect on students' personal experiences with local libraries seemed more rewarding, as the majority of students began to talk about their visits to the local library. At this stage, the interaction patterns altered to take on the explicit form of the IRF pattern as shown in the exchanges starting with 'Who visited a library, any library here in Homs or in Syria?' (turn 9, Extract 1d). This resulted in more lengthy responses from students despite be-

ing in Arabic. This indicated that students could produce more than one- or two-word responses if they were asked contextualized and personalized questions. However, students' lack of L2 proficiency 'put them off' expressing themselves in English. Instead, they resorted to Arabic to communicate their thoughts and feelings. The teacher used the starters as a matter of routine (e.g., turn 1, Extract 1d) to give advance warning that a question was imminent and there would be some clues as to how to answer it.

As the lesson progressed, the teacher managed to steer the interaction towards the rigid structure of the IRF, as in turn 2 in the extract below (2d), where the teacher asked about the meaning of the word 'communication' which was already known to many students. Although many students knew one Arabic equivalent of 'communication', the teacher insisted on getting the accurate meaning of the word in turns 4, 5 and 6. Further probes by the teacher on this vocabulary item were carried out, as the teacher kept asking students about the verb form of 'communication'. Once Mr Delta finished clarifying the possible meanings of the 'communication', he asked the students about another word; 'knowledge' following a similar pattern. His interventions were greater whenever the students failed to pronounce a word accurately, as in 'manuscripts' (turn 19-20, Extract 2d). After providing the correct pronunciation, the teacher asked the whole-class to rehearse the word's pronunciation chorally as shown in the extract:

Exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	Okay		m
		let's explain, read and then translate these words	I	s
		look at me here and stop talking		d
		Now	Fr	m
2	T	What is the meaning of 'communication'?	I	el
3	Ss	the Arabic meaning of it ( <i>ETESALAT</i> )	R	rep
4	T	yes <i>ETESALAT</i> ( <i>communication</i> )	F	e
		but also means <i>TWASOL</i>		com
5	T	The verb is what is the verb...?	I	el

6	Ss	communicate	R	rep
7	T	communicate right now we have many or different kinds or means of communication like the TV and internet and mobile phones	F	e com i
8	T	Okay Now the word 'knowledge' means...?	I I	m el
9	Ss	<i>MA3REFEH</i> (knowledge)	R	rep
10	Ss	yes, <i>M3REFAH</i>	F	e
11	T	The verb is What is the verb of communication, sorry knowledge		el el
12	S	know	R	rep
13	T	yes it means to know something okay look at these words and write down the meaning in Arabic if you want	F	e/acc com m d
14	T	Audio cassettes...?	I	el
15	S	the cassettes	R	rep
16	S	<i>SHREE6 KASSET</i> (cassette)	F	e
17	T	yes cassettes books, CDs, DVDs, and so on manuscripts What is the meaning of 'manuscripts'?	F	e/acc com el el
18	S	books	R	rep
19	T	err, well not books It can be any old books written com sometimes stones for example the old civilizations had manuscripts	F	e i
	T	repeat this word after me manuscripts	I	d el
20	Ss	manuscripts	R	rep

21	T	yes, manuscripts Symbol means sign <i>YA3NEE RAM (sign)</i> for example Red flower is the... the symbol of what...?	F I	rpt el i el
22	Ss	laughing	R	rep
23	S	love	R	rep
24	T	'love' yes love this is something you all know aha	F	e acc z

(Teacher Delta, Extract 2d, EFS Transcript, p. 138)

As found in the systematic observation (section 6.4.2), the teacher used closed questions whose function was either to give directions or to guess the Arabic meaning of a word, as in 'Anyone has an idea what is the meaning of 'Bibliotheca'?' of turns 8-14, Extract 2d. As with the other teachers, such questions were for displaying knowledge. The answers to these questions were known to the teacher and were mostly the Arabic translations of their English counterparts.

Mr Delta's feedback was largely evaluative and affirmative. To this end, he kept using the words 'yes' and repeating the student's answer (e.g. turns 7 and 11, Extract 3d). The following extract shows how the teacher repeated his questions and occasionally reformulated them using more simplified structures to get the students to give the required answer. In different places, the teacher tended to raise his intonation to get the students to respond to his questions (see turn 4, Extract 3d). At no stage in the language lesson, however, did a student evaluate the teacher's answers. Similarly, there were no examples of students using eliciting exchanges to challenge the teacher's frame of reference, as the following extract shows:

Exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	Okay	I	m
		now open your books	I	d

		repeat these words after me		el
		audio cassettes, books, CDs, DVDs, manuscripts, manuscripts, manuscripts photos, records, slides, videos, WebPages		
2	Ss	chorally repeat all words	R	rep
3	T	now I want you now to see or look at the pictures in your books	I	s  d
4	T	What you see what do you see^	I	el
5		yes what are these		el
6	S	stamps	R	rep
7	T	yes, postal stamps for which country	F	e  el
8	Ss	<i>MASER</i> (Egypt)	R	rep
9	T	Egypt they are for a library what is it called nature of question	F  I	e  s  el
10	S	<i>EL ESKANDREA</i> (Alexandria)	R	rep
11	T	Yes the Alexandria Library or Bibliotheca Alexandria ( <i>writes it on board</i> ) repeat the word 'Bibliotheca'	F	e  com  el
12	Ss	Bibliotheca	R	rep
13	T	yes Anyone has an idea what is the meaning of 'Bibliotheca'^	F  I	e  el
14	Ss	confused	R	rep
15	T	It is from Greek language <i>EL-EGREEKIA</i> (Greek) and means 'library'		i

(Teacher Delta, Extract 3d, EFS Transcript, pp: 140-142)

Throughout the lesson, the teacher gave more directions to control the progress of the lesson when he had discipline control problems. He gave directions to students signal-



ling them to read, stop, continue and speak up. Even though he used direct orders, as shown in turns (3, 5, 7, 10; Extract 3d), there was still a state of undisciplinedness from the teacher's own perspective. It should be noted that, in my experience, many teachers in Syria attempt to achieve a high degree of discipline inside the classroom, reporting that they would like the room to be silent enough so that they hear a single pin drop.

Part of maintaining the state of order in Mr Delta's class had to do with correcting language mistakes the moment they occurred. For example, in extract 4d below, the students were constantly interrupted by the teacher's intrusive feedback. The teacher elaborated and explained any grammatical point like relative clauses in turns 10-18 of Extract 4d. This happened at the end of the lesson. Like other teachers, Mr Delta was unable to work outside the confines of the grammar-translation approach. More examples of his old fashioned teaching methods could be traced in the teacher's statement to students as he kept telling them 're-read the text and ask me if you are not sure about anything' (turn 17, Extract 4d).

In the lesson, the students' utterances remained at the level of one- or two-word response. The students were asked to decide on the comprehension questions (e.g., true or false). When a student answered with 'true' they were not asked to elaborate on their answer, although prompts and cues were noticed frequently in the teacher's discourse. In general, it was rare for students to take the initiative and ask questions. The teacher's questioning and his rigid use of the IRF pattern is further illustrated in the following extract:

Exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	Okay (TAIEB) now look at number two and tell me which the sentences you think are true	Fr	m d p
2	T	the ancient library (YA3NE)	I	s

		i.e. the old library		i
		had a lot of books and manuscripts ( <i>YA3NEE KAAN FEHA MAKHTOTAT</i> )	I	read
3	T	it is true or false^		el
4	Ss	true	R	rep
5	T	okay	F	e
		well not many books anyway we will see in the text if this is true or not Alright now 'the new library is much more than just a library true or false^		El
6	Ss	false	R	rep
7	Ss	true	R	rep
		the new library uses the most up-to-date technology	I	el
8	T	Up-to-date means^		el
9	S	HADEETHEH (new)	R	rep
10	T	Yes, new	F	e
		thanks the newest or the most advanced is this sentence true or false^		Com el
11	T	true	R	rep
		you will find and we will discover this in the text	F	e
12	T	now move to the next one	I	s/d
		There are six different levels in the main library ( <i>HUNALEK FE ELMAKTABAA SETATU 6ABKAAT RA2ESEEE</i> )	I	el
13	T	'main' means in Arabic ( <i>RA2ESEEE</i> )		i
		there are special facilities for people with disabilities	I	el
		'Disable' is the opposite of what^		el
14	S	unable	R	rep
15	T	Close, but not 'unable	F	e/acc
16	S	able	R	i

17	T	Great, this is right	I	el
Now re-read the text and ask me if you are not sure about anything				

(Teacher Delta, Extract 4d, EFS Transcript, pp: 142-143)

In the extract above (4d), Mr Delta did not change much of his teaching patterns over the course of time. He standardly explained the meanings of new words whenever and wherever they appeared. For example, although the word ‘ancient’ in turn 2 had been translated and referred to several times earlier to this extract, the teacher was concerned that his students would be forgetful or they did not grasp the meaning of ‘ancient’. For example, he got irritated (turn 3, 4d) that not all students knew the meaning of the word until one student volunteered to give its meaning.

Another feature of Mr Delta’s class was the continuous transmission of information even while he was reading the text, as he kept pausing to comment on the linguistic as well as the paralinguistic content. The teacher provided morphological input on specific vocabulary items which resulted in more question-answer exchanges.

Overall, the analysis showed that Teacher Delta relied on the strict IRF format, in which the students were expected to play no active part in the 'discussion'. There was little variation in his teaching methods. Lessons were didactically taught and dominated by a combination of teacher-presentation and teacher directed questions and answers with little variation in teaching style. Mr Delta kept working with the whole-class and did not use any pair or group work in which the students were expected to play an active part in the 'discussion'.

## 6.5 Teacher Zeta

Not only was he the youngest of the participating teachers, but Mr Zeta also had the fewest years of teaching experience. He had been teaching for about four years in two different government schools. Before that, he taught in the private sector whilst doing his degree in English Language and Literature. Mr Zeta graduated one year before his participation in my research. Before finishing his 4-year university degree, he was teaching English by virtue of the English Teaching Diploma that he received after two

years of study in the then governmental Institute of Language Teachers. For many years, the local Teacher Institutes were responsible for qualifying students to later become teachers at primary and preparatory levels (MOE, 2010). As noted in section 2.3.1, these institutes ceased to exist in the country in 2002. Nowadays, all English language teachers must hold a university degree as a minimum requirement for the profession.

Mr Zeta taught in a rural school in a nearby village. He used to commute to his school during the weekdays. Recently refurbished, the school covered both the second and the third basic education loops i.e. the preparatory and secondary stages. In fact, Mr Zeta was an old friend of mine and he volunteered to participate in the research when he heard about my plans for classroom observation. He was the only teacher that I knew before doing the research. Mr Zeta did not hold a Diploma in Educational Studies.

Because Mr Zeta and I come from the same town, we arranged to meet for an introductory interview. Before this, Mr Zeta was asked to sign the consent forms and was briefed on the nature of the research and the observation procedure. In the interview, when asked about the new national curriculum, Mr Zeta expressed his appreciation of the ‘impressive steps’ that the Syrian educational authorities had taken to update and develop the ‘educational process in the country’. He described the new curriculum as:

I like the new books much more than the old one and I’ll tell you why my friend. First, it’s staged in accordance with students’ ages and abilities. I mean it comes in a series (chain) and it is different from the previous textbooks which were like isolated small islands, I mean, not connected or not well-tuned to students’ levels. In terms of content, you’ll find modern or let’s say erm contemporary themes like the technology, the internet, mobiles and all these communication things. The previous books were not good in addressing these topics. *(My translation)*

When asked about what makes for more effective teaching, Mr Zeta seemed uncertain about what was meant by ‘effective teaching’. Therefore, I asked him to reflect on his old and recent teaching methods. He commented by saying that:

With the new curriculum, I do a lot of preparation. For example, I now try to sift out the most important bits and parts of the lesson. I sometimes check the vocabulary glossary to see if the English-English explanations of the difficult new vocabulary are suitable for students' levels. You see, with the old books we did not have such a glossary. I also read the transcript section from the Teacher's Book because I want to read it out for them if there is no cassette player. In general, I feel this curriculum is more challenging and interesting for me as a teacher and for students. Added to this, I use good questions that make my students think and speak. (*My translation*)

Mr Zeta believed that language teachers should have a 'strong character' inside the classroom so that the lesson runs smoothly. The extract below summarizes his views on what might make for a better practice:

Well, the good teacher as far as I can see is the one who speaks up clearly, pronounces the English words well and explains any grammatical points that arise during the lesson, simplifies information to students. In short, he should make his students understand everything about the lesson at hand. And yes, the good teacher needs to enable students to know the new vocabulary because they are the most important part. I can liken the English lesson to a building whose pillars are the grammar and the blocks are the vocabulary. The more vocabulary blocks you have the more complete and nice the building that you have. God Willing, I'll use more and more group work.' (*My translation*)

Mr Zeta also said that most of the questions he asked in class were mainly designed to check students' comprehension and 'tailored to suit his students' proficiency of English'. Few people might disagree with the fact that the quality of teaching and learning in rural schools is often considered to be lower than their urban counterparts. Such a quality gap manifests itself in the practices that teachers carry out in their lessons. For example, the use of the mother tongue in English classes in rural schools is a common practice in many EFL contexts (Nunan, 2005). Mr Zeta was asked about his views regarding using Arabic alongside English in his classes. He laughed at this, commenting that he expected me to ask such a question as this was an important issue for him. He said that:

Look my friend, I seriously don't feel ashamed to say that I use Arabic in my classes. Even more, I encourage this way of teaching because it is more efficient and more effective. Let's be open and honest with ourselves, our students aren't that good in English and they only use it [English] to pass exams. Apart from using it for this study-like purpose, no one would ever (or let's say most students) use English for communication purposes. As a result, I think you need to enable your students to master the textbook content. I know that other teachers would consider me retarded or backward but I swear by Allah that about 99 per cent of Syrian English language teachers use a lot of Arabic inside the classroom although they deny this in public. For me, things are clear cut, I would use English most of the time and if possible I try hard to avoid using Arabic. In short, yes I use Arabic inside the classroom, a lot sometimes. (*My translation*)

In response to my question if he had ever received training on the new curriculum since he started to teach it, Mr Zeta said that he had not been invited or asked to do any training about the course. Moreover, he had heard from his colleagues that most of the training was theory-laden and did not cater for the different needs of teachers. Moreover, he thought that teachers could do without these training sessions if they spent a few hours reading the teacher's books. He referred positively to the commercial pamphlets that many teachers began to produce immediately after the arrival of the textbook. According to him, these 'pamphlets' were meant to simplify and explain the main textbooks. Lastly, Mr Zeta thought that 'he was doing fine without the Diploma of Educational Studies'.

Mr Zeta gave a quick description of the way he usually conducted a typical lesson. He said that he often started with a short review of the last lesson followed by a 'scan' of the new vocabulary items, which would be explained through translating them into Arabic. After scanning the new vocabulary, he would give a brief introduction to the lesson referring to the main ideas in it. Then he would read, translate and explain the lesson. In the last part of the lesson, he would ask a few questions to make sure that everybody understood it.

### 6.5.1 Field notes

It was agreed that observing Mr Zeta's classes would start at the beginning of the second week of March 2010. There were 27 students in Mr Zeta's class which was smaller than any other classes previously visited. I was introduced to the students and offered a seat at the back.

Unlike other schools, Mr Zeta's school was a mixed-sex school. In Syria, the vast majority of post-primary schools are unisex. However, Christian, private and/or some rural schools are legally allowed to be mixed-sex (MOE, 2008). Being a rural school, the number of students was lower than in other participating schools, although the newly-built school building can accommodate twice the current number of students.

The first observed lesson dealt with the last part of a module entitled *World of Friends* (see Appendix E). Within this module, the teacher was working on a reading-and-speaking unit whose topic was the different types of house around the world. The writing exercises were largely guided by the teacher as he briefly asked students to write a few sentences describing their own homes, whereas the original question stated, 'In your exercise book, write a paragraph about your home'. Because students found this part as the most difficult part of the whole lesson and failed to come up with even more than few simple sentences, the teacher 'stepped in' and volunteered to write on the whiteboard a sample paragraph for them to copy into their notebooks. They were asked to memorize it for the exam.

In the observed lesson, Arabic occupied around 60 per cent of teacher talk time; giving directions, vocabulary explanation, and disciplinary remarks were all executed in Arabic. Even when the teacher was checking students' understanding, this was done through using Arabic. The students in turn replied in Arabic. They were quite obedient, though the girls were far more proactive and interactive. When asked a question, the boys particularly resorted to several avoidance tactics such as scratching or lowering their heads, shying away, or even murmuring any utterance.

At my second visit, the module that was being taught was 'Sport and Activities', which was divided into reading lessons followed by exercises. The lesson was about a

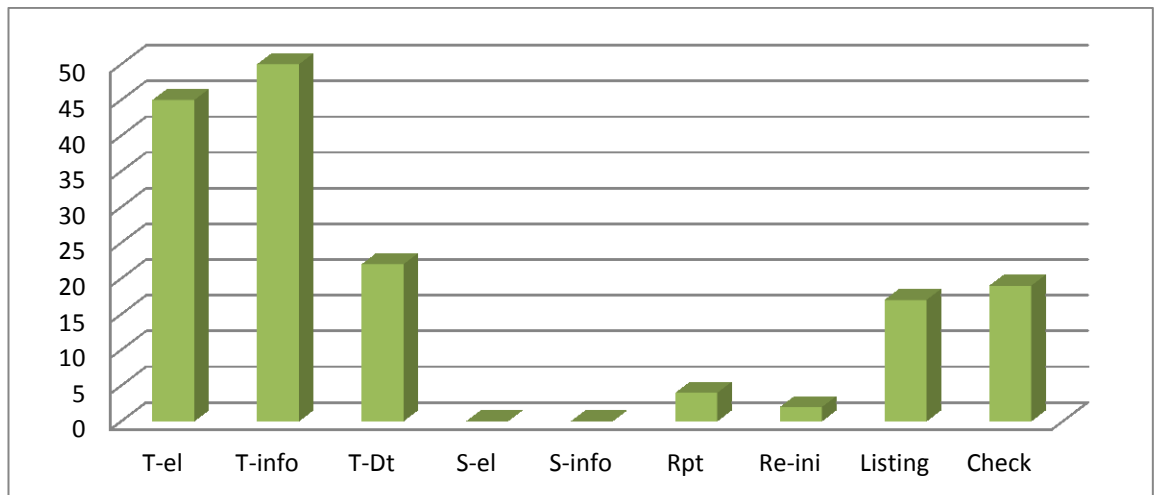
serial story spread over the book (Appendix E). The grammar focus was on the Present Simple Tense and possessive pronouns and possessive adjectives. With hasty warming-up and a brief review of the previous lesson, students were asked to open their books at page 10 and told (in Arabic) to follow him closely while he read, translated and explained the lesson. The students usually had their pencils ready to write down the Arabic meanings of the new words and expressions on the textbook itself. Interaction between the teacher and students only occurred when the teacher checked that the students had got the right translation. Students' output was mostly in Arabic. Even the word 'yes' was chorally uttered in Arabic.

### **6.5.2 Systematic observation**

Systematic observation was carried out in the third lesson at the end of October 2010. For some technical reasons, the teaching events in the first 10 minutes of the lesson were not logged onto the system. However, the findings from systematic observation appeared to be in agreement with what was found in the other teachers' lessons. That is, passing and/or elaborating the information was the most notable pattern of teaching exchanges in the lesson, as shown in Figure 6.21. Apart from reading the text passage in English, Arabic was the prevalent language for passing information and for interaction. Teacher elicitation was the second most salient interaction pattern. This usually occurred as the teacher read from the textbook and made comprehension check questions on the lesson content. Like Mr Alpha, Mr Zeta used to read the text closely, translating almost every single sentence in a practice that would explain why the percentage of teacher information was the highest of all the interaction patterns.



Figure 6.21 Patterning of teacher Zeta's teaching exchanges, 50 = occurrences



Neither student elicitation nor student information moves could be observed in the lesson. One reason for this might be the teacher's domination of the talk time. It might be also argued that students' poor levels of language proficiency limited their possibilities of classroom participation. The teacher's use of directs was relatively high, as he repeatedly steered the students' actions. Checking the students' understanding of the content was a frequently occurring pattern in the teachers' discourse. Mr Zeta's frequent use of Arabic might explain why he did not repeat much of what he was saying. As for the listing, which included (teacher) writing on the blackboard and non-teaching activities, there were few observed examples during the lesson, as shown in the Figure 6.21.

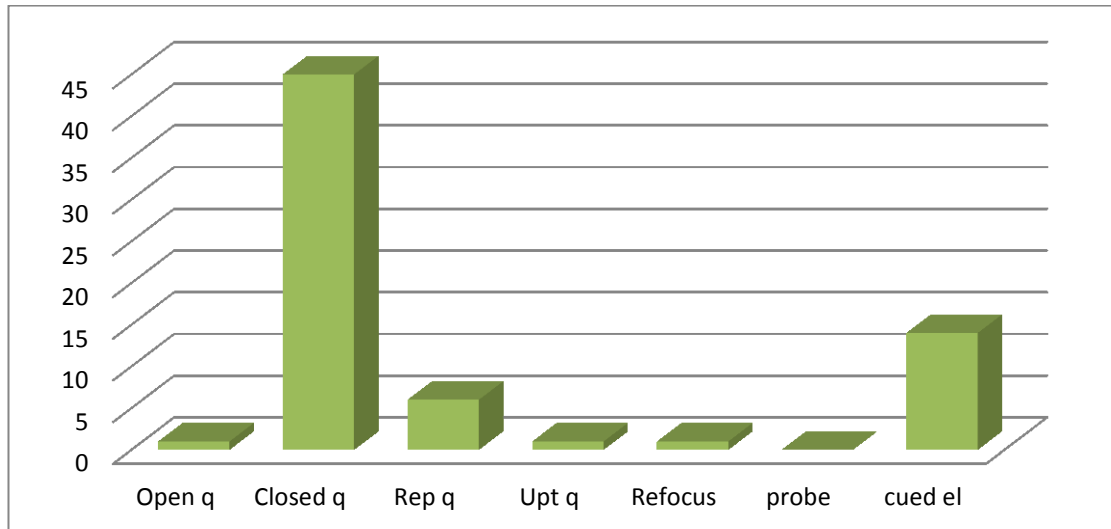
### 6.5.3 Questioning moves

Because of his traditional teaching approach, closed questions were the most pervasive type of question that Mr Zeta used in his lesson as shown in Figure 6.22. The questions were entirely text-based, first in English but immediately followed by the Arabic translation. Repeating questions was relatively less frequent than with the other teachers, since Mr Zeta translated every question explaining the different aspects of it so that students would come up with the exact required answer.

On no occasion did the teacher probe or build on the students' answers, which were very short and in Arabic. Unlike the other teachers, who marked their elicitation by

raising their intonation, Mr Zeta only used this technique a few times, when students failed to guess what it was that he wanted. In this case, he pronounced half of the answer, so that students would complete the rest.

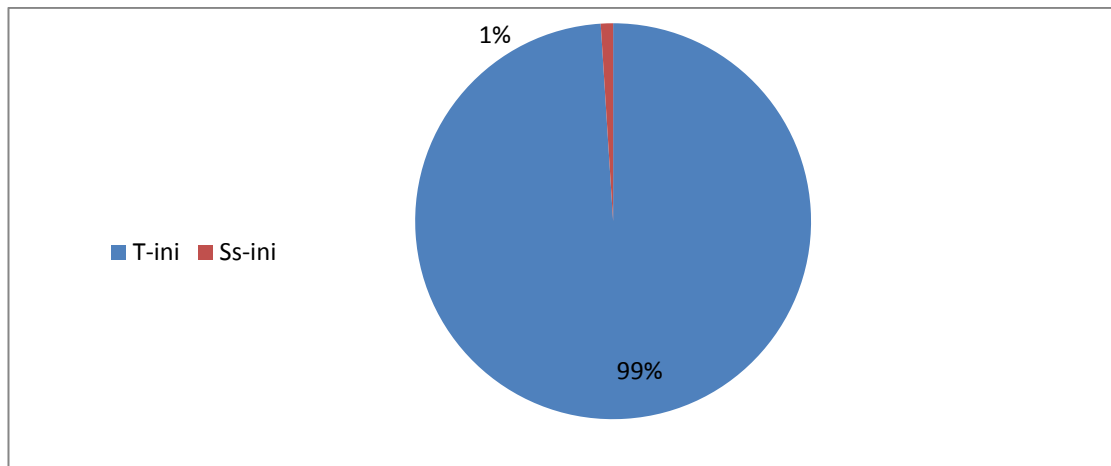
Figure 6.22 Teacher Zeta's question types



#### 6.5.4 Initiation moves

As shown in Figure 6.23, 99 per cent of the initiations were made by the teacher; these occurred in the form of elicitations, explanations, and closed questions. Rarely were students heard in the classroom making initiations except when asked to reproduce the textual content in a very monotonous way. Only one per cent of initiations were made by students. Unlike other teachers, there were no side conversations and other irrelevant initiations; the teacher talk was completely focused on the curriculum content sternly.

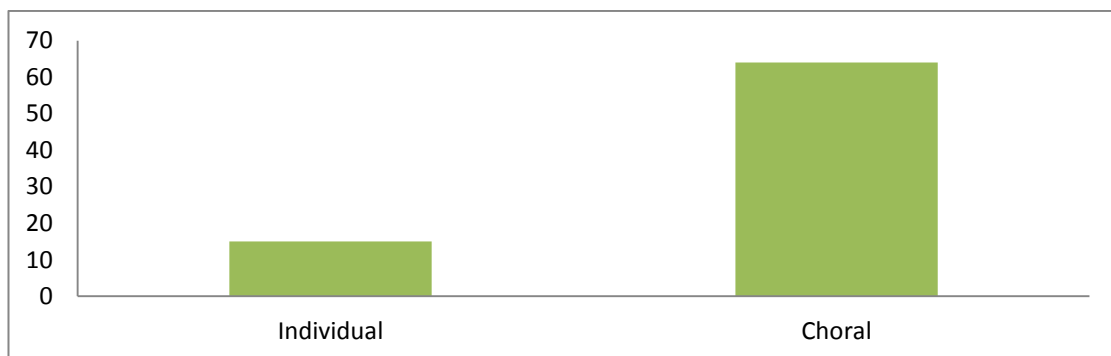
Figure 6.23 Teacher Zeta's initiations (as percentages)



### 6.5.5 Response moves

During the lesson, the teacher maintained a fast teaching pace. This partially explained why choral responses were much more frequent than individual ones, as illustrated in Figure 6.24. Interestingly, girls responded, whether chorally or individually, more than boys. They also showed more enthusiasm and engagement than the boys. As mentioned before, male students tended to keep silent and often pretended that they were following the lesson. Out of the 12 male students only two spoke and only then when nominated by the teacher.

Figure 6.24 Students' responses to teacher Zeta

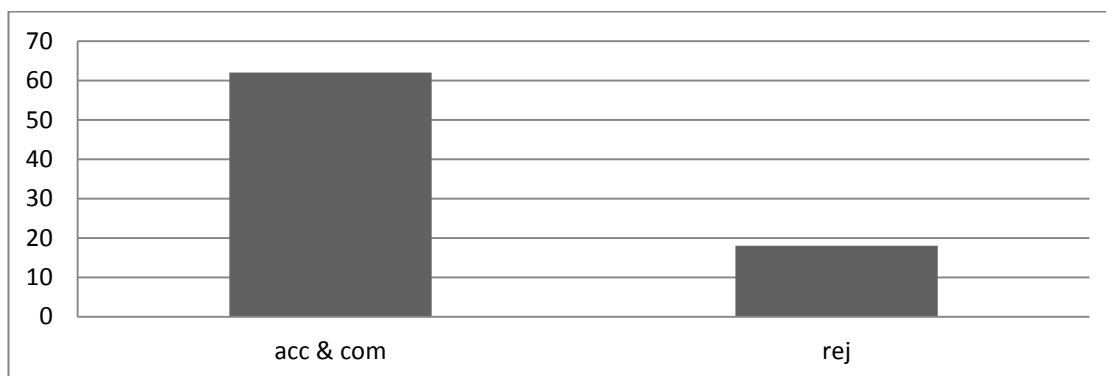


### 6.5.6 Feedback moves

As shown in Figure 6.25, the teacher accepted students' answers by repeating them or by giving approving comments in Arabic. In several examples, when a student

failed to come up with the desired answer, the teacher rejected the answer by saying ‘no’ or *GALA6* (incorrect). He would then turn to another student seeking the required answer, which was mostly a fixed predetermined one.

Figure 6.25 Teacher Zeta’s feedback moves, 10 = occurrences



### 6.5.7 Discourse analysis

As with other teachers, the overall analysis of the patterning of Mr Zeta’s teaching exchanges reveals the following recurrent patterns: recitation and a very high percentage of code-switching between Arabic and English. Throughout his classes, Mr Zeta was seen working with the whole class all the time and there was no pair or group work whatsoever. His teaching was mainly centred on grammar teaching, drilling new vocabulary and directing students to take notes.

Lasting for fifty minutes in length, the lesson under analysis here was taken from the Sport and Activities module whose grammar focus was possessive pronouns and adjectives (see Appendix E). The Present Simple Tense comprised the second syntactic-lexical focus of the lesson. The reading passage was entitled Ahmad and the Hawk and was a serial story of five episodes spread over the whole textbook.

The teacher began his class with a quick warm-up introduction where grammar checking was the main focus. Mr Zeta tried to engage with students by asking them about some morphological and derivational structures of the possessive adjectives and pronouns (e.g. ‘he/his/him’). He then moved on to remind students of what they had covered thus far. This was done completely in Arabic and was followed by inconsistent English translations.

The extract below (1z) reveals the strict IRF patterning by which Mr Zeta guided his class. In this extract, the teacher followed a deductive approach to teaching personal pronouns and possessive adjectives, where he presented the rule and then asked students to apply it to subsequent examples, commenting on student responses. The extract also illustrates the high percentage of teacher informing exchanges in the lesson. The teacher kept talking in Arabic and only used English when referring to the actual words of the pronouns as in ‘his’, ‘her’, and ‘us’. Mr Zeta believed that ‘Arabic use in English language class could be the most efficient and effective strategy’ as manifested in one of his interviews. In his attempt to simplify the linguistic points for students, the teacher drew comparisons between the two systems of grammar, likening English pronouns to those found in Arabic (turns 3-5). Although students did not grasp the grammar, they repeatedly nodded their heads and repeated ‘yes teacher’ as shown in the following:

exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	<i>MARHABA DARSNA ELYOUM BEDNA NEHKE 3AN ELDAMEER EL SHAKHSEEAH MA HEEK</i> (Hello today we have personal pronouns do we not?)	Fr I	m chk
2	Ss	<i>NA3AM ISTAAZ</i> (yes Teacher)	R	rep
3	T	<i>KULNA FENAA NESHTAAK MEN KUL DAMEER SHA7SEE SEFET MULK W DAMEER NASB</i> (We already said that we can make possessive adjectives from personal pronouns)	I	I i
		<i>SEFET EL MULK TUKABEL BEL 3ARABEH KULNA</i> (possessive adjectives is equivalent to Arabic ‘us’)	I	i
		<i>METL EL ISM ELL BA3D AHRUF ELJARR</i> (It is the same as the noun following prepositions)		i
	T	<i>W MN3RBO DAMEER FEE MAHAL JAR BEL IDAFEEH</i> (It has a similar function to a prepositional phrase)		i
		<i>TAYYEB</i> (well)	I	m
		<i>DAMEER EL NASB KULNA SHU BEKABEL</i> (Alright now possessive pronouns)		cu

4	Ss	<i>EL DAMAER</i> (Pronouns)	R	rep
5	T	<i>DAMEER ELNASB</i> (Possessive pronouns)	F	rep
	T	<i>ASHU KULNA BEKABEL BE 3ARABI</i> (What does it equal in Arabic?)	I	el
6	s	<i>MAF3OOL BHE</i> (The object)	R	rep
7	T	<i>AYOUA MAF3OOL BEHEE</i> Yes correct, the object	F	e com
		<i>YA3NEE DAEMAN MAWKE3 DAMEER ELNASB BEL</i> <i>JUMLEEH WEEN BKOON</i> (So we have always possessive pronouns in the sentences)	I	i
		<i>METL ELIDAFEEH BEL 3ARABI</i> (It is like additives in Arabic)		i
		<i>IZAN</i>	I	m
		<i>DAMEER ELNASB YOUKABEL BEL 3ARABI^</i> (So possessive pronouns is similar to object in Arabic^)		el
8	s	<i>MAF3OOL BEHEE</i> (yes, object Teacher)	R	rep
9	T	BRAVO <i>EL MAF3OOL BEHEE</i> (Bravo the object)	F	e com

(Teacher Zeta, Extract 1z, EFS Transcript, pp. 152-153)

In extract 1z, the overwhelming majority of the exchanges were teacher-initiated. The teacher informing and teacher elicit moves accounted for more than 96 per cent of the moves in the observed lesson (see turns 3-7, Extract 1z). The teacher's informing exchanges were designed to elaborate on textual morphological and lexical points. By virtue of this technique, Mr Zeta maintained his interactional and 'semantic' control throughout the lesson. Students' informing exchanges, on the other hand, were completely absent from the lesson. However, not all the exchanges followed the IRF structure. For example, in turns 5 and 7 of extract 2z below, the teacher did not evaluate or

comment on the student's response. Instead, he chose not to provide the right possessive form of the subject pronoun 'he' i.e. 'his'.

Throughout the lesson, Arabic was the language used to negotiate the meaning for both the teacher and the students as shown in Extract 2z. Moreover, the teacher did not allow enough time for students to report back their ideas, as he rapidly took over control of the lesson discourse (turns 12-16, Extract 2z). His authority over the classroom discourse was constantly maintained through the questioning techniques and through the subsequent evaluations of the students' contributions. As a result, there were few opportunities for students to make statements, ask questions or to agree or disagree with the ideas being presented by the teacher, as shown in the following extract:

exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	<i>AMMA DAMEER EL SHAKHSEE WEEN MAWK3O</i> (Whereas personal pronouns, Where do we place them in the sentence)	I	i  el
2	Ss	<i>KABLE ELFE3EL ISTAAZ</i> (Before the verb Teacher)	R	rep
3	T	<i>AYOUA KABLE ELFE3EL</i> <i>AHA</i> (Before the verb)	F	rpt
	T	Bravo		e
	T	<i>TAYYEB</i> EL HE (Okay now What about 'he')	I	m el
	T	<i>SHU SEFET EMULK MENHA W SHO DAMEER EL</i> <i>ELNADB?</i> (What is the possessive adjective of 'he')		rpt el
	T	<i>W RAJAAN BDOON DAJJEH NO NOISE PLEASE</i> (And please without noise)		z
	T	Okay you	I	n

4	S	He	R	rep
5	T	<i>SHU</i> (what <sup>^</sup> )	I	el
6	S	He <i>DAMEER</i> (pronoun of) <i>EL ERR</i>	R	rep
7	T	He <sup>^</sup>	I	el
8	S	<i>HIS SEFAAT ELMULK</i> (‘His’ is possessive adjective)	R	rep
9	T	<i>AYOUA HIS SEFAAT ELMULK</i> (Good) His is possessive adjective	F	e com
	T	<i>W SHU DAMEER EL ELNASB?</i> (And what about the possessive pronoun)	I	el
10	S	Err them...no him	R	rep
11	T	<i>AYOUA</i> Good	F	e
	T	<i>K3ODEE</i> (Sit down)		d
		<i>TAYYEB</i> (ok) they what about ‘they’ <sup>^</sup>	I	m el
	T	You		n
	T	<i>SHU SEFET EL MULK W SHU DAMEER EL NASB</i> (What is the possessive pronoun and possessive adjective)		el el
12	S	This? Them There <sup>^</sup>	R	rep
13	T	<i>SEFET EL MULK</i> (possessive adjective)	Re-i	el
14	S	Their	R	rep
15	T	Yes their <i>W DAMEER EL NASB?</i> (possessive pronoun)	F	el el
16	S	Them <i>AYOUAH</i> (Good)	R F	rep e

(Teacher Zeta, Extract 2z, EFS Transcript, pp. 159-160)



Like Mr Gamma, Mr Zeta strictly followed this sequence: read, explain and translate. Relying totally on the textbook, the teacher read the passages sentence by sentence, commenting on the content and translating it literally to the students. Every single sentence, phrase and word was translated. The teacher believed that students would feel better when taught in this way. The superficial responses that students gave served as indicators of their weakness in the English language (turns 4-8, Extract 2z).

The teacher maintained a high level of classroom discipline throughout, giving rapid questions and directions. He kept talking most of the time, so that students' attention was not diverted anywhere else during the class. In the final exchange, the feedback was evaluative with the word 'bravo' used to encourage and acknowledge (turn 9, Extract 3z). The lengthy explanations of grammar were another pattern in Mr Zeta's teaching style. On several occasions, he repeated the information to confirm it or to reinforce it in students' minds, as shown in the following extract:

exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	<i>HALLAQ MNEFTA AH EL KTAAB EL SAFHAA 12</i> (Now open your books on page 12)		d
2	S	Page 12	I	chk
3	T	yes <i>HOON 6OLLAB 3ENNA KUSSA MUKASMEENA LA 3DET AKSAAM</i> (we (have a story divided on different parts Here, oh students) <i>IZAN ELKUSSAT MUKASEMAH LA 3EDET AKSAAM LA 3EDEET^</i> (So the story comes in several parts several^)	R  I	Rep  i
4	Ss	<i>AKSAAM</i> (parts)	R	rep
5	T	<i>HALLAQ NOW NYHNA RAA7 NEBDAA BEL KESM EL AWAAL</i> (Now we are going to start with the first part of the story) <i>BEL KESEM EL^</i> With part^	I	i  el

6	Ss	<i>EL AWWAL ISTAZ</i> (One Teacher)	R	rep
7	T	<i>ELAWWAL MEN EL KUSSAH</i> Yes (With part one of the story) <i>3ENWAN EL KESSA HWEE</i> (The title of the story is) Ahmad and the Hawk Hawk <i>6AB3AN NOO3 MEN ANWAA3 EL SOKOOR</i> (One kind of hawks) <i>6AER JARE7 MEN ANWAA3^</i>	F   I	e   i  i  el
8	Ss	<i>EL SOKOOR</i> (Hawks)	R	rep
9	T	<i>ELSOKOOR</i> (Hawks) bravo	F	e

(Teacher Zeta, Extract 3z, EFS Transcript, p. 162)

As can be seen from the extract above, the teacher did not vary his teaching style during the class. Rather, he kept working within what might be called his ‘comfort zone’, where using Arabic at the expense of English was a recurring pattern. While Atkinson (1987, p. 244) calls for ‘judicious usage of L1 in the form of translation techniques’, Mr Zeta’s strategy was ‘always use it’.

It can, therefore, be concluded that the IRF pattern dominated Mr Zeta’s teaching practices. However, there were several cases when the teacher did not comment on the student answer/contribution verbally or physically. These cases can be seen integral to Mr Zeta’s teaching approach, in the sense that he focused on imparting text-based information to students. He even skipped the exercises that asked him to get students into groups or pairs. Listening activities were also ignored all together.

Questions were all closed and the teacher controlled the discourse by inviting and evaluating the students’ responses. At no stage in the lesson did students take the initiative to speak or to ask for more elaboration — even students’ requests to check the accuracy of a translation was very rare and only happened once in the whole lesson. In

short, the teacher did not change his teaching style and he rarely granted students opportunities to participate meaningfully in the discourse.

The teacher's lack of teaching experience was reflected in his inability to theorize and vocalize his teaching style and how he developed his views in this respect. His extensive talk time was used as a technique to discipline students, who did not make any genuine contribution to the lesson. Whole-class teaching was the prevailing norm with no pair or group-work during all the classes observed/filmed. The teacher therefore worked within an IR/F framework, through 'lecturing' and through closed factual questions. The teacher still controlled the turn-taking, asked most of the questions and evaluated the students' contributions against her own frame of reference to which the students willingly conceded (see Wells, 1999). In short, Mr Zeta did most of the talk explaining, revising and even checking the correctness of what had been already discussed.

### **6.5.8 Stimulated-recall**

Unlike Mr Beta, Teacher Zeta, in the stimulated-recall interview, thought that he did not talk too much in class. He made the point that students did not help him at all and he had no choice but to keep talking:

You're asking me what I'm doing now! Obviously, Taha, I am always teaching and talking. For instance, By God, did you see how students were indifferent! All they did was 'wait for my explanation'. I swear that I gave them the meanings of these words two lessons before, but what'd you do to a student who only comes to class to show me his height. Not all my students are like this. Oh no. Take for example this girl (*pointing to clips*) and as you could see in the video, she always jumps in to contribute to the lesson. This is the kind of student we'd love to see in the class. You also saw me how I talked to her and praised her response. I constantly encourage my students by using positive words like 'bravo' and 'excellent', the class would be dull if I did not keep talking. Also look at me when I was explaining the possessive pronouns. I revised the grammar and then invited students to answer my questions, but what was the result? They do not know the answer. (*My translation*)

Mr Zeta thus reported that he kept explaining grammar in order to fill up the time for the students to think. Otherwise, the long silences in the classroom would make him feel embarrassed. The teacher at many points in the lesson did not stick to the *EFS* questions, as he held that most of them were beyond his students' language abilities.

## 6.6 Teacher Eta

Teacher Eta had been teaching English for 5 years at two different secondary schools in the Homs area. After graduating with a BA in English Language and Literature, he had to wait for two years before applying to a local 'Governmental Announcement of Teaching Vacancies' (MOE, 2008). The two schools he had taught in were in rural areas. In reality, Teacher Eta worked at the same school as Teacher Zeta. Neither teacher, however, held a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Studies. For the past two years, the teacher had been gaining experience of teaching *EFS*. Because of time pressure, Mr Eta agreed that I could start observing his classes immediately and a telephone interview was scheduled with Mr Eta before the observation. The telephone interview lasted for 25 minutes. It could not be voice-recorded though. However, I took detailed notes of the conversation.

When asked about his views of the new curriculum, Teacher Eta, like the other teachers, thought that this educational innovation was a 'milestone in the process of revolutionizing the teaching and learning process in Syria under the shrewd leadership of the President'. He continued to say that the new *English For Starters* was distinctively different from the old textbooks 'in everything'. He thought that the main difference lay in the fact that the new course book was communicative in nature and more interesting to teach. He thought that *EFS* looked at everyday conversation and was closer to the Syrian contexts. However, he also believed that the communicative goals of the book could not be achieved, because of the low proficiency levels of the Syrian students. He could not, however, recognize or theorize that the new textbook emphasised a shift in English teaching towards more of a student-centred form of learning.

When asked about his teaching style, Mr Eta said that he usually started his classes with some 'ice-breaking activities' like explaining the new words. Then, he would

read the passages commenting and explaining any relevant grammatical points. When probed if he was doing whole-class teaching, small group or pair work, the teacher said ‘honestly, Mr Taha, I sometimes use small group work but not always: you know our time pressures’. He made the point that although he continued his attempts to implement such techniques, students were not ‘co-operative or responsive enough’. In the interview, Teacher Eta talked about his perceptions of how languages should be taught and learnt. For example, he said that he usually avoided using Arabic in his classes:

Well, I usually avoid using Arabic inside the classroom because this is an English period and we are supposed to teach English only, but our students won't benefit from a word we say if we don't translate the English vocabulary into Arabic. Here, I am not blaming our students. On the contrary, we, EFL teachers, are hugely responsible for such deteriorating standards of English teaching. (*My translation*)

Mr Eta, and like the previous five teachers, viewed the good teacher as one who would simplify grammatical rules and who would enable his/her students to get high marks in their exams. In terms of pedagogy, he thought:

Well, I think, and perhaps I might be wrong in this, I think that erm good teaching means that the teacher should make sure that no student leaves the class without understanding the lesson very well. All new words need to be explained so that students can read and understand the new language easily. Grammar is also important and teachers have to make it their job to simplify the grammar points for the students' minds. For example, I usually teach or remind my students of grammatical rules almost every class. I do this for two purposes; the first is that students will be required to work on grammar exercises in the exam; the second is that grammar goes with students for ever because I think it is the main pillar for any language. (*My translation*)

For Mr Eta, ‘effective’ teaching equalled the ‘techniques’ that would enable students to memorize linguistic structures and to retain as much vocabulary as possible. He thought that would make his class pedagogically better. When I asked about the types of question that he would be using to achieve this, he replied that:

I ask many questions to check that the students understand points. If they do not understand me, then I am ready to explain it again till the morning of the next day. Erm, I also ask questions that motivate students' thinking, like 'why do we use the present simple in this sentence for example'. My questions build on the questions that are in the textbooks. (*My translation*)

Finally in his comment on the training that he received on the new curriculum, Mr Eta said that he was listed or nominated by the Headmaster for the next training round which would take place in Hama City Training Centre in a few months. Other than this, he had not attended or received any briefing or training on the new textbook.

### **6.6.1 Field notes**

Due to time pressures in Mr Eta's timetable, we agreed to start classroom observations immediately after the interview. After gaining students' verbal consent, observation began in the same week that I started observing Mr Zeta, namely the second week of March 2010. Mr Eta told me that he had been observed before. Therefore, he was confident of his teaching method and would not worry if we started video-recording straight away. However, despite his enthusiasm, I preferred to limit my classroom observations to three sessions, one for field notes, the second for systematic observation and the last for video-recording.

Like Mr Zeta's class, the class was not large, with only 25 students: 14 girls and 11 boys. The teacher reported that there were some absences and this was not uncommon in the school. As in Mr Zeta's class, girl students sat in separate desk rows. The classroom itself was big, so the teacher moved his table and chair closer to students' desks where he spent most of time standing and teaching. Sitting at the back of the classroom, I began to take notes of Mr Eta's teaching methods.

In the first observed lesson, the teacher began by asking students to open their books at a certain page, reminding them of the new vocabulary in the passage. After that, the teacher asked them to go through the reading passage silently for a few minutes, urging them to underline 'any new words or difficult phrases'. During this time, he listed on the white-board the new idioms and expressions so that he could later elaborate on

them while reading the text. Then, Mr Eta began to read from the textbook, stopping every few minutes to check that students were following him and that they understood the meaning of the English words and expressions. Students' responses always involved the same phrase; 'yes teacher'.

After reading the lesson, the teacher began to do comprehension check questions, which were found at the end of the reading text. Throughout the lesson, the girls showed more presence than the boys. For example, when the teacher invited students to read out the passages, girls volunteered to do this, while the boys were hesitant and did not show any drive to participate in the lesson activities.

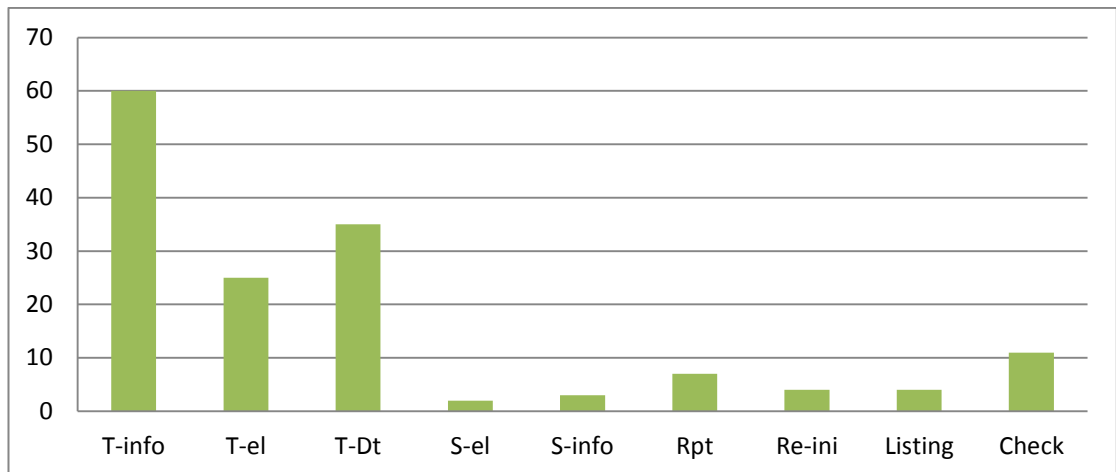
It needs to be mentioned that the teacher worked with students on the vocabulary and grammatical points (comparative or superlative form of adjectives) skipping the listening parts, in a way that was similar to the practice of the other observed teachers. The lesson was tightly teacher-controlled, in that all turns were determined and controlled by Mr Eta. During the lesson, the teacher used Arabic repeatedly. Grammar was written in English but was simplified and explained to students in Arabic. Students were not found to speak English for any communication purposes.

### **6.6.2 Systematic observation**

The quantification and distribution of Teacher Eta's teaching exchanges revealed that most of his interaction was teacher-dominated. As with the other observed teachers, Mr Eta controlled the presentation of information as well as the prescription of tasks. As shown in Figure 6.26, the most prominent pattern was teacher 'informing' moves, in the form of frequent explanations and/or imparting grammatical and linguistic knowledge. The Figure also illustrates how infrequent the students' input was, as they made just one initiation and one information move during the whole lesson.

So, teacher 'directs' and teacher 'elicitations' were the established and prevailing norm with a few cases of checking student understanding. The teacher did not repeat much of what he was teaching. This was presumably because students kept passively nodding their heads and chorally saying 'yes Teacher'. The teacher's strict focus on grammar reduced the quality and quantity of interaction.

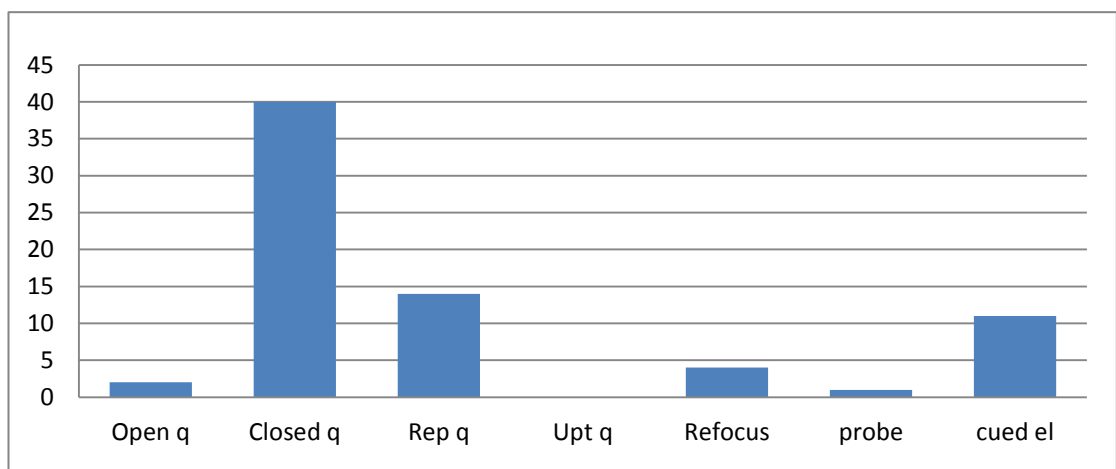
Figure 6.26 Distribution & patterning of teacher Eta's teaching exchanges



### 6.6.3 Questioning moves

Teacher Eta overwhelmingly used closed questions during his talk time, as shown in Figure 6.27. The questions were used to ask students whether they understood the Arabic translation of the new words, i.e. translation check questions. Closed questions were also used to check students' understanding of each paragraph of the lesson. There were only two examples of using semi-open questions. Using the technique of raising his intonation to cue students to the required answer was another technique that the teacher adopted. Like Mr Zeta, Mr Eta did not repeat many of his questions. There were no uptake or probe questions.

Figure 6.27 Teacher Beta's question types

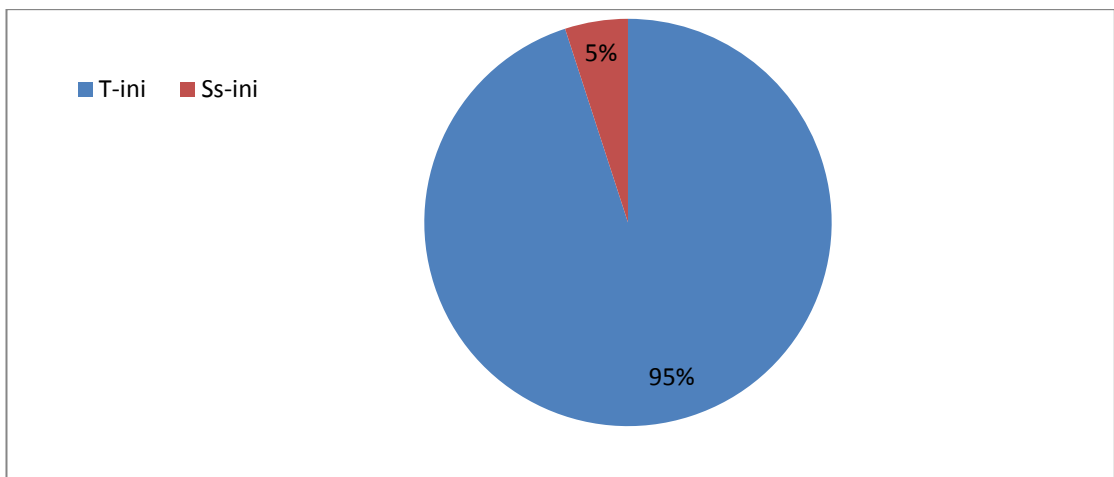




### 6.6.4 Initiation moves

Like the previous five teachers, Mr Eta used the whole-classroom talk. There were no attempts at pair or group discussion and students were not encouraged to contribute their own ideas at any point. Figure 6.28 shows that students only contributed five per cent to the overall initiations in the lesson and even these were not designed to ask genuine questions. Rather, students asked the teacher to check their next homework or to complain about their friends' behaviour. Students also asked the teacher about the importance of some exercises in the exam.

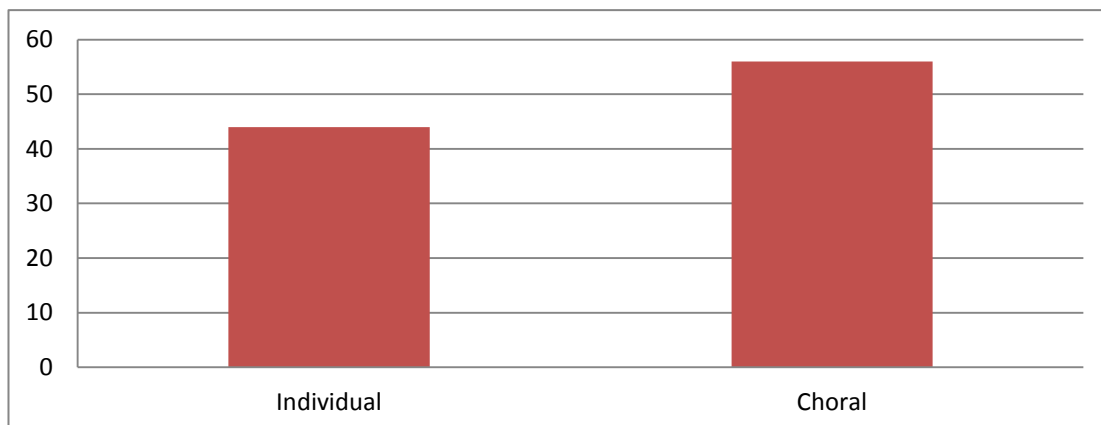
Figure 6.28 Teacher Eta's initiation move types (as percentages)



### 6.6.5 Response moves

During the lesson, the teacher kept up a fast pace of interaction with students. This partially explains why choral responses were relatively more frequent than individual ones as shown in Figure 6.29. Male students tended to keep silent or pretend that they were following the lesson; out of the 12 male students, only two participated in the lesson activities. The girls, however, showed more enthusiasm, participation and engagement.

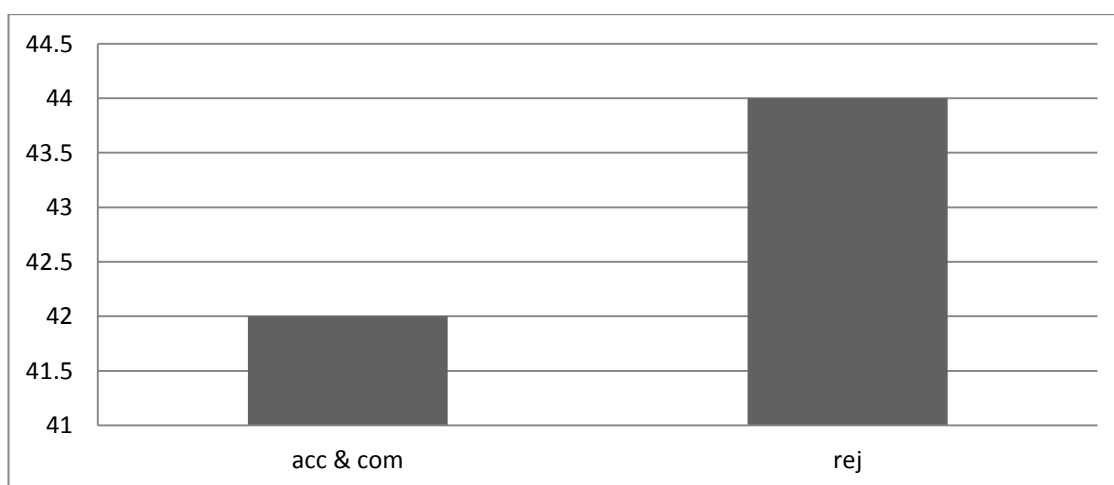
Figure 6.29 Students' responses to Teacher's Eta's questions



### 6.6.6 Feedback moves

Unlike the other teachers, Mr Eta used fewer acknowledgement moves. He gave more 'reject' than 'accept' utterances. Figure 6.30 shows that the reject move (rej) is noticeably more frequent than 'accepting' (acc). From the notes taken alongside the ODCS observation, the teacher never accepted answers that were out of his frame of reference or 'pedagogic agenda'. In several examples, the teacher rejected the answer simply by saying 'no' or *MO SAHEE7* (the Arabic for 'incorrect').

Figure 6.30 Teacher Eta's feedback moves



### 6.6.7 Discourse analysis

Although the focus of Mr Eta’s lessons differed in terms of the content, the patterning of teaching exchanges across them did not suggest any major variations. That is, the teacher in his interactions kept using the IRF structure, which made up the majority of teaching exchanges while working with the whole class. Like Mr Zeta, the teacher in this lesson dominated the talk through using teacher elicits and teacher informing, as shown in the following extracts.

The extracts were taken from Mr Eta’s third observed lesson in March 2010 from a module entitled Adventure (see Appendix E). The module was composed of two reading passages, a skills focus for speaking and listening and a communication workshop. The lesson observed dealt with the journey of the British explorers Captain Scott and his colleagues to Antarctica. The teacher started the lesson by advising his students to open the books at page 12 in order to ‘read and translate the new words in the lesson’. There were no ice-breakers or warm-up activities apart from a brief two-minute introduction announcing that this unit was about adventure.

The first twenty minutes of the lesson time focused on the new lexical items in the text. For example, students were required to put the key words into full sentences after choosing the correct verb as in ‘explore/ a polar region’ (See appendix E). Amongst other activities, there was a task that required students to work in pairs and to talk about their dreams. However, the teacher skipped this task. He continued to explain the meanings of eight new easy words as shown in Extract 1e below:

Exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	<i>MARHABA</i> (Hi)	Fr	m
2	T	<i>BAS EFTAHONA KUTBLKUUN LANNO HADA AWWAL YOUM MNJEEB ELKETAB ELMULAONEN</i> (Please open your books)		d
3	T	Open your books on page 12 Or page eleven... page eleven		d

4	T	Ok our first unit is adventure		m
5	T	You know the meaning of adventure^ Who wants to say the meaning of adventure^	I	el el
	T	Try to tell me something in English because we have someone a visitor here we have a guest		s
6	T	So try to speak in English (though we do not speak always in English)		d
7	Ss	(laughter)		z
8	T	We... we often speak in Arabic		z
	T	Ok This is our first unit 'adventure'		m i
9	T	I want you to give me the meaning of this word		
10	T	Try to focus Try to look at err at these pictures in the first unit and it will help you		d
11	T	Who can tell me the meaning of this word The word adventure	I	el s
12	T	You do not know? You...what's the meaning of the word adventure?		s el
13	S	<i>MUGAMARAA</i> (adventure)	R	rep
14	T	Adventure^	I	el
15	T	Something unusual		com
16	S	<i>EKTESHAAF</i> (suggestion)	R	rep
17	T	Yes To do something unusual for you like you go to a mountain	F	e com
18		If you are going to go to a mountain		s
19		To go trekking in a on a mountain This is an adventure If you want to climb a mountain		s i

20	S	<i>TUGAMEER</i> (to explore)	I	i
21	T	Aha or jump from a high place like a pun jumping	I	i

(Teacher Eta, Extract 1e, EFS Transcript, pp: 175-176)

Extract 1e is representative of Teacher Eta's use of the IRF structure particularly in the opening stages of the lesson. It shows that the students' responses to the teacher's long questioning sequences were limited to one or two words. However, they were all in Arabic (e.g. turns 13 and 20 of Extract 1e). The teacher in turn 21 started to show signs of frustration over students' failure to come up with the meanings of what he viewed as 'simple and easy' vocabulary. He acknowledged the students' answers by showing approval, using the word 'aha' where he was content with an answer, as he wanted students to give it in English.

Negotiating the meaning seemed a challenging job for Mr Eta, as the next extract reveals. He was trying to make students work out the meaning of the phrase 'deserted island' and its connection with other phrases in exercise 2 (See Appendix E). It took him about 10 minutes to explain the meaning of the phrase 'deserted island'. After turn 5 in Extract 2e, he quickly switched back to using Arabic. Students seemed to a large extent unable to communicate with the teacher on this task. They just repeated the answers chorally. This occurred several times during the class, as can be seen in turns 7, 8, 13 and 14 of the following extract:

Exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>		<i>YALLA</i> (come on)	I	m
1	T	For example		s
2	T	Explore		i
		I say explore a desert		i
3		I say explore a desert or		rep
4		Explore a desert island^		el
5	S	<i>YAKTASHEF JAZEERA</i> (Explore a desert island)	R	rep
6	T	Who knows what the meaning of 'a desert island' is?	I	el

7	S	<i>JAZEERA</i> (desert)	R	rep
8	Ss	<i>JAZEERA</i> (desert)	R	rep
9	T	Yes	F	e/acc
10	T	Island is ' <i>JAZEERA</i> '		com
		Desert you know is ' <i>SA7RAA</i> '^ (desert)		el
11	S	<i>SA7RAA</i> (desert)	R	rep
12	T	But when I say a desert island what the meaning becomes^	I	el
13	S	<i>JAZEERA SAHRAWEA</i>	R	rep
14	Ss	<i>SAHRAA W JAZEERA</i> (deserted)	R	rep
15	T	No	F	e
16	S	<i>JAZEERA SAHRAWEA</i>	R	rep
17	T	Nod head	F	e
18	S	<i>JAZEERA MALEEA</i> (full of) <i>ELSAHRAA</i>	R	rep
19	T	No	F	e
20		Island or <i>JAZEERA</i> sorry		com
		Desert is somewhere unknown		i
21	S	<i>MAHJOORA</i> (deserted)	R	rep
22	S	<i>JAZEERA MAHJOURA</i> (uninhabited desert. Somewhere unknown)	R	rep
23	T	Yes... yes	F	e
		<i>JAZEERA MAHJOURA</i> (deserted)		com
24	S	<i>MANFEAA</i> (remote and empty)	R	rep
25	T	<i>JAZEERA MAHJOOURA SAWAAN</i> This is	I	i
		Island is or desert island is <i>JAZEERA MAHJOOURA</i>		i
26	T	Ok	I	m
		If I say explore a desert island		el
	S	<i>JAZEERA MAHJOURA</i> (desert island)	R	rep
27	T	Yes,	F	e
		but what is the meaning of explore here?		el
28	S	<i>MAHJOOURA</i> (deserted)	R	rep

29	T	Explore^ It is it a verb	i	el
30	S	<i>FE3EL</i> (verb)	R	rep
31	T	Yeah Explore a desert island^	F I	e el
32		What I do there?		s
33	T	If I go to a desert island what I do there^^		el
34	S	<i>YAKTASHEF JAZEERA</i> (explore a island)	R	rep
35	T	If I go to visit a desert island what I find there	I	el
36		Or explore that island What I do there?		s el
37	T	<i>SHU MA3NATAAHA</i> (What does this mean) <i>IZA ANA BROO7 3A JAZEERA</i> <i>MAHJOOURA</i> (If I go to a deserted island)		rep el
38	T	<i>SHU BKOON ANA 3AM ASHTEGEL</i> (Then what will be I doing there)		z el
39	S	<i>YAJED OR YAZOOR</i> (visit)	R	rep
40	T	<i>YA3NEE</i> (in other words) it is an adventure and explore	I	i
41	S	<i>IKTISHAAF</i> (exploration)	R	rep
42	T	<i>FA IZAN</i> (so) explore this is a verb <i>IZAN</i> (then) explore^	F	e el
43	S	<i>IKTISHAAF</i> (exploration)	R	rep
44	T	<i>YAKTASHEF</i> (explore) <i>IZAN</i> (thus) explore desert island ‘ <i>YAKTESHEF</i> ’	I	s el

(Teacher Eta, Extract 2e, EFS Transcript, pp: 178-179)

The IRF pattern is clearly illustrated in the above extract where the teacher was not happy because his students failed to get the right translation of the phrase ‘explore a desert island’. Students’ wrong answers were often immediately rejected by the teacher, as in turns 15 and 19 of Extract 2e.

Throughout the lesson, Mr Eta did not change his questioning techniques. He used short closed clarification questions, as in ‘what I do there?’ ‘What does it mean?’ Such questions were used by the teacher in his search for a specific Arabic translation, where the meaning of ‘desert’ did not mean ‘a dry lifeless place’. Rather, he wanted the students to work out that ‘desert island’ means an inhabited island. However, students kept telling him that ‘desert island’ means a dry, sandy island. Students could not figure out how to link the phrase ‘desert island’ with the verb ‘explore’. After this, the teacher began to discuss the accuracy of the translation of the verb ‘explore’ and its derivatives (turns 25-30, Extract 2e). Much of the time spent on this little exercise could have been saved if the teacher had initially provided the Arabic translation of ‘deserted island’. In his interview and as shown in 6.6.1, Mr Eta did say that he usually avoided using Arabic in the class. However, in this case avoiding using Arabic resulted in a catastrophic loss of time.

As with Mr Zeta and Mr Delta, the interaction pattern of Mr Eta revolved around the IRF structure. However, in many cases, he refrained from commenting on the students’ answers by keeping silent or nodding his head. This occurred in turns 21-23 in extract 2e and in turn 21 in extract 3e, as he attempted to probe the meaning of ‘go canoeing’ because he was still unsatisfied with the Arabic translation that the students had provided. He re-directed the question to students asking ‘and when I say, I go canoeing what is the meaning then’. Because Mr Eta was keen to get an accurate translation for this expression, different students’ responses were rejected. The students’ responses were very short, consisting of just one or two words and all in Arabic. This was an indicator of the low level of the students’ proficiency in English. That might explain why the teacher kept using the informing exchanges-another noticeable feature as illustrated in this extract:

Exchange			moves	acts
<b>Teaching</b>				
1	T	<i>TAYYEB</i>	I	m
		<i>NEHNA 3AM NEKRAA FE3EL MA3 TASNEEFAT</i>		rep
		<i>MA3OO</i>		
		(So we are reading the verb with its classifications or asso-		i



		ciations)		
2		<i>ASBAAH SHWWO 3AM A3MEL</i> (So what will I be doing?)		el
3	T	3AM A3MEL TASNEEF (I am classifying)	R	rep
		<i>LANNO HEEK FE3EL BEJEE HEEK FE3EL W I</i> <i>AMTHALAA</i> (Because with such a verb, we have such words to come with it)		com
4	T	<i>YA3NEE 3AM NAAAKHUUTH KIAAS NAMOOTHAJ</i> (In other words, we are making standards and checking against them)		i
5	S	<i>W AMTHAL</i> (And similar things)	I	rep
6	T	<i>BESEER NAMOTHAJ METLO W MA3OO</i> (It can be with the example)	I	i
7		Okay Sari read the verb go		d
8	S	Canoe, go	I	read
9	T	Go canoeing Do you know what is the meaning of canoeing	I	i el
10		Look here at picture This is a canoe		d i
11	T	Look at the picture This is called gold canoe		d i
12	T	Canoe^	I	el
13	Ss	<i>KAREB</i> (Boat)	R	rep
14	T	Yes <i>KAREB</i> (Yes, a boat)	F	e
15	T	<i>BAS HALLAQ EZA ANA FATEHET EL KAMOUS MA RA7</i> <i>YAETLAA3 MA3EE SHU MA3NAA CANOE ELLA B</i> <i>EKOLLAK KAREB RAFEE3 AW 6AWEEEL RAFEE3</i> (Be aware that if you open the dictionary you won't find the meaning of canoe. It only says it is a small boat)		s s

		<i>YA3NEE BE MA3NAA AAKHAR</i>		i
		(I mean that)		i
16	T	<i>LASIS KUL ELKALMAAT EL ENGLISZEIA LAHA MUKABEL HARFEE BEL 3ARABI</i>		i
		(Not every word in English can be matched with a word in Arabic)		
17	T	<i>YA3NEE MA RA7 EKDAAR ATRJEMLKOON EAAHA</i>		z
		(I cannot translate it literally for you)		
18	T	<i>BAS HADA HWE ELKAREB EHFATHOO BEL SHAKEL</i>		i
		(This is the closest meaning to it)		
19	T	<i>KUL MA KULNA CANOE</i>	I	el
		(Whenever we say 'canoe')		
20	S	<i>MA3NAHA HADA EL KAREB</i>	R	rep
		(It means 'boat')		
21	T	<i>AYOUHA TZAKAR HADA EL KAREB</i>	F	e
		(Yeah Remember this 'boat')		com
		<i>W EZA KULT GO CANOING SHU BESEER W SHUU I MNETENTEJ MA3NAHAA MA3NAHA</i>	I	s
		(And when I say, 'I go canoeing' what is the meaning then)		el
22	S	<i>YA3NEE YAZHAB BEL KAREB</i>	R	rep
		(It means 'go by boat')		
23	S	<i>YAZHAAB L ROKOOB EL KAREB</i>	R	rep
		(Go to sail on boat)		
24	T	<i>BAS MA MNKOOL YAZHAAB</i>	F	e
		(No we do not say go)		rej
25	T	<i>YA3NEE BESEER HOON SAIL</i>		i
		(It becomes like 'sail')		
26	S	YOUBHER	R	rep
		(Sail)		
27	T	Yes, OUBHEER BELKAREEB	F	e
		(Sail by boat)		
28		IZAN (so)	I	m

		go canoeing		el
29	S	<i>OUBHER</i> (Sail)	R	rep
30	T	Go diving	I	el
31	S	<i>ELA AL GHATES</i> (Diving)	R	rep
32	T	Yes next	I	el
33	S	Go Para... Para	I	read

(Teacher Eta, Extract 3e, EFS Transcript, p. 181)

The questions that the teacher used during the class were all text-based and were comprehension-check questions. They were also closed and teacher-controlled. Students' participation or voice was only heard when they were invited by the teacher to give a 'yes-no' response. No pair or group work was observed during the entire lesson. It seemed that in many cases there were lapses of communication between the teacher and the students.

Throughout the entire lesson, Mr Eta controlled the interactions through his elicitations, questioning and evaluation of the students' contributions, so that there is no real interchange of ideas beyond the teacher's frame of reference. The teacher insisted on working within the grammar-translation framework as he urged students to guess what morphological category the word 'scientific' falls into, namely adjective, noun or verb. He kept giving directions to students using various techniques to navigate their thinking towards a pre-defined destination. This can be seen from the overuse of phrases such as 'try to speak English, try to focus, try to tell me something in English' as illustrated in extracts 1e and 3e.

Throughout his lessons and even in the brief encounters that the teacher had with the students, the framework of interaction was that of recitation and passing information. Students did not ask for information clarifications and were passively responding only to teacher's verbal elicitation. At no point in the lesson was there a student question challenging the teacher's interpretation of the text.

# **C** **HAPTER** **Seven**

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## **Discussion & Findings**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The present chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the empirical results of the study. It also brings together the findings from the interviews, the classroom observations, the questionnaire and the discourse analysis in order to answer the research questions. The first part of this chapter will discuss the overall findings from the classroom observation by aggregating the teaching exchanges of the individual teachers. In presenting this, the same organizational structure adopted for each individual teacher will be followed. The second part of the chapter will focus on the discourse analysis of the whole cohort of teachers who took part in the study. Based on the discourse analysis framework adopted for this study, the patterns of the teaching exchanges and the general trends in the classroom discourse will be identified and discussed. Throughout the chapter, findings from the questionnaire and interviews will be cross-validated with the classroom observations.

## 7.2 Study focus and purpose

The study set out to explore the pedagogical practices of a group of Syrian EFL secondary school teachers by examining the patterns of classroom interaction and discourse in an attempt to provide insights into how teachers can be helped to improve their pedagogical practices through in-service education and training. Teacher-student interactional exchanges were, therefore, analysed to see whether there was any variation in teaching approaches across the whole sample. In addition to the interactional and discourse practices operating in these classrooms and the effects on students' expression and cognition, teacher perceptions of the impact of the new curriculum on classroom practices were explored. The study aimed to address the following research questions:

- 1) What interactive and discourse practices do Syrian secondary level EFL teachers currently use in their whole class teaching?
- 2) To what extent do teachers feel equipped to implement interactive approaches in the classroom as advised by the Syrian MOE and the guidelines of the newly adopted national curriculum?
- 3) What can be done to address the training needs of Syrian secondary level EFL teachers in order to promote a wider repertoire of interactive and discourse practices in whole class teaching?

The next sections will discuss the findings from the empirical chapters. These findings will be set within the wider context of research evidence.

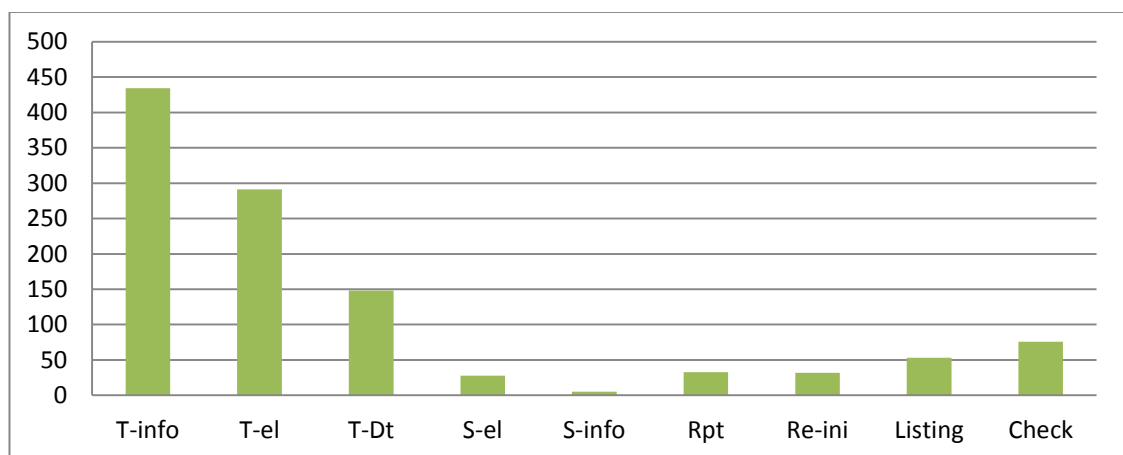
## 7.3 Systematic observation & questionnaire

As illustrated in Figure 7.1 below, the overall patterning of the teaching exchanges did not vary much across the six teachers. Teacher explanation, question-and-answer and cued elicitations dominated the classroom discourse (see sections 6.1.2, 6.2.7, 6.6.3 and 6.3.2). However, some differences were noted between the urban and rural teachers: the latter were more likely to rely on the dictating of notes, providing even fewer opportunities for the students to participate in the classroom talk. Across the whole sample, students contributed less than six per cent of the teaching exchanges.

Moreover, the quality of this contribution was very low both cognitively and linguistically as it usually took the form of checking a translation or repeating the teachers' utterances.

Although there were slight differences in the teaching practices of the participants (e.g., Teachers Gamma and Beta), the overall picture largely matched the individual practices. That is, the domination of elicitation and information giving turned the atmosphere inside the classroom into a mono-voiced medium. This also led to the absence of a meaningful and constructive reciprocal process between teachers and students, students and students. Across the whole sample, students rarely made initiations in the form of questions to teachers. Their participation was limited to answering teacher-directed questions, requesting permission or checking a missing word or sentence (see Figure 7.1). This finding supports Cazden's (1988) view that a rigid pattern of interaction reduces students to passive learners and kills any possible input from them.

Figure 7.1 Overall patterning of teaching exchanges, 500 = occurrences



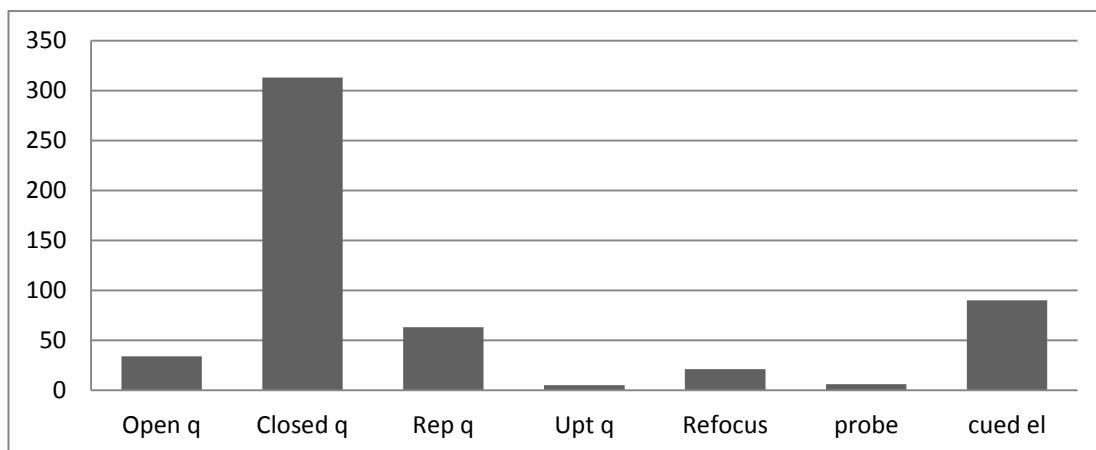
In short, the results show that all participants worked closely within the IRF sequence across the study sample. As a result, there was little variation in teaching approaches and an overwhelming predominance of teacher-directed question-and-answer and teacher-presentation sequences, as reflected in the high level of teacher eliciting and informing exchanges.

## 7.4 Questioning moves

When aggregated, the overall results of the teachers' questions confirmed what had been found for each individual teacher (see Figure 7.2). That is, the prevalence of class dictation and recitation. Teacher questions were largely text-based, short-and-quick, and comprehension-checking in orientation. Because of the strict IRF patterning, the overwhelming majority of teachers' questions were closed, and just one possible answer was usually pursued. This finding supports Ellis's (2005) argument that 'checking comprehension' is usually executed through low-cognitive questioning techniques. In addition to giving direct questions, the teachers frequently cued elicitation through raising their intonation at the end of statements. As a result, choral responses were noticeably common in classes, especially in those of Mr Zeta and Mr Eta (sections 6.5.4 and 6.6.4).

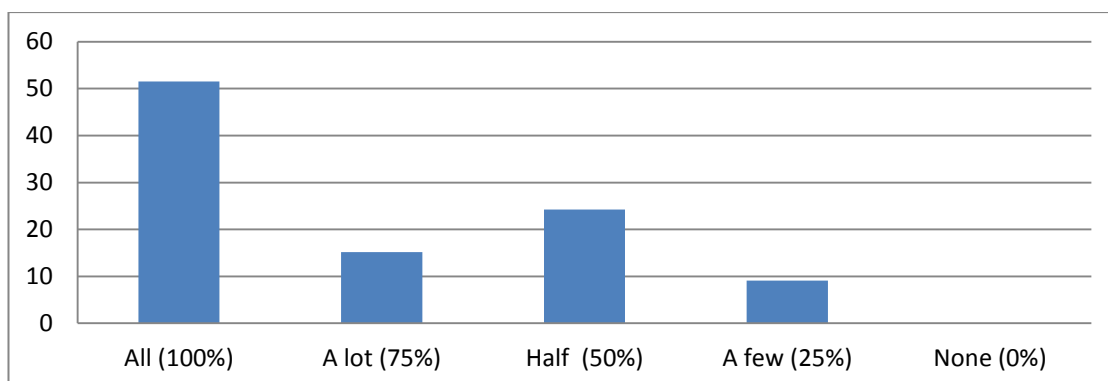
The relationship between questioning behaviour and the general teaching pattern is very evident in the literature. For example, Cazden (1988) argues that strict IRF discourse leaves little room for students to negotiate teacher explanations and premises. The data inputted to the ODCS support this view, showing that students rarely took the initiative to ask questions unless given permission and time/space by the teacher (see sections 6.2.2, 6.3.2 and 6.4.2). Cazden suggests that students can be freed up from this problem by directing questions to their peers and colleagues. She recommends that teachers move away from the recitation mode in favour of discussion. In terms of teaching strategies, this can be achieved by injecting authentic questions that can generate genuine conversation distinct from the 'pastoral' role in teaching practice. The systematic observation findings support what was found in the questionnaire, where the majority of the teachers confirmed that the principal purpose behind their classroom questions was to check students' overall comprehension and progress (see section 5.7).

Figure 7.2 Question types for participating teachers, aggregated



In the questionnaire, the majority of responses showed that teachers usually asked closed display questions whose answers were limited and already known, as shown in Figure 7.11 below (see sections 5.5 and 5.7).

Figure 7.11 How many questions do you know the answer to?



## 7.5 Initiation moves

The aggregation of the data in the ODCS analysis shows that teacher initiation moves overwhelmingly dominated in classrooms. As illustrated in Figure 7.4, the accumulation of initiations reflects the individual profiles of the teachers. In percentage terms, 94 per cent of the initiations were made by teachers. The teacher initiations



usually consisted of closed questions, comprehension checks, translation checks, elicitation, and progression checks. For example, teachers Beta and Gamma tended to phrase their questions in yes/no-structure as in ‘have you got the meaning of this?’ or ‘did you finish copying the meaning of the words?’ The teachers mainly asked text-based questions with low cognitive impact (sections 6.2.3, 6.3.3, and 6.4.7). Besides closed questions, some teachers used commands and information requests to get their students speaking. An example of this is the use of imperative ‘Name the reasons for moving from Bloom house into Langer house’ as found in Mr Delta’s class (see section 6.4.7). As discussed above, students only contributed to six per cent to the overall initiatives. Their responses did not even last for more than a few seconds and comprised a few words. Besides, the quality of student response was quite low, as they only re-produced the information given in the class. Therefore, little emphasis was placed on ‘communicativeness’ in the classes observed (see Figure 5.9, reprinted below). Similar results were found in the questionnaire, as teachers placed the blame of the ‘non-communicativeness’ inside classes on students’ poor language proficiency (see Ellis et al., 2001).

Figure 7.3 ODCS, Initiation moves, aggregated

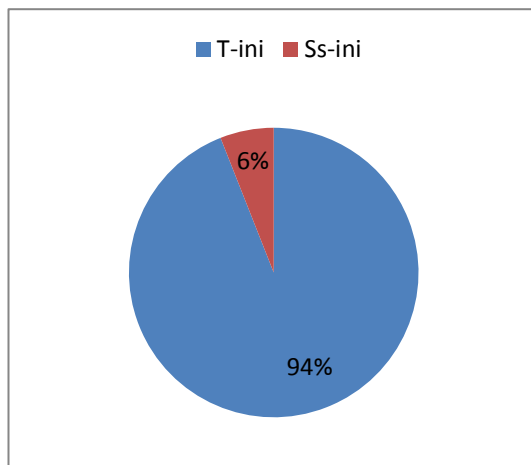
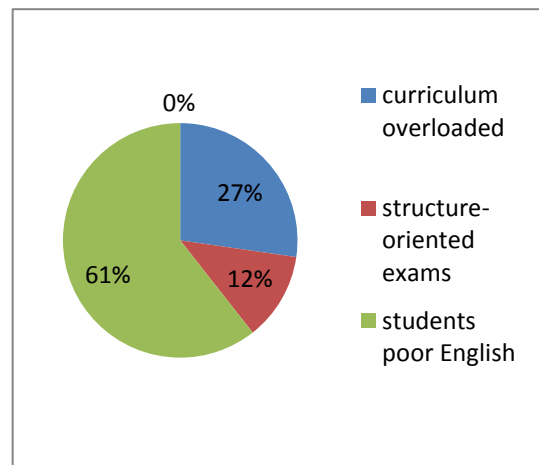


Figure 5.9 Q10: It is hard to teach communicatively because

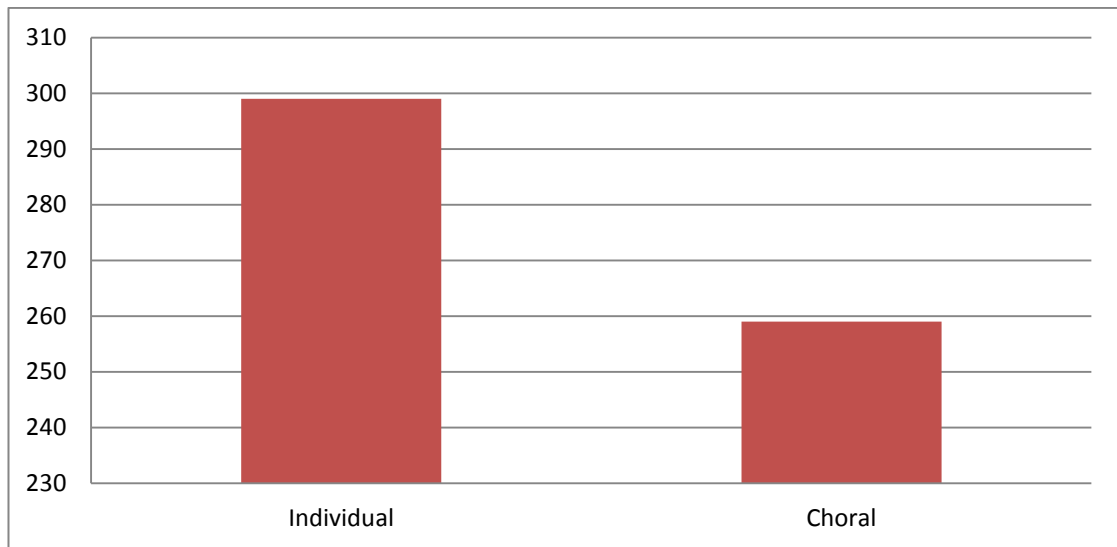


## 7.6 Response moves

Individual responses to teacher questions were more frequent than choral responses, as shown in Figure 7.5. It was noticed that in the ‘rural’ schools, the teachers resorted to use more cued elicitations and the students tended to resort to various avoidance behaviour techniques (see sections 6.5.7 and 6.6.7). For example, students in these schools tended to repeat the teacher utterances or ‘pretend’ that they were trying to answer a question. In doing so, they were trying to convince their teacher (and themselves) that ‘everything was going well’. Chick (1996) calls such behaviour ‘safe-talk’. Although schools in rural areas are supervised by the local Educational Directorates, the standards as well as the expectations unfortunately tend to be lower than the urban schools (see section 2.3). The last point supports what Barton (2002) and Bouck, (2004) calls ‘savage inequalities’.

In the observed urban classes, there seemed to be some variation in the students’ level of language proficiency. Comparatively speaking, this created a competitive environment inside the class, with the more able students attempting to capture the teacher’s attention. Jones and Gerig (1994, p.170) suggest there is evidence to show that ‘verbally active’ students are high achievers and that student involvement in class discussions was also ‘deemed to be a major component of effective instruction – hence learning’. It was also noted that in the present case that teachers encouraged this by picking certain students when several hands were raised to answer a specific question. This situation was likely to make low-achieving students feel more ‘unwilling to participate’ as teachers did not set high expectations from them. Such students were usually given easy and simple questions. However, it was found that choral responses or collectivist tendencies in educational practices, tended to happen when the teachers used the cued elicitation technique, as when raising their intonation for students to complete a sentence or repeat a translation. The detailed discourse analysis of responses showed that students responded chorally to cued elicitations (see section 7.8). The teachers did not make much effort to investigate or probe student responses.

Figure 7.4 Response moves, aggregated

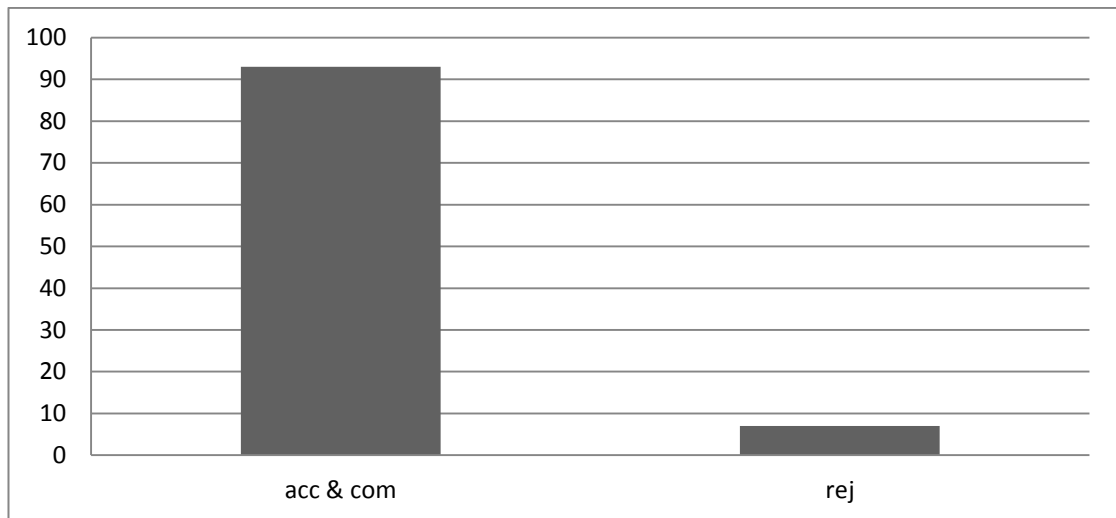


## 7.7 Feedback moves

As suggested by the individual analyses, there was little variation in the patterns of interaction across the six observed teachers. The move of ‘accepting’ student responses outnumbered the ‘rejection’ move, as illustrated in Figure 7.5. It was also found that teachers often repeated/translated a student’s answer with some degree of reformulation. In this sense, the ‘reformulation’ moves covered mostly the pronunciation and the grammaticality of the utterances in the form of recasts (see Panova & Lyster, 2002; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Chaudron, 1988).

When a teacher rejected a student answer, there was a need either to re-direct the question to the whole class or to *probe* the student answer to find out how he/she came up with that answer. However, such a probing process appears to have led to a loss of control over the whole class. Therefore, choral responses were favoured by the teachers (see sections 6.3.5 and 6.4.5). In addition, the ‘comment’ move very often overlapped with the repeating move. According to Duff (2000), teachers in such contexts tend to ‘re-voice a student contribution and to affirm its validity’ (p.135).

Figure 7.5 Feedback moves, aggregated



## 7.8 Discourse analysis & interviews

Based on the system of analysis designed for this study, this section discusses the patterns of the teaching exchanges. The framework provided a clear and systematic basis for analysing the patterning of the teaching exchanges and provided useful data for analysing the nature of the teacher-student talk that took place in the lessons. In addition, the DA triangulated well with the computerised analysis of ODCS.

One of the main findings of the discourse analysis of the six observed teachers was that the interactional patterns varied little across the whole sample, as the IRF structure dominated the teacher-student exchanges. However, several examples of IR teaching exchanges were also found, along with the IRF structure (e.g., sections 6.2.7, 6.5.7, and 6.1.7). Teacher-fronted talk dominated all lessons observed and no group or pair-work was used in any of them. Students mainly responded to teacher-directed questions and reacted to teacher-cued elicitation. The high frequency of teacher eliciting and teacher informing moves confirmed this conclusion.

The analysis of the teaching exchanges also showed a similarity in the teaching styles of all six teachers, despite the fact that they varied in their teaching experience. Even where there appeared to be a slightly higher level of student participation through student informing exchanges, as with Teacher Alpha, the discourse and frames of reference were still tightly controlled by the teacher's questioning and explanations. The

third move, the 'F' move, was rigidly used in most cases to evaluate rather than extend the students' contributions. These findings support Cazden's (1988, p.138) view that within such a discourse structure 'children never give directions to teachers and rarely ask questions except to request permission'. She goes on to conclude that 'the only context in which children can reverse interactional roles with the same intellectual content, giving directions as well as following them, and asking questions as well as answering them, is with their peers'.

In addition, the analysis of the discourse revealed that whenever teachers interacted with their students, they took interactional and semantic control of the discourse. This finding is also supported by other research (e.g., van Hees, 2011; Skidmore, 2000; Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Edwards & Furlong, 1978). This also suggests a strong tendency to maintain more traditional patterns of classroom talk under the appearances of organisational or curriculum change. Using Bernstein's (2004) theoretical framework, the analysis of the current study shows that the new Syrian curriculum was taught authoritatively within strongly classified frames. There was no evidence of investigational, independent and/or collaborative forms of learning being used in the lessons, despite the fact that such approaches were highlighted by all teachers in their interviews.

The findings from the interviews revealed that teachers Alpha, Beta, Delta and Eta viewed drilling and recitation as a form of classroom discussion (see sections 6.1, 6.2, 6.6 and 6.5). Clearly, the two practices are completely different. Unlike recitation, discussion, where there is some exploration of a topic, implies a reciprocal process in the classroom. Yet, this was not attested across the whole cohort of the teachers. The findings from the current study also challenge the assumption that teaching varies with the 'age and maturity' of the students and that teachers draw more on their prior knowledge of students as they get older (Stevenson & Palmer, 1994). Rather, the findings support Dillon's (1994) view that recitation is often called discussion by teachers and students, but that 'real' discussion, in which there is an exploration of a topic, an interchange of ideas and questioning by students, is rarely practised in class. It was also found that the dominance of the IRF structure served the teachers' interests and

goals in controlling the discourse, pace and discipline inside the classrooms. Consequently, this resulted in low levels of student-teacher or student-student interaction.

Furthermore, it was found that the cognitive demands on students did not go beyond the basic thinking skills such as comprehending concepts, identifying grammatical structures, recognizing errors or familiarizing the class with vocabulary items (see sections 7.5.7 and 7.6.7). Most of the EFL lessons in the present study were conducted through teacher recitation, where interrogations of the students' knowledge and understanding were the most common pattern of teacher-student interaction. This led to limiting the interactive roles the students could play in the discourse and their opportunity for higher-order thinking (i. e. analysing, applying, synthesizing, arguing, or critiquing) which Bloom et al. (1956) suggest can only be exercised through spoken discourse and written texts.

Therefore, for most of the time it was the teachers who were doing the cognitive work. The ubiquity of the three-part exchange structure in all observed lessons meant that lessons were predominantly conducted within the teacher's frame of reference; teachers controlled the pacing and sequencing of teaching exchanges. This was best demonstrated in Mr Zeta's class (see section 6.5.7). Apart from checking the accuracy of translations or requesting permission to do something, students did not ask questions to their teachers.

Although the system of analysis used in the present study only focused on the organisation of language forms used in spoken interaction, and did not directly address effective learning strategies or students' cognitive development, it does nevertheless point to the lack of opportunities the students had for linguistic and cognitive development because their utterances are mainly restricted to responses.

Overall, the discourse analysis of the Syrian EFL classes suggests that teachers did not diversify their teaching styles to embrace pair or group work inside the classroom. Instead, they kept 'bombarding' students with information. By doing so, teachers operated within their comfort zone, whereby traditional methods of grammar induction associated with translation were common practice during the whole instruction process. Thusly, the introduction of the new curriculum did not lead to any significant changes

in terms of teaching methods, as teachers continued to preserve the traditional teaching patterns including talk time, turn allocations, discipline techniques and class management.

## **7.9 Summary of findings**

This part presents a summary of the overall findings of the study. They will be classified under three main categories, namely teaching and learning relations, interactional and social relations, contextual and professional training needs.

### **7.10 Teaching and learning relations**

The study revealed that the teaching mode in the observed Syrian EFL secondary classrooms was marked by a culture of recitation and dictation underpinned by authoritarian, transmissional, and knowledge-testing practices. Such a mode of teaching contrasted markedly with the recommendation advised by the Syrian MOE and the guidelines of the newly adopted national Syrian curriculum. While the MOE training programmes and the new curriculum guidelines encouraged teachers to adopt a less authoritative role in the classroom and to embrace a more interactive approach, the findings indicated that the tight control by the teacher of the classroom discourse in fact stifled dialogue and interactions between learners and teachers.

In the questionnaire and the interviews, teachers claimed that they were teaching communicatively and that they encouraged students to talk to each other, ask questions, and discuss topics freely. However, classroom observation showed that teachers' perceptions belied their practices. Students were rarely encouraged to talk to each other, to introduce ideas or even to ask questions across the whole sample (see sections 5.4, 6.1.6, 6.2.6, 6.4.1).

Further, while most teachers stated in the questionnaire that they were familiar with the curriculum goals, teachers' actual practices did not indicate this. Contrary to their views, it was found that teacher inability to implement interactive teaching practices found its roots in their lack of pedagogical understanding of the importance of meaningful classroom talk that invites students to play an active role in the discourse.

While the questionnaires and the interviews proved essential in understanding the teachers' classroom behaviour, the results of the observations indicated that teachers' classroom practices were compatible with grammar-translation approaches. The majority of teachers (namely Alpha, Beta, Delta, Zeta and Eta) performed a restricted range of roles in the classroom with the roles of transmitter, language expert and evaluator being most dominant. These findings support what was found by similar studies (e.g., Karavas, 1993). Teachers were also found teaching traditionally and following a deductive approach, whereby language forms and rules were presented then followed by examples. After that, students were drilled on these rules and examples. This finding supports what Richards and Rodgers (2001) argue, namely that the deductive approach of language teaching is closely connected to a transmission-oriented pedagogy where knowledge and information are imparted passively rather than negotiated or constructed.

Because of the heavily transmission-oriented teaching mode of teaching, students were not able to engage in any form of effective language communication opportunities. Most teachers were found following a 'linear approach' to English teaching (Nunan, 1998). For example, they were over-concerned with simplifying language features and forms through extensive explanation and repetition (see sections 6.1.7, 6.4.7, 6.5.7). Instead of building on or checking students' previous linguistic and general background knowledge, teachers were hasty in 'bombarding' students with new language knowledge, justifying this by the need to cover the thick curriculum and prepare students for the exams (section 7.6.2). Such practices clearly stand in opposition to tenets of socio-cultural theory that encourage teachers to build on students' past knowledge (see sections 3.7.5 and 3.7.6).

In such a culture of teaching and learning, teacher-student interaction was reduced to a process of checking students' knowledge and/or interrogating their understanding of language forms and functions. Lessons were found to be conducted through teacher recitation and teacher presentation. Any chances for creating real communication were very unlikely to occur and were often curtailed by the teachers' tight control of discourse as well as by students' low levels of language proficiency (see sections 6.4.7 and 7.8). All these factors contributed to limiting the interactive roles the students



could play in the discourse and their opportunities for building higher-order thinking skills such as arguing, narrating, critiquing and creating. According to Ellis (2001), these skills can only be reached if students are encouraged to extend their ‘talk time’ in the lessons.

The influence of modes of assessment on teachers’ instructional styles was another important finding of the current study. It was found that form-based modes of assessment both informed and influenced teaching practices. For example, teachers’ preoccupation with student final examinations directly impacted the way they prepared material, presented information, and delivered the teaching, i.e. their pedagogical styles (see sections 5.4, 5.5, 6.2.1). Findings from the interviews revealed that most teachers underlined the importance of exams not only to their personal agendas, but also to the students’, parents’ and the school administrations’ agendas. Broad expectations were held about students achieving good marks at the end of the year; if teachers failed to deliver on this, they would be in trouble, according to many of them. Because of the exam structure-focused nature of the situation, the teaching styles of the teachers were geared towards serving this end (see section 5.4). This naturally led to more grammar-centred and teacher-centred teaching styles, whereas the new guidelines advised that teachers should ‘modify’ their teaching to become student-centred. One of these modifications was ‘simplifying the information’ (see section 8.11.3). At an overall level, this resulted in an emphasis on teaching content rather than skills and fostered teaching about the language rather than teaching ‘the use of the language for communication’ (Ellis, 2005, p.43).

It was also found that the institutional uniformity of the Syrian schooling system (syllabus, seating arrangements, timetabling...etc.) meant that teachers followed similar steps in the delivery of the textbook content. Across all classes, similar events happened in terms of the delivery of the academic content and the classroom management, indicating that teachers and students worked towards achieving communal pedagogic goals (see sections 6.1.1, 6.2.1, and 6.4.1). Classroom activities were mainly language-centred and textbook-governed, with syntactic and semantic grammatical aspects forming the core of lessons. Most teachers followed the same sequence of events: presenting new vocabulary items, explaining them, and drilling vocabulary pronunciation

and spelling. After this, lessons were read for comprehension. Lastly, grammatical points and tenses were presented and practiced whenever they appeared (see section 6.6.2). The teachers were found to be in favour of structural accuracy rather than meaningful interaction and of vocabulary drilling rather than meaning construction.

It was found that the teachers' authoritarian teaching activities were responsible for hampering students' opportunities to participate in the class activities and to use the English language for meaningful and communicative purposes (see sections 6.6.7 and 7.8). This supports what Johnson (1995) found: in the EFL context where the teachers and students were from the same culture, most classroom activities were form-centred focusing on language features such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and spelling. These results reveal that teachers' knowledge of the communicative approach on theoretical and practical levels was incomplete and incompatible. The Syrian English language teachers have been asked to implement an approach without possessing the necessary skills and knowledge for its effective implementation.

### **7.11 Interactional and social relations**

The discourse analysis of the six teachers revealed that the patterns of interaction varied little across the whole sample, and that the IRF structure dominated the teacher-student exchanges (see sections 6.8, 6.1.7, 6.4.7). The class talk time was overwhelmingly managed, controlled and filled by teachers. Classes were teacher-fronted with teacher explanation and elicitation exchanges as the dominant interaction patterns.

The findings of the study also revealed that classroom questions were used for both pedagogical and disciplinary goals. Those questions belonged to the closed low-order thinking category (see sections 6.4 and 6.8). Findings from discourse analysis, interviews and the questionnaire showed that teachers repeatedly asked display questions whose answers were already known. Besides direct questions, the teachers used a variety of forms and structures to check student comprehension, or invite their responses. For example, raising intonation at the end of statements was amongst the most frequently-adopted practices by most teachers (see sections 7.8, 6.2.7 and 6.4.7). This served as an indicator for students to answer, repeat, or re-state what had already been

said. Because questions carry the power of disciplining students, teachers (e.g. Delta and Eta) tended to ask many quick short questions to keep noisy students under control (see sections 6.4.3 and 6.4.7).

In addition, the study found that teacher feedback to student responses was of low quality and appeared to be a direct result to the poor questioning techniques. For example, some teachers tended to just nod their heads as a sign of approving or rejecting the students' answers (see sections 7.7, 6.3.6). Others limited their feedback and comments to a few words for the sake of speeding up activities in the period. Talking about the quality, the teacher feedback was mostly evaluative marked by the use of short words of acknowledgment. Recasting or repeating student responses was one of the most recurring practices (see sections 6.1.4 and 7.7). Probing students' responses, whether right or wrong, was minimal and was intended not to increase the students' input or unpack the cognitive processes leading to the response. Rather, it was designed to steer students towards the pre-determined answers. At all times, students only spoke when permitted by teachers.

Although teachers and students in the urban schools showed a slightly higher degree of involvement than their counterparts in the rural schools, students' overall participation was poor in class discussions. Teachers' dominance of talk time perpetuated the non-participation of their students. Several other factors played a role in curtailing students' involvement in the classroom activities, such as lack of confidence in the target language, the prevailing learning culture, students' individual learning styles and their view of the teacher as the subject expert. This produced 'de-contextualized classrooms' where learners' past knowledge background and opinions were not part of teacher-student interactions (see also, Bishop & Glynn, 2003; Hellermann, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

The study found that a culture of 'cosseting' student learning dominated lessons, through 'simplifying information' to students. In their interviews, teachers made it clear that they considered simplifying grammatical rules and language structures as the most important goal of their teaching (particularly Alpha, Beta, Delta and Zeta). The observed teachers spent a great deal of time explicating basic syntactic rules like those

for ‘relative clauses’ or ‘grammatical cases’. For them, this served two interrelated purposes: strengthening grammatical rules in student minds and preparing students for the final structure-based exams (see section 7.8). To achieve these two goals, teachers were found to be using Arabic widely.

With the exception of Mr Gamma, the degree of using Arabic inside classes was very high (see sections 7.5.7 and 7.6.7, 5.6). Thus, teachers’ L1 overuse and code-switching negatively impacted on the delivery inside the classroom. Although the new curriculum guidelines encouraged teachers to keep Arabic to a minimum, some teachers viewed Arabic as an indispensable commodity in their classes as they were unable ‘to get along without’ it. This case was particularly evident in Teachers Alpha, Eta and Zeta’s classes who, in their interviews, all three expressed that the use of Arabic was a matter of choice as much as a matter of necessity. They thought that using Arabic was not only ‘effective’ but also ‘necessary’, justifying this by their students’ limited linguistic literacy.

## **7.12 Professional-training and contextual relations**

Based on the questionnaire and the interviews, it was found that there were two camps of views regarding teachers’ professional training for the new textbooks and their interactive approaches. The first proposed that the Syrian MOE did not invest enough in their training. This group of teachers criticized the short, ill-designed training program run by the MOE. The second group, a minority, thought they were both capable and trained enough to fulfil the expectations of the new curriculum. They redirected the blame to students’ low English standards (see sections 5.9 and 6.2). However, when the latter group was probed about their understanding of interactive teaching, they failed to theorize its basic tenets. They reduced the whole concept to doing group or pair-work activities. Therefore, it was found that the lack of systematic training led to a sketchy and usually fragmented understanding of the new CLT-based curriculum and made it difficult for the teachers ‘to leave the security of the traditional methods and take the risk of trying new unfamiliar methods’ (Li, 1998, p. 680). Similar studies have found that teachers’ lack of commitment to the effective implementation of a learner-centred curriculum reform was attributable to the minimal training

opportunities provided for teachers to come to terms with the underlying principles and practical implications of a communicative learner-centred approach (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Karavas, 1993).

In addition, the close investigation of the observed teachers revealed that teachers' previous experience and professional training did have a bearing on their performance. For example, although some teachers (specifically Mr Alpha and Mr Gamma) attended several training workshops in the Gulf, they were still found to be following traditional methods in their teaching in Syria (see sections 6.1.1 and 6.3.1). The questionnaire and observations also revealed that teachers who did not hold PG Diplomas in Educational Studies were more inclined to adopt teacher-centred approaches (see section 5.9). This result appears to be in harmony with what Spada and Fröhlich (1995) argue, namely that teachers with a good educational background adopt more learner-centred methods than those with no education background.

The study also found that an array of contextual considerations came into play when investigating EFL in Syria. For example, some teachers reported that the Syrian centralized educational policy-planning left little margin for them to work beyond the confines of the prescribed guidelines — referring to time pressure and the condensed curriculum (see sections 5.6 and 5.9). In the questionnaire, teachers reported that large class sizes coupled with hard-to-move seating arrangements contributed to the difficulty of introducing group work techniques. Added to this, it was found that there were signs of a culture of collective thinking, especially in rural areas, where teachers were viewed as the 'fountains' of knowledge who deserve ultimate respect (Imai, 2010). There were also teachers who did not get proper professional development to modify/update their conduit-based of language teaching and learning (see section 5.9).

# **C** **HAPTER** **Eight**

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## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, this section will discuss the implications of the findings for teachers, educational policy-makers and students. The implications will be discussed in light of the three main areas identified in the research questions: teaching and learning relations, interactional and social relations, and professional and contextual relations. The chapter concludes by highlighting the limitations of the study and identifying potential areas for future research.

## 8.1 Implications for teaching and learning

The study found that English language teaching in a group of Syrian secondary classrooms was largely made up of teaching about its vocabulary and grammatical structures. It was not being used for the purposes of communication. The interviews and classroom observation found that English language teaching and learning was viewed as a means to an end, i.e. passing the exam. Only Teacher Alpha deviated slightly from this principle (see section 6.1.7). According to Al-Khwaiter (2001), such practices are sustained because:

1. Teachers do not require a lot of preparation or interaction with the learners;
2. Students can ask the teacher to explain and translate everything;
3. Teachers can keep learners under their control;
4. Quiet and controlled classrooms are favoured and encouraged by the school administration.

The study also found that the GTM was widely used. Brown & Yamashita (1995) argue that GTM is used extensively in such contexts because it closely matches the discrete and passive nature of university entrance examination questions, emphasising teacher-fronted teaching arrangements. Such an approach to teaching is easier to undertake without previous training, since teacher-fronted interaction does not require much communicative ability in English on the part of the teacher.

The first step in addressing these issues is to suggest that teachers should instil in their students the importance of using the English language. They can start by creating more opportunities for students to use English in short role play situations. They can also adopt strategies that promote problem-based activities. For example, students can be asked to contextualize and/or personalize the various textbook activities and then share them with classmates in English. More spontaneity in the use of English should be encouraged, as it was found that teachers tightly controlled the lesson discourse thereby closing down opportunities for student initiations. One teacher, Mr Gamma, artificially modelled this to his students when he asked two students to act out a short dialogue on the whereabouts of their residence. He began this at the outset of a lesson on ‘*The*

*House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (see section 6.3.7). Such practices ought to be encouraged and sustained.

Building on the above, teachers should foster spontaneous conversation that is best represented in the form of a class discussion where people can agree and disagree on a topic. Through discussion, student understanding is expanded, their motivation is retained, their skills are nurtured, and their thinking is cultivated (Hardman, 2008; Ellis, 2006; Alexander, 2010). That does not make it an easy task to achieve in EFL classes, given the fact that teachers need to first address students' linguistic competence as well as their oral performance. To resolve this, teachers can introduce simple topics to discuss with students and allow for switching to the L1. This is thought to be an effective strategy as it will allow for linguistic scaffolding, with students being able to prolong their talk in English (Mercer, 2010).

From the study, it was found that explaining the meaning of the new words and structures usually took at least a quarter of the class time. Vocabulary was mostly taught in two ways: some teachers had long bilingual lists of new words, whereas others 'dissected' each paragraph commenting and explaining every new word (e.g., Teachers Beta and Eta). Much of this time could be freed up and used for discussion time, to allow teachers and students to discuss the ideas found in and beyond the text. Students will as a result come to realize the importance of ideas written and spoken in a language other than their own. This will in turn make them value the ideas expressed in the language rather than viewing lessons as only 'a set of new structures and vocabulary' (Morrow & Schocker, 1987, p. 252).

The teaching of discrete grammatical forms and structures also dominated many of the classes observed. High stakes assessments were reported to be the main reason for such an approach. To reduce the level of transmission-based teaching, teachers need to be trained to integrate communicative elements when teaching grammatical rules and focus on form and communication; the two do not have to stand in opposition (Larsen-Freeman, 2007; Nassaji & Wells, 2000). This could take the form of using grammatical patterns at the discourse, sentence and word level. This is usually referred to as the development of 'communicative grammatical competence' where learners are ex-



pected to understand grammatical forms in a range of situations (Leech et al., 2002). Such practical activities might include paired work where students are given two different sets of questions of equal difficulty. Then students are asked to discuss the answers to the questions. This will help to improve students' linguistic accuracy as well as their fluency. Using personalized or illustrative pictures is often useful, as this integrates the four language skills in a meaningful and accessible context.

The second possible course of action has to do with re-designing the examinations so they have a major oral component like that found in the IELTS exams. The significance of this move would be twofold: teachers would have to change their lesson plans to focus not only on accuracy but also on fluency and building meaningful communication in English. At the same time, students would become capable of communicating their ideas in English. There are of course many challenges in adopting such assessment practices, not least coping with a large number of students and teachers needing to standardize the questions to ensure that the fairness element in any assessment is addressed. Overall, unless teachers provide communicative activities that stimulate student interest, increase their involvement in the discourse and develop their skills of negotiating meaning, student thinking and learning will continue to be of a low order (Black, 2004; Hardman, 2011; Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Myhill, 2006).

## **8.2 Implications for fostering interaction and social relations**

Because of the narrow use of the IRF mode of teaching found in the current study and in many other international studies, teachers need to review their practices to enhance the quality of interaction inside their classrooms. Such a 'review' should mainly target the ways that teachers use classroom talk to engage with students. This includes their choice of questions, the quality of feedback, enabling students' participation, using the mother tongue and widening classroom participation.

Closed questions that are used to display knowledge were found to be dominant in the EFL classes observed. In order for teachers to increase students' output, there should be a conscious selection of open referential questions whose answers are not predictable or pre-known to the teacher. The culture of cosseting student learning, by simplify-

ing questions or providing information to students, should be reduced in favour of challenging students' thinking and linguistic skills. For example, instead of spending a long time on comprehension check questions following the reading of a passage, teachers can open up a discussion on the ideas discussed in the passage. Teachers should also give more time to students to generate their own questions before commenting or starting another question.

In their responses to student answers, most teachers gave evaluative feedback which usually took the form of accepting/rejecting the answer, repeating it, or reformulating it. Such a move by teachers lacks the elements of reflection, discussion, or interaction as Wells and Ball (2008) maintain. In order for teachers to extend student output and engage them, they should adapt their use of the F move by using more probes to ask for elaboration on an answer and more uptakes, where they build their subsequent questions on students' answers. When extending teacher-student talk time, students' communicative competence is inevitably enhanced. Their language proficiency is thus increased, their background knowledge is exploited and their learning is scaffolded (Gibbons, 2006; Nystrand et al., 2001; Sharpe, 2001). According to Nystrand and Gamoran (1991, p. 269), it is only when teachers break away from recitation for the sake of discussion and conversation, that 'authentic questions and uptake become increasingly common, and teacher evaluation is transformed into just another conversant turn.'

Modifying the teacher questions and feedback will naturally improve the interactivity between students and teachers. According to Myhill (2003, p.368) interactive teaching is not 'simply about participation and response levels [...] it is about engaging learners in learning and thinking'. In section 6.1.7, Teacher Alpha's class appeared to be slightly more active as the teacher skilfully allocated and managed turns, despite using the IRF sequence and by providing positive feedback to students. Mercer (2000) points out that the IRF sequence, can be used to open up discussion if it goes beyond finding out what has been learnt. It *can* be used to explore the process of learning in its initial stages, so that proper adjustments and modifications are introduced to better cater for students' learning needs.

Talking at students in the form of lecturing results in students feeling bored and demotivated. This also makes them passive participants, relying on teachers to solve emerging problems and to spoon-feed them. Teachers should accordingly cut down on the time they explain and impart discrete information to students and foster class participation, by asking students to discuss their answer to a question in pairs or to generate their own questions on the topic under consideration. A major benefit of students working in pairs is that they learn from each other; they build the feeling that they are accountable for their peer's contribution and shy students feel more secure in exchanging ideas with their classmates.

Widening classroom participation implies that teachers not only choose the more able and active students to respond to their questions, but they also include less proficient students by encouraging them to voice their answers even if they are not grammatically accurate. In the study, it was found that in the urban schools the high-achieving students were favoured by teachers at the expense of their less able classmates (see sections 6.2.4 and 6.5.4). Most teachers maintained tight control on turn allocations, electing and singling out specific students to respond to their questions. For more effective classroom interaction, teachers should grant everyone equal opportunities to ask questions, to answer and to comment. They might also use what Mohr and Mohr (2007) call a 'response protocol', where teachers invite students to elaborate on their responses and on the process that led them to such answers. In doing so, students should be allowed to speak in the Arabic language. The teacher should behave like a 'chameleon' who knows when it is time to intervene and control and when to step back, be unobtrusive and let learning take place (Mishan, 2012).

Using the mother tongue was common in most of the observed classes. Arabic was used to give directions, explain the meanings of new words, create funny stories, discipline students and provide background information. However, teachers, especially in the rural areas, used English only when reading from texts, pronouncing new vocabulary, illustrating grammatical examples or writing on the board. For teachers, students' poor English together with the need to get through the syllabus, were amongst the main reasons used to justify their use of Arabic in the classroom.

In order for teachers to set the right balance between the two languages, teachers should welcome students' responses in any language they choose and try to increase the English 'injection' little by little. Atkinson (1987, p. 244) calls this the 'judicious usage' of L1. Although some argue that mother tongue overuse impedes the development of thinking in English, using Arabic could prove beneficial in many cases, as it speeds up the progress of English acquisition and facilitates learning.

On the whole, there should be a climate where the learners' views and feelings are respected and valued, where they feel free to experiment with the language and where the teacher is open and willing to learn from his/her learners. There should be a climate where the teacher acts as a facilitator between the learners, their tasks and the input they are exposed to (Karavas, 1993). Students need support to make the necessary adjustments required by the curriculum. Teachers should promote a type of social interaction which advances higher-order thinking, as set out in Bloom's Taxonomy. Higher-order thinking skills enable learners to think. Kennedy (2007, p. 184), maintains the lower-order 'thinking skills of knowledge, comprehension, and application focus on rote learning or what students should think, whereas the higher-order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation focus on how to think'.

### **8.3 Implications for teachers' professional development**

A major finding of the study was the mismatch between perceptions of what was going on in the classroom and actual classroom practice. Policy makers and teachers talked the rhetoric of communicative approaches, whereas the findings of the current study suggest classroom talk in Syria is largely made up of lecturing, rote and recitation, with little co-construction and discussion (see sections 7.3, 7.10). The same result was found in a number of studies (e.g., Burns, 1990; Mitchell, 1987; Nunan, 2004). While communicative approaches have been officially adopted in Syria, they have not been effectively implemented, let alone institutionalized, so they are an 'established practice' for teachers and schools (Fullan, 2005; Gibbons, 2003). In their interviews and the questionnaire, teachers held positive views about the new curriculum. However, this raises the question of which comes first: changing beliefs or changing classroom practices. It may well be that continuing professional development should focus

on changing pedagogical practices first as a way of changing beliefs. In other words, once teachers can see improvements in their teaching and in student learning, they may be more prepared to change their mind set. Stenhouse (1975) wisely observed there can be no curriculum development without teacher development.

Equipping Syrian EFL teachers with high-quality professional training is thought to be the most effective strategy in order to fulfil the goals of the Syrian MOE educational reform. Given that teachers are the key element in the implementation process (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992), teacher education and support is clearly central to the successful implementation of an innovation. A similar conclusion is reached by Andrews (1983, p. 139), who says: ‘...the necessary changes in attitude and performance will only be achieved by means of systematic in-service training and very gradual adjustments and accommodations made by practising teachers in the light of their own experience’. Teacher training will thus enable teachers to see the benefits of a particular language teaching approach and convince them of its effectiveness.

It will require reform at both the PRESET and INSET stages. At the PRESET level, in the questionnaire and the interviews, teachers stated that studying in the departments of English language and literature did not resolve their pedagogic and educational needs, nor did it attend to the challenges faced once they had been recruited as ‘qualified’ teachers. Although the PG Diploma in Educational Studies has been in place for many years, it is not a compulsory element for recruiting teachers (MOE, 2008). There are several measures that the MOE could take to address these issues. For example, they could set up separate Teacher Colleges which specialize in preparing future EFL teachers in the country. Alternatively, divisions within the existing English Literature Departments could be created so that future teachers can choose to specialize in language pedagogy in their last two years of university study. Better coordination between the MOE as a recruiter and Syrian universities as the supplier would help bridge the gap examined between theory and practice. There should also be closer collaboration between the ministry and the universities on the design of the PRESET curriculum to cater for the effective implementation of the new curriculum as recommended by Richardson (2001) and Snyder (1992).

At the INSET stage, the study found little in the way of systematic provision beyond and the majority of teachers completing the questionnaire and those interviewed expressed their resentment over the lack of training opportunities provided by the MOE. Where teachers had taken part in INSET they reported there was a concentration on theory, rather than actual classroom practice delivered through a series of workshops. The teachers were then expected to cascade the training back to their schools to allow for wide coverage to the district teachers. However, it was acknowledged that without follow ups in the classroom the training would have little impact. Teachers recognised there was a need for a number of monitoring processes to be introduced to evaluate the effectiveness of the training, which included observation of the training sessions in the workshops and in the schools.

For policy makers, the findings of the current study suggest improvements in pedagogical practices require professional development programmes that develop and upgrade pedagogic knowledge and skills over a sustained period of time, starting with the provision of higher education provision of PRESET and continuing throughout a teacher's career, through the provision of school-based INSET. Research also suggests that the school and the classroom need to be at the heart of teacher development at the PRESET and INSET stages so as to blend theory and practice. It also requires the building of 'strong partnerships between the universities, districts and schools' at both the PRESET and INSET stages (Day, 1993, p. 48).

For teachers, the findings suggest the need for a reflective practice approach to teaching. The literature on teacher professional development is replete with the importance of reflective practice, which traditionally takes the form of peer-review, where teachers are asked to examine other teachers' practices and then critically reflect on their own (Dillon & Maguire, 2007; Hardman, 2012; Nunan & Choi, 2009; Richards, & Farrell, 2005; Tanner & Jones, 2007). In this way, teachers empower each other through the use of constructive feedback and reflection using live observation, audio and video recordings.

In order for teachers to analyse their discourse and the quantity and quality of their interaction with students, they need study groups and cluster meetings at the school and

district level respectively, supported by external input from universities, school inspectors and advisors, and private INSET providers. For Newell (1996), ‘the essence of reflection is the interaction of experiences with analysis of beliefs about those experiences’ that occurs in a ‘collegial environment encouraging social responsibility, flexibility, consciousness, and efficacy’(p. 568). Similarly, Wallace (1991) argues that through practice and reflection on newly acquired knowledge, teachers can integrate theory and practice and reflect upon their pedagogic beliefs and values. Ur’s (1999) model of reflective practice for EFL teachers calls for the integration of external and personal sources of knowledge as theory develops from practice, not vice versa. In Ur’s view the most important basis for learning is personal professional practice. If Syrian teachers are to successfully apply the new teaching approach in their classrooms, they should clearly understand the basic principles and features of that approach in both theoretical and practical terms (Fergusson, 1983).

Teachers in the study also reported on the inadequate length of time for teacher training and highlighted the need for teacher education to be an ongoing process. One-shot, short term training courses, as reported in the study, were seen as being inadequate for implementing and sustaining new curriculum initiatives. Similarly, Joyce and Showers (1995) argue convincingly that effective forms of in-service training include theory or principles, demonstration or modelling; practice, feedback and coaching. Such practices will enable teachers to see the innovation being simulated or modelled during training, the opportunity to try it and receive feedback within a controlled supportive setting. Coaching in the workplace following initial training provides support during implementation, collegiality and companionship (Joyce & Showers, 1995). It will also require the development of school-based training modules and building the capacity of teacher educators to mentor teachers.

The process of inspection in the Syrian educational system is regulated by the MOE through the Administration of Pedagogical Inspection (MOE, 2008). The responsibilities of this administration include undertaking the tasks of pedagogical inspection and evaluating the performance of basic and secondary school teachers. Inspectors in Syria are responsible for monitoring and evaluating teachers’ performance and competency. However, the system is ineffective, as inspectors themselves lack organization and

training. Instead of their occasional visits to schools, English language inspectors should make regular visits to observe more classes with teachers to give feedback on their performance. More importantly, they should make regular follow-up visits to schools and pay extra attention to newly appointed teachers in order to induct and monitor their progress.

The recruitment process itself should also be reviewed, in order to ensure that the best teachers are recruited. While the MOE has recently introduced the points-based system, stricter measures in the selection of teachers should be introduced. Further, raising teachers' salaries would help to solve the problem of private tutoring that many teachers take part in after school. Morris et al. (1996) argue that lack of commitment to implementing new policy initiatives is usually evidenced by a 'wait and see' stance by teachers, with very few willing to commit themselves at an early stage to the new curriculum. They suggest that a positive attitude may be engendered if teachers can perceive incentives or rewards for implementing the innovation. The rewards may be related to salary, promotion prospects, increased resources, or improved working conditions. School administrators should also encourage teachers to use various sources other than a textbook, so that teachers assess the latest pedagogic developments in their subjects, so as to have a positive impact on school, curriculum, teacher, and student development. Giving teachers access to the internet so they can download resources will require a major investment in the information and communications infrastructure in Syria. In the early stages, it would make sense to create regional teacher resource centres with a concentration of ICT resources for use by districts, clusters and schools.

All in all, teachers need to be provided with opportunities to work together, to learn from each other, and to improve their expertise as a learning community. They should be encouraged to practice reflection, develop a risk-taking approach, and to commit to continuing professional development and life-long learning. These guidelines are particularly needed by Syrian EFL teachers in order to achieve 'interactive professionalism', which implies collaboration and participation. Addressing these challenges may help ensure access, equity, and quality across all educational levels and settings (Shawer, 2010).



## 8.4 Limitations and recommendations

This study, like any other, has its limitations. The first limitation concerns the timing of the data collection. The study was carried out a few years after the implementation of the new curriculum. Accordingly, teachers' views and practices are continuing to evolve. Although the interaction patterns identified were typical of the classes observed (and much beyond), the picture described in this thesis might not reflect fully what is happening in every EFL Syrian classroom.

Secondly, there is the problem of generalisation. Syria is a large and diverse country. Therefore, findings in one particular geographic location may not be representative of the overall secondary EFL situations in the country. However, the teachers studied were typical of the district in terms of their qualifications and their educational backgrounds. Their typicality together with my experience of the context suggests that the findings that emerged from the study are relevant to an understanding of what happens in secondary English classrooms in Syria more generally.

More research is needed in schools and classrooms in different parts of the country to see how other teachers have interpreted and implemented the educational reform, and how they are overcoming the constraints. This will add to the repertoires of good practices in Syrian secondary English teaching. In addition, follow-up studies are needed to see that developments and changes in Syrian secondary school teachers' perceptions and practices as educational reforms are scaled up.

Thirdly, the lack of time due to the scholarship regulations prevented me from doing a longitudinal study on teacher-student classroom interaction. In this regard, a longitudinal study could be carried out using the various research tools (interviews, questionnaires and observation) developed for this study. For example, a study could be undertaken to look at how each of the six teachers theorised their teaching and the impact it had on classroom practices over time. The role of textbooks in facilitating or hindering curriculum reform could also be studied. In addition, teachers' questioning and feedback strategies following coaching, observation and feedback could also be investigated. Studying the role of school-based INSET in changing professional cultures

could also yield interesting insights into the factors that influence teacher beliefs and classroom behaviours during the process of curriculum change. Fourthly, as this study focused purely on teachers, research involving students and their views about their learning of English as a foreign language would reveal interesting insights into the teaching and learning process in Syrian schools.

A few limitations regarding the research methods need to be acknowledged. As highlighted in Chapter 3, Syrian EFL teachers in general are not used to being observed or asked about their instructional decisions. In this context, teachers associate observation with appraisal or ministerial evaluation. Therefore, it was unavoidable that the observed teachers had some concerns about my presence in their classrooms and this may have influenced their behaviours. However, I did my best to minimise the observer paradox. My presence in the classroom over a two-week period gradually reduced any initial reactivity. In selecting the most suitable method of analysis, the criteria for selecting an ‘appropriate methodology’ depends on the context of study and the nature of the research questions (Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Holliday, 1994). In addition, although the stimulated-recall technique works well when there is time and willingness on the part of the participants, there can be serious practical difficulties implementing it consistently in a busy teaching environment. In this study, the majority of the observed teachers (four out of six) used time pressure as an excuse not to have to watch themselves semi-publicly.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, this study contributes to the relevant literature in several ways. For example, it provides a thorough and critical overview of the EFL teachers who participated in the study: their background and training, their pedagogical practices, their priorities, the problems they face in the classroom and their reactions to the introduction of the new English curriculum. To date, there are few such empirical studies in Syria. In this regard, one of the key contributions of the study is that it offers useful and detailed insights into current classroom practices and the professional development of teachers. It also touches on a range of factors that shape, help and hinder teachers’ achieving the MOE educational and pedagogical goals. Methodologically, this study shows the value of a mixed methods approach, as it involved

questionnaires, observations and interviews in studying teacher responses to and the impact of curriculum innovation.

## 8.5 Suggestions for further research and reflections

Having identified the main contributions of this study to the teacher development literature, together with its educational implications and limitations, the following section will propose some suggestions for further research. To begin with, it is important to highlight that this study is exploratory in nature and has provided detailed initial insights into a group of Syrian EFL teachers' pedagogical and interactional practices while implementing the new national English language secondary curriculum. More research on this kind will provide more detailed insights into the Syrian context and beyond (Orafi, 2008; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). To build on the findings of this study, further longitudinal (qualitative and quantitative) investigations will be valuable in drawing together a more comprehensive picture of Syrian EFL teachers' practices and beliefs.

The questionnaire findings could serve as the basis for a more ambitious nationwide survey in which the practices and beliefs of a wider range of teachers are studied. It could also involve other stakeholders (i.e. students, inspectors and school principals) as their perceptions will be insightful and useful. In this respect, further research is needed to investigate students' perceptions of the curriculum. As long as the new curriculum recommends that students should genuinely communicate in English, then it is important to understand what students think about these expectations. Here, there needs to be further empirical research to examine the relationship between teachers' beliefs, classroom processes and student achievement. The research could also involve more experimental designs using control groups to build a more robust evidence base to answer outstanding questions about the most effective approaches to teacher development in Syria and their cost effectiveness against all the other competing demands on the education system.

Finally, I would like to conclude by noting how this research study has contributed to my own personal and professional development. Like other novice researchers, I found

that undertaking this project was challenging but rewarding. During the project, my academic and research skills developed enormously. My confidence in designing a research study and collecting and analysing data was also enhanced. I have come to realise that doing educational research is not a straightforward process and that even for researchers who may think that they are familiar with the research context, there are certain difficulties and challenges that have to be overcome. These lessons, hopefully, will open more doors for me to carry out further research into English language teaching in my country.

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## 10 APPENDICES

- Appendix 'A' follows here
- For full appendices (B, C, D, E, F and G) check York Online Repository  
<http://www.york.ac.uk/library/collections/yorkdigitallibraryyodl/>

## **Appendix A: Questionnaire**

### **Introductory Letter**

**Dear Teacher of English,**

**I am a PhD student doing my research on classroom interaction at the *University of York* in the UK. Principally, my research focuses on how interactive the English language teaching in the Syrian secondary school classroom is. Four years ago, I was myself a secondary school English language teacher in a Syrian school.**

**The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine your attitudes towards teaching English as a foreign language. Your name is not required but your frank answers to all items would be so highly appreciated. Your help is vital for the success of this research which will contribute to the development of teaching English in Syria. I would value it if you could answer the questionnaire and return it to the Head Teacher's office (or to me) within two days.**

**Yours faithfully,**

**Taha Rajab**

## English Language Teachers' Attitudes towards Whole-Class Interactive Teaching

### Part 1 General information

Please give the following information to help in the analysis of this questionnaire (please tick  )

a	<b>Gender</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Male</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Female</i>			
b	<b>Total number of years in teaching</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>0-5</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>6-10</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>11-15</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>16-20</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>over 20</i>
c	<b>Secondary stage(s) you teach</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>1<sup>st</sup></i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>2<sup>nd</sup></i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>3<sup>rd</sup></i>		
d	<b>Your highest completed academic qualification</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Bachelor's</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Master's</i>			
e	<b>Do you hold a <i>Diploma in Education</i>?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>YES</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>NO</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f	<b>The average number of students in your class</b>	<i>0-15</i>	<i>16-25</i>	<i>26-35</i>	<i>36-45</i>	<i>over 45</i>
g	<b>What are the teaching &amp; learning resources available and being used</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Textbook <input type="checkbox"/> Blackboard <input type="checkbox"/> Chalk <input type="checkbox"/> Cassette/ CD player				

### Part 2 General attitudes

This section explores your general attitudes towards teaching and learning. Please **CIRCLE ONE** letter of the answer that best matches your thinking. If you circle 'Other' please give an explanation in the space below the box.

#### 1. What do you think has been the biggest influence on the way you teach?

a	The way I was taught at school.	b	The way I was taught to teach at university.	c	The other teachers in the school.	d	Other (please explain below)
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.....

#### 2. Do you agree that the teacher needs to do most of the talking inside the classroom?

a	Strongly agree	b	Agree	c	Neutral	d	Disagree	e	Strongly disagree
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**3. In your lessons, how often do students talk to each other while doing a classroom task?**

a	A lot (at least ¾ of the time)	b	Sometimes (around ½ time)	c	Not very much (around ¼ time)	d	Very little
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**4. How do you feel when/if students talk to each other about their classroom tasks in the lesson?**

a	Angry	b	It is becoming un-disciplined	c	That they are not concentrating	d	Pleased
e	Other (comment) .....						

**5. How often do the students in your classroom work together in groups, if any?**

a	Often (more than 40% of lessons)	b	Quite often (30%)	c	Not very often (20%)	d	Hardly ever (10%)	e	Never (0%)
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**6. What for you is the main disadvantage of students working together in groups in the classroom?**

a	They copy each other	b	They work more slowly	c	The teacher cannot tell if the students understand or not	d	It is noisy	e	Other - (comment)
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**7. What for you is the main advantage of students working together in groups in the classroom?**

a	The teacher does not have to do all the talking	b	They can develop their language skills	c	They enjoy it	d	They can learn from one another
e	The clever can help the less clever	f	Other (comment) .....				

**8. Do you generally use the same teaching approach that you were originally taught by?**

a Yes	b No - (Please explain) .....
-------	----------------------------------

**9. The questions that you ask in the classroom are mainly designed to....**

a Check the students' understanding	b Revise the topic	c Find out what the students think	d Make sure the students are listening
e Keep the students motivated	f Other .....		

**10. I feel that I cannot teach in a communicative way because.....**

a The curriculum is overloaded (i.e. too dense)	b The structure-oriented exams are the ultimate goal	c The students are not good enough in English	d I do not have the resources
e The other teachers would disapprove of this	f Other .....		

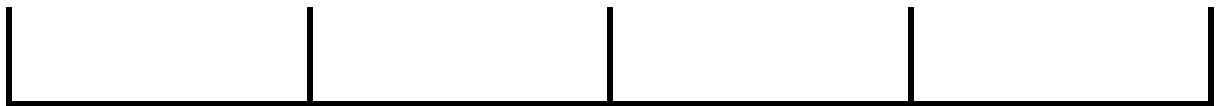
### **Part 3 Teaching Methods**

This section explores your attitudes to teaching methods in the classroom. Please **CIRCLE** one number that best captures your opinion. For example:

**Q. How often do you read a newspaper?**

Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very often
1	2	3	4	5

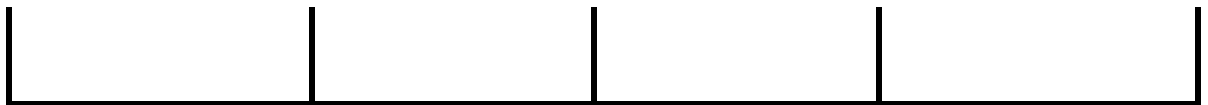
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11. In lesson, it is important to mainly focus on teaching English grammar.


Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5



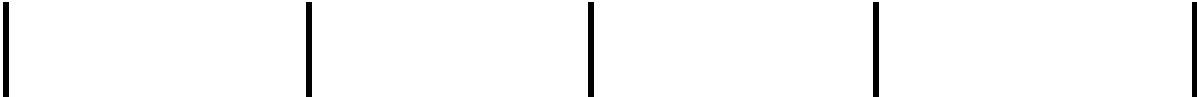
12. It is important to encourage learners to communicate in English.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
				

13. Pair-work (student-student) in the classroom is a waste of time.


Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
				

14. It is important to translate most (if not all) words into Arabic.


Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
				



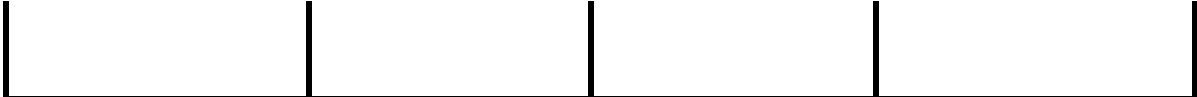
15. The teacher of English should avoid lecturing for most of the classroom time.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
				

16. Learners at school prefer lecturing to working together.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
				

17. Classroom seating arrangements with large class size prevent the use of interactive language teaching methods.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
				

18. I do not teach in a communicative style.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5

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**Part 4 - Teacher Initiation (use of questions inside classroom)**

This section explores your use of questions in the classroom. Please **CIRCLE** one number.

**19. How often in a lesson do you ask questions?**

Very often (90%)	Often (75%)	Half the time (50%)	Rarely (25%)	Very rarely (5%)
1	2	3	4	5

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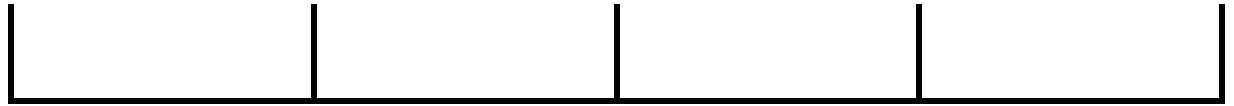
**20. Of the questions you ask in the classroom, how many do you know the answer to?**

All (100%)	A lot (75%)	Half of them (50%)	A few (25%)	None (0%)
1	2	3	4	5

--	--	--	--

**21. How many of your questions require students to give a 'Yes' or 'No' answer?**

All (100%)	A lot (75%)	Half of them (50%)	A few (25%)	None (0%)
1	2	3	4	5



**22. How many of your questions require the students to answer in chorus i.e. all together?**

All (100%)	A lot (75%)	Half of them (50%)	A few (25%)	None (0%)
1	2	3	4	5



## **Part 5** Teacher Feedback

This section looks at the feedback you give to students. In responding, you should choose by ticking ✓ the answer for each question to reflect **your common practice**.

### **23. When I ask a question, I usually select a student.....**

a	who has his/her hand up	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
b	who doesn't have their hand up	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
c	who is calling out	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
d	who is not paying attention	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
e	according to their seating arrangement (e.g. first rows)	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
f	at random	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
g	Other - please explain .....	

### **24. When a student gives the right answer, I usually.....**

a	acknowledge that the answer is correct (e.g. say 'yes', 'ok', 'right')	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
b	praise the student	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
c	ask the class if the student is right	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
d	ask the class to repeat the answer	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely

e	ask the student to elaborate on the answer	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
f	comment on the answer	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
g	Other – please explain .....	

**25. When a student gives the wrong answer, I usually.....**

a	tell them it is wrong	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
b	repeat the question to the same student	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
c	rephrase the question to the same student	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
d	ask the class if the answer is correct or not	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
e	probe the student's answer (i.e. explore it again)	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
f	give the student the right answer immediately	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
g	comment on the answer	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
h	Other - please explain .....	

**26. If I ask a student a question and he/she does NOT answer, I usually.....**

a	wait for a few seconds and repeat the question	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
b	re-phrase the question	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
c	ask another student	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
d	ask the whole class	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely
e	give the right answer myself	<input type="checkbox"/> often <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> rarely

f	Other - please explain .....
---	------------------------------

**Part 6 Interactive teaching**

**27. When thinking of improving my teaching, it is needed to.....**

a	do <i>more</i> whole class discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> most needed <input type="checkbox"/> needed <input type="checkbox"/> not needed
b	do more group work	<input type="checkbox"/> most needed <input type="checkbox"/> needed <input type="checkbox"/> not needed
c	do more paired work	<input type="checkbox"/> most needed <input type="checkbox"/> needed <input type="checkbox"/> not needed
d	do more individual work	<input type="checkbox"/> most needed <input type="checkbox"/> needed <input type="checkbox"/> not needed
e	I am happy and will <b>carry on</b> with the way I am teaching now.	<input type="checkbox"/> most needed <input type="checkbox"/> needed <input type="checkbox"/> not needed

**28. If you know that ‘interactive teaching’ involves engaging all classroom students with broad participation, then in your opinion what is the most needed strategy for best application of interactive teaching?**

a	using less evaluative feedback and building up on students’ answers	<input type="checkbox"/> most needed <input type="checkbox"/> needed <input type="checkbox"/> not needed
b	using different types of questions (e.g. using more open-ended questions)	<input type="checkbox"/> most needed <input type="checkbox"/> needed <input type="checkbox"/> not needed
c	encouraging students’ higher-order thinking skills creating a positive atmosphere inside classroom	<input type="checkbox"/> most needed <input type="checkbox"/> needed <input type="checkbox"/> not needed

d other, please specify .....

**Part 7** Teacher Training Needs

29. For better implementation of innovative teaching methods please select the option which best describes how much each of the following is needed for ‘**in-service training**’ i.e. training that is given to teachers during the course of their employment

a	Teaching grammar, reading, writing, speaking or listening	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>most needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>not needed</b>
b	Theoretical knowledge on how to use pair and group-work effectively	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>most needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>not needed</b>
c	Attending conferences and symposiums on English language teaching	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>most needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>not needed</b>
d	Language enhancement courses i.e. improving teachers’ proficiency in English language	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>most needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>not needed</b>
e	Other, please specify .....	

30. In your opinion, what is the most change that most needed to be introduced to the ‘**pre-service training stage**’ i.e. training given to students before they become full teachers like the university degree in English Language & Literature?

a	Studying English language more/rather than English literature	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>most needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>not needed</b>
b	Enhancing the knowledge of the theories of learning and teaching methods	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>most needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>not needed</b>
c	Having peer observation	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>most needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>not needed</b>
d	Making the <i>Diploma in Education</i> an obligatory pre-requisite for being an English language teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>most needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>not needed</b>
e	Changing the university curriculum to serve educational purposes	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>most needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>not needed</b>
f	Integrating the <i>Diploma of Education</i> in the degree of English Language & Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>most needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>needed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>not needed</b>
g	Other, please specify .....	

Thanks for help, it is most appreciated.



