

TESOL Programs: Theory Surpasses practice

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Abstract

This study explores the structures of TESOL programs in which student-teachers of English gain theoretical foundations and practical techniques for teaching English. Based on stages of actual teaching methodology, this paper questions the efficiency of current programs in Saudi Arabia to answer the research questions: 1. Do TESOL programs include adequate practice to come out with well-trained teachers and 2. If there is a practical shortage in TESOL programs, is it attributed to the program's design or to educators' teaching styles and strategies? Another objective of this paper is to determine and outline the correct timing and pairing of theory and practice in the context of TESOL programs. This suggested model is called Snowball Practice Model which synchronizes theory to practice in TESOL programs. This study's survey-based presents a conceptual framework of actual TESOL teaching stages and suggests an alternative option for effectively integrating theory-practice model rather than a model similar to the current methodologies. Participants of English teachers have been selected who graduated from Saudi universities and a survey is conducted to investigate the teaching methodologies, curricula, facilities of the TESOL programs and teaching field. The results show that most TESOL programs focus on theory than practice, and that this focus leads many novice teachers to struggle at the beginning of their careers.

Keywords: TESOL programs, Snowball Practice Model, theory-practice synchronization

1. Introduction

This study investigates the practice and theory within the English teachers' preparation programs in Saudi Arabia. This issue has been a popular research topic over the past five decades, as teaching quality in schools is a direct result of the preparedness of novice teachers from their university programs. Actually, teacher education at a university is featured by gaining "knowledge" while the actual practice of teaching in schools after graduation represents skills, ability and talent. Therefore, knowledge should be a supportive tool for the development of innovative practical skills. Richards and Crookes (1988) described TESOL programs that attempt to achieve their goals by offering balanced curricula which emphasize both theory and practice. However, "theory sometimes wins over practice" (p 9). There is no consensus between researchers regarding the content of TESOL programs focuses on theory or on practice, as the teaching methodologies applied to the different programs. Each leans more toward one aspect or another.

Farrell (2012) defines a novice teacher as "anyone teaching a new course for the first time" (p 437). A novice teacher by definition lacks experience, socialization and mastery of theory to effectively transform theory into meaningful practice. Therefore, they are usually in a state of confusion to respond instantly to students' needs in different teaching cases. Induction years can have significant effects on TESOL teachers, as teaching skills are often solidified for future years during this phase. Induction years allow teachers to build the base for their cumulative skills; the teachers' subsequent practices then depend upon these skills bases. If, during the induction, a base of practical and creative skills is developed, the teacher will likely be very successful later in his or her skills career. However, if the base is developed using incompetent or random practices, these inefficient practices will be reinforced making later training a real challenge.

2. Literature

Several studies have examined the field of teacher education. Brannan & Bleistein (2012) identified three categories of support for novice teachers: "mentors, coworkers and family" (Brannan & Bleistein 2012, p. 519). Their results show that teachers consider coworkers and mentors as the most significant providers of support. This indicates the important role external factors play in teaching in terms of influence, experience and skills. The fact that mentors and colleagues as major resources for novice teachers implies a lack of sufficient practical duties within university programs. Another study by Baecher (2012) included 77 graduates from TESOL programs. Baecher (2012) focused on the working lives of these graduates as well as the teaching preparation in the TESOL programs. She administered a questionnaire to these graduates to receive feedback about perceived quality of the MA TESOL programs they attended. She concluded that teacher educators must ask themselves:

“How well-prepared are the language teachers to face the service practice and the skills they need at their classrooms?” (p. 578). Baecher (2012) also questioned the practical output of these graduates and whether they can stand in service practice as successful, confident teachers or if they struggle until they embark on their teaching paths. Similarly, Faez and Valeo (2012) carried out a study using a survey and follow-up interviews with 115 novice teachers to investigate those teachers' perceptions of their own preparedness for teaching a) after graduation and b) after gaining some classroom experience. Faez and Valeo (2012) found that practicum and 'real' teaching experience were the most influential aspects of teachers' induction years. These experiences raise teachers' awareness and allow them to gain experience inside a classroom. This study also examined novice teachers' perception of real and authentic practice and its importance for teaching. Farrell (2012) outlined a practical suggestion for bridging the gap between pre-service and in-service education. Farrell's suggestion was based on the attrition often experienced by novice teachers during the induction period. The challenges faced in this period include lesson planning, lesson delivery, classroom management and identity development. Farrell (2012) also suggested “including a practice reflection during the pre-service courses and a supplementary course that focuses on first year induction through reflective practice” (p. 446). Farrell (2012) collected a comprehensive overview about the needs of novice teachers to be “teacher socialization, mentorship, collegial support, classroom management, self-confidence, professional identity and competence” (p. 599).

The practicum courses are primary sources of teaching practice for TESOL students when they tend to get field socialization. Practicum allows students to building the necessary skills providing authentic teaching situations. Richards and Crookes (1988) conducted a study about practicum courses by surveying 120 TESOL programs in the United States aimed to identify objectives of the teaching practicum. They focused on “settings, logistics, components, supervision and curriculum” as prominent components to be considered (p 9).

Silberstein's article (2008) discusses theorizing TESOL programs. She emphasizes theory and adaptive frames for the English language teaching (ELT) application and practice to assert the important role the theory plays as a guide for teaching practice. Silberstein affirms that “it is difficult to imagine a non-theory field (p. 300). To evaluate the perspective of teacher education, Kiely and Askham (2012) carried out a study to receive feedback about the teacher preparation programs. Kiely and Askham (2012) held semi-structured interviews with 27 TESOL graduates from Britain who worked in seven countries in Europe, Asia and North America. Results showed two major points: First, that the teachers had more positive attitude after completing the program than they had before completing it. Second, they felt well prepared for evaluations of longer courses (p. 515).

The ability of teachers to mediate between theory and practice after completing a TESOL program is a component of success in EFL/ESL classrooms. To achieve this balance between theory and practice, theory must be fully understood first and then to be put into practice. McNamara (2008) proposed how to practically and meaningfully apply theories into a learning environment where there is a gap between what the different theories propose and what actually is being done. Chappell and Moore (2012) emphasized the importance of linguistic component beside the methodology and practicum. They asserted that equipping pre-service teachers with linguistics training and capabilities lead to more successful teachers (p. 598).

2.1 Programs in Saudi Arabia

Teacher education aims to meet high and consistent standards in both the teaching of theory and of practice. However, practicum courses are not always major components of Saudi universities. There are three plans of study in English departments across 11 Saudi universities: Applied Linguistics, English Literature, and Translation. It is disappointing when graduates of Translation and Literature apply and sometimes receive teaching jobs without compatible preparation. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the structure of English bachelor degree in 11 Saudi universities. The numbers were calculated using averages. Table 1 shows that teaching practice proportion is completely absent due to the natures of Translation and Literature programs. Some graduates are asked to study one more year at a college of Education to join a teaching profession. Table 1 represents eight universities or colleges as listed

2.2 Jizan, Dammam, King Faisal University, Um Alqura, Aljouf, Huraimalla , Qassim, College of Arts Female Section

Table1. Structure of English Programs in above Universities

component	language skills	TESOL courses	practicum	observation	linguistics	Literature and Translation
Year 1	90 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Year 2	75%	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	14 %
Year 3	0 %	16%	0 %	0 %	31%	37%
Year 4	0 %	40%	0 %	0 %	20%	40%

There are three universities which require students to take a practicum course. This course usually takes place in the students' last semester.

2.3 Almajma , King Saud University, College of Teachers Male Section

Table 2. Structure of English Programs in above Universities

component	language skills	TESOL courses	practicum	observation	linguistics	Literature and Translation
Year 1	85 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Year 2	70%	0 %	0 %	0 %	10%	20%
Year 3	15%	15%	0 %	0 %	23%	46%
Year 4	0 %	5%	10 %	0 %	30%	50%

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

1. Do TESOL programs include adequate practice to produce well-trained teachers?
2. If there is a practical shortage in TESOL programs, what is an optimal method to integrate practice successfully?

3.2 Data Collection and Sample

To evaluate TESOL programs chosen for this study, four independent variables have been selected: (methodology, curriculum facility and teaching field). These independent variables were studied to determine how they influence the teachers' readiness in the field of teaching (the study's dependent variable). Data were collected through an online survey of 147 male and female Saudi English teachers who had graduated from eleven Saudi universities and who teach at the elementary, intermediate, secondary schools and college level. The survey is a five-rank Likert scale to measure the attitudes of these teachers towards the teacher preparation programs they attended.

Descriptive statistics regarding the participants' age, experience and gender will first be given to help define the sample of the participants. Approximately 80 % of the sample is in the range above 28 years old. Regarding gender, male participants constitute 72% of the sample and only 28 % female English teachers who participated in the survey.

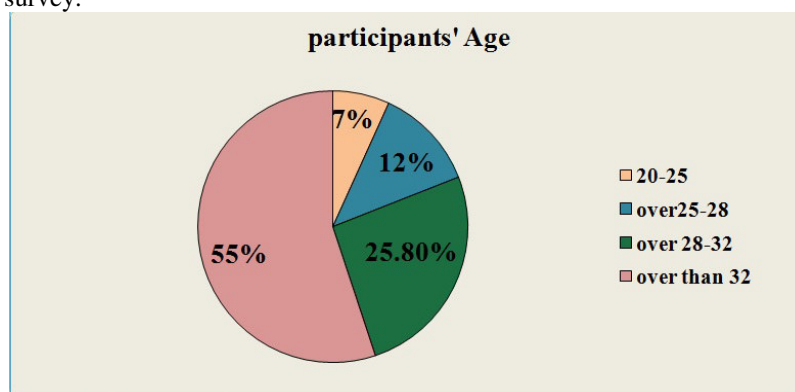


Figure 1. Participants' Age

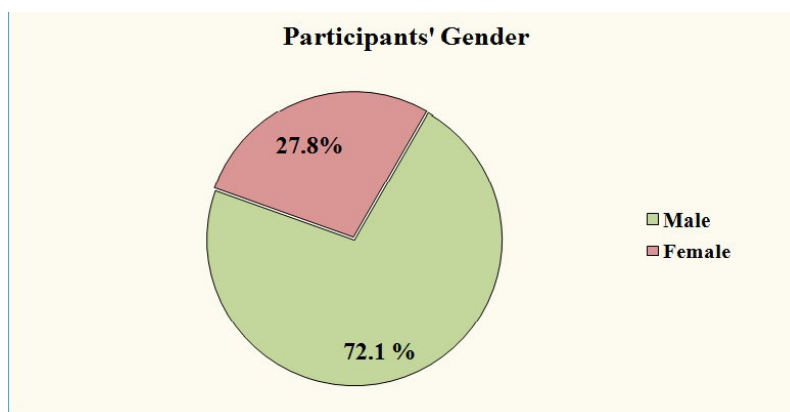


Figure 2. Participants' Gender

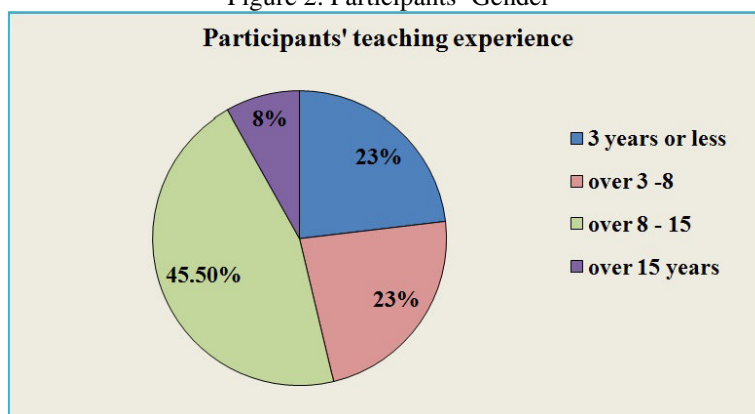


Figure 3. Participants' Teaching Experience

4. Results

In Table 3, the first column shows the survey questions related to the program educators' methodology. A summary of the frequency of each response is also displayed. Then mean (M) of each response and standard deviation have been calculated to show whether theory or practice was prevalent; this was determined using a five-rank scale in the last column, which shows the overall attitude of the participants towards the item.

Table 3. Results of Participants' Responses Regarding the Program Methodology

Methodology of the Program Factor									
Clause	Measure	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	The Result
1. Each theory about teaching English taught in the program was employed in a practical situation	Freq.	15	54	31	43	4	2.77	1.06	I don't know
	%	10.0%	37%	21%	29%	3%			
2. While you were studying, you watched or observed how methods of teaching were practiced.	Freq.	49	66	10	19	3	2.05	1.05	Disagree
	%	33%	45%	7%	13%	2%			
3. The program professors always presented the topic orally.	Freq.	0	13	9	50	75	4.27	0.92	Agree
	%	0%	9%	6%	34%	51%			
4. In the program, we were always asked to teach short lessons to the class as training on the theories.	Freq.	38	51	12	40	6	2.48	1.25	Disagree
	%	26%	35%	8%	27%	4%			
5. We, as students in the program, were always encouraged to bring up and to suggest ideas which enhanced the teaching practices.	Freq.	28	61	34	20	4	2.39	1.030	Disagree
	%	19%	41%	23%	13%	3%			
6. In the mid-term and final exams of the program, we were tested only in the theories of teaching rather than practice.	Freq.	7	18	26	56	40	3.70	1.136	Agree
	%	5%	12%	17%	38%	27%			
7. Page: 32 The personalities of the program's professors facilitated the spirit of practicing educational theories	Freq.	18	57	44	26	2	2.57	0.965	I don't know
	%	12%	38%	30%	18%	1%			
8. The supervisors from the program who supervised my practicum always guided me to relate and match my classroom practice to the theories.	Freq.	20	40	44	38	5	2.78	1.082	I don't know
	%	14%	27%	30%	26%	3%			
9. We were asked to do practice-oriented assignments for teaching.	Freq.	25	58	32	26	6	2.52	1.093	I don't know
	%	17%	39%	22%	18%	4%			

Findings clearly show that the participant's found that theory was often focused on more than practical application within their respective TESOL programs. The questions of Table 3 and their scores are listed here individually.

Item 1: M = 2.77 (I Don't Know). There is no absolute or affirmative decision regarding whether theory is prioritized over practical application. It is in the hesitation area.

Item 2: M = 2.05 (disagree). The participants believe that they were not exposed to or involved in the practical aspect of teaching methods.

Item 3: M= 4.27 (Agree). This indicates that professors depend primarily on lecturing and oral presentation to

enrich students' understanding of theory rather than focusing on practice.

Item 4: M= 2.48 (disagree). There is a lack of putting theory into practice, such as demo lessons.

Item 5: M= 2.39 (Disagree). There is no obvious encouragement from educators to student-teachers to bring up ideas of practice.

Item 6: M= 3.70 (Agree). This gives an impression of what an assessment might look like. It is supposed to be fully based on theory.

Item 7: M= 2.75 (I Don't Know). This item involves the participants' opinions about their professors. "I don't know" indicates that professors' methods have some balance between theory and practice.

Item 8: M= 2.78 (I Don't Know). This result indicates that the participants doubt the effectiveness of their professors' teaching supervision during the practicum period and the adherence of this supervision to a theoretical base.

Item 9: M= 2.52 (I Don't Know). This item focuses on types of assignments given to student-teachers. The mean indicates a focus on theory rather than practice.

Table 4. Results of Participants' Responses Regarding the Curricula

Curriculum of the Program Factor									
10. The textbooks in the program contain detailed practice by situations.	Freq.	19	57	35	33	3	2.61	1.035	I don't know
	%	13%	39%	24%	22%	2%			
11. The textbooks in the program reflect much theory without enough practical situations.	Freq.	3	11	13	68	52	4.05	0.963	Agree
	%	2%	7%	9%	46%	35%			

There were only two items for measuring the second factor (Curricula). Both items were direct questions regarding the curricula which aimed to determine if the textbooks used focused on theory or practice.

Item 10: M= 2.61 (I don't know). There was some hesitation amongst the participants to assert that the textbooks used contained guided practice.

Item 11: M= 4.05 (Agree). This item indicated that the textbooks had been enriched with theory. As a whole, curricula for the different programs were obviously rich with theory but likely not practice-driven.

Table 5. Results of Participants' Responses Regarding the Program Facilities

Facilities Factor									
12. The classrooms were equipped with multimedia devices.	Freq.	54	63	13	13	4	1.97	1.030	Disagree
	%	37%	43%	9%	9%	3%			
13. The buildings are suitable for teaching practice when we need to practice teaching.	Freq.	46	42	19	33	7	2.40	1.270	Disagree
	%	31%	29%	13%	22%	5%			
14. There is a rich library containing resources about teaching English.	Freq.	31	28	34	42	12	2.83	1.277	I don't know
	%	21%	19%	23%	29%	8%			

The items measuring the facility factor (see Table 5) refer to non-supportive facilities for teaching practices, such as multimedia and library resources. The first three factors of this study—methodology, curriculum and facilities—are components of the teachers' preparation programs. Together, these components identify the internal factors. However, the fourth factor examined in this study (Teaching Field) is meant to represent the programs' output (external factor). Table 6 demonstrates that—through colleagues, mentors and trial and error approach—teaching field is a primary source of experience for novice teachers.

Table 6. Results of Participants' Responses Regarding the Teaching Field

Teaching field factor									
15. I got over the challenges of teaching in my first three years of teaching by trial and error	Freq.	2	10	31	72	32	3.82	0.894	Agree
	%	1%	7%	21%	49%	22%			
16. I got over the challenges of teaching in my first three years by mentors' guidance.	Freq.	25	33	41	42	6	2.80	1.150	I don't know
	%	17%	22%	28%	29%	4%			
17. I got over the challenges of teaching in my first two years by observing my colleagues	Freq.	5	16	33	63	30	3.65	1.030	Agree
	%	3%	11%	22%	43%	20%			
18. The first three years of my teaching, my students were not as lucky as the students of the fourth and further years because I got much experience in the fourth and further years.	Freq.	7	20	40	62	18	3.43	1.027	Agree
	%	5%	13%	27%	42%	12%			
19. When I teach, I always relate the theory taught in your preparation program to what you are doing.	Freq.	11	45	45	38	8	2.91	1.039	I don't know
	%	7%	31%	31%	26%	5%			
20. I found difficulties in my teaching during the first three years because I was not prepared well in the program on the real practice of teaching.	Freq.	2	22	36	59	28	3.60	1.003	Agree
	%	1%	15%	24%	40%	19%			

Table 7 shows Cronbach's Alpha for the reliability of the questionnaire items. The reliability of the 20 items was found to be 0.711 in the acceptable range.

Table 7. Reliability of Items

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.711	20

5. Discussion

Marx (1975) accurately described the relationship between theory and practice stating that "Practice without theory is blind. Theory without practice is sterile." (p. 182). Marx sees theory and practice as being part of one interwoven relationship in which neither one can stand alone or functions effectively without the other. If practice is delayed after Theory is learned, that practice maybe less than functional since the pairing and timing of both concepts is essential. One of the major objectives of this paper is to determine and outline the correct timing and pairing of theory and practice in the context of TESOL programs. Theory is concerned with declarative knowledge "knowing that", while practice is concerned with procedural knowledge "knowing how". Whenever there is a significant gap or any other kind of separation between the acquisition of declarative and procedural knowledge, both aspects are affected negatively. Procedural knowledge will not follow the theory properly because of the experience shortage in the right timing. Thus, the details of the theory will not be as fresh as they were at the time of reception.

Practice can be looked at from various approaches. Some researchers have developed diagnostic techniques for practice. Ghaye (2011) summarized Reflective practice as follows: "It is a link between what we do and how we improve it. This is related to our feelings and emotions about our work. The reflection can be assessing ourselves here and now and analyzing the past problematic areas to perform better as well as focusing on the strengths as well" (p 5). Farrell (2012) suggested including a practice reflection during the pre-service courses and a supplementary course called *Teaching in the First Years*, which would focus on first-year

induction through “reflective practice” (p. 446). This painstaking reform is commendable and can lead to valuable results during the induction years of teaching. However, for a novice teacher, Reflective Practice could be considered a part of self-assessment and monitoring which could be categorized under the trial and error approach. Reflective practice during induction years unfortunately can deprive students from consistent high quality teaching, since the trial and error approach is the prominent feature of self-assessment. However, reflective practice is very successful with experienced teachers as it helps them start working on more innovative practices.

The most prominent deficiency of TESOL programs is that theory is introduced, enhanced, and reinforced separately from delayed, authentic practical implementation. Theory is thus learned as an abstract concept, creating an extra challenge for those who have audio-visual and kinesthetic learning preferences. These students therefore grasp only the surface level of these theories. Rogers and Babinski (2002) confirmed this challenge by describing novice teachers’ feeling. “Novice teachers may feel discouraged when idealized images of teaching differ from the reality of classroom” (p. 68). Another challenge of TESOL programs is that practice and authentic teaching come too late after the completion of theoretical preparation. Practice is therefore not based on or related to a solid theory, as shown by Item 20 of the survey. This may be attributed to inadequate theory-practice synchronization during the TESOL programs. This corresponds with Senior’s (2010) view that “many teachers have a good grasp of how to set up communicative activities, many lack a fundamental knowledge of learning theory” (p 171). There is evidence that some teachers avoid focusing on aspects of the language (including error correction) in their lessons. It is sought that theory and practice together form a “Meta-teaching” in which practitioners are aware of how and why they do what they do in ESL/EFL classrooms.

The TESOL field should be primarily practical, and its practices should be based on a theoretical foundation. This practical approach should be the goal of a TESOL program as opposed to a focus on an accumulation of theoretical knowledge to be later implemented in a delayed practice. Johnson (2009) (as cited in Kiely 2012) observes that teacher education “for much of its history a field of practice rather than one of research” (p. 503). One implication of this is that knowledge building has been performed through practice, rather than through conventional research methods. This manifests the role of theory as an initial phase that is employed concurrently with practice which is the primary component of the whole process.

The survey items and results of the present study reveal some key items which illuminate the balance between theory and practice in TESOL programs. Undoubtedly, the responses indicate a clear attitude from former TESOL students that these teacher preparation programs deliver more theory than they do practice. For instance, Item 2 is crucial because it asks a key question: Were student-teachers trained in practicing different approaches, such as the Direct Method, the Silent Way, the Communicative Method, the Audiolingual Method and the Grammar-Translation Method, so that they would be capable of implementing the appropriate method depending on the situation at hand. The responses to Item 2 indicate that most students simply read a list of features for each of these methods and discussed those features in class. For instance I asked some English teachers about the Natural Approach and the Silent Way and I received one answer “Yes, I studied that method at the university but I cannot remember the exact details”. As Brown (2007) states that some teachers do not distinguish between different approaches when they observe them. This is the result of being only exposed to theories without practice in the TESOL programs.

Merriam Webster defines teaching as “the act, practice, or profession of a teacher”. Merriam Webster's definition explains the nature of teaching to be in action not in theory. This action includes the act, practice, and profession of teaching. This practice is meant to be reciprocal experience (actual interaction) inside the classroom. Merriam Webster's definition supports the view that teaching skills require interpersonal interaction not only intrapersonal interaction. Troike (2006) explains interpersonal interaction as “communicative events and situations which occur between people” (p 112). This means a teacher must interact with real students. The studying phase at a TESOL program is replete with Intrapersonal interaction which is “communication that occurs within an individual's own mind” (p 113). One advantage of putting theory into action in TESOL classes is the availability of instant guidance, coaching and scaffolding by a course professor. In other words, theoretical lectures, written assignments and presentations cannot be considered reciprocal actions. Item 9, in the survey, shows that most respondents did not find assignments to be practical, since the average answer to this item was “I Don’t Know”.

There are interesting results to be considered in regard to the teaching field. Item17 of the survey emphasizes the significant role played by colleagues in the transference of teaching experience. This study conforms partially to Brannan and Bleistein's (2012) results which identified a considerable influence of colleagues and mentors but this study is neutral to the influence of mentors on new teachers. The discrepancy regarding mentors may have to do with the different demographic input between Branan & Bleistein's study and our study. The role of mentors may depend on the macro educational strategy, while colleague factor is emphasized significantly in both studies. This motivates us to create a simulated environment of practice providing these teacher preparation programs with solid theory and practice methods.

5.1 Actual vs. Snowball Practice Model (SPM) in TESOL programs

This study presents a suggested model of adapted structure of TESOL programs. This model emphasizes *how* practice is integrated into a program rather focusing on *the quality* of practice. Table 8 shows the actual structure of programs in Saudi Arabia while Figure 4 illustrates our conceptual framework for an alternative model. This alternative model, the Snowball Practice Model (SPM), is to make a practicum course available throughout the entire program. It would be free ESL/EFL courses offered for the public as an act of corporate social responsibility (CSR). This method would address two issues at once: hits two birds with a single stone. On the one hand, it allows a practicum course to be available at a low cost, because student-teachers could take on faculty and management roles as part of their training . On the other hand, it could be an act of CSR. A classroom could be dedicated to this part of the program. Including such a service into the program could facilitate the adaptation of the program structure for balancing theory with authentic practice. Table 8 and Figure 4 show a comparison between the two structures.

Table 8. Actual Structure of Teacher Preparation Program in KSA

Years	Methodology		Learning Reference	Assessment	Assessing practical
1 st Year	Linguistic Skills		Audio-Visual		
2 nd Year	Theoretical Awareness Empowerment		Audio-Visual		
3 rd Year	Interactional Stage Multidisciplinary		Audio-Visual		
4 th Year	Theoretical Reinforcement	Practical Training Feedback	Audio-Kinesthetic	Assessing theoretical	

5.1.1 Linguistic skills stage: This stage involves Saudi student-teachers enrolled in the program learning English language skills. The Course topics in this stage are writing, reading, grammar, speaking and listening, and study skills.

5.1.2 Theoretical Awareness and Empowerment stage: In this stage, concepts, terms, approaches, methods, theories of applied and pure linguistics, and pedagogy in lecture mode are delivered. This is a crucial stage for laying the foundation of students' knowledge bases. Newly learned theories are also supported during this stage with scholarly views, group discussion, opinions, assignments and demo practice are implemented.

5.1.3 Interdisciplinary and pedagogy through interaction: In this stage, student-teachers are asked to broaden their knowledge and perspectives by studying courses in related disciplines, such as Translation and Literature along with their TESOL courses. Student-teachers interact with one another by completing presentations, interactive reflections, and written assignments. They also prepare lesson plans and present them to the rest of the class.

5.1.4 Theoretical reinforcement and practical training: In this stage, theory is still being introduced. However, it is also being reinforced during one semester of practicum in some programs. The Practicum course acts as the authentic practice to prepare student-teachers for the real teaching field. A practicum supervisor usually makes five to eight observations of each student during their practicum to provide feedback on their work.

5.1.5 Assessment: Students' understanding of theory is assessed throughout the second, third and fourth years of the program, while practice is assessed during the last semester.

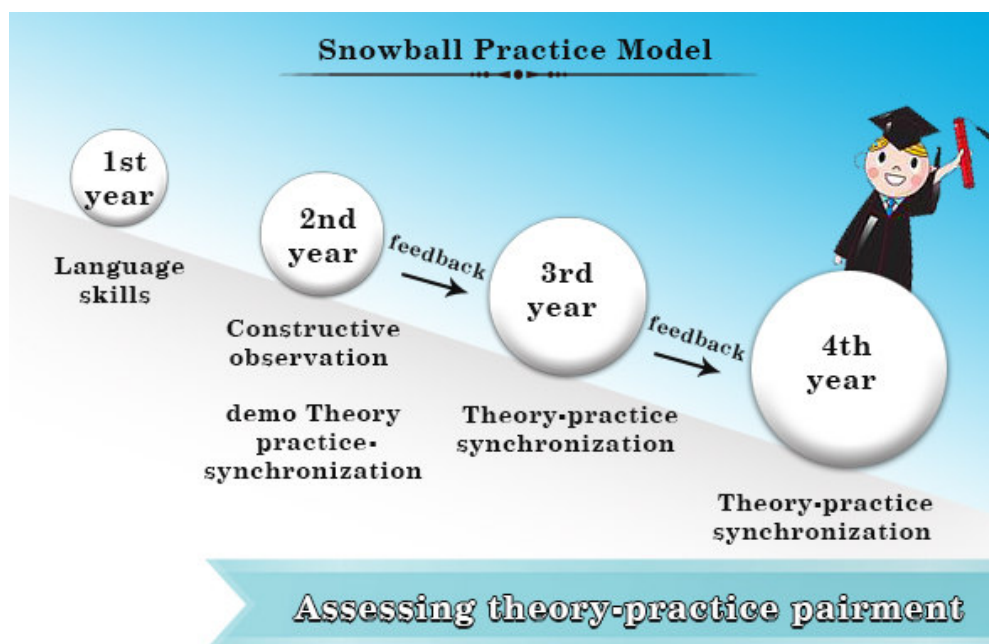


Figure 4. Snowball Practice Model (suggested structure)

The Snowball Practice Model (SPM), designed by the authors of the present study, relies on providing free English learning courses to the public. One classroom can be devoted to this purpose as this would help make the most of the availability of free resources (student-teachers). The SPM can provide student-teachers with easy access to authentic practice and observation. This model also introduces an optimal theory-based practice which is currently absent from TESOL programs as Ramani, Richards, Nunan and Widdowson 1990 state that "in the field of second language acquisition, teacher educators have frequently lamented the ever-present gap between theory and practice" (as cited from Senior 2010). In traditional TESOL programs, theory is studied far earlier and far more than practice. This stops student-teachers from learning how to imagine or to optimize how theory can be applied practically in different situations. By synchronizing the teaching of theory and practice, theory is used as the basis for practice. Moreover, practice also can enhance theory comprehension with successful linkage. Widdowson (1984) suggested that "fostering dependence on teaching techniques alone, without the awareness of how techniques relate to theoretical principles, militates against healthy development in the ELT profession" (as cited in Senior 2010 p. 172). In the SPM, feedback is provided constantly by peers and supervisors. In this model, student-teachers begin to gain experience in their second year and they continue to gain more experience as they go, creating a snowball effect. The more they roll over years, the more experience they gain, until eventually they are equipped with enough practice to skillfully teach in ESL/EFL classrooms. Additionally, this model involves the assessment of theory being carried throughout student-teachers' teaching in classrooms rather than writing tests. This gives more reliability and validity to the assessment process. The following are the definitions of the terms used in Figure 4.

5.2.1 Constructive observation. This involves continuously observing real classes via either attendance or video recordings. Discussion is then carried out either individually or in a group. This allows student-teachers to apply the theory they have learned and discuss it in meta-teaching sessions.

5.2.2 Demo theory-practice synchronization. This involves teaching mini lessons (demos) to theorize applicable practices. This occurs on a weekly basis and is done to increase the socialization involved in teaching.

5.2.3 Theory-practice synchronization. Due to availability of practicum opportunities at hand during the second, third and fourth years of the program, this synchronization involves student-teachers to teach some classes all year long, while theory is being learned. In other words, it is to study theory, discuss it, and understand it, and then to apply it in a real classroom no later than one or two weeks.

5.2.4 Assessing theory-practice pairing. Assessment of the student-teachers' performance depends primarily on observing *how* well theory is implemented in an authentic teaching environment rather than doing paper-based tests. However, some paper-based tests are still conducted.

Richards and Crookes (1988) assert that "teaching maybe viewed as an art, as a craft"(p. 11). The SPM provides a good opportunity for student-teachers to form and shape their skills, art, and creativity during the program rather than shaping their talent in the field and being forced to learn as they go.

5.3 Characteristics of SPM. The following are the characteristics of SPM:

1. Building a theoretical base through reciprocal theory and practice (theory-practice synchronization).

2. Reliable and valid assessment based on synchronization progress.
3. Providing continuous, influential feedback and guidance.
4. Balancing theory with practice for graduates.
5. Besides teaching, providing educational management skills.
6. Providing CSR by offering free courses to the public.
7. Instilling confidence, autonomy, and socialization in students of the program.

Student-teachers who graduate from an SPM-based TESOL program would be completely prepared to start teaching as fairly experienced teachers applying different levels of teaching skills in different situations as levels shown in Table 9. On the contrary, novice teachers who graduate from traditional TESOL programs usually develop their teaching skills gradually moving from a surface level of teaching to a deeper one using trial-and-error, mentors' guidance, colleagues' help or developmental training. Table 9 was designed by the authors of the present study.

Table 9. Levels of Teaching Skills

component level	Input Generation	Student/Teacher Interaction	Assessment	Feedback
Level 1	Oral presentation	Drills	Homework	Negative correction
Level 2	Visual presentation	Reciprocal discussion and technology	Written test	Positive correction
Level 3	Audio-visual	Communicative activities	Constructive assessment	paraphrasing
Level 4	Kinesthetic and Tactile	Authentic conversation	Real Recordings	Student/teacher conference

6. Conclusion

The research questions are intriguing and speculative. Therefore, this study was carried out to pinpoint the theory-practice jigsaw relationship with an alternative model (SPM) to the traditional model of the TESOL programs. Based on the results, theory surpasses practice in which restructuring TESOL programs is a demand to utilize an optimal integration of a core and complimentary segments of teaching process. On the whole, the attitude of Saudi teachers of English is negatively expressed towards the proportion of practice in the current TESOL programs, while they assert that colleagues and trial-and-error approach are primary sources of experience gaining. This leads to an initiation of a structural reform movement in English teachers' preparation programs in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, this study, not only serves the Saudi educational system, but also it can be generalized to all programs which have similar structures and conditions to the Saudi programs. A recommendation for further studies is to take TESOL professors' views about enriching practice in the programs and methods of its implementation.

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