



**An Evaluation of the Language Improvement Component  
in the Pre-Service ELT Programme  
at a College of Education in Kuwait: A case study**

*Submitted by*

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To

The University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Education  
(March, 2012)

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*Dedicated with love to*  
*the memory of my father, Faleh Alnwaiem,*  
*who passed away during the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of my PhD journey.*

*I still remember his words when I last saw him: "Son, I'm proud of you and*  
*I'm confident you'll be a PhD holder one day."*

*I wish you were here dad...*

## **Abstract**

The current research study was conducted with the aim of evaluating the basic language skills component (BLSC) in the ELT pre-service programme at a College of Education in Kuwait by eliciting the participants' views regarding its quality and using the results as a basis for suggesting amendments and improvements. The BLSC comprises three courses, Writing, Reading and Conversation, which must be taken by new student teachers in the first semester of enrolment in order to improve their language proficiency.

In view of the exploratory nature of this study and its context-specificity, the naturalistic orientation of interpretive and social constructivism as an epistemological stance were selected. The research design employed a sequential mixed methods case study using an adapted version of Bellon and Handler's (1982) evaluation model. The participants in the study were three lecturers teaching the BLSC courses and 55 students in their first year at the English Department. The data, both quantitative and qualitative, were collected through course evaluation questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, diaries, and relevant written documents. Data were analysed quantitatively using SPSS descriptive statistics and qualitatively using exploratory content analysis.

The findings revealed that the BLSC has some major shortcomings that need to be addressed. Shortcomings related to the physical environment of the college site include old buildings, a limited number of classrooms, shortages in learning and teaching resources and facilities, and insufficient library resources. With regard to the goals and objectives of the BLSC, the findings showed some critical issues and the need for a certain degree of revision. Moreover, the findings reveal students' dissatisfaction with some aspects of the content and materials of the BLSC, including boring and non-challenging topics, and outdated textbooks. Teaching methods were found to be traditionally oriented, applying a teacher-centred approach. The findings show that students were extremely critical of the traditional assessment philosophy used by their teachers, which depends on a final exam that tests rote-learned materials.

The study concludes by making suggestions that will have implications for the improvement and development of the given programme in particular, as well as educational practice in general. In addition, the study proposes a model for evaluation which can be applied and modified depending on the specifications of any given context.

## **Acknowledgments**

First and foremost I praise and glorify Allah (God) the most gracious and the most merciful who provided and continues to provide me with health and strength to pursue my studies. Though only my name appears on the cover of this thesis, a great many people have contributed to its production. It is a pleasure to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed in different ways to this study.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my first supervisor Dr Salah Troudi, who I have been privileged to be supervised by, for his patience, devotion, and insightful feedback and guidance throughout all the stages of my PhD research. Indeed, I am greatly indebted to him for providing me with time, knowledge, and emotional support and understanding in times of hardship and apprehension. My thanks also go to Dr Shirley Larkin, my second supervisor, for her valuable comments.

My sincere gratitude and honour go to all my colleagues at the University of Exeter, especially Abdulrahman Alfahadi & Mohammed Fakehy, my best friends, whom I first met in the UK and who became like my brothers. I greatly value their friendship and I deeply appreciate their belief in me. Special thanks go to my colleague, Dr Abdelhamid Ahmed, for his emotional support and friendship.

I also wish to express my greatest indebtedness to my family, especially my mother, for their continuous prayers, encouragement, and support.

Finally, and most importantly, a sweet special thanks to my second half, my soul mate beloved wife, for putting up with my 'dark moments' and providing me with unconditional emotional support and encouragement, and for being always there for me. Special thanks must also go to my two children, Fahad & Haneen, who were both born during my PhD journey, seeing them growing while I am away, busy with my studies, was a hard time. I owe them all a lot and I look forward to compensating them in future. I count myself very lucky to have such a loving family.

## List of Contents

### Chapter I Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study .....	10
1.2 Preamble .....	11
1.3 Statement of the Problem .....	13
1.4 Purpose of the Study .....	15
1.5 Research Questions .....	16
1.6 Significance of the Study .....	16
1.7 Organization of the Thesis .....	18

### Chapter II Context of the Study

2.0 Introduction .....	20
2.1 Background of Education in Kuwait .....	20
2.1.1 The General Aims of Education in Kuwait .....	20
2.1.2 The History of the Education System in Kuwait .....	22
2.1.3 The Government's Role in Developing the Education Status .....	23
2.1.4 The Structure of Education in Kuwait .....	24
2.2 Introduction of ELT in the Educational System in Kuwait .....	26
2.2.1 History of ELT in Kuwait .....	27
2.2.2 ELT in the Higher Education Institutes .....	30
2.2.3 Teacher Education in Kuwait .....	32
2.2.4 Programme Evaluation in Kuwait .....	36
2.3 Conclusion .....	37

### Chapter III Literature Review

3.1 Introduction .....	38
<b>SECTION ONE: Programme Evaluation</b>	
3.2 Definition of Evaluation .....	38
3.3 Brief History of Programme Evaluation .....	41
3.4 Purposes, Types, Approaches and Models of Evaluation .....	43
3.4.1 Evaluation Types .....	44
3.4.1.1 Formative vs. Summative .....	45
3.4.1.2 Product vs. Process .....	47
3.4.2 Approaches to Programme Evaluation .....	49
3.4.2.1 Case Study Evaluation Approach .....	50
3.4.3 Models of Programme Evaluation .....	51
3.4.3.1 Bellon and Handler's Evaluation Model .....	52
3.5 Conceptual Framework of the Study .....	55
<b>SECTION TWO: Language Teacher Education Programmes</b>	
3.6 Introduction .....	58
3.7 The Importance of Language Improvement Component .....	59
3.8 Development of Curriculum Elements .....	62
3.8.1 Establishing Goals and Objectives .....	63
3.8.2 Importance of Teaching Materials .....	67
3.8.2.1 Selection of Content .....	69
3.8.2.2 Materials Evaluation .....	70
3.8.2.3 Use of Educational Technology in ELT .....	71

3.8.3 Teacher’s Role in Achieving Quality Teaching Methods .....	72
3.8.3.1 Student Centeredness .....	74
3.8.3.2 The Importance of Teacher Evaluation .....	76
3.8.4 English Language Assessment and Feedback .....	77
3.8.4.1 The Difference between Evaluation and Assessment .....	77
3.8.4.2 Assessment Practices .....	78
3.8.4.3 Formats for Testing Basic Language Skills .....	80
3.8.4.4 Feedback .....	82
3.9 Previous Studies on Language Programme Evaluation .....	83
3.10 Summary .....	87

## **Chapter IV Methodology and Research Design**

4.1 Introduction .....	88
4.2 Preamble .....	88
4.3 Philosophical Assumptions: Research Paradigms .....	89
4.3.1 Constructivist Approach to Programme Evaluation .....	91
4.4 Research Framework and Theoretical Justification of this Study .....	92
4.5 Research Questions .....	95
4.6 Research Design: Mixed Methods Case Study .....	97
4.6.1 The Role of the Evaluator .....	99
4.7 Data Collection Instruments .....	100
4.7.1 Quantitative Data Collection: Questionnaires .....	102
4.7.1.1 Questionnaire Design .....	103
4.7.2 Qualitative Data Collection .....	106
4.7.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews .....	107
4.7.2.2 Students’ Diaries .....	110
4.7.2.3 Document Analysis .....	111
4.7.3 Relationship of the Research Instruments to the Research Questions .....	112
4.8 Participants .....	112
4.9 Data Collection Procedures .....	114
4.9.1 First Contact with Participants .....	117
4.9.2 Phase One .....	118
4.9.3 Phase Two .....	119
4.10 Data Analysis Procedures .....	120
4.10.1 Questionnaire Data Analysis .....	121
4.10.2 Qualitative Data Analysis .....	122
4.11 Strategies for Ensuring Quality Data and Verifiable Conclusions .....	123
4.11.1 Piloting .....	123
4.11.2 Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire .....	125
4.11.3 Establishing Trustworthiness for the Qualitative Data .....	126
4.11.3.1 Credibility .....	127
4.11.3.2 Transferability .....	127
4.11.3.3 Dependability .....	128
4.11.3.4 Confirmability .....	128
4.11.4 Triangulation .....	129
4.12 Ethical Considerations .....	129
4.13 Limitations of the Study .....	131
4.14 Summary .....	133

## Chapter V: Findings and Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction .....	134
5.2 Description of the Current Practices at the Study Site .....	134
5.2.1 The English Language Department .....	135
5.2.2 Admission Policy .....	139
5.2.3 The Learning Environment .....	139
5.2.4 Teaching Staff .....	141
5.2.5 Course Objectives .....	141
5.2.5.1 Writing Course .....	141
5.2.5.2 Reading Course .....	142
5.2.5.3 Conversation Course .....	142
5.2.6 Course Content and Materials .....	143
5.2.6.1 Writing Course .....	143
5.2.6.2 Reading Course .....	144
5.2.6.3 Conversation Course .....	145
5.2.7 Course Assessment .....	146
5.2.7.1 Writing Course .....	146
5.2.7.2 Reading Course .....	147
5.2.7.3 Conversation Course .....	147
5.2.8 Summary .....	148
5.3 Participants' Evaluative Views of the BLSC.....	148
5.3.1 Course Objectives .....	149
5.3.1.1 "A Grammar Course Disguised as Writing" .....	149
5.3.1.2 Reinforcing Already Taught Reading Skills .....	152
5.3.1.3 Inattention to Listening Skills in the Conversation Course .....	155
5.3.2 Course Content and Materials .....	159
5.3.2.1 Language Skills Topics .....	159
5.3.2.2 Selection of Teaching Materials .....	168
5.3.3 Teaching and Learning .....	174
5.3.3.1 Approaches and Techniques to Teaching the BLSC .....	174
5.3.3.2 Teaching Aids .....	193
5.3.4 Assessment & Feedback .....	195
5.3.4.1 Formative and Summative Assessment Practices .....	195
5.3.4.2 Students' Views of Assessment .....	198
5.3.4.3 Feedback .....	209
5.4 The Nature of Students' Challenges in the English Department .....	212
5.4.1 Socio-Cultural Issues .....	213
5.4.1.1 Issues Related to Local Culture .....	213
5.4.1.2 Influence of Pre-University Education .....	217
5.4.2 Individual Characteristics .....	220
5.4.2.1 Linguistic Difficulties .....	220
5.4.2.2 Psychological Issues .....	229
5.5 Suggestions for Improving the BLSC .....	233
5.5.1 Suggestions for Course Objectives .....	234
5.5.2 More Time for the BLSC .....	235
5.5.3 Suggestions for Course Content and Teaching Materials .....	235
5.5.4 Suggestions for Course Teaching and Learning .....	237
5.5.5 Suggestions for Course Assessment and Feedback .....	240
5.5.6 The Need for More Language Skills Courses .....	243
5.5.7 English as a Medium of Instruction .....	245
5.5.8 Teachers' Professional Development .....	246
5.6 Conclusion .....	247

## **Chapter VI: Discussion of the Research Findings**

6.1 Introduction .....	249
<b>SECTION ONE: Discussion of the Results of the Evaluation</b>	
6.2 Physical Environment .....	249
6.3 Findings for the Four Main Aspects of the Programme .....	252
6.3.1 Goals and Objectives .....	252
6.3.2 Content and Materials .....	254
6.3.2.1 Inappropriate Selection of Textbooks .....	255
6.3.3 Teaching and Learning .....	257
6.3.3.1 Teaching Grammar as Writing .....	258
6.3.3.2 Genre Writing Approach .....	259
6.3.3.3 Lack of Practice and Limited use of Technological Teaching Aids....	261
6.3.4 Assessment and Feedback .....	262
6.4 Learning and Teaching Issues .....	264
6.4.1 Students' Linguistic Challenges.....	264
6.4.2 Students' Psychological Challenges .....	267
6.4.3 Teachers' Professional Development .....	270
6.5 Socio-Cultural Issues .....	271
6.5.1 Students' Pre-University Learning Experience .....	271
6.5.1.1 Memorisation and Lack of Criticality and Creativity .....	271
6.5.1.2 Exam-Oriented Education System .....	273
6.5.2 Marginalizing Local Culture .....	273
6.5.3 Students' Lack of Reading Culture .....	274
<b>SECTION TWO: Broader Issues Emerging from the Evaluation</b>	
6.6 Responsibilities and Role Perceptions .....	275
6.7 Teachers' Perceptions of Students .....	279
6.8 Unexpected Students Voices .....	281
6.9 Power in the Teacher Education Classroom .....	284
6.10 Summary .....	286

## **Chapter VII: Conclusions, Implications and Contributions**

7.1 Introduction .....	287
7.2 Summary of the Research Findings .....	287
7.3 Implications of the Study .....	289
7.3.1 Implications arising from the current evaluation.....	289
7.3.2 Wider implications for the field of ELT teacher education.....	294
7.4 Contributions of the Study .....	296
7.5 Suggestions for Further Research .....	300
7.6 Final Remarks and Conclusions .....	301
7.7 Reflection on my PhD Journey of Research .....	304

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 Writing Course Evaluation Questionnaire .....	307
Appendix 2 Reading Course Evaluation Questionnaire .....	312
Appendix 3 Conversation Course Evaluation Questionnaire .....	317
Appendix 4 Teacher Course Evaluation Interview .....	322
Appendix 5 Student Course Evaluation Interview .....	324
Appendix 6 Student Diary Form .....	327



Appendix 7 Preliminary Questionnaire .....	328
Appendix 8 Example of Transcribed Interview with Writing Course Lecturer .....	329
Appendix 9 Extract of a Coded Transcript .....	335
Appendix 10 Certificate of Ethical Research Approval .....	337
Appendix 11 Consent Form .....	340
Appendix 12 A Picture of One of the Classrooms .....	341
<b>List of References .....</b>	<b>342</b>

### **List of Tables**

Table 2.1 The Educational Structure in Kuwait .....	25
Table 3.1 Some of the common definitions of evaluation .....	39
Table 3.2 Comparison of formative and summative evaluation .....	46
Table 4.1 Instruments used to answer the research questions.....	112
Table 4.2 Questionnaire respondents .....	113
Table 5.1 Marking Criteria .....	146
Table 5.2 Students' views of the objectives of the writing course.....	150
Table 5.3 Students' views of the objectives of the reading course.....	154
Table 5.4 Students' views of the objectives of the conversation course.....	157
Table 5.5 Students' views of the content & materials of the writing course.....	159
Table 5.6 Students' views of the content & materials of the reading course .....	161
Table 5.7 Students' views of the content & materials of the conversation course .....	164
Table 5.8 Students' views about the teaching & learning in the writing course .....	176
Table 5.9 Students' views about teaching & learning in the reading course .....	184
Table 5.10 Students' views about the teaching & learning in the conversation course.....	189
Table 5.11 Students' views of writing course assessment & feedback.....	199
Table 5.12 Students' views of reading course assessment & feedback.....	202
Table 5.13 Students' views of conversation course assessment & feedback.....	205
Table 5.14 Students' ratings of the degree of difficulty of the four language skills.....	221

### **List of Figures**

Figure 1.1 English Major Programme Components .....	15
Figure 4.1 General Design of the Study.....	99
Figure 4.2 Sequential Mixed-Methods Design Procedure.....	116
Figure 5.1 English Major Curriculum at a pioneering College of Education .....	137
Figure 5.2 Participants' Evaluative Views of BLSC .....	149
Figure 5.3 Students' challenges in the English Department .....	213
Figure 7.1 Proposed Model for Evaluation .....	298

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

I started learning English at the age of ten, when I was in my fifth year at school, and I majored in English when I joined Kuwait University. Raising my English proficiency level was my major concern both in high school and college, as I realised that without being proficient in English it would be very difficult for me to achieve my goal to be a successful English teacher. The only chance I had to improve my English proficiency at Kuwait University was the language improvement courses that I studied in the first semester at the beginning of my English language teaching (ELT) teacher education programme. I remember that this was a frustrating experience for many reasons. I thought these courses would prepare me and help me to improve my English before continuing the programme. However, this was not the case. Most classes were taught with little real English practice. The teacher used Arabic most of the time, therefore I felt that I was in an Arabic class, not in a class in which we were supposed to practice the target language as much as possible. Also, the language teachers taught us in a very traditional way. For example, I remember the students had no active role in learning the language; the teacher led the class most of the time and we sat passively waiting for his or her instructions. By the end of the first semester it was clear to me that these courses were mostly useless and the goal of most students was just to pass the exam, rather than to learn anything; therefore, I searched for other ways to improve my English by joining the British Council and taking language summer courses in the UK.

Later on, as a Kuwaiti English teacher, I became interested in examining the difficulties that Kuwaiti English teachers face while teaching. I noticed from the beginning of my teaching journey that a low standard of English is considered a major obstacle for many of my Kuwaiti teaching colleagues. This was confirmed after conducting a textbook evaluation study as part of my Master of Arts degree at Leeds University in the UK. I found that despite the negative aspects of the textbook, it was the teachers' low levels of English language proficiency that were

the most problematic factor, as they could not teach the textbook in the way it should be taught. Many of the English teachers referred to the poor English preparation they had received in their pre-service education. At that point, I began to consider what contribution I could make towards improving the situation in the ELT teacher education programme in Kuwait.

Based on my personal experience of learning English and becoming an English language teacher, I realised that the language component of the ELT teacher education programme is not effective and could play a better role in improving future student teachers' English proficiency. Hence, the first topic that came to mind when I had the chance to do my PhD was to evaluate the language improvement component of the English teacher education programme from the student teachers' and lecturers' points of view. As a PhD student with a professional interest in carrying out research at higher degree level to evaluate the language component of the ELT teacher education programme, I realised that conducting such research would throw valuable light on ways to develop and improve the current situation in the ELT teacher education programme in my country as well as making a much needed contribution by giving students and teachers the chance to have their voice heard and their views expressed and delivered to the Ministry of Education authorities. If ELT teacher education programmes in Kuwait are to be reformed one day, then evaluation research of this kind could be very helpful by introducing new models of evaluation for teacher education programmes, and suggesting recommendations for improvement. This is what I hope to achieve in my study.

## **1.2 Preamble**

Generally speaking, teachers are the foundation of the educational process and their role is vital. It is argued that the success or failure of any educational system depends mainly on the teacher. In fact, as Hargreaves & Lo (2000: 1) contend, "it is teachers, more than anybody, who are expected to build learning communities, create the knowledge society and develop the capacities for innovation". Moreover, recently, there has been growing recognition that teachers play a major and central role in student achievement (Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Carey, 2004). The better the teachers are, the better the students' performance. Inevitably, therefore, the key to

the success of any educational system depends on the quality of its teacher education programmes.

Teacher education programmes in the field of ELT aim to educate and train effective and competent language teachers. The curriculum in such programmes is divided into three components: (1) language, (2) science and (3) practicum (Rahimi, 2008). The language component plays an important role in improving students' language proficiency, which is considered the most essential characteristic of a good language teacher (Brown, 2001; Cullen, 2001) and "has indeed constituted the bedrock of the professional confidence of non-native English teachers" (Candido de Lima, 2001: 145). Moreover, other researchers, such as Thomas (1987), argue that the main goal of any language teacher education programme should be the teacher's linguistic competence.

Competence in using English in the classroom is the most essential characteristic of a skilled and proficient English language teacher, and is considered to be the most important skill to attain for many English teachers (Lange, 1990). Cullen (2001) argues that a language teacher without the requisite language skills will definitely lack authority and self-confidence in the classroom, and this will consequently affect all aspects of his or her teaching performance. Language teachers are presumed to be competent and well trained, with good command of the basic language skills, and their inability to meet the required standards leads to imperfect and deficient teaching (Al-Mutawa, 1997).

Improving language proficiency ranks as the most essential component in any ELT teacher education programme (Berry, 1990; Murdoch, 1994). Obviously, the priority of language improvement is particularly important in countries where access to the target language and native speakers of the language is limited (Cullen, 2001) as in the State of Kuwait.

Despite the fact that the language improvement component is a significant training requirement for English teachers all over the world, it is sometimes neglected in pre-service as well as in-service programmes. According to Cullen (1994), pre-service English language teacher education programmes around the world usually

include a fairly predictable set of components, such as methodology/pedagogical skills, a linguistic component, a literature component, a practical component, and sometimes a language proficiency improvement component which aims to develop and improve the general language proficiency of the future teachers. Cullen (1994) contends that low proficiency in English is a major concern among teachers, and should also be of concern to those involved in planning pre-service teacher education programmes.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

There is a noticeable dissatisfaction among Kuwaiti educationalists with the teaching competency levels of newly employed, newly qualified Kuwaiti English teachers. For example, a recent study conducted by Al-Darwish (2006) investigated the effectiveness of the teaching delivered in public schools by English teachers who had graduated from the ELT teacher education programme at one of the Educational Colleges in Kuwait. The results showed that these teachers lacked proficiency in English and therefore lacked confidence in speaking English in classes or in public. Moreover, Al-Shalabi (1988) conducted an evaluative study on the pre-service ELT teacher education programme at Kuwait University. The results showed that the majority of candidates' language competency scores were unfavourable. The reason for such a low level of proficiency among students can be attributed to many factors, of which inadequate teacher education is likely to be one of the most important. Consequently, many researchers have called for the development and adaptation of such programmes. For instance, Al-Sheikh (1993) recommends that a comprehensive evaluation of the teacher education programmes should be conducted in Kuwait.

As the language component in ELT teacher education curricula is considered essential in developing and increasing the level of proficiency of English teachers, there is a need for a comprehensive evaluation of this component. Such evaluations may help to: i) identify the strengths and weaknesses of the existing curricula; ii) improve the current programmes; and iii) recognise the language development needs and expectations of the student teachers registered on these programmes.

This research study was conducted at the Department of English in a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait, in order to evaluate the basic language skills component (BLSC) of the ELT teacher education programme with the purpose of improving it. The English major programme consists of five components: Basic Language Skills, Linguistics, Literature, Teaching of English as a Foreign/Second Language, and the Vocational Courses Component (see Figure 1.1). This study focuses on the BLSC which comprises three courses which must be taken by new student teachers in the first semester of enrolment in order to improve their language proficiency. These courses are Writing, Reading and Conversation, as specified in the English major curriculum shown in Table 5.1 below (the courses are described in detail in Chapter V).

Many students enrolled in the Department of English complain about their proficiency level in English language. They reported experiencing language problems due to their lack of the basic necessary skills and knowledge, which makes it hard for them to communicate effectively in English. Students pointed out that they have difficulties in writing, reading, listening and speaking in English. They state that although they have taken the compulsory BLSC and passed it at the beginning of the programme, they have gained very little improvement in their language and the courses have not had the expected impact on their language competence or proficiency. The lecturers in the Department of English confirm these problems. Obviously, many of these language proficiency problems stem from the school education these students experienced prior to joining this programme; however, the basic language skills courses should have an impact on improving their language proficiency. For this reason, as a major source of English teachers for public schools in Kuwait, the ELT teacher education programme at this pioneering Education College, specifically the BLSC, needs to be evaluated and investigated in order to find areas for improvement to achieve the highest level of teaching preparation practice.

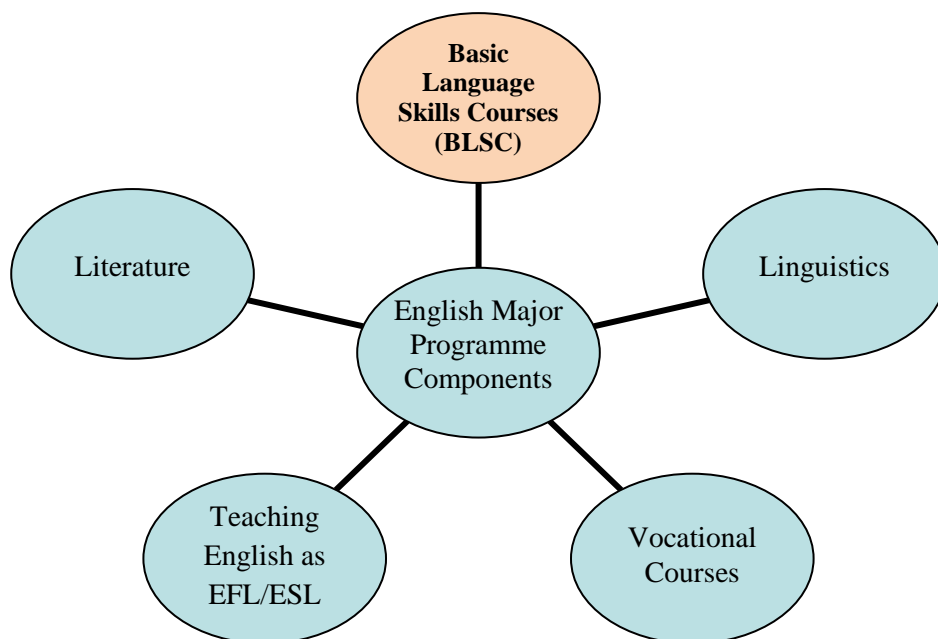


Figure 1.1 English Major Programme Components

This study is particularly timely because, since its establishment in 2001-2002, the ELT teacher education programme at the education college in question has not been evaluated, either as a whole or in terms of its components. This is therefore a useful opportunity to explore the strengths and weaknesses of these courses.

#### 1.4 Purpose of the Study

As a result of the aforementioned discussion, an evaluation of the BLSC in the Department of English at a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait has been chosen to be the focus of this research study. Evaluating the courses of the BLSC through a comprehensive study and discovering areas that need improvement may help in finding solutions for the students' language problems.

The overall goal of this study is to evaluate and explore the BLSC in the programme of the Department of English, and use the results as a basis for suggesting practical amendments and improvements. This is done by eliciting students and lecturers' views about the three language courses and presenting their suggestions and recommendations for improvement. The study specifically attempts to achieve the following aims:

- To understand the current situation of the basic language skills courses in the Department of English in terms of: (1) course objectives, (2) content

and materials, (3) teaching and learning and (4) student assessment and feedback.

- To identify students and lecturers' views of these BLSC in terms of the four aspects mentioned above.
- To identify the nature of the challenges faced by the Kuwaiti students in the English Department.
- To recommend and suggest improvements to the basic language skills component in the English language teaching programme.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

For the present study, four research questions have been developed to guide the process of gathering data that to help identify areas for improvement in the BLSC:

- 1) What are the current practices of the ELT teacher education programme at a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait?
- 2) What are Kuwaiti students and lecturers' evaluative views about the basic language skills component at a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait?
- 3) What is the nature of the Kuwaiti students' challenges in the English Department at a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait?
- 4) What do Kuwaiti students and lecturers suggest for improving the Basic Language Skills Component?

These research questions and the strategies adopted to address them are considered in more detail in Chapter IV.

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

There is no doubt that any shortcomings or defects in teacher education programmes will vitally affect the teaching process. Teacher education programmes are considered to be a critical element in the achievement of the objectives of education, so educational programmes should be frequently reviewed and evaluated to keep up with worldwide developments. Improvements and amendments to teacher education programmes have an essential role in the educational process, therefore programmes that do not undergo constant development will struggle to respond to the present needs, interests and expectations of society.



This study is significant for a number of reasons. The need for such a research study at the English Department in a pioneering College of Education has become obvious as a result of both the researcher's observations and informal feedback received from the students and lecturers regarding problems with various elements in the BLSC programme. In addition, this study is the first comprehensive evaluation project conducted into the BLSC English teacher education programme since the establishment of this College of Education in 2001-2002. Therefore, it will be interesting to find out how this component is progressing, what its current situation is and how students and lecturers evaluate its performance.

Evaluation studies carried out in Kuwait and in the Arab world as a whole, although rare, generally follow a positivist paradigm as a theoretical framework and methodology (Al-Naimi, 1996). This study is methodologically unique in relation to the evaluation of educational programmes in the Kuwaiti context. Most of the previous evaluation studies in Kuwait have used a questionnaire instrument with closed-ended items as the main method, depending solely on statistical analysis in presenting the results (e.g., Safi, 1986; Safi, 1995; Al-Mutawa & Al-Dabbous, 1997; Al-Mutawa, 1997). However, this study benefits from a variety of methods that explore the participants' views in more extensive detail by employing interview and diary methods and analysing them qualitatively. Moreover, this evaluation makes use of the interpretive/social constructivist mode of enquiry which is difficult to apply in Kuwait due to cultural considerations, where the lecturer is seen as the sole authority and has complete power, while students are considered mainly as passive receivers.

It should be noted that I come from the same context as that in which this study takes place and have experience of the educational context, as a teacher of English. Although this helped me explain and interpret the findings of the study, building on my own experience and understanding of the context, this arguably may have affected the formulation of the questions in this study (e.g. the four preliminary questions). My preconceptions of the phenomenon may also have led to some bias in my interpretation of the data (my personal positioning vis-à-vis the evaluation is described in detail in section 4.6.1 in Chapter IV).

It is hoped that the findings of the study may be able to provide valuable information to decision-makers to assist them in making changes and improvements in order to design a more effective language improvement component in the department of English, thus enabling future ELT students to acquire a better command of English. Finally, the present study may contribute to the field of programme evaluation by presenting a flexible evaluation model or research design, which can be implemented in different contexts.

### **1.7 Organisation of the Thesis**

This chapter presented an introduction and background to this study, which paved the way towards identifying the problem, purpose, research questions and significance of the study.

Chapter II is intended to familiarise the reader with the Kuwaiti educational context and background within which this study took place. This includes the aims of the educational system in Kuwait, followed by an outline of some of the historical events and the economic and cultural/political pressures that shaped the formation of these aims. Moreover, it shows how ELT is implemented in the educational system, and ends by shedding some light on the teacher education programme in Kuwait and its evaluation system.

Chapter III presents a review of the literature related to the evaluation of educational programmes in general, with special emphasis on language programme evaluation. This chapter is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the evaluation aspect, encompassing a brief history of programme evaluation, followed by an exploration of its purposes, types, approaches and models. The second section discusses the ELT teacher education programme, with special emphasis on the evaluation of its course objectives, content and materials, teaching methods and assessment.

Chapter IV outlines the methodology of the current study. It starts with the ontological assumptions underpinning the study, including the epistemological stance adopted and the theoretical framework followed. The chapter then sheds light on the study design, data collection instruments and participants. It also

describes the data collection and analysis procedures and the strategies applied to ensure quality data. Finally, the ethical considerations, as well as the limitations of the current study, are presented.

Chapter V presents a detailed analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data from the four research instruments used in this study: namely, the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, diaries and document analysis. This includes statistical data analysis as well as interpretation of the qualitative findings.

Chapter VI discusses the key findings drawn from the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data of the current study, focusing on linking the findings to the context of the study and the related literature.

Finally, Chapter VII summarises the findings of the current research and offers some final remarks and conclusions. It also presents the implications arising from this study and its theoretical and pedagogical contributions to knowledge. Finally, the chapter ends with possible suggestions for further research and a reflection upon the researcher's PhD journey.

## **Chapter II**

### **Context of the Study**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents an overview of the Kuwaiti educational system and its history, as well as the implementation of English language teaching in Kuwait. The aim of this chapter is to help the reader to understand how the students in the programme under study have developed in their learning process in the different stages of the educational system and how the system has shaped their education before they enrolled in their current studies. The chapter aims to show how historical and political events have changed and impacted on the development of the educational system and ELT in Kuwait.

The chapter is divided into two main sections: (1) the background of education in Kuwait, including its aims, system and history, and (2) the introduction of ELT and teacher education programme evaluation in Kuwait. This discussion will help us to understand the current situation of education in Kuwait.

#### **2.1 Background of Education in Kuwait**

This section starts by presenting the general aims of education in Kuwait before describing the history of the educational system in Kuwait and the economic and political events that have shaped the current education system in Kuwait. The section ends with an exploration of the structure of education and its different stages.

##### **2.1.1 The General Aims of Education in Kuwait**

Clear educational aims form the basis for the successful implementation of educational plans and strategies. With this in mind, in 1974 the government of Kuwait formulated the general aims of education in the state with the help of a specialised committee. The committee consisted of senior lecturers from the University of Kuwait and educational specialists from the Ministry of Education. The blueprint for the general aims was set out in accordance with the Kuwaiti constitution, the aims of the educational plan and findings from research in the field. The aims were issued in a document which specified the framework for

educational philosophy in Kuwait together with the areas and contents to be covered, maintaining a balance between cultural, spiritual, mental, social, psychological and physical growth to enable the learners to proceed creatively in the new situation (Ministry of Education, 1979). Later, in light of certain historical and political events, these aims were revised and rewritten by the Ministry of Education in Kuwait.

The general educational goals in Kuwait were derived from four main sources:

1. The religious, social and cultural nature of Kuwaiti society;
2. The spirit of the age in which we live;
3. The needs of pupils;
4. Contemporary educational orientations.

(Ministry of Education, 1996: 10)

The overall aims of education in Kuwait, according to the Ministry of Education, are as follows:

- To help individuals to develop mentally, physically, spiritually, socially and psychologically in accordance with their potential and the traditions of Kuwaiti society. Above all, the aim of education is studied with regard to the principles of Islam, Arab traditions and contemporary culture so as to enable people to fulfil their aims and aspirations in a way that strikes a balance between individual ambition and societal need.
- To train and develop Kuwaiti human resources at all levels of education to absorb the necessary scientific methods and their applications in all areas required by society.
- To develop the concept of education and its curricula to catch up with the rapid revolution in the field of science and technical training, while stressing the importance of Arab and Islamic heritage in developing spiritual values and strengthening basic principles and the sense of belonging to the homeland.
- To develop and support religious schools and colleges and adult literacy centres, in keeping with scientific and technical progress.
- To attain a balanced sharing of educational services and activities among the different areas of the country and endeavour to make science and knowledge accessible to every Kuwaiti citizen.
- To dedicate more efforts to training national resources in the field of education, to develop their capabilities and their competence while

reducing reliance on foreign elements in this field, without harmfully affecting the education process.

(Ministry of Education, 1996: 21)

It is worth mentioning, however, that the practical reality is far from this ideal, as aims have drifted away in the last two decades of the twentieth century (Esmaeel, 2001). Practical considerations have made the achievement of those aims very difficult. For example, the educational process in schools is neglecting the students' inclinations and their individual differences by focusing only on providing them with enormous amounts of information (Al-Ahmad, 1995), largely due to the shortage of teachers and the resources available to them. Moreover, according to Esmaeel (2001), in Kuwait the theoretical aspect is much more obvious and widespread in all educational fields rather than the practical aspect, meaning that for much of the time students act merely as passive receivers of knowledge and gain little understanding. The researcher's experience as a teacher has revealed that most of the students rely on a process of recitation and repetition, purely for the sake of succeeding in the examination. Consequently, the educational process is being drastically affected as learners became less creative and have poor learning skills, which ultimately defeat the general aims of the system (Al-Darwish, 2006). The following sections will describe some of the historical, economic and political events that have played critical roles in shaping the educational system in Kuwait.

### **2.1.2 The History of the Educational System in Kuwait**

Education in Kuwait is based on the nature of the Kuwaiti society in terms of values, culture, rules, potentials, requirements, problems and attitudes. In fact, education in Kuwait began as a religious venture linked to the mosques, in which scholars taught people the teachings and provisions of Islam. Therefore, early education in Kuwait focused on Islamic knowledge, which was derived from the Holy Qur'an. This earlier education was not based on a systematic or specific curriculum; it was unstructured oral education, dependent on memorising and recitation (Al-Abdulghafoor, 1978).

In 1943 the Kuwaiti government approached the Ministry of Education in Egypt for help in organising a curriculum to be implemented in the public schools. Al-Jassar

(1991) states that the curriculum adopted the Egyptian style, with some modifications based on the needs of Kuwaiti society at that time. However, this curriculum was only used until the government increased the education budget and asked educational experts to conduct an assessment of the educational process in Kuwait in 1955 (ibid).

As a result of this assessment a report was drafted, suggesting the dividing of Kuwaiti education into four educational stages:

- Kindergarten stage, beginning at the age of four.
- Primary stage, from ages six to ten.
- Intermediate stage, from ages eleven to fourteen.
- Secondary stage, from ages fifteen to eighteen.

It is believed that the formation of education in Kuwait played a major role in changing and preparing the educational system for the twenty-first century (Aldhafiri, 1998).

### **2.1.3 The Government's Role in Developing the Education Status in Kuwait**

Since Kuwait's independence on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1961 and the establishment of the first Ministry of Education, the Kuwaiti government has devoted substantial human and economic resources to enhance and to support the educational process. This can be clearly seen in the legislation and in certain articles in Kuwait's constitution. Law No. 11, which was enacted in 1965, states that:

Education is free from kindergarten to university and there are equal opportunities for boys and girls, for all Kuwaiti people. Education is compulsory from kindergarten to the middle school level.

(Ministry of Information, 1996: 18)

After the enactment of this law, Kuwaiti people started to look at education differently and found it easier to send their children to school. In the past they had paid the Kuttab with food or gifts in order to attend classes, but now learning was free and more organized. Day by day, the Kuwaiti citizens began to realize the importance of education in their lives. Accordingly, there were successive

increases in student numbers, which led to the establishment of more schools and the provision of more teachers.

In addition, as a result of compulsory education and gender equality, the number of female students noticeably increased. For instance, in the academic year 1966/1967, when the act came into force, there were only 42,044 female students registered in public schools, as compared to 56,033 male students. By 1999/2000, there were 158,504 female and 154,921 male students. These figures demonstrate that the government's efforts to encourage equality between males and females have succeeded (Al-Edwani, 2005).

The Ministry of Education has taken complete control of the setting of educational goals, decision-making and expenditure on education. Article 13, Chapter 2 of the Constitution states that "Education is a basic element to be provided and supervised by the state" (Ministry of Information, 1996: 34), and this responsibility extends to matters such as school establishments, furniture, equipment, teaching aids, school libraries, and the provision of textbooks and teacher's guides. Moreover, in public sector schools, the government holds responsibility for salaries, in-service training, school supervision and curriculum development.

#### **2.1.4 The Structure of Education in Kuwait**

Before describing the educational structure in Kuwait today, it is important to mention the recent changes to the system that have been instigated by the state. Firstly, the Ministry of Education set out to staff all primary school stages exclusively with female administrators and teachers. This strategy came as a solution to the problem of the shortage in male teachers, and to make jobs available for the increasing number of primary stage female graduate teachers. A perhaps more critical change is that, in 2004/2005, the Ministry of Education reformed the structure mentioned earlier in this chapter, changing the duration of each stage. The four new stages are shown in Table 2.1:



Table 2.1 The Educational Structure in Kuwait

Stage	Ages	Status	Years
Kindergarten	4-6	Optional	2
Primary	6-11	Compulsory	5
Intermediate	11-15	Compulsory	4
Secondary	16-18	Optional	3

The new structure involves a reduction of the upper secondary stage by one year, and the extension of compulsory education from eight to nine years of schooling. According to the Ministry of Education, this reformed structure aims to meet the students' psychological and behavioural needs in an era of high technology. In addition, the Ministry seeks to unify the formal education stages with the Arabian Gulf Council Countries (Al-Edwani, 2005). However, in reality, this reform caused some controversy in the day-to-day practice of schooling. For instance, the Ministry of Education does not seem to take into consideration that there are fundamental traditional and social issues in a conservative country like Kuwait that need to be dealt with when applying such a change. Many female teachers who have had to teach in boys' schools had been victims of molestation and abuse, especially from older students who have failed many times and had to repeat the same year again.

Each of the four stages of the educational structure in Kuwait has specific aims set by the Ministry of Education. The Kindergarten Stage was first introduced in the academic year 1954/1955. The aim of this stage is to provide the appropriate conditions for the overall development of the child physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and socially. According to the Ministry of Education (1996), kindergartens aim to develop children's capacities for interaction and communication, together with helping children to understand the Islamic values and their feeling toward their family, their nation and the whole world.

At the age of six children begin the primary stage, which lasts for five years. During this stage, pupils are starting one of the most critical stages of their lives. Therefore, as one might expect, primary education receives special attention, while

considering the development of every educational process according to its vital importance and its effects on the stages that follow in the education process.

The intermediate stage starts from the age of eleven and lasts for four years. Its purpose is to continue with the development of the aspects of growth addressed in the primary stage, along with the spirit of the age and the mentality of the people. In fact, the later stages of education depend heavily on what is achieved during this stage; therefore, students' interests and abilities with regard to secondary and vocational education may be identified. As a result, continuity throughout the three stages is hopefully achieved.

The secondary stage is a three-year cycle catering for students between the ages of 16 and 18 years, at the end of which the students are awarded the General Secondary Education Certificate. This is considered as the most significant stage in the student's life in Kuwait, since it has a considerable effect on deciding his or her future opportunities for study or employment. The secondary stage is designed to extend the benefits that have been achieved in the previous stages in cultural aspects through the study of a variety of subjects, including Religion, Arabic and foreign languages.

Many aspects of the education system in Kuwait have undergone change and development. The government and the Ministry of Education have played a major role in helping the educational process to progress by implementing up-to-date international educational trends, and also providing modern educational aids and teaching methods for the schools.

## **2.2 Introduction of ELT in the Educational System in Kuwait**

This section sheds some light on the history of ELT in Kuwait and its implementation in the different stages of the educational system, including public schools and higher education institutes. Additionally, it presents a description of the teacher education programmes in Kuwait. A brief account of programme evaluation in Kuwait ends this section.

### **2.2.1 History of ELT in Kuwait**

The teaching of English as a foreign language has a prominent position in Kuwait's educational system. Historically, English was presented as a school subject at a very basic level along with other subjects such as Arabic, maths, Islamic religion and history. However, it did not have the same status as Arabic, which was not just a subject but also the medium of instruction. This situation changed when the Kuwaiti government introduced English as a formal school subject through the Compulsory Act in 1966/1967. Since then, English has been taught as a compulsory subject from the intermediate stage; that is, from the age of ten. Therefore, students in Kuwait enrol at university and other higher institutes after 12 years of schooling, but with eight years of learning English.

Initially the grammar-translation approach was adopted, focusing on English grammar and vocabulary. Students had to memorize grammatical rules and long lists of English words with their Arabic translations. However, there was no opportunity to practice them in authentic communication. Because of this, students started to lose interest in the language. The government noticed that at the end of the secondary stage, the standard of English attained was unsatisfactory and the requirements and objectives of the syllabus were not fulfilled. It initiated, therefore, an overall re-examination of the English curriculum, including the textbooks used, the implementation of teaching methods and the teacher training process.

Consequently, the grammar-translation method was replaced by the audio-lingual approach, where the focus was on developing students' listening and speaking skills. Students were drilled in the recitation of English speech and listened to taped conversations between English native speakers. However, it was noted that there was little interaction between students and teachers. Moreover, as the emphasis was on listening and speaking, the other two skills, reading and writing, were neglected. As a result, many students were able neither to speak English fluently, nor to write grammatically correct English sentences. For this reason, this approach was in turn replaced by the communicative language teaching approach in the mid 1970s (Al-Darwish, 2006).

In the communicative language teaching approach, the focus was on English for communication. Teaching concentrated on language functions and situational language to obtain fluency in English, at the expense of correct pronunciation or grammar. Therefore, language accuracy suffered (Mabrouk and Khalil, 1989). The proficiency of most students was very low and the majority of secondary school graduates were not able to read or converse in English (Al-Mutawa et al., 1985).

Obviously, there was a need for a major reform. The poor standard of English among Kuwaiti school students, along with an increased understanding of the importance of English and its proliferation, not only worldwide but also in all aspects of Kuwaiti life, convinced the Ministry of Education in Kuwait to introduce some changes to the educational system (Aldhafiri, 1998). Thus, in 1993, English was introduced into the primary school curriculum, to expose learners to the language from the first grade. The aim, according to the Ministry of Education, is to expose pupils to English for 12 instead of eight school years, in the hope that the additional years of study would enhance their proficiency in the language (Al-Mutawa & Kailani, 1989).

This step caused controversy among the Kuwaiti public for several reasons. No clear plan existed for teaching the English language curriculum (Al-Mutawa, 2003). In addition, the number of teachers was limited; therefore over 200 teachers from Egypt, Syria, and Kuwait – mostly newly qualified teachers and intermediate or secondary teachers – were offered positions. Even today, over a decade later, many teachers are not well trained; for example, some graduated from the Arts College at Kuwait University, specialising in English linguistics or literature, with no teaching experience at primary level (Al-Mutawa, 1997). To compensate for this, teachers participate in a two-week course on how to teach English before beginning their teaching jobs; however, clearly this is not enough to impart the art of teaching. As a result, many teachers find it difficult to adjust in the first few years of their teaching careers (Al-Mutawa, 1997). Other researchers have looked at the direct and indirect negative effects of such a change. For example, Aldhafiri (1998) investigated the effects of teaching English at the primary stage in Kuwait and concluded that the students' performance in Arabic L1 decreased after English teaching was introduced into primary school, and the students' attitudes towards

Arabic became more negative as they started to consider Arabic as a boring and difficult subject. After almost 20 years of teaching English at the primary stage, there is a need for further studies to investigate its impact.

Teachers and students in Kuwait generally have access to various teaching aids and materials, including pupil books and workbooks, a white board, a tape recorder, flash cards and overhead projectors. Class sizes vary from school to school, depending on the size of the area in which the school is located; however, most classes consist of 25 to 30 pupils. The first textbook adopted for the new primary classes was imported from the United Arab Emirates, but in 2002 the new Kuwaiti English curriculum textbook, *Fun with English*, was introduced.

*Fun with English* is a new English textbook series written and designed specifically for the Kuwaiti primary school system. It follows the syllabus laid down by Kuwait's Ministry of Education and aims to encourage students to communicate in English from the very first day. It adopts an integrated approach to language teaching, combining both structural and communicative methodologies. The aim of this integration is to ensure that students will learn to use English both fluently and accurately (Ministry of Education, 2003). The series teaches English through games, songs, stories and varied activities.

Personal experience as a teacher of English showed that a major problem was how to persuade the teachers, especially the experienced ones, to take ownership of the new methods of teaching and integrate them into their practice. It should be noted that the Ministry of Education has complete authority in choosing the textbook to be used in schools; in other words, teachers and learners have no input into which textbook to use in teaching and learning English. Despite this top-down policy, the Ministry of Education has made little attempt to link teachers' and learners' needs to what modern methodologies have to offer.

The aforementioned brief history of ELT and its implementation in Kuwait's schooling system gives an idea of how the current participants of this study, pre-service student teachers of English, experienced their learning of English in their school education. Various issues suggest poor practices of English teaching and

learning, which eventually lead to the students' poor proficiency of English. Consequently, this study sets out to see how the BLSC in the English Department in a pioneering College of Education improves the language proficiency of the Kuwaiti students who have graduated from such an educational system.

### **2.2.2 ELT in the Higher Education Institutes**

#### **Kuwait University**

One of the most important decisions taken by the Ministry of Education to date was to establish Kuwait University in 1966-7, the first university in Kuwait and, indeed, in the Gulf region. Kuwait University was intended to act as a centre for developing intellectual life as well as enhancing scientific research in fields which served the state. In addition, its establishment aimed to provide the country with specialised Kuwaiti professionals in a variety of fields. Originally, it comprised the College of Science, College of Arts and Education. More recently, the university has expanded and its 14 colleges offer wide-ranging programs in sciences and humanities at undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels, with an internationally renowned and culturally diverse community of professors and academicians aiming to provide the highest level of teaching, research and scholarship (Kuwait University, 2008).

As part of its policy admission, Kuwait University accepts secondary school students in all of its faculties on condition that they have passed tests and interviews in English, together with a minimum 80% GPA (Grade Point Average). Most of the science faculties (Engineering, Medicine, Science, and Dentistry) now use English as a medium of instruction, whereas the rest use the medium of Arabic.

English proficiency is a pre-requisite for students entering the faculties that use English as a medium of instruction. These faculties presuppose that students have sufficient command of English language to progress in their educational programmes without difficulty. In spite of this requirement, however, most of the placement tests show that many students have obtained low scores in English and therefore had to enrol in intensive remedial courses before being allowed to proceed (Registration Office, 1995).

## **The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training**

The Ministry of Education established the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) in the year 1983/1984 in response to the urgent need for well-trained, skilled manpower and to oversee technical and vocational education in the country. All of the vocational and technical institutes and faculties were transferred from the Ministry of Education and other ministries, such as the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Public Work, to the PAAET for management and supervision, giving the PAAET responsibility for developing these institutions and dealing with the national shortage of technical and vocational labour.

The main objective of the PAAET is to train and develop a national labour force to compensate for the scarcity in the national technical labour force needed for the development requirements of Kuwait. Its objectives are divided into three categories: long-term objectives, five-year plan objectives and short-term objectives:

1. Enriching, advancing and training the national manpower so that it is able to provide skilled technical labour force for Kuwait;
2. Increasing its capacity and capabilities in order to achieve its responsibilities in a better way;
3. Increasing the effectiveness of its systems, programmes and staff in order to raise the standard of their efficiency.

(Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, 1999).

Students joining PAAET colleges after graduating from secondary school PAAET are required to undergo an English Placement Test, which helps to determine their English language proficiency level. English language is a prerequisite in all PAAET colleges and students who obtain less than 55% take a remedial non-credit course; others take general-purpose English courses, depending on their own specific subject area.

PAAET colleges' systems and programmes presuppose that the joining students have a good command of English and are not beginners, especially after twelve years of learning the language at school. Most students, however, suffer from a low

level of English proficiency, which is clearly shown by the high number of students attending the remedial non-credit course annually (Al-Bazzaz, 1994; Osman, 1996).

The PAAET covers two sectors: Applied Education, and Training institutes. The Applied Education sector consists of four education colleges offering a variety of specialisations, such as the College of Basic Education and the College of Business Studies. The Training sector consists of six training institutes, such as the Electricity and Water Institute and the Telecommunication and Navigation Institute.

### **2.2.3 Teacher Education in Kuwait**

Teacher education programmes were first offered in Kuwait in the academic year 1950/1951 for training males, and in 1953-1954 for females (Buouyan, 1999). Students who had graduated from school could attend such training programmes for four years and receive a diploma in teaching at primary level. However, in 1972-1973, these institutes were developed into Teacher Education Institutes, where secondary school graduates could undertake two-year programmes and receive a diploma in education that would qualify them to teach at schools. Subsequently, the Institutes became Colleges of Basic Education (CBE) and now offer four-year (eight semester) bachelor's degree courses for secondary school graduates.

Nowadays, the CBE is an integrated college, providing academic, cultural and pedagogical training and educational preparation. Its philosophy is based on a number of principles:

- Islam is considered and observed as the source and basis of proper educational thinking.
- Attention should be paid to Arabic writing and grammar, and the revival of the Arabic heritage.
- Social awareness of the principles of Islam should be developed.
- The college's programmes should be linked to the students' environment.



- The college's qualified specialist programmes should be linked to the requirements of Kuwait's educational system.
- The college exists to provide the Ministry of Education with educational services.
- The college should meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education for Kuwaiti teachers.

(College of Basic Education Directory, 2004).

Therefore, based on these principles, the college's objectives and goals can be summarised as follows:

- Preparing male and female student teachers to teach one of the major school subjects: Islamic religion, Arabic, English, maths, and science, mainly in primary schools.
- Preparing skilled national cadres to teach in kindergarten.
- Preparing national cadres who are qualified to teach home economics and practical studies such as interior design in intermediate and secondary schools (ibid).

The College offers programmes in a variety of specialisations: Islamic education; Arabic; English; Science; Mathematics; Physical education and sport; Librarianship; Music education; Kindergarten; Home economics; Interior design; Electricity; Special needs education; and Educational technology. All programmes last four years.

The CBE is the only college to offer four-year bachelor's degree programmes to its students. Other PAAET colleges offer two-year programmes leading to a Diploma Certificate. A student's cumulative average must be 1.5 or over to be able to graduate from the CBE, and all graduates are eligible for employment by the Ministry of Education in public primary schools and kindergartens. Since the CBE segregates by gender, unlike Kuwait University, there are two CBE campuses, one for females and another for males, sited in two different cities. The teaching courses are offered either three times (60 minutes) or twice (90 minutes) a week. In theory students are free to choose the classes that suit their schedule however,

due to the high number of students many have very limited choices, their preferred options having already been taken.

Since its inception the CBE's English teacher education programme has played a major role in supplying the Ministry of Education with English teachers for primary schools in Kuwait. However, many studies have revealed that English teachers are not competent and face many challenges in their teaching: one reason for this is insufficient pre-service training (Al-Mutawa & Kailani, 1989; Al-Mutawa, 1997; Al-Mutawa, 2003; Al-Edwani 2005; Al-Darwish, 2006; Al-Sharaf, 2006; and others).

Previous research has raised many issues concerning current teacher education programmes. Colleges of education around the world have been criticised and described as ineffective in preparing teachers for their work, unresponsive to new demands, remote from practice, and barriers to the recruitment of bright college students into teaching (Roth, 1999), and Kuwait is no exception.

Although teacher education was established comparatively recently in Kuwait, considerable debate has taken place recently over teacher education programmes, the degree to which newly-qualified teachers are prepared, and the knowledge and required skills that pre-service teachers should acquire (Bufarsan, 2000). In fact, Kuwaiti researchers who have conducted studies of teacher education programmes in Kuwait have found that these programmes suffer from issues such as teacher-centredness, student-teacher power relationships and roles, and other curriculum issues.

According to Al-Obaid (2006) Kuwaiti student teachers are dissatisfied with the teaching programmes of the colleges in Kuwait and view them as inadequate and unchallenging. One of the main criticisms relates to the teaching methods used by the lecturers. Lecturers on teacher education programmes in Kuwait are traditional and the 'teacher lectures, students listen' model seems to be predominant (Al-Nouh, 2008). This teaching method provokes teacher-centredness, where the teacher plays the principal role in classroom. Safi found that "the most common method of teaching for over 93% of the faculty members

was [the] lecture in which students have little or no active involvement, while the teacher is very active” (1995: 3). Student teachers in learner-centred language classrooms have to complete many challenging tasks and undertake many responsibilities different from those they carry out in teacher-centred classrooms. This requires that students possess certain qualities and special skills in order to be able to perform these tasks properly, which many Kuwaiti students lack. Moreover, lecturers generally use hand outs and textbooks to prepare students for written examinations. Bufarsan (2000) comments that lecturers seem to prefer less demanding methods of teaching, which arguably produce lower educational achievements; moreover, it has been established that “the dismissal of teachers for unsatisfactory practice is very rare [in Kuwait]; whether productive or dismal in their performance, teachers will be paid and kept in employment” (Al-Obaid, 2006: 63).

Another issue that has been highlighted in the teacher education programmes in Kuwait is the issue of power and roles. Lecturers in teacher education programmes in Kuwait have a complete power over students, including in everyday classroom interactions and the awarding of grades. Because lecturers have sole responsibility of students’ final grades, concerns about examinations and results lead students to adjust their actions and behaviour to please their lecturers. Consequently, the fear of failure in exams and of making mistakes represents a serious source of tension among Kuwaiti students in teacher education programmes. In addition, it is uncommon for Kuwaiti students to experience a real two-way communicative relationship with their teachers (Al-Mutawa, 2003). In a study conducted by Al-Obaid (2001), she found that some Kuwaiti lecturers believed that a ‘successful’ lecturer is one who is at the centre of the teaching and learning process. Because of this ideology, many lecturers tend to retain complete control of everything that happens in the classroom. In fact, this ideology of control and one-way communication runs down the chain from the Ministry of Education to the teachers, who tend to practice their profession in much the same way, ignoring the student voice. This practice, I believe, has enhanced students’ perception of their role as being only receivers and passive, and teachers’ as being only delivers and active. Al-Obaid asserts that “students expect their teacher to provide them with the necessary input, while their job is to consume it successfully” (2006: 64). The

Ministry of Education in Kuwait seems to give complete power to the lecturers in the teacher education system, which obviously has its consequences on the students' experience in these programmes.

#### **2.2.4 Programme Evaluation in Kuwait**

The history of programme evaluation in Kuwait is relatively short. Since the academic year 1969-1970, when the first cohort of students graduated and joined the labour force, many studies have been conducted to assess the quality of Kuwait University graduates. As the number of graduates increased, so did the public's concern about the ability and the quality of teaching offered by Kuwait University's graduates and programmes. Consequently, Kuwait University came under pressure to address these concerns.

One year after it was established in 1977, the Centre for Evaluation and Measurement (CEM) conducted a comprehensive faculty evaluation programme, probably the first in any institution of higher education in the Arabian Gulf Area. The main purpose of the study was to assess students' reactions and attitudes towards the course materials and the methods of teaching used by the lecturers (Safi, 1986). In 1982 a larger-scale evaluation was undertaken to assess the quality of the academic programmes and their graduates. A survey elicited students' opinions on various aspects of the programmes, as well as the conditions and opportunities for Kuwait University students after graduation.

PAAET, the other only higher education institution in Kuwait, established its Measurement and Evaluation Centre (MEC) in 1986, whose work has been increasingly accepted by its members and administration, which led the Centre to legalize its existence in the PAAET administration (Safi, 1995). The Centre has conducted many evaluation projects; however, the first extensive project took place in 1995, focusing on students' reactions to course materials and the quality of the lecturers' teaching.

In short, evaluation studies conducted by CEM as well as MEC are playing a major role in providing valuable information and identifying critical issues in terms of the purpose, objectives and philosophy of the academic programmes in both Colleges.

Their recommendations could help in improving these programmes and services. A more in-depth review of the evaluation studies in Kuwait is presented in the following chapter

### **2.3 Conclusion**

The educational process in Kuwait has gone through remarkably rapid change and development. Within the last fifty years, student and school numbers have expanded enormously. The Kuwaiti Government's role and efforts have been fundamental in enhancing both the quality and the quantity of education. One of the most influential decisions was the introduction of the Compulsory Act, which increased both the literacy rate and female enrolment in education compared with other countries in the region.

From the inception of education in Kuwait, the English language has gained a special position in the educational system; this is evident from the recent reforms giving students more exposure to English from the very beginning of their primary education, and the importance given to English by Kuwait University and the PAAET, which play a significant role in providing the state with a labour force of teachers.

## **Chapter III**

### **Literature Review**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of programme evaluation in the educational field and to shed light on some components of language teacher education programmes in relation to programme evaluation. The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section gives an overview of the definition of the term 'evaluation', followed by a brief history of educational programme evaluation, and a discussion of programme evaluation types, approaches and models and their relation to language programmes. This section ends with a justification of the conceptual framework underpinning the current study. The second section deals with English teacher education programmes and touches specifically on their four different components, namely: objectives, content and materials, teaching methods, and assessment and feedback.

#### **SECTION ONE: Programme Evaluation**

##### **3.2 Definition of Evaluation**

In recent decades the definition of the term 'evaluation' has been subject to intense debate and has undergone significant changes. Originally, the word 'evaluate' was a Latin word meaning 'to strengthen' or 'to empower', as noted by Gitlin & Smyth (1989). Many definitions of evaluation exist in the literature, all of which differ in their scope, abstraction and restriction. For example, Tyler's early conception of evaluation is considered too restrictive. He defines it as "the process of determining to what extent the educational objectives are actually being realised" (1950: 69). Conversely, Richards et al. (1985: 98) define evaluation as "the systematic gathering of information for purposes of making decisions." However, this definition is also applicable to other curriculum components, such as needs analysis or testing, and is therefore too broad (Brown, 1995). Another definition of evaluation is offered by Fitzpatrick et al. (2004: 5): "the identification, clarification, and application of defensible criteria to determine an evaluation object's value (worth or merit) in relation to those criteria." However, it could be argued that identifying and designing defensible criteria is not always applicable, because the

means of judging any evaluation object differ from one individual to another, and consequently it is difficult to agree on one evaluation criterion. In this perspective, Nevo argues that choosing criteria to judge the merit of an evaluation object is “one of the most difficult tasks in educational evaluation” (1983: 121).

Clearly, then, there is a need for a workable, broadly accepted definition of ‘evaluation’. Yet, among professional evaluators, there is no uniformly agreed-upon definition of the term. In fact, in considering the role of language in evaluation, Scriven, one of the founders of this field, states that there are almost 60 different terms for evaluation that apply to one context or another. These include terms such as *adjudge*, *appraise*, *analyse*, *assess*, *review*, *examine*, *rate*, and *rank* (cited in Patton, 2000: 7). Thus, defining the term appears to be confusing and difficult.

Table (3.1): Some of the common definitions of evaluation (Calidoni-Lundberg, 2006: 19).

Source	Definition
Stufflebeam (2000)	Evaluation is a study designed and conducted to assist some audience to assess an object's merit or worth
Vedung (1997)	Evaluation is a careful retrospective assessment of the merit, worth and value of administration, output and outcome of government intervention, which is intended to play a role in future practical situations.
Scriven (1991)	Evaluation is the process of determining the merit, worth and value of things and evaluations are the products of that process. Evaluation is not the mere accumulation and summarizing of data that are clearly relevant for decision making...gathering and analyzing the data that are needed for decision making comprise only one of the two key components in evaluation, a second element is required to get to conclusions about merit or net benefits: evaluative premises or standards. Evaluation has two arms: one in engaged in data gathering, the other collects, clarifies and verifies relevant values and standards.
Centre for Program Evaluation– Government of the United States	Evaluation (1) assesses the effectiveness of an ongoing program in achieving its objectives, (2) relies on the standards of project design to distinguish a program's effects from those of other forces, and (3) aims at program improvement through a modification of current operations.
<i>COBUILD English Language Dictionary-Collins</i>	Evaluation is a decision about significance, value, or quality of something, based on careful study of its good and bad features.
ASEAN Australia Development Cooperation Program	The assessment of how well a project/activity achieved its objectives. Ongoing evaluation (during project implementation) is referred to as 'review' and is linked closely with monitoring.
Australian Government	The process of reviewing the overall efficiency (did we do the right thing?), effectiveness (did we do the best possible way?) and economy (did we get the best possible value for what we invested?) of a project. Evaluation also considers the alignment of a project's outcomes to the program's objective(s).

Diverse definitions of evaluation can be found in the literature (see Table 3.1 above). Reading these definitions gives us a clear picture of how evaluation is

derived from various roots and origins. Obviously, there are many reasons for the existence of this wide range of definitions, including large number of actors involved in the evaluation process, with different aims and objectives, different methods, and diverse priorities. Notwithstanding this diversity, core ideas can be found in the literature, such as the common attempts by evaluators to attribute observed outcomes to known inputs, and *vice versa*; the importance of efficiency, accountability and resource allocation; and the attention given to programmes' implementation and delivery (Lundberg, 2006).

This debate about definitions is arguably problematic to the reputation of programme evaluation. Sawin (2000) argues that there are serious problems and issues in the field, and defining the term 'evaluation' comes first on the list. He asserts that:

*There seems to be an urgent need to solve the definition problem as we clarify the boundaries of the field. In the context of certification, how can we attempt to test prospective practitioners without some consensus about how evaluation should be practiced? More fundamentally, how can we claim that evaluation is a profession if we cannot agree on such matters?*

(Sawin, 2000: 233).

Given the multiplicity of definitions, it is reasonable to suggest that the definition of the term 'evaluation' depends on the definer's particular perspective. When evaluation in education began, researchers tended to define it from a single perspective of determining whether or not objectives had been met. Recently, researchers have started to look at it from a different angle: evaluation could also mean investigating the process to find room for improvement. Therefore, it is the researcher's contention that the definition should contain both perspectives. Brown's definition is the most suitable and all-inclusive. He defines evaluation as "the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a curriculum and assess its effectiveness within the context of the particular institutions involved" (Brown, 1995: 218). It is all-inclusive because it includes all the important elements that any evaluation study should contain. First, evaluation is viewed as a systematic process. It should not be conducted as an afterthought; rather, it should be a planned and purposeful process. Second, it involves collecting data regarding questions or issues in a programme. Third, evaluation is a process of enhancing knowledge and decision



making, whether the decisions are meant for improving a programme or determining whether or not to continue it.

It can be seen from the discussion above that programme evaluation can play a range of different roles. For instance, it can help us to understand, verify and increase the impact of materials on students. It can help in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a programme. In addition, it can help stakeholders and administrators to verify whether the programme is running as originally planned. The increased interest in programme evaluation in recent years highlights its importance. Therefore, defining the purpose of an evaluation and the type, approach and model to be used are the first and most crucial steps in preparing an appropriate and successful evaluation programme. Before discussing these matters, it is useful to briefly consider the history and development of programme evaluation.

### **3.3 Brief History of Programme Evaluation**

In response to dissatisfaction with educational and social programmes, educational evaluation started to be formulated during the 1950s (Guerra-Lopez, 2008). Until the late 1950s evaluation mainly focused on educational assessment and was conducted by social science researchers in a small number of universities and organizations. The first steps towards the development of the field of evaluation began in the 1960s, when many countries started to become aware of the need to monitor the progress of programmes and to evaluate their effectiveness. Early evaluation was characterised by its emphasis on scientific methods, as reliability and validity were key to data collection and evaluators were required to be objective and to focus on the outcome of the programme (Fine et al., 2000; Torres & Preskill, 2001; Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005). Evaluations in the early decades (1950s-1970s) were mostly summative in nature, aiming to judge the success of programmes, usually through external evaluators. Language programme evaluations in this period were mostly focused on comparisons of teaching methods and materials with the intention of testing language-learning theories, and adopted a positivistic paradigm that used large-scale experimental quantitative research designs (Lynch, 1996).

These early evaluation practices were widely criticized because of: (1) their questionable validity, due to the unreliable test measurements; (2) weak generalizability of the findings, because of the diversity of programme contexts; (3) inadequate attention to instructional and learning processes, which were sometimes ignored entirely; and (4) low capacity to provide useful information for programme development and improvement (Beretta, 1992; Greenwood, 1985; Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005; Lynch, 1996).

Throughout the 1980s growing concerns were voiced about the utility of evaluation findings and the use of experimental and quasi-experimental designs (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). Hence, evaluations in language education shifted attention to classroom and programme processes, and these changes led to a greater possibility of informing programme development (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005; Lynch, 1996). Evaluations with a formative function became widely used, looking at what goes on within a programme in order to provide information for programme improvement (Yang, 2009). Naturalistic and qualitative evaluations, inspecting classroom processes, student and teacher views and perceptions, and programme content and materials, for example, started to be used either as a standalone approach or as an addition to the positivistic, quantitative approaches (Lynch, 1996).

The evaluation of educational programmes has expanded considerably over the past thirty years: Leeuw (2002: 5) describes it accurately as a “growth industry”. Lundberg (2006) argues that in recent decades evaluation has increasingly become an independent science with roots in many disciplines, and has revealed itself as a useful tool for understanding and implementing activities in educational programmes. Nowadays, there is increasing interest in participatory, collaborative and learning-oriented formative evaluations applying mixed methods, rather than summative evaluations conducted by an individual evaluator. Evaluators know and accept the fact that few evaluations are value-free and, indeed, most are politically charged (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). The gradual movement from evaluating specified programme outcomes to evaluating the actual curricular experience illustrates how evaluation is developing in terms of ideas, models and practices.

### **3.4 Purposes, Types, Approaches and Models of Evaluation**

Studies relating to English language teaching deal with numerous issues, all of which are to some extent connected to the education of English teachers. Therefore, it is very important for pre-service teacher education programmes to have a structured evaluation system so that essential changes can be made to these programmes (Coskun & Daloglu, 2010). As suggested by Peacock (2009), evaluation of these programmes is a starting point on the road towards the professionalisation of ELT. The importance of evaluation to teacher education programmes is well supported in the literature. Rea-Dickins & Germaine (1998: 8) stress “the importance of having systematic evaluation at the heart of a programme”, and many others agree, including Reid (1996), Lynch (2003) and Peacock (2009).

The matter of programme evaluation objectives and purposes, though, is quite broad. Generally speaking, a programme’s objectives provide guidance for achieving the programme’s purposes; Lundberg (2006) classifies three main groups of objectives:

- Evaluation for development: aimed to improve institutional performance.
- Evaluation for accountability: aimed to provide information to decision makers.
- Evaluation for knowledge: aimed to generate understanding and explanation.

Posavac & Carey (2003), on the other hand, propose six purposes of programme evaluation, all of which help to plan and improve programmes, to assess their worth and to make corrections in on-going service:

- To assess unmet needs
- To document implementation
- To measure results
- To compare alternative programmes
- To provide information to maintain and develop quality
- To detect negative side effects

(cited in Erozan, 2005: 24)

While these classifications are important, it should be borne in mind that there is not a clear-cut division between these objectives: they have multiple methodological interactions and unavoidable points of overlap. In the current study, the purpose of evaluating the basic language skills courses is to detect

weaknesses and illustrate the obstacles that students and teachers face, which will provide the decision makers and administrators with sound and valuable information, and hence, hopefully, help them to maintain, develop and improve the quality of these courses and consequently the quality of the whole programme.

The expanding use of evaluation in recent years has led to concern about its consequences, a point raised by Schwarz & Struhkamp (2007) in their article, "Does Evaluation Build or Destroy Trust?". They presented two examples where trust was possibly lost during the evaluation processes, and maintained that "if uncontrolled, unplanned or unreflected evaluation is used ... it involves a certain danger of destroying trust while being (or claiming to be) a possible trust-building tool" (Schwarz & Struhkamp, 2007: 334). In fact, the relationship between evaluation and trust has received little attention in the literature, and discussing this matter further may reveal other interesting issues and ideas. Clearly, evaluation is a very useful and important tool for any educational programme, although it needs to be used carefully so that it does not interrupt or interfere with other learning or social processes.

#### **3.4.1 Evaluation Types**

Before discussing the different 'types', 'approaches' and 'models' of evaluation, it is worth mentioning that these terms are quite often used interchangeably. Obviously, this lack of agreed-upon language in educational programmes has its consequences. Worthen & Sanders are among the researchers who have called for unifying the use of these terms; they argued: "the semantic undergrowth in the field of evaluation could hardly be termed univocal; some clearing of redundant verbiage is clearly called for" (1987: 145). One of the consequences of this matter is stated by Altschuld & Kumar, who relate the minimal reporting of evaluation in the literature to "the way labels and key terms are used in articles, papers, presentations, and other entries in the database" (2002: 178). In fact in this study, while reviewing the literature on evaluation, it was confusing to encounter different labels for the same model or approach, so the call for some unification of the terms and labels used programme evaluation, while not an easy task, is wholeheartedly supported.

### **3.4.1.1 Formative vs. Summative**

In the literature there are two major types of language programme evaluation: formative and summative evaluation. This classification was first proposed by Scriven in the late 1960s (Chen, 2005). Scriven (1998) discusses the purposes of evaluation in terms of the use of outcomes. For instance, the outcome of an evaluation could be limited to conclusions regarding the worth of a programme or inputs to serve for the improvement of the programme, including recommendations in the light of the conclusions. He also suggests that evaluation serves two major purposes: to describe the worth of a programme (summative evaluation) and to aid the development and practising of the programme (formative evaluation).

Formative evaluation is recommended if the evaluation is meant to create learning and thereby improve the programme in question. Summative evaluation, on the other hand, is recommended if the evaluation is intended to control performance in terms of accountability (Rossi et al., 2004). In other words, formative evaluation takes place during the development of a programme with the purpose of collecting information that will be used for the improvement of the programme, whereas summative evaluation occurs at the end of a programme and gathers information to determine whether the programme was successful and effective, resulting in important decisions as to the continuation or cancellation of the programme (Erozan, 2005). A comparison of formative and summative evaluation is provided in Table 3.2.

Richards (2001: 288) suggested questions that need to be addressed when implementing formative evaluation:

- Has enough time been spent on particular objectives?
- Has the placement test placed students at the right level on the programme?
- How well is the textbook being received?
- Is the methodology used by teachers appropriate?
- Are the teachers or the students getting sufficient practice work?
- Should the workload be increased or decreased?
- Is the pacing of the material adequate?

With regard to the role of the evaluator in these two evaluation types, Guerra-Lopez (2008) demonstrates that in a formative evaluation, the evaluator helps and gives suggestions to the administrators or programme developers to overcome any weaknesses and difficulties, and identifies potential challenges in the programme for the sake of improving it. In a summative evaluation, on the other hand, the evaluator aims to produce a summary result of whether the programme has achieved its goals or not.

The current study is considered as a formative evaluative study, as it is conducted while the programme is in progress, and is aiming at improving the BLSC for the betterment of the quality of the component and the English teacher education programme as a whole.

Table (3.2): Comparison of formative and summative evaluation (adapted from Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007: 25).

Descriptors	Formative Evaluation	Summative Evaluation
Purpose	Quality improvement	assurance; Provide an overall judgment of the evaluand
Use	Guidance for decision making	Determining accountability for successes and failures; promoting understanding of assessed phenomena
Functions	Provides feedback for improvement	Informs consumers about an evaluand's value, for example, its quality, cost, utility and safety
Orientation	Prospective and proactive	Retrospective and retroactive
When conducted	During development or ongoing operations	After completion of development
Particular types of service	Assists goal setting, planning, and management	Assists consumers in making wise decisions
Foci	Goals, alternative courses of action, plans, implementation of plans, interim results	Completed projects, established programmes, or finished products; ultimate outcomes
Variables	All aspects of an evolving, developing program	Comprehensive range of dimensions concerned with merit, worth, probity, safety, equity, and significance
Audience	Managers, staff; connected closely to insiders	Sponsors, consumers and other interested stakeholders; projected especially to outsiders
Evaluation plans	Flexible, emergent, responsive, interactive	Relatively fixed, not emergent or evolving
Typical methods	Case studies, observation, interviews, not controlled experiments	Wide range of methods, including case studies, controlled experiments, and checklists
Reports	Periodic, often relatively informal, responsive to client and staff requests	Cumulative record and assessment of what was done and accomplished; contrast of evaluand with critical competitors; cost-effectiveness analysis
Relationship between formative and summative evaluation	Often forms the basis for summative evaluations	Compiles and supplements previously collected formative evaluation information

### **3.4.1.2 Product vs. Process**

Another distinction in the literature of evaluation is between product and process evaluation. Product evaluation is used to determine to what extent the programme's objectives have been achieved. In other words, its purpose is to assess, measure and judge the merit of the product and ascertain the extent to which it met the needs of all the beneficiaries, with action to be taken at the end of the process (Chen, 2005). Therefore, researchers conduct product evaluations to decide whether a given programme is worth continuing, repeating, or extending to other settings (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). It is criticized in the literature because of its narrow focus on inputs and outputs and because it ignores other aspects of the programme and treats them as a "black box" (Bennett, 2003: 26).

While during its early implementation the product evaluation model was often used, more recently there has been substantial attention given to process evaluation to investigate programme processes (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005; Lynch, 1996; Minamoto & Nagao, 2006; Hashimoto et al., 2010).

A process evaluation is an ongoing check on the process of the programme, and how plans/objectives are implemented (Davidson, 2005). One of the main purposes is to provide staff and administrators with feedback about amendments needed if the implementation is inadequate. That is, are programme activities being implemented as planned and on schedule? Are available resources being used efficiently? And do programme participants accept and carry out their roles? (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). Moreover, a process evaluation normally reports how a programme's participants, such as students and teachers, judge the quality of the processes in the programme. In addition, according to Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, "a process evaluator has much work to do in monitoring and documenting an intervention's activities and expenditures" (2007: 341), also undertaking other tasks including interviewing key participants, and highlighting existing problems that participants address (Preskill et al., 2003).

According to Chen (2005), process evaluation takes place at regular intervals with the objective of improving the programme. Scriven (1976) states that in the process evaluation, all elements of a programme, such as aims and objectives,

materials, teaching methods and assessment practices, need to be investigated and evaluated. From this perspective, Stake argued that a process evaluator needs to consider the following issues when conducting a programme evaluation: (1) begin with a rationale, (2) fix on a descriptive operation and (3) end with a judgment operation (1967: 41). This approach to process evaluation seems to have an interesting feature: it acknowledges the interaction between the descriptive and the judgmental activities during the evaluation process (Barnawi, 2011). Stake does not seem to take into consideration, however, that it may sometimes be difficult to apply this approach exactly, since it traces the whole programme from its beginning until its end, starting with the rationale and moving through the programme until it finishes with the outcomes. It has been argued that evaluating a programme from its foundation is indeed a demanding task, especially when evaluators have to address different aspects of the programme and individual views about it (Maclean et al., 2000).

It is worth mentioning that a process evaluation is comparable to a formative type of evaluation, as it is conducted at regular intervals during the course of a programme with the aim of improving it. Moreover, like formative evaluation a process evaluation is an ongoing procedure that seeks to examine various components of a particular programme, such as objectives, content and materials, teaching methods, and assessment practices. According to Richards (2001), the pedagogical assumptions behind such an evaluation are that it investigates the potential strengths of a programme and hence calls for reinforcing them, as well as identifying any weaknesses found and suggesting recommendations for improvement.

In the current study, a process type of evaluation is followed. The reason behind this selection is that the purpose of this evaluation study is to evaluate the processes implemented in the BLSC and in the English Department in general from the point of view of the key participants of the programme, namely students and teachers. This type of evaluation helps to identify problems that arise within the programme, as addressed by the participants. Hence, recommendations for the improvement of the quality of the learning experience are suggested and made available for administrators to take into account.



### **3.4.2 Approaches to Programme Evaluation**

Different approaches to evaluation have been developed since the beginning of evaluation studies in the 1930s. Various researchers have introduced approaches with some similarities and differences over the years. Therefore, a single categorization scheme for all approaches or all models does not exist and researchers choose which approaches and models to follow according to their programme evaluation goals, limitations and desired outcomes. As mentioned earlier, approaches to programme evaluation have been termed and classified differently by different researchers.

One example of a classification of approaches to programme evaluation was developed by Fitzpatrick et al., (2004), who classified approaches to programme evaluation into five categories: (1) Objectives-oriented approach, (2) Management-oriented approach, (3) Consumer-oriented approach, (4) Expertise-oriented approach and (5) Participant-oriented approach, according to the main focus of the approach. For example, the objectives-oriented approach, which is the most commonly used approach for programme evaluations, focuses on objectives and is concerned with determining to what extent they are accomplished, whereas the management-oriented approach focuses on management needs. Similarly, the consumer-oriented approaches target educational consumers and produces evaluation products to meet their needs; the expertise-oriented approach, which is one of the oldest and most frequently used approaches, uses professional expertise to evaluate the educational programmes. Finally, the participant-oriented approaches require involvement and naturalistic questioning of participants as the main focus.

Another example of a classification of approaches to programme evaluation was suggested by Wilkes (1999), who advocated that different evaluation methods should be used to gather the maximum possible information and developed four categories for approaches as follows: (1) Student-oriented approach, (2) Programme-oriented approach, (3) Institution-oriented approach, (4) Stakeholder-oriented approach. Similarly, those models of approach were also classified according to their focus of evaluation for the purpose of improving the programme.

More recent classifications of evaluation approaches were presented by Stufflebeam & Shinkfield (2007) who classified 26 approaches under five categories: (1) Pseudoevaluations, which promote invalid or incomplete findings; contains five approaches, such as Politically Controlled Studies, and Pandering evaluations; (2) the Questions- and Methods-Oriented category includes 14 approaches, such as Objectives-Based Studies and Case Study Evaluations; (3) the Improvement- and Accountability-Oriented category includes three approaches, such as Decision- and Accountability-Oriented approaches, and Consumer-Oriented Studies, (4) the Social Agenda and Advocacy Approaches category includes three approaches, such as Responsive evaluation and Constructivist evaluation, and finally the (5) Eclectic Evaluation Approaches category has just one approach, namely Utilization-Focused evaluation.

#### **3.4.2.1 Case Study Evaluation Approach**

Because the case study approach has a great influence on this study, there follows a brief review of the relevant literature. In the area of programme evaluation, a case study approach looks at the programme in its geographic, cultural, organizational and historical contexts, aiming to examine its internal practices, operations and processes (Stufflebeam, 2001). According to Fitzpatrick et al., “the case study is one of the most frequently used designs in evaluation” (2004: 307), and it has even been claimed that all evaluation studies are case studies (Stake, 1995, cited in McDonough & McDonough, 1997). According to Stufflebeam & Shinkfield (2007), a programme evaluation study that is based on a case study is a focused, in-depth description, analysis and synthesis of the programme, or an element of it.

However, a case study is not simply a data-gathering technique; rather, it is a methodology that includes and uses a number of strategies and methods (Berg, 2001). To conduct effective case studies, evaluators need to employ a wide range of both qualitative and quantitative methods: these include diaries, analysis of archival records, interviews, observations, questionnaires and rating scales (Yin, 2003). In case study research an evaluator has no control of treatments and subjects: s/he looks at programmes as they naturally occur and evolve (Stufflebeam, 2001). An evaluator needs to look at the programme within a

relevant context and describe how the contextual factors influence it. An interesting element of a case study evaluation approach is that the evaluator does not choose the questions; however, the study should be keyed to the questions of most interest to the evaluation's main stakeholders. This means that the evaluator needs to communicate and interact with the programme's stakeholders and engage them in the process of interpreting the findings.

Despite the advantages of the case study approach in programme evaluation, it has some disadvantages that the evaluator needs to be aware of. The main limitation is that some evaluators may use its openness and lack of controls as an excuse for conducting it randomly, with no systematic process, and bypassing steps to ensure that the findings and interpretations are relevant and reliable. Stufflebeam & Shinkfield argue another limitation: "because of a preoccupation with descriptive information, the case study evaluator may not collect sufficient judgmental information to permit a broad-based assessment of a program's merit and worth" (2007: 183). Clearly, then, it is critical for any case study evaluator to decide on an approach and a model to follow in order to be systematic and to come up with a justifiable and reliable set of findings. Furthermore, it is important to collect enough information regarding the various aspects of a programme in order to give an accurate judgment and assessment of it. More details and justification of the case study approach selected for this research are presented in the next chapter under section 4.6.

### **3.4.3 Models of Programme Evaluation**

The term 'model' in the field of evaluation is used to "describe an approach which has been developed by a particular person" (Bennett, 2003: 17) and is characterized by a particular approach to evaluation design (ibid.). A systematic evaluation model is useful and important in any evaluative study as it provides a fundamental stance to assist the evaluator to decide on the methods of data collection, what research procedures to follow and which participants need to be targeted. According to Alkin & Ellett (1990), understanding the different evaluation models provides insights and a framework for conducting evaluations in a justifiable way. These models give the evaluators a wide range of strategies for performing evaluations and present validated possibilities for carrying out

evaluation studies. To decide on an evaluation model, reviewing various sources and models is crucial.

The literature on evaluation presents numerous approaches and models, and in recent years, the number of possible models has increased. These models have emerged in the literature depending on the purpose of evaluation, who is conducting it, the questions answered and the methods used (Erozan, 2005). The conceptual models address the meanings of evaluation from different viewpoints such as accountability (summative), improvement (formative), goal-based, goal-free or value-added (Ewell & Boyer, 1988; Thomas, 1991), quantitative (Taba, 1966), qualitative (Willis, 1978; Patton, 1987), process and product (Taba, 1966; Eisner, 1977). Every evaluator chooses the evaluation model that best fits his/her evaluation of a particular programme. The programme evaluation literature is rife with models, approaches, instruments and dimensions of evaluation. These include Tyler's (1942) behavioural objectives model, Scriven's (1967) consumer-oriented model, Stake's (1967) responsive model, Hammond's (1973) evaluation model, Provus's (1971) discrepancy evaluation model, Stufflebeam's (1971) Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) evaluation model, and Bellon & Handler's (1982) formative model for improvement, Brown's (1995) evaluation model, Lynch's (1996) Context Adaptive Model (CAM) and many others. These models are necessary for any evaluation and should always be taken into consideration. For reasons of space, since Bellon & Handler's model has had a great impact on the current study, it will be presented in fuller detail than other models.

#### **3.4.3.1 Bellon & Handler's Evaluation Model**

Bellon & Handler (1982) present an evaluation model or framework that is designed specifically for improving educational programmes. They argue that their model "can make a unique contribution to those interested in developing and improving educational programmes ... [they] know that this approach to improvement is very practical and usable" (1982: v). Their framework consists of four major elements, which will be discussed in detail:

1. The four focus areas (goals, organization, operations, and outcomes)
2. Status descriptions
3. Analysis activities

#### 4. Cumulative improvement components

##### **The Four Focus Areas**

Bellon & Handler (1982) claim that goals, organization, operations, and outcomes are the main dimensions or elements of any programme, and they form the four focus areas in their evaluation model.

The first area, *goals*, deals with the intended outcomes and expectations of the programme. In order to improve programme goals, it is crucial to understand the philosophy or assumptions underlying the programme. If current goals and philosophy seem to be incompatible, decisions should be made to bring them together while the improvement process is undertaken. Moreover, it is important for programme goals to be selected based on students' needs and desires. In other words, educational goals are statements of desired outcomes and expectations, which reflect the values and needs of those involved in the programme.

The second focus area, *organization*, aims at reviewing and analysing a variety of factors influencing curriculum effectiveness, namely the specific programmes offered, the resources available and how they are being used, the procedures followed to handle communication and decision-making, and the structure of the programme (Bellon & Handler, 1982). It is argued that other evaluation models have mostly ignored the organizational effects on programme development; however, this area is very important and when given proper attention it is possible for it to play a major role in the improvement operation (ibid.).

The third area, *operations*, focuses on the everyday functioning of programmes and decisions associated with learning experiences. Curriculum implementation is investigated to identify how well general goals are translated into actions to achieve specific learning objectives for daily lessons. Curriculum authorities have the responsibility to look at ways to improve the arrangement of course content and skills to be covered at all levels. A study of programme operations may assist teachers to improve their repertoire of effective techniques to enhance learning.

The last area, *outcomes*, seeks to identify the effects of a programme on the participants and on the educational setting in which the programme is established. Bellon & Handler (1982) assert that both expected and unexpected programme results should be given attention, because unexpected results might have either positive or negative effects on overall programme success.

### **The Status Descriptions**

Status descriptions are primary overviews that contain information about programme goals, organizations, operations and outcomes. This information is gathered at the beginning of the evaluation process and it helps to provide a clear perspective on the current state of the programme. This phase involves mixed methods, document analyses and interviews or questionnaires. Gathering information from various parties such as teachers, students, administrators and parents provides a wide range of viewpoints, which can be very valuable in identifying important differences of opinion as well as commonly held perceptions regarding the programme. The status description phase needs to be a short and straightforward process with the expectation that more detailed descriptive information will be collected at a later phase.

### **The Analysis Activities**

After completing the current status phase, activities to analyse the specific elements of the programme can begin. Analysis activities are designed to analyse the worth and effectiveness of the programme. Here, the four focus areas - goals, organization, operations and outcomes - are assessed to identify what steps or procedures might be needed in order to improve the programme. In this phase of programme analysis information collected during the status descriptions phase can be used; additional data, however, can also be collected if necessary through various methods, including observations, interviews, questionnaires, tests and informal conversations. The information required and how it is collected depend on the key questions formulated at the beginning of the evaluation process.

### **Cumulative Improvement Components**

As the process of evaluation is being undertaken, the status phase information is reviewed while conducting the analysis activities. At the same time, insights gained

during the analysis process help the evaluator to form a better understanding of the programme under study. The interaction of status and analysis activities helps to develop recommendations for adjustments to the four focus areas being examined. According to Bellon & Handler (1982: 14):

*... four cumulative improvement components are used to present the gradual development of a set of recommendations and action plans. Following each major area of analysis, a clearer picture of the desired curriculum is obtained.*

For example, when completing the analysis activities, it is possible to link the results with the information collected from the current status phase, and check whether there is agreement between them. Bellon and Handler (1982) state that the value of this systematic process lies not in the degree of changes made, but in the fact that all major elements are analysed separately and in combination, to be sure that the programme is progressing effectively.

Overall, in the literature on evaluation, one might expect different models with divergent terminologies. Clearly, this diversity makes it exceedingly difficult for inexperienced evaluators to decide on a specific model. As Wilkes (1999) states, the appearance of so many different models of curriculum-based evaluation has brought about confusion in the field. However, it is very important to decide on a suitable model for the study under consideration, and to give a clear justification for this choice.

Among the various models, there is no single correct model to apply for the evaluation of educational programmes. According to Patton (2008), when developing a framework for programme evaluation research, issues such as the individual nature and the unique characteristics of the programme, its purpose and its environmental background play key roles in terms of guiding the selection of an evaluation approach and model.

### **3.5 Conceptual Framework of the Study**

Since this study aims to evaluate the BLSC of the English language teacher education curriculum, with a view to improving the course and hence the English Department, the literature was searched for models of evaluation that have

improvement as their ultimate goal to serve as the base of the conceptual framework of the current study. Formative processes lend themselves more to the social constructivist perspective favoured by this research and therefore the chosen model needs to be equivalent and appropriate to this theoretical framework, a detailed discussion of which can be found in Chapter IV, which covers the methodology adopted for the current study.

When the aims and questions of the current research were analysed in the light of the extant evaluation models for improvement, Bellon and Handler's (1982) evaluation model appeared to be the most appropriate for the present study. The research aims are threefold: i) describing the status of the BLSC in a pioneering College of Education, ii) evaluating four aspects of the BLSC by taking different viewpoints into consideration, and iii) identifying the shortcomings and weaknesses that need to be improved or strengthened and suggesting recommendations to achieve this. These three aims represent the three elements included in Bellon and Handler's evaluation model - status descriptions, analysis activities and cumulative improvement components. However, instead of employing this evaluation model as it is, an adapted version of the model has been implemented in the current study. The rationale for this adaptation and the difference between the original and the adapted models follow.

In Bellon and Handler's (1982) model the four focus areas to be evaluated (goals, organization, operations and outcomes) were pre-selected by the authors and represent the main aspects of the programme development process. However, in the current study, only the BLSC was evaluated, not the whole English Department programme; in other words, the evaluation had to be conducted at the component/course level, not at the whole programme level. In order to achieve this transition from macro to micro level evaluation, the four focus areas in the original model were replaced with four different areas to be evaluated, namely the course objectives, content and materials, teaching and learning methods, and student assessment and feedback procedures. The selection of these four aspects was based on the participants' needs; that is, after preliminary informal interviews and short questionnaires with the students and teachers of the BLSC at the English Department, these four areas were identified as the most controversial aspects of



the BLSC, and were suggested as the focus of this study. This procedure is well supported in the literature; as Stufflebeam & Shinkfield (2007: 217) contend, “stakeholders must play a key role in determining the evaluation questions, variables, and interpretive criteria”. Moreover, they added, “the questions addressed in constructivist studies cannot be determined independently of participants’ interactions ... Questions emerge in the process of formulating and discussing the evaluation’s purpose, program’s rationale, planning the schedule of discussions, and obtaining various initial persons’ views of the programme to be evaluated” (ibid.: 219).

Aside from this difference, the three processes in Bellon and Handler’s model were followed in the adapted model: i) description of the current status, ii) analysis or evaluation activities, and iii) identification and recommendation for improvements involving any of the four major aspects being evaluated.

This model is deemed appropriate for the current study because it is designed to improve the programme in question, which is the main aim of this research. Moreover, the design and procedures are compatible with the interpretive–social constructivist theoretical framework underpinning the current study and the case study methodological approach followed. That is, the model calls for a description of the social context of the programme and is heavily dependent on the participants’ views and needs. It is worth mentioning, however, that although this model seems to be appropriate for this study, its success was not guaranteed, as this is the researcher’s first experience of evaluation. Thus, further reading and investigations were conducted to ensure that this was the correct choice before conducting the actual study. This choice of model was encouraged by its successful use in Erozan’s (2005) evaluative study, “Evaluating the language improvement courses in the undergraduate ELT curriculum at Eastern Mediterranean university: A case study” in Turkey. She comments in the conclusion to her study:

*No major problems were experienced when conducting the evaluation model employed in this study. The variety of data sources was the major strength of the model ... another strength of the model was that it could be implemented in different contexts or for different purposes by adapting or changing the focus areas in the model accordingly*

(Erozan, 2005: 361).

In fact, there is no one ideal model for conducting a programme evaluation. It all depends on the purpose of the evaluation, the nature of the programme being evaluated, the characteristics of the participants involved, and on the timeframe, resources and tools available. However, this does not mean that evaluators can do what they like with no systematic method; it is important to conduct evaluations in a principled, systematic and explicit way, as will be confirmed in the methodology discussion in Chapter IV below.

## **SECTION TWO: Language Teacher Education Programmes**

### **3.6 Introduction**

This section of the literature review discusses the different elements of English language teacher education programmes. It first highlights the importance of the language improvement component in EFL teacher education programmes before discussing the different elements of the programmes, such as the objectives, content and materials, teaching methods and assessment and feedback.

Because of the international nature of the English language, English language teacher education programmes are being implemented across the whole world. Researchers in the area of EFL teacher education programmes have paid considerable attention to the process by which EFL teachers are prepared (Candido de Lima, 2001). Studies regarding the nature of teacher education courses, different approaches to language teacher education and numerous paradigms of teacher education methodology have been discussed repeatedly. Williams (1994) states that different factors need to be taken into account when designing a teacher education model, such as cultural appropriateness, political influences, teacher background and competence, expectations from students, cost and accountability.

It goes without saying that teacher education programmes are of crucial importance, since they are the key determinants of the quality of education of the next generations. Improving these programmes means improving teachers of the future and in turn developing the education of future students. In EFL teacher education programmes, the language improvement component can play a significant role in the development of a good English language teacher, when it is

given the deserved weight; therefore great care needs to be taken when designing the content of such programmes. The next section discusses the content of teacher education programmes and the importance of the language improvement component.

### **3.7 The Importance of the Language Improvement Component**

EFL teacher education programmes around the world are comprised of several components. According to Cullen (1994), there can be a methodological/pedagogical component, a linguistic component and a literature component. Most programmes emphasise the methodology component; however, in others the focus is placed on improving the language proficiency of the future teacher. In China, for example, teacher education programmes virtually exclude the methodological element and concentrate on raising the language level *per se*. This means that attention is given to linguistic knowledge rather than the ability to use the language in everyday real life communication. Such a programme does not improve language; it only improves knowledge about it. This approach has been criticised by Cots & Arno (2005), who contend that we must distinguish the communicative command of the language from knowledge about language. In countries where English is not the medium of instruction the main interest of English teachers is

*... the need to improve their own command of the language so that they can use it more fluently, and above all, more confidently, in the classroom. An in-service teacher training course which fails to take this into account is arguably failing to meet the needs or respond to the wishes of the teachers themselves*

(Cullen, 1994: 164).

The most essential characteristic of a good teacher is language competence (Lange, 1990). In a study conducted by Berry (1990), two groups of English teachers teaching at secondary level in Poland were asked to rank the most important component out of the following three: methodology, theory of language teaching or language improvement. The language improvement component was ranked as the most crucial by both groups, and methodology was ranked second. Another study, conducted in the EFL teacher education programme at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman by Fahmy & Bilton (1992), showed that students were aware of their need to improve their English proficiency and they recommended language support in

the programme as a necessary element. Murdoch (1994) asserts the need to reduce the hours of study devoted to other subjects in teacher education programmes, such as educational psychology and the principles of education, for the sake of reserving more time for language improvement. Murdoch (1994) administered a survey to 208 students in two English teachers' colleges in Sri Lanka to address issues regarding the training component in the curriculum. The results showed clearly that in order for teachers to fulfil their professional role, a higher level of language proficiency needed to be gained. Moreover, the survey suggested that training programmes need to focus on the language improvement aspect in order to produce teachers who are more competent.

Self-esteem and confidence is another issue that is affected by low English proficiency. According to Candido de Lima, "poor command of the language through lack of use can affect the self-esteem and professional status of the teacher and interfere with simple teacher procedure" (2001: 147). Therefore, those involved in planning and designing language teacher education programmes should be aware of the importance of this component and be concerned about the low level of English proficiency among future English language teachers.

The issue of low levels of English proficiency among EFL teachers is not new and has been widely discussed in the literature. Lafayette (1993) reports that, in an article published more than 70 years ago, Freeman (1941) highlighted that having a bachelor's degree with a major in the foreign language does not necessarily mean that you have acquired the skills that make you a successful teacher. He said "there is a vast amount of downright bad teaching going on nowadays right before our eyes; and those teachers are theoretically innocent because they comply with all requirements" (p. 295). It is interesting that Freeman's remarks, although made more than half a century ago, can still be applied to the current situation and are still being discussed by contemporary scholars in the field of ELT teacher education.

In Kuwait, where this study took place, many studies have shown that Kuwaiti English language teachers suffer from low levels of proficiency in English language. For instance, Al-Shalabi (1988) evaluated the English teacher education

programme at the College of Education at Kuwait University. The main aim of the study was to evaluate the English teaching performance of student teachers and to elicit their opinions on their programme. Two methods were used to collect the data: an observation and a questionnaire. The results show that although 80% of the student teachers obtained high ratings in most of the teaching skills, a major weakness was found in the students' command of English. Unfortunately, however, this study lacks depth in its explanation of the findings because it was missing one important method, namely interviews. In the absence of adequate detail, it is difficult to assess the validity and reliability of these findings.

In another study conducted by Al-Mutawa, to investigate the linguistic level of Kuwaiti secondary school graduates, the findings showed that "the majority of secondary graduates are unable to communicate their thoughts accurately in oral and written English" (1997: 214). In addition, she commented that there is a high failure rate in English through all the intermediate and secondary levels. In fact, the poor standard of English among Kuwaiti students (Aldhafiri, 1998) is questionable, especially with the increased importance of the English language and its widespread use in every aspect of everyday Kuwaiti life. What is more worrying is that students in Kuwait enrol at university and higher institutes after spending twelve years of schooling learning English, yet in spite of this long period, the proficiency of many students is very low, as many studies have showed that the majority of secondary school graduates cannot read or converse in English (e.g. Al-Mutawa et al., 1985). Another evaluative study was conducted by Al-Darwish (2006). The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Kuwaiti elementary school English language teachers and their supervisors regarding the teachers' effectiveness in teaching English to first and second graders. The findings revealed that both teachers and researcher's levels of satisfaction with the teachers' current level of proficiency in English language were quite low.

Although previous research and existing literature have discussed the underachievement and low proficiency levels of EFL students, there is a clear gap in the educational literature in the context of Kuwait; despite the importance of the language improvement component in teacher education programmes, there is a lack of investigation as to why this component is not doing its job in improving the

proficiency of future English language teachers in Kuwait. Hence, the current study sets out to fill this gap.

Overall, in most parts of the world, considerable attention in EFL teacher education programmes has been given to the methodology and the language level of the future teacher. Language competence has been rated as the most important characteristic of a good teacher. Studies have shown, however, that only a few teacher education programmes are capable of achieving the objective of improving language proficiency in the target language.

### **3.8 Development of Curriculum Elements**

Evaluation is an important process in all fields of life and is of particular significance in the field of education, in that it is conducted to attain the aim of improvement. When an evaluation of a programme is planned, there must be a consideration of what elements of the programme curriculum need to be the focus of the study. Each element of a curriculum has a potential source of information that can be fed into the evaluation process. The purpose of collecting information from different elements is, of course, to improve each of the elements, hence this will lead to the improvement of the whole programme.

Many researchers have analysed the elements that a programme consists of. For example, according to Brown (1995: 233), the programme elements or components are “needs analysis, objectives, testing, materials, teaching and the evaluation itself”. Other researchers have slightly different opinions about the elements that can be evaluated in a programme; for instance, Hedge suggested specific aspects of a course that teachers might want to investigate in an evaluation study, including “student needs, course content, resources, methodology, teaching strategies, and assessment” (2000: 354).

The next sections will focus on four elements of a programme curriculum, namely goals and objectives, content and materials, teaching methods, and assessment and feedback. This selection is based on the students’ views, and therefore it is important and relevant to review the literature of each of these elements.

### **3.8.1 Establishing Goals and Objectives**

The distinction between 'goals' and 'objectives' has been discussed extensively in the literature. According to Hedge (2000), it is a distinction between the general and the specific. Goals are defined as "a way of putting into words the main purposes and intended outcomes of your course" (Graves, 2000: 75). They are general statements of the aims that the course will explicitly try to achieve. Brown explains that goals are "what the students should be able to do when they leave the program" (1995: 71). On the other hand, objectives are specific statements that describe how the goals will be achieved. By setting objectives, a goal is broken down into learnable and teachable entities (Graves, 2000). For every goal, therefore, there are specific objectives to help achieve it.

Goals and objectives are considered vital elements of educational programmes, as they are the starting points that identify the educational process and approach. Teaching plans, curriculum contents and appropriate educational tasks are all laid down and selected based on the goals and objectives. Formulating clear goals and objectives helps teachers by giving them a clear vision of what they will teach and what they should aim to achieve (Graves, 2000). MacDonald and Healy (1999: 69) explain the role of objectives by commenting, "one of the main reasons for using objectives is to enhance communication between the teachers and the learners". According to Hedge (2000), giving priority to the setting and stating of objectives while planning a course has a variety of advantages: it enables us to judge the appropriateness of the content and materials of the course, and to make explicit to the students the aims of the course, which will encourage them to develop their own agendas and plans. Accordingly, evaluation is useful in assessing the outcomes and achievements of the goals and objectives. As one of the leaders in the evaluation field, Stake (1967) asserts that in evaluating any educational programme, in addition to other components, its goals and objectives should also be considered and evaluated.

The process of selecting goals and objectives has to be governed by certain conditions and standards, as many researchers agree. For example, Al-Shafai et al. (1996) state that one of the conditions for good educational objectives is that they should be clear to anyone who tries to achieve them, including curriculum

planners, teachers and students. They also suggest that objectives need to be as definite and clear-cut as possible. In addition, they recommend that objectives should allow the learner to express impressions, expectations and aspirations; to prove him/herself; and to develop his/her skills and creativity. They end their list of conditions by asserting that these objectives must express the philosophy of the society and its attitudes, both in the present and in the future.

Following the same line of thinking, Graves (2000: 94) has suggested a summary of guidelines to consider when formulating goals and objectives, which include the following:

- Goals should be transparent and general, but not vague.
- Goals should be realistic. They should not be what you want to achieve, but what you *can* achieve.
- Goals should be relatively simple, and they should be about something that you would spend class time to achieve.
- Objectives should be more specific than goals but directly related to the goals.
- Do not try to pack too much into one objective.

Obviously, the precision and clarity are fundamental matters that should be taken into consideration when deciding on and drafting specific objectives: ambiguous objectives simply lead to different interpretations, resulting in an inappropriate choice of content, materials, and teaching methods.

Despite the importance of the goals and objectives, in practice, they are one of the most difficult elements of course design (Graves, 2000). One of the problems is that we can never know exactly what will actually happen inside the classroom, as it is to a greater or lesser extent unpredictable. Therefore, planners need to be very careful while formulating goals and objectives, and need to consider all the related aspects. Systematic collection of information can serve as basis for formulating suitable goals and objectives for a course. Some of this information can only be collected from students. From a psychological point of view, the determination of learners' requirements can greatly facilitate the role of the teacher. In this regard, Henson (1995: 192) suggests that most authorities appear to agree that all statements of performance of objectives should meet at least three criteria:



- Objectives should be stated in terms of the students' expected behaviour.
- Objectives should specify the conditions under which the students are expected to perform.
- Objectives should specify the minimum acceptable level of performance.

Here, the significance of the learners' needs as a basis for building course objectives becomes obvious, since students are considered all-important in the educational process. Student needs analysis is a very important step that has to be part of the establishment of any course or programme's goals and objectives. Supporting this view, Brown contends, "a logical outcome of determining the needs of a group of language students is the specification of goals, that is, general statements about what must be accomplished in order to attain and satisfy students' needs" (1995: 21).

Richards (2001) states that needs analysis is conducted to assess specific parts of a programme, the programme participants, and the components of the programme to be evaluated. In fact, needs analysis can serve a variety of purposes, one of which is to identify the goals and objectives of a programme, the suggested materials, and the teaching methods to be used; therefore, needs analysis plays a fundamental role in the design of any language programme (Abu-Rizaizah, 2010). Current educational trends favour language programmes that are structured based on a needs analysis of learners; many researchers and educationalists call for such needs analysis to be conducted before the goals or objectives of any programme are set (Long, 2005). Yildiz (2004: 34) concurs that "having considered the necessary characteristics for a good curriculum for a foreign language, it is evident that needs assessment should not be avoided in the curriculum design procedure."

The aforementioned discussion shows clearly the importance and difficulty of formulating goals and objectives for any given language programme. In order to set appropriate goals and objectives, language programmes' designers and planners should follow a process that includes a variety of conditions and conduct needs analysis. However, this process does not usually take place in real practice. For instance, in Kuwait, where the current study is located, due to the top-down educational system most of the goals and objectives were established without going back to the learners' real needs. In other words, most of the programmes

goals and objectives were elicited from the literature, taking into account theories and research but without assessing the real needs of Kuwaiti learners. This has been one of the reasons behind the lack of achievement of many of the current goals and objectives.

Many evaluation studies have been carried out to investigate the goals and objectives of a particular programme. For instance, Erozan (2005) conducted an evaluation of the language improvement courses in the pre-service English teacher education programme in a Turkish university. In her evaluation, the adapted version of Bellon & Handler's (1982) curriculum evaluation model was employed. The participants in the study were six lecturers teaching the language improvement courses and students enrolled in these courses. The data, both qualitative and quantitative, were collected through course evaluation questionnaires for students, interviews with students and their teachers, classroom observations, and examination of relevant written documents. The study looked into different aspects of the courses, including the goals and objectives. The results revealed that the language improvement courses were generally effective. Although some of the courses' objectives were achieved, students and teachers expressed negative views towards others, branding them as unrealistic and not addressing students' needs. One of the strongest elements of Erozan's (2005) study was the variety of methods used, which helped in increasing the reliability of the findings.

Another study was conducted by Langroudi (1999) with the aim of evaluating aspects of an on-going educational programme, the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programme, in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Specifically, the study attempted to inspect the principal components of the programme (including the goals and objectives), examining its effects, to find out implications both for the given programme and for ESP teaching more generally. Data were collected through various methods, using questionnaires, interviews, observations and document analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered to complement and supplement each other. The findings revealed a general positive attitude toward teaching/learning EFL. However, although there was a general agreement that the broad needs of the students had been well recognised and the objectives had been

well set, the programme was not regarded as a success due to its failure to achieve the intended objectives. The researcher believes that this failure was due to some fundamental factors, chief among them being the neglect of detailed learners' needs analysis with respect to their 'wants', lack of provisions for teacher training, discrepancy between the perception of priorities by policy-makers and programme designers, lack of teacher support, and the neglect of learner assessment and evaluation.

### **3.8.2 Importance of Teaching Materials**

The term 'materials' in an educational context denotes any textual materials used by teachers and students, including textbooks, worksheets, handouts, audio-visual aids and technological materials. All these aids are useful for teachers and students to enhance their teaching and learning process and experience.

Textbooks are probably the most popular teaching materials and are considered as a central element in any teaching-learning situation. McGrath (2006) accurately points out that textbooks tend to dictate what is taught, in what order and how, as well as what learners learn. According to Hutchinson & Torres (1994: 315):

*The textbook is an almost universal element of [English language] teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in [various] countries ... No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook.*

Other theorists, such as Sheldon, agree with this reflection, implying that textbooks "represent the visible heart of any ELT programme" (1988: 237) and offer substantial advantages for both the learner and the teacher in the EFL classroom. Although textbooks may not meet learners' needs, they are efficient in terms of time, money and quality – all of which may be defective when using teacher-generated materials. Cunningsworth (1995) argues that textbooks play several roles in the ELT curriculum: they are a reliable resource for self-directed learning, a source of ideas and activities, and reference material for learners.

Several researchers, on the other hand, reject the view that textbooks are beneficial. Allwright (1982), for instance, argues that textbooks are too inflexible and always reflect the pedagogic, psychological and linguistic preferences of the

authors. In addition, Harmer states that a possible disadvantage of textbooks to teachers is that “previous decisions about the exact syllabus and the textbook to be used can often tie teachers to a style of teaching and to the content of the classes” (1991: 256). This lack of choice may affect language teachers’ ability to create a positive learning environment, as they find themselves obliged to follow a style with which they do not agree or even one they find difficult to follow. Harwood (2005) investigated various anti-textbook arguments in the literature and made a distinction between strong and weak anti-textbook views. He argues that the strong view advocates the abandonment of any type of commercially prepared materials in language classes, while the weak view “finds materials in their current state to be unsatisfactory in some way, but has no problem with the textbook in principle” (Harwood, 2005: 150).

To clarify my position on the question of the potential benefits of textbooks, I believe that the use of a textbook can be of great help to both teachers and learners on the condition that it meets the needs, preferences and expectations of both teacher and learners, as well as other parties, such as school administrators and parents. While a good quality textbook enhances any curriculum reform, realistically a perfect textbook cannot exist. Whether textbooks are too inflexible and biased to be used directly as instructional material or whether they are actually useful and essential for teaching and learning, no one can deny the fact that textbooks still sustain immense popularity and are likely to remain part of classroom learning in the long term. Milton (2002), however, cautions that when using textbooks, one needs to bear in mind some critical issues, such as:

- 1) Good materials must be clear about what it is that they are intending to achieve.
- 2) Materials should be linked to the teaching methods and approach used in classroom.
- 3) Materials should be appropriate to the age of the learners.
- 4) Materials should be motivating for the learners.

### 3.8.2.1 Selection of Content

The term 'content' is used in the current study to refer to the topics of interest and areas of subject knowledge chosen as the main subjects or themes to talk or read about in classroom, in order to practice and learn the target language. Such content can be in a textbook or handouts as well as the topics chosen by the teacher as lesson subjects.

As we have seen previously, using a textbook is a questionable matter. Interestingly, what should be included in a textbook leads to even more questions. For example, some textbooks strive to incorporate lessons on the culture of the target language. However, whether or not to teach the culture of the target language in EFL classrooms has become a controversial issue. Some theorists, for instance, claim it is virtually impossible to teach the target language without its cultural content; without this information, learners will lose one of the fundamental purposes of language learning: the opportunity to cope with different experiences in an appropriate manner (Stewart, 1982; Valdes, 1986; Byram, 1988). Other theorists, such as Brumfit (1980), caution against forcing learners to express themselves using cultural cues of which they have little or no experience.

In fact, when it comes to content, a number of possibilities are available and teachers will need to be selective based on the suitability of each for their own students. In this perspective, Hedge gives an interesting example of choosing a storyline for young learners as well as for adults. She states:

*... for young learners a story-line with the same people and places can appeal to their familiarity with the story genre, can increase sympathy with the language through empathy with the characters, can introduce humour and fun, and can present a comfortably familiar setting confined to home and school (2000: 350).*

On the other hand, for adults, a storyline could have other advantages and uses, such as including characters in interaction so that the link between language and role relationships can be exposed. In addition, it can help to present cultural diversity and a variety of topics. Hedge accurately contends that in order to be successful and grasp students' attention, a teacher needs to choose topics "which are provocative but not offensive, intellectually stimulating but not too arcane, and

popular but not bland” (2000: 351). Moreover, whatever the selection of topics, it needs to be based on and address students’ needs and preferences.

### **3.8.2.2 Materials Evaluation**

Materials evaluation is an applied-linguistic activity that is vital for the development and administration of language-learning programmes (McGrath, 2002). It is a process of judging the fitness of something for a specific purpose (Tomlinson, 2007). According to McDonough & Shaw (1993) the ability to evaluate teaching materials effectively can be very useful for teacher development and professional growth. Cunningsworth (1995), Nation (2007) and Ellis (1997) agree, asserting that materials evaluation helps teachers to acquire systematic, useful and accurate insights into the overall nature of materials. In addition, Tomlinson suggests that this technique can also help teachers to “make judgments about the effect of the materials on the people using them” (2003: 15), and hence choose material that meets their needs as well as their learners’ needs. For this reason, it is important to evaluate the materials used in classrooms to determine to what extent they meet learners’ and teachers’ needs. Moreover, Brown (1995) brings our attention to the idea that textbooks should not determine the aims or become the aims themselves; rather, they should always be at the service of both the learners and the teachers. Therefore, it is important to establish and apply a wide variety of relevant and contextually appropriate criteria for the evaluation of the textbooks used in language classrooms to ensure that textbooks are suitable for teachers’ and learners’ needs and wants.

There is a clear gap in the literature in the Kuwaiti educational context with regard to material evaluation studies. One study was conducted by Al-Nwaiem (2006) with the aim of evaluating the newly introduced English textbook series in Kuwaiti public schools. The study investigated primary school teachers’ and students’ needs, desires and expectations regarding English language textbooks. Questionnaires were submitted to both teachers and students at three primary schools in Kuwait. The results were used to design evaluation checklist criteria that were subsequently applied to the new textbook series to determine to what extent the needs of the teachers and learners are being met by the textbook. The findings of the study revealed that the new textbook made a valuable contribution

to the teaching of English in primary schools in Kuwait; however, despite its numerous strengths, it was regarded as very challenging to young students and had some weaknesses that need to be overcome. The main shortcoming of this study is the researcher's reliance on only one research method. In the absence of detailed information, which could have been collected by interview for example, there is no way of judging the validity and reliability of the conclusions and this seriously undermines the value of this study.

It is understood that materials evaluation is a complex process that depends on the distinctive characteristics of the particular context in which it is performed. McDonough & Shaw (1993) make the distinction between two different teaching situations. The first involves teachers who have wide latitude in making decisions about the materials they select from the available "open-market" materials. The other type involves those classrooms where the Ministry of Education produces materials for the teachers in schools for classroom use (McDonough & Shaw, 1993: 59). In Kuwait, teachers in public government schools have no choice at all in choosing a textbook for classroom use; the Ministry of Education's policy is to ensure that all public schools in the country follow the same textbook. Therefore, the process of materials evaluation is performed not by the teachers, but by the Curriculum Evaluation and Development department in the Ministry of Education. However, at the university level it is the teacher's choice to select the best textbook that he/she thinks is appropriate for the students. While this freedom of choice seems to be positive, it can also arguably be risky. This is because teachers have no prior experience in selecting a textbook to teach, and some teachers take this opportunity to choose a textbook without taking the learners' needs into account.

### **3.8.2.3 Use of Educational Technology in ELT**

It is claimed that technological aids promote learning through their use in the educational process (Dokur, 2008). Technology such as computers, audio-listening laboratories and TVs assist students to participate in a wide range of contexts and exploit authenticity. With television, for example, teachers can expose their students to the target language using different subjects including news, commercials, documentaries and videos that offer real-life scenes from the target language culture, thus providing an increased sense of immediacy (Christie et al.,

1996). In the same vein, Loykaew (2007) points out that technological teaching aids can provide a more authentic learning environment which can be created by combining two senses: sight and hearing. She further states that skills can be easily integrated because the varieties of media are capable of combining reading, writing, speaking and listening in a single activity. Third, students can have considerable control over their own learning since they can not only go at their own pace but also monitor their own progress.

It is worthwhile here to give an example of how technology can be useful in teaching language skills. For instance, in teaching writing, teachers use computers inside and outside the classroom to promote the learning of writing in an EFL context. Harmer summarized the advantages of using computers for writing: word processing packages help students to improve their poor writing, save time in editing, enable spelling to be checked and are more suitable for group writing, where the whole group can see the writing (Harmer, 2001). In an interesting study, Sullivan & Lindgren (2002) attempted to use word processing software to investigate their learners' needs and problematic areas in EFL writing. This software tracks every step that students take while writing about a specific topic. By applying such method they believe that teachers may be able to understand what aspects their learners have difficulty with, and will also be able to suggest areas for improvement. Although Sullivan & Lindgren were successful in their experiment, it should be noted that only four participants were involved in their study. It is possible, therefore, that in larger classrooms it could be challenging for a teacher to track every student's writing.

### **3.8.3 The Teacher's Role in Achieving Quality Teaching Methods**

The search for better methods of learning and teaching is an enduring preoccupation of both teachers and linguists (Abu-Rizaizah, 2010). Researchers define the concept of 'method' as a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular approach to language and language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Allwright, 2003). In order to use any specific method, however, a teacher should have a relevant qualification that can help him/her to achieve sound, high quality teaching. Wechsler & Shields (2008: 5) proposed a comprehensive definition of teaching quality. They believe that high-quality teaching occurs:



*when teachers come to the classroom with a rich toolkit of knowledge and skills that they utilise following a set of effective practices, and which lead, over time, to student learning.*

Teachers need to have an all-around awareness of different elements. According to Fenstermacher & Richardson (2005), there are three elements of good teaching: “the logical acts of teaching” (including activities such as demonstrating, explaining, and correcting), “the psychological acts of teaching” (such as motivating, encouraging, and rewarding), and “the moral acts of teaching” (such as exhibiting and fostering honesty, courage, and fairness). It is understood, however, that without the help of other issues the teacher will never achieve high quality teaching. Fenstermacher & Richardson point out that for student learning to occur there must also be “willingness and effort by the learner”, “a social surround supportive of teaching and learning” and “opportunity to teach and learn” (2005: 190).

Minor et al. (2002) conducted a study to examine pre-service teachers’ perceptions of effective teachers, from which seven key characteristics emerged: student-centred; effective classroom and behaviour manager; competent instructor; ethical; enthusiastic about teaching; knowledgeable about subject; and professional. Of course, these characteristics are not fixed; as Arnon & Reichel (2009) accurately state, different people understand an ‘ideal teacher’ and the associated characteristics differently.

Teaching methods used in pre-service language programmes play a vital role, not only in improving the students’ language proficiency level, but also in determining the style of teaching that they carry with them when they become teachers. However, teachers in pre-service programmes often do not provide students with sufficient opportunities to use language in communicative activities (Luchini, 2004). Many researchers, Wallace (1991) for example, have stressed that students must be exposed to a wide range of teaching modes and procedures, including seminars, workshops, lectures, discussions, cross-over groups, jigsaw learning, field study, group work activities, task-based learning, and others. Such a variety of teaching methods is expected to enhance and maximise the effectiveness in

students' training, and consequently have some influence on their own classroom practices.

In Kuwait, in the researcher's own experience, most lectures in pre-service programmes are conducted in lecturing mode. The risk of exposing pre-service students to a limited choice of methods, especially those focused on lecturing, lies in the possibility of their developing and adopting "a transmission style" of teaching (Murdoch 1994: 254) with their own students, a style which is not suited to current educational thought, that focuses on communication skills. Teachers need to allow students to play a more active role in the classroom, and to take into account the concept of student-centeredness.

### **3.8.3.1 Student Centeredness**

Parpala and Lindblom-Ylänne (2007) found that current studies of teaching in higher education identify two different approaches to teaching: teaching as teacher-centred or content-oriented, and teaching as student-centred or learning-oriented. These distinctions are also stressed in other research (see for example Struyven et al., 2010).

According to Nunan (1999), the student-centred approach is based on a belief that students bring to the learning situation different beliefs and attitudes about the nature of language and language learning, and that these beliefs and attitudes should not be ignored while selecting the content, teaching methods and other learning practices in the classroom. In a student-centred approach, students play an active role in the learning process. Consequently, they will have the chance to express themselves in any form that they prefer and at any time. 'Student-centred' can also mean that the choice of what and how to teach is decided with reference to learners, and the purpose of language teaching is to engage the learners and actively involve them in the learning process: that is, learning by doing (Nunan, 1999; Garrett & Shortall, 2002).

Student-centeredness attracts a wide range of participants in the educational context, especially students, since it makes them feel confident and gives them the ability to make some decisions of their own, and thus activates their own learning

styles. This was the case with the findings of Erdem's (1999) case study, in which he evaluated the English language curriculum at the Middle East Technical University in Turkey based on an adapted version of the Bellon and Handler (1982) curriculum evaluation model. Data were collected by questionnaires and interviews from a wide range of participants, including teachers, students, school principals and one senior manager, as well as class observations and the examination of written English language curriculum-related documents. The results of this evaluation revealed that the current traditional teacher-centred set-up of the English language curriculum needed to be replaced with a learner-centred one.

On the other hand, some researchers have criticised learner-centeredness on the grounds that students are not in the best position to know what they want or decide on content or methods of teaching. Other researchers, such as Kumaravadivelu (2006), state that such autonomy in a learner-centred approach, though it has potential in a Western context, may not necessarily be suitable for non-Western educational systems. However, Nunan correctly replied to such a criticism by arguing that students "may not be able to formulate and articulate their needs in any precise fashion, but the notion that they do not have ideas on the subject is belied by a substantial amount of research" (Nunan, 1998: 13). Edwards and Hattam add that "students can and should participate, not only in the construction of their own learning environments, but as research partners in examining questions of learning and anything else that happens in and around schools." (2000: 6). Despite the fact that students may not be able to decide what is best for them, we should not completely ignore their needs and suppress their preferences. If our concern is to improve our students' ability to convey meaning in a variety of contexts, a "learner-centred approach to teaching has been hailed as the most effective way to achieve this goal" (Troudi, 2005: 119). It is worth stressing, however, that a learner-centred approach is not the only and absolute solution to more effective pre-service language programmes in Kuwait; nonetheless, it is crucial to give our students a chance to express their views and to do and learn what they prefer.

### 3.8.3.2 The Importance of Teacher Evaluation

In higher education lecturers use a variety of teaching methods and teaching styles to transfer knowledge to their pre-service students. Recently, the consideration of the quality of the teaching and training of such lecturers has increased and become more important than ever.

It is known that English language teachers play a central role in their learners' learning and academic achievement. Effective and efficient learning on the part of the students is highly dependent on teacher quality and the actions they take in their classes (Markley, 2004). Hence, evaluating the performance and the quality of teachers in pre-service education is important.

One of the purposes of evaluation of teacher performance and quality is accountability. The public puts great pressure on teachers in this regard. Such demands, according to Oliva & Pawlas, have sometimes made teachers

*. . . feel that they are the most scrutinized professionals in the world. They live in the public eye ... Their performance in class and their behaviour out of class are evaluated by the public, students, and other teachers and administrators (1997: 490).*

Oliva & Pawlas (1997: 491) warn pre-service teachers "to expect continuous evaluation of their performance as a way of life".

Evaluation provides students with an opportunity to express their opinions of their teachers' teaching and to voice their preferences for specific learning methods, as well as helping teachers to understand their weaknesses and hence improve the quality of their teaching to meet their students' needs. In other words, in the process of teaching and learning, being informed about the opinions of students will help teachers to live up to their expectations better (Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009). Coombe et al. (2007: 1) agree, pointing out that "teacher evaluation not only helps teachers improve their performance but also provides them with much needed and appreciated information about all of the positive aspects of their classroom". In this regard, Thornton (2006) clearly states that the quality of teachers makes a difference. She reports a number of studies that indicate a significant relationship between teacher quality and student learning, such as the work of Byrne (1983) and Darling-Hammond (1999). Kelly (1987) also

acknowledges the significance of teacher evaluation and points out that “without some kind of evaluation it is difficult to see what basis might exist for any real development either of the curriculum or of the teachers themselves” (Kelly, 1987: 215).

### **3.8.4 English Language Assessment and Feedback**

Troudi et al. (2009: 546) point out that “assessment continues to play a major role in learning and teaching and is extensively and intensively addressed in research studies and theoretical articles both in mainstream education and TESOL/TEFL literature”. Before discussing assessment in detail, it is essential to distinguish it from the similar concept of evaluation.

#### **3.8.4.1 The Difference between Evaluation and Assessment**

The terms ‘assessment’ and ‘evaluation’ are often used interchangeably, as the definitions of the words are very similar. In the context of education, however, the definition, application, objectives and uses of these terms are significantly different.

The definition of evaluation has been discussed in detail in section 3.2 above, where Brown’s (1995) description was selected as the most relevant for the purposes of the current study. Assessment, however, is defined as the process of collecting information about the progress and language development of the students (Cheng et al., 2004). Similarly, Harlen proposes:

*It is generally agreed that assessment in the context of education involves deciding, collecting and making judgments about evidence relating to the goals of the learning being assessed (2006: 103).*

Nunan (1991) emphasizes the difference between assessment and evaluation in language education. He suggests that assessment is a process of gathering information about the students’ ability in the target language, whereas programme evaluation is a wider term for a more general process used while making decisions. As indicated by these definitions, assessment is an on-going process. It is applied at intervals to gauge the progress and achievement of the students, using different materials such as discussions, tests or dialogues.

In spite of the differences in their definitions, objectives and usages of the two terms, assessment and evaluation are not entirely separate. Assessment is an important ingredient of evaluation studies because the information obtained from assessment is necessary for evaluation. Evaluation and assessment should be used together for the improvement of learning and to guide instruction in the most efficient way.

#### **3.8.4.2 Assessment Practices**

Assessment practices are a process of measuring students' linguistic ability or performance using a range of methods or procedures, including tests, authentic tasks, portfolios, peer assessment and self-assessment, among others (Graves, 2000; Douglas, 2001; Lynch, 2003). These assessment methods often focus on determining students' achievement during the course through quizzes, mid-term and final exams (Lynch, 2003; Weir & Roberts, 1994). In the current study it is relevant to review the literature of assessment practices to see the variety of options that can be used by the Kuwaiti EFL teachers in order to assess their students.

Testing is one type of assessment that is typically used at the end of any learning event to measure student achievement (Hedge, 2000). It differs from assessment, as assessment is a more comprehensive term, referring to the general process of monitoring or assessing students' ability and progress. In other words, a test can be given to measure students' ability at a specific time, whereas assessment is ongoing throughout the semester. Despite this difference, both aim to "find out how well a student is doing, or whether a certain method or technique is working, or how a course can be made to help the student do better" (Al-Nouh, 2008: 33). According to Hedge (2000: 378), the term 'testing' refers to "the specific procedures that teachers and examiners employ to try to measure ability in the language, using what learners show they know as an indicator of their ability". She adds that good tests should provide learners with an opportunity to demonstrate how much they know about language structure and vocabulary, and to show how they are able to apply this linguistic information to convey meanings and express opinions in classroom activities by using the four basic language skills. Gipps (1994) further points out that tests are conducted to measure students' ability to

remember and apply information that is learnt routinely. She suggests that tests should measure understanding by asking students to use their knowledge to resolve a new problem or to apply their knowledge in a new setting or context (ibid).

Peer-assessment, where students are the assessors as well as the assessed, is also discussed in the literature. This method is reported to hold many potential benefits for both students and teachers (Bostock, 2000); according to Mok (2010), peer-assessment, if considerably implemented, can facilitate students' development of numerous learning and life skills, including learner responsibility, metacognitive strategies, assessment skills, and a much deeper approach and style of learning. On the other hand, Mok (2010) acknowledges that despite these benefits, there are number of challenges within the classroom practice that can hinder its implementation.

Yuen (1998) reports that the main challenge is due to teachers' lack of experience and uncertainty about the feasibility of peer-assessment, and a lack of guidelines and support for its implementation. Yuen's observation is supported by the researcher's own experience as a teacher of English in Kuwait, where very little input on peer-assessment was provided by the pre-service teacher education programme, and no help at all was given by the school I was teaching in to implement this method of assessment.

Recently, interest in learner autonomy has grown noticeably and greater attention is now paid to specific methods of assessment, such as self-assessment and portfolios, which are able to assess students' learning gains in autonomous learning environments (Benson, 2006; Morrison 2005; Shimo 2003). Nunan (1988) argues that self-assessment provides an effective process of developing critical self-awareness. This means that learners are better able to decide on realistic goals and choose their own learning approach. Little (2005) points out that in a learner-centred approach, learners should be involved in a variety of processes of learning inside and outside the classroom, including the process of assessment. Bullock (2010: 115), meanwhile, recommends encouraging students to apply self-assessment at the beginning of a course, as this will help them and

their teacher to understand that “they are not all starting from the same place, thereby sensitizing teachers to the mixed levels and abilities of their students and helping learners to view learning in personal terms”. On the other hand, other researchers acknowledge their concerns regarding this method (Ekbatani & Pierson, 2000) principally the student’s ability to assess his or her own proficiency level with any accuracy (Little, 2002). Although students may find self-assessment difficult, with the guidance of their teacher they would naturally improve over time and gain the required experience to know how to assess their own learning and achievements.

#### **3.8.4.3 Formats for Testing Basic Language Skills**

In the assessment literature there is a long tradition of discussing and labelling language tests based on their application to the four basic language skills, that is, writing, speaking, reading and listening. There follows a brief review of some of the test formats for each language skill, in order to understand the different methods of assessment that EFL teachers in Kuwait can apply in their classroom.

When testing writing, several aspects of the test situation should be considered; Hamplyons (1990; cited in Lynch 2003) identifies four primary procedures:

- (1) *The task*: length of time, medium of response (computer or pencil and paper) and prompt attribute (topic, content for the prompt, purposes, audience and linguistic difficulty).
- (2) *The writer*: the characteristics of the student who answers the tasks, such as cultural background, gender, ethnicity and personality.
- (3) *The reader*: the reader, whose interpretations and understanding of the written text are crucial in judging it.
- (4) *The scoring*: several types of procedures are available, such as ‘analytic scoring’, which gives separate ratings for a variety of aspects of the performance (Lynch, 2003).

One of the main problems with testing writing is that tests are actually assessing grammatical competence instead of assessing the true objective of the writing course. Bernhardt & Deville (1991) observed that the ability to write should not



comprise only mechanical aspects of writing such as spelling, punctuation and grammar, but also the ability to organise content, to revise what has been written and to adapt the writing style to suit the audience.

The testing of speaking skills is the most widely reviewed area in the literature (Kawamura et al., 2006). According to Bernhardt & Deville (1991), there are three types of speaking test methods. (1) Static tasks: where a student is asked to explain a diagram or describe a picture. (2) Dynamic tasks: where a student is asked to relate a story that involves the description of relationships. (3) Abstract tasks: where a student is asked to express his/her opinion. Lynch (2003) suggests other formats for testing speaking, such as personal conversation, reading aloud, giving directions, detailed description, picture sequences and presentations. Among all these speaking assessment methods, role-play and oral interviews are the most widespread methods for testing speaking (Birckbichler, 2006; Lynch 2003).

With regard to the testing of reading skills, 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' models of reading are extensively reported in the literature. The top-down model of reading focuses on skills such as identifying the main purpose, skimming for main ideas, scanning for specific information and making propositional inferences (Lynch, 2003). On the other hand, the bottom-up model of reading focuses on skills such as recognising the meaning of grammatical structures, recovering the referent from a pronoun and recognising the meaning of any given lexical item (Weir, 1997). According to Lynch (2003), reading tests always involve tasks where students read a text and then indicate their understanding of the different information mentioned in the text.

Finally, listening is an internal process of comprehension, just like reading. Lynch (2003: 50) pinpoints that "it is difficult if not impossible to test solely listening; other language modalities will inevitably form a part of the testing process". He further proposes a range of formats to test listening. These include listening to passages using television, radio or recorded dialogues, where students have to answer task formats such as multiple-choice, matching, re-ordering, short answer and gap-filling. The recent literature on listening tests is proving to be a valuable

resource for teachers when deciding on the tasks to be applied to test their students' listening comprehension skills (Berne, 2004).

#### **3.8.4.4 Feedback**

Generally speaking, feedback is used to express an opinion or a reaction to another person's action or performance (Mackey et al., 2000). This reaction, in turn, aims to facilitate or promote more valid and suitable actions in the future, in relation to a goal and a vision. Furthermore, in educational environments, it can be used to praise achievement or to point out an error or a mistake (Marzano, 2003). According to Gipps, "in the classroom, teachers' feedback provides information regarding academic content, classroom events and the pupils themselves. This feedback affects pupils' reactions, including their perceptions of success and failure" (1994: 136). Wong & Waring suggest that "an integral part of language teaching is giving feedback" (2009: 195). Feedback should avoid being directed to the person's personality, however; it should always be focused on the person's actions in a certain situation.

Feedback can be categorised according to the medium used to practice it (oral and written) and to the intended message conveyed (for example, accuracy vs. fluency) (Hedge, 2000). Teacher feedback in classrooms can be classified into positive and negative or corrective feedback. Positive feedback praises students using utterances such as 'very good' or 'well done'; this appraisal helps to increase and develop students' self-confidence (Wong & Waring, 2009). Negative or corrective feedback is used when something goes wrong, as it helps students understand what has to be changed in order to avoid this mistake in future (Gass & Mackey 2006). Negative feedback is widely used in teaching contexts (Ellis, 1999).

Many research studies have been conducted to show the efficacy of one type of feedback over another. However, results are mixed and no one opinion has been agreed upon; it is difficult therefore to decide which type of feedback is best for all contexts (Loewen & Erlam, 2006; Loewen & Nabei, 2007; Mackey & Goo, 2007; Russell & Spada, 2006). Although research in general has showed a notable benefit for students of receiving feedback, regardless of its type (Leeman, 2003; Lyster, 2004; Swain, 1985), results from a number of comparison studies suggest that

when students are provided with constructive feedback concerning the correct formulation of the target forms they will be able to recall the corrected forms in future language usage (McDonough, 2005). According to Scheeler & Lee (2002: 232), “precise, immediate, and frequent feedback increases efficacy and efficiency of learning in school aged students. If feedback is delayed, it allows learners to practice errors, especially in the acquisition phase of learning and when learners are allowed to repeat errors, they learn to perform skills incorrectly”. In addition, Sadler argues that

*in order to raise the quality of feedback, teachers should know which skills are to be learned, be able to recognise and describe and demonstrate a fine performance, and indicate how a poor performance can be improved. The most important point is to have a clear idea about the performance which the students are trying to achieve (1998: 120).*

In relation to the Kuwaiti context of the current study, the feedback practices used by the majority of teachers tend to focus on the discussion of students’ most common mistakes. Hence, it is recommended that teachers mix the different types of assessment and feedback. Moreover, it is beneficial to select the type of feedback that is most appropriate to students’ linguistic needs and proficiency level, such as corrective and/or constructive feedback. Finally, the use of electronic personal feedback can be very useful, as it meets individual students’ needs.

### **3.9 Previous Studies on Language Programme Evaluation**

This section reviews some evaluation studies conducted both in the state of Kuwait and worldwide. As acknowledged in Chapter I, there is a clear gap in the literature on Kuwait with regard to the evaluation of the language improvement component of pre-service language educational programmes. Even in the field of evaluation of language programmes in general, there are very few studies devoted to pre-service language programmes. The extant programme evaluation studies differ in terms of their purposes, emphasis and methodologies. Some aim to show whether the institutions met their goals and objectives at the end of the programme, while others evaluate their programmes formatively, to find out whether the programmes are effective or not, or to find out what the teachers’, students’ and authorities’ views are about the programme.

In Kuwait, Al-Mutawa (1986) conducted an investigation into student teachers' opinions about learning English in the College of Education at Kuwait University. The study found that although respondents were weak in their English reading, writing and listening, their speaking skills were poorer still. Two main reasons were identified: the ineffective instruction in English received by students during their schooling years and the disjointed methods of teaching English in the College of Education at Kuwait University. Al-Mutawa (1996) also evaluated an inset course for teachers of English as Foreign Language in the Primary Education Sector (EFLPS). The study was undertaken to evaluate a short-term inset programme organised for first grade teachers in primary schools in Kuwait. Its main aim was to assess workshops, theoretical aspects, training and organization in order to improve the programme. A questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of EFLPS teachers. The study found that trainees' overall evaluation of the course was favourable. However, this study can be criticised for using only one method; it can be argued that observation is critical and can be very useful in any evaluation study.

In addition, Al-Shalabi (1988) evaluated the English teacher education programme at the College of Education at Kuwait University. The main aim of the study was to evaluate the English teaching performance of student teachers and to elicit their opinions on their programme. Two methods were used to collect the data: observation and questionnaire. The results show that 80% of the student teachers obtained high ratings in most of the teaching skills required of English teachers. The main weakness found was in the students' command of English. However, this study was missing one important method, namely interviews, as it is argued that interviews are among the most important methods for collecting rich, deep and detailed data.

In the same Arabian Gulf context Al-Mansoori (2001) conducted an evaluation of pre-service EFL teacher education in the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU). A responsive-constructivist approach was selected for the evaluation. A conceptual and procedural framework, grounded in some basic tenets of Fourth Generation Evaluation, was developed. Eighty-one student teachers in their final year in the UAEU and 56 newly qualified teachers from the UAEU completed a questionnaire

about their preparation. Following this, ten percent of them were asked to participate in follow-up interviews. Fourteen decision makers from the UAEU and the Ministry of Education and Youth were also interviewed, employing in-depth/open-ended conversational interviews. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data. The qualitative data were categorised through comparative analysis. On the basis of the problems and needs identified, recommendations and suggestions for programme planning and improvement were made.

In a recent international study Ustunluoglu et al. (2012) conducted an evaluation aiming to describe the process of developing a new teaching programme at the Preparatory Programme at the School of Foreign Languages, Izmir University in Turkey, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme. Two hundred and thirty-six first year students and 48 faculty members from five different faculties participated in the study. The results indicated a significant relationship between students' proficiency scores and their perception of their own competencies, and a significant difference in perceptions of their own competence in terms of levels at the preparatory programme. Although faculty members stated that the Preparatory Programme, in general, meets the needs of the students, students still had difficulty in practising some tasks requiring higher order thinking skills. The study suggests several courses of action: a series of learner training sessions to raise the awareness of the students, extending the duration of the modules, reviewing the order of objectives at the Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate levels, and working in cooperation with Faculties in order to increase awareness of mutual expectations.

Coskun & Daloglu (2010) conducted an evaluative study with the two main aims of drawing attention to the importance of programme evaluation for teacher education programmes and revealing the pre-service English teacher education programme components that are in need of improvement or maintenance. This was approached from both teachers and students' perspectives by using Peacock's (2009) recent evaluation model in a Turkish university context. The study was based on data collected from teachers and fourth-year student teachers who had had experience with the new teacher education programme initiated by Higher

Education Council (HEC) in the 2006-2007 academic year. The data collected by means of questionnaires and interviews revealed that although participating teachers and student teachers had similar views about some of the programme components, they held different ideas about the balance between linguistic and pedagogic competences in the programme. While teachers believed that the programme did not suffice to improve student teachers' linguistic competence, student teachers thought that the pedagogic side of the programme needed to be improved.

Another study was conducted by Tarnopolsky (2000) to formatively evaluate the language programme in Ukraine. In the study, Tarnopolsky evaluated the writing course and considered the past and present situations in teaching writing. The results of the needs analysis indicated the necessity of introducing writing into EFL courses and using the process-genre approach in the course. The first version of the course based on this approach was evaluated and it was found that there were some problems. The course was communicative, but activities that were more fun needed to be added. When this was done, the second version of the course was found to be more successful.

Finally, Henry & Roseberry (1999) also evaluated the writing course at the University of Brunei Darussalam. The aim of their study was to evaluate the teaching method and materials prepared according to the process-genre approach by testing whether the participants would improve their ability to texture their writing after genre-based language instruction, and whether the participants would produce texts that conformed more closely to the allowable move structure after genre-based instruction. The participants in their study were 13 first-year students. The results indicated that practical analysis of the genre, both in the target language and in the mother tongue, can be beneficial for learners' output in terms of organizing information and how this information is combined.

It can be seen from this discussion that the evaluation of second language programmes has concentrated on specific issues, such as the comparison of different teaching methods or comparison of the teaching styles of different teachers (Johnston & Peterson, 1994). Since the 1990s developments in language

programme evaluation have been affected by the developments in general education programmes (Kiely & Rea-Dickins, 2005). The target, design and focus of the language programme evaluations have been reconsidered. Classroom activities are more focused and different technologies have been developed to describe classroom processes (Wallace, 1991). Approaches started to shift to the more naturalistic approaches (Patton, 1990). All of these trends exhibit orientations aiming to obtain a more comprehensive and context-based view of the language programmes. However, all these aspects mean that language programme evaluations are very complicated, with a large number of components. Therefore, there is still much work to be done in order to improve the language programmes using language programme evaluations in the light of the previous studies and new trends.

### **3.10 Summary**

This chapter has defined and explained the basic concepts and constructs of the current study. It started with the controversial issue of defining evaluation and a presentation of its history. In addition, it presented the different purposes, types, approaches and models of evaluation, before turning to a discussion of the language teacher programmes and examining in detail four of their elements, namely goals and objectives, content and materials, teaching/learning methods and assessment and feedback practices. Finally, a review of some previous evaluation studies was presented. The literature showed that the current study is unique in its exploration and evaluation of the language improvement component in a pre-service language programme in Kuwait. This chapter has been helpful in developing the different research instruments used in the current study: the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview and student diaries.

## Chapter IV

### Methodology and Research Design

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the methodology and design aspects of the current study. It describes the different phases of the planning, development and implementation of the evaluation. First, the underpinning philosophy that shaped the strategy used to answer the research questions posed in this study will be explained, aiming to give a clear picture of the research framework, the epistemological assumptions and the rationale that have been adopted while conducting the study. Next, the research design and its questions are presented, followed by a description of the data collection procedures, including the designing of the instruments, the nature of sampling and the administration of the methods, as well as a description of the data analysis procedures. Then, the strategies for ensuring the quality of the data are discussed; these include piloting, credibility and trustworthiness, and triangulation. This chapter ends with the important issue of ethical considerations and a description of how they were dealt with.

#### 4.2 Preamble

Since every research methodology should be driven by certain philosophies and assumptions, the first choice to be made relates to the theoretical assumption that underpins the study. The aim of this study is to evaluate the basic language skills component (BLSC) of the English Department at a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait by eliciting the participants' views regarding its quality, in order to improve it. To achieve this aim, I assume that the nature of reality is subjective and that there are multiple realities, and only by interacting with the participants will I be able to elicit their views of the phenomena under study. While conducting the study, I am aware that my understanding will be value-laden and biased by my own previous experience; however, I will make every attempt to analyse the data critically and allow patterns to emerge without influencing the analysis. It is the participants' subjective states that I am interested in (Gergen & Gergen, 2003), and allowing the voices of the participants to be heard through the data will make their



understanding explicit. Hence, I need an approach to research that will allow me to do this.

### **4.3 Philosophical Assumptions: Research Paradigms**

The theoretical perspective describes our view of the world around us and the social life within that world. According to Crotty (1998), every piece of research has a theoretical perspective that explains the philosophical attitude underlying its methodology. Therefore, it is crucial for researchers within any field to demonstrate the paradigmatic position from which they work and to have an awareness of other possible positions that could underlie their research. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000), a paradigm framework is a set of basic beliefs that guides our actions, while Lynch sees a paradigm as “a lens through which we view the world” (2003: 2). Certainly, to become acquainted with such assumptions, we need to understand the process of research itself. Crotty (1998) states that these assumptions are about reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology) and the approaches that we follow in order to achieve this reality (methodology).

The definition of the term “ontology” seems to attract great controversy in educational research, and is frequently confused with “epistemology”. However, ontology can be seen as the study of being. According to Crotty (1998:10), ontology “is concerned with ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the nature of reality as such”. On the other hand, the term “epistemology” refers to the procedure that we follow in order to understand and explain how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). Clearly, in educational research there are different methods of enquiry and therefore a range of epistemologies. A review of the literature on educational research, and specifically the programme evaluation field, shows that the two paradigms most widely used are the scientific (positivist) and the naturalistic (interpretive) paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lynch, 2003; Lodico et al., 2006). These two paradigms hold two different stances towards ontology and epistemology.

The scientific, positivistic paradigm was extensively used in studies of evaluation at a time when technical excellence was the most important criterion for successful evaluation research (Cronbach, 1982). Such studies were heavily reliant on

experimental designs, and used methods such as closed-ended questionnaires, tests and observational checklists to collect quantitative data for statistical analysis (e.g., Campbell & Erlebacher, 1970; Bryk & Weisberg, 1976; Cook et al., 1977). However, a variety of factors led to criticism of approaches based on positivistic assumptions in the field of educational programme evaluation research. These included their inadequacy or failure to capture the complexities and details of the real world within which programmes are implemented and evaluated, as well as their inability to take into account the significant aspect of social and political influences (Al-Mansoori, 2001). Owing to this, researchers started to look at alternative paradigms that would compensate for these shortcomings (e.g., Eisner, 1975; Stake, 1975; Guba, 1978; Patton, 1980; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The interpretive paradigm appeared to be the most influential.

The interpretive paradigm opposes the assumptions of traditional scientific positivism and sees reality as dependent on the interpretations of the people in a society (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). It assumes that reality is constructed by different members of the society. According to Pring (2000: 55), in an interpretive paradigm, “reality or (multiple realities) is (or are) totally created or constructed through the negotiation of meanings”. These multiple realities are socially constructed; as Lodico et al. state: “different persons may bring different conceptual frameworks to a situation based on their experiences, and this will influence what they perceive in a particular situation” (2006: 8). For example, in an evaluation study a researcher tries to reach reality by seeking information from the perspectives of different people, such as teachers, pupils, parents and governors, and then negotiating the meaning with them. Therefore, reality does not exist separately from the mind, but rather is totally constructed by the participants of the research and the researcher.

Interpretivist researchers see that meaning “comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998: 8). In fact, they challenge the positivistic assumption that reality can be reached by reducing its component parts to constructs and variables; instead, interpretivist researchers argue that phenomena have to be understood as complex “wholes”, which are affected by the historical, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts in which they are

embedded (Lodico et al., 2006: 8). Interpretivist researchers believe that human experiences are culturally and historically mediated through social practices that are uncertifiable, constantly problematic, and changing regularly. Thus, they find it impossible to separate reality from values and accept the inherent subjectivity in any research related to people and the social world (Lynch, 2003).

#### **4.3.1 Constructivist Approach to Programme Evaluation**

Many researchers have extensively applied the constructivist approach to programme evaluation (for example Bhola, 1998; Schwandt, 1984; Fetterman, 1994); however, Lincoln & Guba (1985, 1989) are considered pioneers in this regard. The main purpose of the constructivist approach is to make sense of the mixture of constructions that exist or emerge among stakeholders. It should be borne in mind that one construction cannot be more 'true' than others, however, it may be more informed and clearer than others. The constructivist approach places the evaluator and programme stakeholders at the heart of the enquiry process. This process has to be consistent with effective ways of changing and improving the context of evaluation. Therefore stakeholders, together with the evaluator, must play a key role in deciding the evaluation questions and the areas on which the evaluation should focus (Stufflebeam, 2001). In guiding the programme evaluation process, the evaluator balances the application of quantitative and qualitative methods. According to Stufflebeam, evaluators applying the constructivist approach must employ a relativist perspective to obtain and analyse findings, and must emphasise the locality and specificity of data results over generalisability (2001).

Constructivist programme evaluation approaches tend to adopt non-experimental designs, where the context of the programme is not controlled. Generally speaking, the data and the analysis tend to be mainly qualitative, with the aim of describing and interpreting the programme aspects as they happen (Lynch, 2003); as Denzin and Lincoln state, "qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (2000: 3).

By reviewing the literature, various forms of constructivism are revealed, including trivial, cognitive, social, critical and radical constructivism. However, one of the dominant forms is social constructivism (Glaserfeld, 1995; Dougiamas, 1998), which is the form that is implemented in this current study. Although different forms of constructivism share the same common features, each has its specific emphases. Social constructivism emphasises the influence of the social interactions on the processes by which knowledge is constructed. According to many theorists (Solomon, 1987; Duffy et al., 1993; Ernest, 1995), social constructivists emphasise the influence of social and cultural contexts in learning and assume that meaning is constructed socially through language. They argue that meaning and understanding can be reached through our interaction with the environment, and that knowledge is not only within the individual, but part of the entire learning environment (Scardamailia & Bereiter in Duffy, et al., 1993). Since knowledge is reached through social negotiation, social constructivists believe that interactions and discussions with individuals, (such as interviews) are crucial and necessary methods to achieve a better understanding of a phenomenon.

#### **4.4 Research Framework and Theoretical Justification of this Study**

In view of the exploratory nature of this study and its context-specificity, the naturalistic orientation of interpretive and social constructivism as an epistemological stance appears to be an appropriate selection. The study was designed to allow the researcher to evaluate the BLSC in the English teacher education programme by exploring the students' and lecturers' views on the three courses, without neglecting the social realities surrounding them. In this study, the interpretive/ social constructivist approach promotes an understanding of the context within which participants act, and of the process by which events and incidents take place (Maxwell, 1996). The aim is to present a true reflection of everyday actions through natural language to convey as closely as possible how participants feel, and what their concerns, beliefs, and views are in regard to the evaluand (the subject/aspect that is being evaluated). As Denzin & Lincoln (2000) state, such an approach will help the researcher explain why things happened, from the view of the insiders.

Understanding how knowledge is constructed, organised and changed is important if we are to comprehend how pre-service students organise their knowledge of learning and teaching. From the perspective of social constructivism outlined above, knowledge can be perceived by viewing individuals' views that they construct through their interactions with each other and with their own environment (Williams & Burden, 1997). It is suggested that participants in the current study organise and reorganise their knowledge through the new experiences provided by the daily process of their learning at the college site, and by the environment surrounding them. They integrate this knowledge with the knowledge gained from their previous experiences, such as school experience and their social life, and this leads them to make new meanings about teaching and learning. Therefore, in this study, knowledge is not discovered or collected through instruction that does not correspond to the individual's objective reality or real life environment.

Since this study aims to identify students' and lecturers' views towards the BLSC and construe their social reality, the above argument applies to this study and hence came the commitment of this study to the interpretive / social constructivism mode of enquiry. The study seeks to explore the participants' subjectively-held views about the nature and quality of learning and teaching in the BLSC. Therefore, in the context of this study, participants are understood from the social constructivist perspective to be "meaning-making organisms, theory builders who develop hypotheses, notice patterns, and construct theories of actions from their life experience" (White & Gunstone, 1992: 101). In this regard, Radnor (2002: 4) states that:

*The interpretive approach rests on the premise that in social life there is only interpretation. Everyday life revolves around persons interpreting and making decisions about how to act based on their own experiences and their interpretation of the experience and behaviour of others.*

In fact, the interpretive approach provides educational researchers with a deeper understanding of individuals' actions, such as teaching and learning, and with a rational justification of these actions. Obviously, individuals are affected by the context of the situation, which informs them and enables them to take a certain course of action. Thus, knowledge is experientially constructed and reformulated

in relation to the experiences of the individual. In this way, the individual, the situation and the action performed are all interrelated. Moreover, the interpretive approach gives actors, such as students and teachers, the opportunity to reflect and comment on their own experience and actions. Thus, the interpretive approach will help interpret, from the social constructivist perspective, the students' and the lecturers' views regarding the quality of the BLSC from four different aspects, as mentioned in Chapter I. Although each individual has his/her own unique experience, the aim is to understand and interpret all the different experiences to come up with a general view and understanding. As Kiely and Rea-Dickins observe, "each individual's experience, and the way each interprets and makes sense of that experience, are different, and the task of evaluation is to understand these experiences and interpretations without seeking a single, universal, objective truth" (2005: 40).

Another reason for adopting the naturalistic interpretive approach in this study is that it is not intended to implement any intervention or treatment, but rather to present a description of the naturally occurring processes. With respect to programme evaluation specifically, Patton argues that in naturalistic inquiry, the evaluators do not attempt to influence the programme or its participants; however, he contends that:

*Naturalistic inquiry evaluators focus on capturing program processes, documenting variations, and exploring important individual differences between various participants' experiences and outcomes ... A naturalistic inquiry strategy is selected to describe naturally unfolding program processes and impacts (1987: 14)*

In other words, by implementing the interpretive design in this study, the programme can be approached as something to be interacted with, rather than manipulated and measured (Lynch, 2003).

On the other hand, since it is intended to learn about the BLSC and its implementation with a view to improving it, the purpose for the evaluation was defined as formative. The aim was to assess the quality of the daily processes of the three courses in order to better them (see Chapter III for details about formative evaluation).

To summarise, the methodology of the current study is ontologically and epistemologically consistent with social constructivism, in which truth or meaningful reality does not exist independently of our thinking, but emerges as a result of our interactions. Therefore, I attempt to construct meaning by interpreting views from different perspectives using multiple methods. This is because I believe that a meaningful reality will only be reached as a result of the engagement of the researcher (me) with the participants (students and lecturers). The interpretive perspective is generally very useful for eliciting a deeper and more detailed range of individuals' views. Thus, adopting such a paradigm will help me to understand the participants' experience in the programme, and consequently to interpret it. This will hopefully help me as a researcher to form appropriate recommendations, which will lead to the improvement of the quality of the three courses, and hence the programme as a whole.

#### **4.5 Research Questions**

The current study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the current practices of the ELT teacher education programme at a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait?
- 2) What are Kuwaiti students and lecturers' evaluative views about the basic language skills component at a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait?
- 3) What is the nature of the Kuwaiti students' challenges in the English Department at a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait?
- 4) What do Kuwaiti students and lecturers suggest for improving the Basic Language Skills Component?

The importance of the first research question comes from the fact that becoming acquainted with the context of the evaluand is of major importance in any evaluation study. As Osborne-Daponte (2008) suggests, the evaluator needs to develop a thorough understanding of the programme at the beginning of the evaluation, as this will help to clarify the picture of the processes it uses. He contends that "any evaluation that is done without a thorough understanding of the program can be of no constructive use" (Osborne-Daponte, 2008: 4). Familiarity with the context of the study involves acquiring knowledge about

different factors, such as the social and cultural aspects as well as the environment of the site. This step continues throughout the whole evaluation cycle, as the evaluator's knowledge is in a state of constant flux as information from different sources is being received.

The second question is the main research question in this study. It seeks to elicit the students and lecturers' views of the BLSC from four different perspectives. These four perspectives were specifically determined after conducting a preliminary study, as well as informal interviews and meetings with students and teachers in the English Department to investigate their views about the areas that most need to be improved and therefore to be evaluated. This is supported by Stufflebeam, who contends that "the questions addressed in constructivist studies cannot be determined independently of participants' interactions. Evaluator and stakeholders together identify the questions to be addressed" (2001: 72).

With regard to the third research question, it was more a result rather than a starting point, that is, it has emerged from the analysis of the data. Since case study data analysis involves recurring and cyclical processes, I was open to allowing questions to arise as I analysed my data (Creswell, 1998; Palys, 1997; Silverman, 2000). This was supported in the literature of constructivist evaluation by Stufflebeam & Shinkfield who argue that in constructivist evaluation studies "the set of questions to be studied is never considered fixed" (2007: 219). While analysing the data it was found that most of the participants' views were formed as a result of certain challenges and obstacles they experienced while teaching/learning in the college. Therefore, it was important to shed light on these challenges in order to better understand and interpret the participants' views. Hence, this question was informed by the data analysis.

Lastly, the fourth research question asks the student and lecturer participants for their suggestions, recommendations and ideas for improving the weaknesses in this component of the programme and hence improving the whole programme in general. The importance of this question comes from the fact that no one understands the difficulties more than the actual people who experience them on a



daily basis. Consequently, it was crucial to listen to their suggestions and ideas to solve these difficulties and overcome the problems.

#### **4.6 Research Design: Mixed Methods Case Study**

In compliance with the exploratory nature of the methodological approach adopted in this study, the research design of the current study employs a sequential mixed methods case study. In the literature, mixed methods research is a procedure for collecting, analysing and integrating both quantitative and qualitative data for the purpose of better understanding the research problem (Creswell, 2005; Borkan, 2004). The rationale for mixing the two kinds of data is based on the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods is sufficient to give a complete and detailed picture of the case under study. Therefore, this study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to complement each other and to take advantage of the strengths of each method (Green & Caracelli, 1997; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Case study research is one of the methodologies that is commonly used in answering qualitatively-driven questions that endeavour to discover meaning, to investigate processes, and to expand an in-depth understanding of an individual or group (Lodico et al., 2006). Case studies investigate and report the complex dynamics and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other aspects in unique instances that aim to reflect real life circumstances (Cohen et al., 2007). According to Pring, case study methodology derives its importance from the “emphasis upon the uniqueness of events or actions, arising from their being shaped by the meanings of those who are the participants in the situation” (2000: 40).

Case studies can be differentiated from other forms of research by the fact that these studies tend to focus on a bounded system (Merriam, 1998). In this regard, Bassey states that a case study is “an empirical enquiry which is conducted within a localised boundary of space and time” (2003: 109). In other words, the bounded system can be determined by asking if there is a limitation to the number of people involved in the study, or a finite amount of time. For example, in this study the case is a group of 55 first year students and the three lecturers of the BLSC, studying

and teaching on an English teacher education programme, and was thus bounded by number; students are studying in a programme with a limited duration (4 years), bounded by time; and taught at a pioneering college of education, bounded by place. In addition, Stake (2005) emphasises the complexity of the case being studied. He explains that it is not something that can be looked at or analysed detached from its context: rather, understanding the details of the case context enhances the ability to analyse the whole case.

In this research, a case study is deemed to be an appropriate methodology for the following reasons: (1) The nature of the research questions were best answered by using a case study, as the aim of the research was to look for answers about the views of different parties, students and lecturers regarding the quality of the BLSC, and the reasons behind such perceptions. (2) As an evaluator, I sought to investigate participants' everyday processes in the programme to help me interpret the findings. Consequently, a case study was an appropriate solution. (3) I conducted and employed both qualitative and quantitative methods in the study, which is one of the characteristics of case studies.

Beside its advantages, however, the case study approach has some limitations. According to Stufflebeam (2001: 35), "the main limitation of the case study is that some evaluators may mistake its openness and lack of controls as an excuse for approaching it haphazardly and bypassing steps to ensure that findings and interpretations possess rigor as well as relevance". Therefore, in this research, I was aware of the importance of the plan that had to be followed and the different steps that had to be followed without bypassing any of them.

In particular, the current study is designed as a piece of formative evaluation research, employing an adapted version of Bellon & Handlers' (1982) model of programme evaluation, under the umbrella of the interpretive paradigm. It employed a sequential mixed methods case study approach as its methodology. That is, the quantitative and the qualitative phases of the study were conducted in sequence (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell, 2003). The quantitative phase is represented in the closed-ended questionnaire, whereas the semi-structured interviews and the students' diaries constitute the qualitative phase. Students

were asked to write diaries of their everyday experiences of the programme. Then, the questionnaire was administered, followed by the semi-structured interviews with the participants, and the collection of the students' diaries at the end of the phase. The following figure represents the design of the study visually:

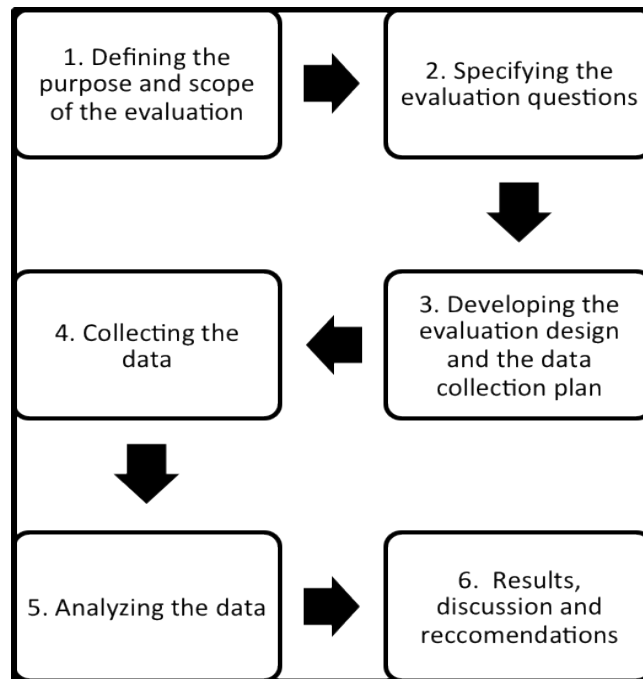


Figure 4.1 : General Design of the Study

#### 4.6.1 The Role of the Evaluator

The nature of the relationship between the evaluator and what is being evaluated plays a critical role in the accessibility of information, the collection of that information, and the final report and use of that information. In the field of programme evaluation, two roles are recognised for an evaluator: external and internal (Lynch, 2003). An external evaluator is someone from outside the setting under evaluation, and is hired to “come in” and do the evaluation (Lodico et al., 2006: 322). Such an evaluator is preferred by many organisations because this person has no obligations, and in theory, he/she should be unbiased while conducting the evaluation (ibid.). On the other hand, an internal evaluator is typically a member of staff of the programme’s organisation who is responsible for carrying out duties that pertain to evaluation. Internal evaluators have advantages over external evaluators; for example, internal evaluators’ familiarity with the context of the setting can reduce the amount of time spent getting to know the programme (Osborne-Daponte, 2008). Moreover, internal evaluators usually have

better accessibility to organisational documents and information that external evaluators may not have. However, the main argument against using internal evaluators is that the social and political ramifications of evaluation processes may make it difficult for internal evaluators to be frank about problematic issues in the programme: hence, they tend to be biased (ibid.).

In this study, I acted as an external or outsider evaluator, as I was not employed or involved in the programme itself, but at the same time, I was knowledgeable enough about the context and familiar with the setting of the programme. I did not face major problems of entry into the evaluand's physical and social setting, or to its formal and informal activities. As an external evaluator, I had the advantage of not being affected by the routines of the context of the programme, nor of taking things for granted. However, I tried to avoid missing any subtle information or undercurrents by taking notes of any incidents that occurred or any information I came across while collecting the data that might help me to understand the phenomenon better. It is worth mentioning that I come from the same context as that in which this study takes place and have experience of the educational context as a teacher of English: this helped me explain and interpret the findings of the study, building on my own experience and understanding of the context.

#### **4.7 Data Collection Instruments**

This study made use of both qualitative and quantitative instruments of data collection. The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, students' diaries, document analysis and the open-ended items in the questionnaires, and the quantitative data were collected through closed-ended questionnaire items.

In the field of programme evaluation choosing procedures to collect necessary data from a variety of sources requires careful attention (Kawamura et al., 2006). The quality and variety of the collected data determines the success of the programme evaluation initiative. When conducting evaluation studies, evaluators can choose among different quantitative or qualitative methods of data collection, or combine them.

Taking into account the nature and type of this study and the limited amount of time allotted to conduct the field study data collection, the data collection instruments had to be prepared beforehand, while seeking a balance between flexible design and the need to act within the available amount of time, resources and access provided. For instance, the fact that I could not use an observation method in this study because of the lecturers' refusal to allow me to observe actual classes obliged me to search for another way to collect detailed information about the processes that happen inside the classroom; hence, the diary method was employed to compensate, in part, for the lack of observational data. Another example is the use of audio recording instead of video recording during interviews and while collecting information to describe the setting of the evaluand: although video recording would have helped to present a partial picture of the setting, it needed certain facilities and equipment that were difficult to arrange within the given time.

With regard to how qualitative research is related to the social constructivist stance adopted in this study, Greene et al. state that "qualitative advocates emphasised the interpretive, value-laden, contextual and contingent nature of social knowledge" (2005: 274). Thus, the justification for giving more weight to qualitative methods in conducting my research rested on the nature of this research itself, which attempts to learn more about social constructivism, which accounts for the social and cultural aspect of the context where participants construct their knowledge.

The heavy dependence on qualitative research methods in this study comes from an awareness of what is important in answering the proposed research questions – in this case, participants' views – meaning that what was looked for in this study was the construction of reality by students and lecturers of the programme. In fact, in an attempt to understand the participants' experiences, it was important for me to attend to the setting and to obtain the information in their daily real lives: therefore, historical, cultural and physical settings will be described and analysed.

All the characteristics of the social constructivist approach discussed above have helped to decide to focus mainly on qualitative research methods while collecting

the data for this study. However, the usefulness of quantitative methods in such an interpretive study cannot be denied. Undoubtedly, adopting both types of data collection method can yield valuable information in any evaluation, as they serve different purposes and complement each other; therefore, ignoring either type of information would be pointless and self-defeating (Brown, 1995; Richards, 2001). In this regard, Johnson & Christensen argue that “the mixing of methods would add very useful and complementary information” (2004: 34). Brown rightly states that “Sound evaluation practices will be based on all available perspectives so that many types of information can be gathered to strengthen the evaluation process and ensure that the resulting decisions will be as informed, accurate, and useful as possible” (1995: 232). A point should be made here, however: in such an exploratory study, determining the data collection method, and even what questions are to be asked, should be linked to what seems to be of importance to those being studied, which plays a crucial role in this choice (Albaker, 2008). The following section discusses the different types of methods used in the study and their design.

#### **4.7.1 Quantitative Data Collection: Questionnaires**

The questionnaire survey is a popular research instrument and has been proven useful for establishing opinions and comments on a wide range of issues (Newcomer & Triplett in Wholey et al., 2004). It is easy to analyse, familiar to most people, less intrusive than telephone or face-to-face surveys, and very cost-effective compared to face-to-face interviews (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). In addition, as Richards accurately states, “questionnaires are easy to administer and information can be obtained from large numbers of respondents” (2001: 301).

The justification for the use of a questionnaire for the qualitative element of this study is that even though questionnaires are usually used in quantitative research, in the current study the questionnaire results are not an end in themselves; as Fogelman (2003) argues, questionnaires can be a useful source of data used within the case study. Moreover, Brown (1995) contends that questionnaires, when used to evaluate courses, “are probably the most efficient and common way of obtaining student feedback on courses and teaching” (1995: 200). In addition to method triangulation issues, questionnaires facilitate the exploration of the general trends

regarding most students' views that were perceived in the early stages of this study.

On the other hand, questionnaires do have limitations and disadvantages. Gillham (2000: 8) lists the most common disadvantages of questionnaires. For example, participants are usually not motivated to answer the items in a questionnaire. In this study, since I administered the questionnaire myself, I made sure to explain to the students how personally relevant it was for them as teachers of English in this college, and by doing so, many students were encouraged and excited about giving their views about what they think needs to be done to improve the courses. Moreover, in questionnaires, misunderstood questions cannot be corrected. To prevent this from happening, I ensured that I was available at all times to provide clarification of any questions the students might have. Additionally, in the development stage of the questionnaire, many items were modified and some question wordings were changed after piloting.

#### **4.7.1.1 Questionnaire Design**

Three separate questionnaires, one for each of the three BLSCs (writing, reading and conversation), were designed to explore and give an idea of the general views that students have about these courses (see appendices 1, 2, & 3). Before the end of the semester, for every BLSC a course evaluation questionnaire was administered to the first-year students who were taking these courses. Although a separate questionnaire was designed for each course, all three were parallel: only differing terms of items concerning course-specific issues like course aims and objectives.

The aim was to identify the participants' views on different aspects of the course they had taken, as well as their suggestions for the improvement of the course. Students were asked to express their views on the four fundamental aspects of the course: course aims and objectives, course content and materials, course teaching/learning processes, and student assessment as well as giving suggestions for possible improvements to the course.

The questionnaire items were derived both from the literature review (Alderson & Beretta, 1992; Weir & Robert 1994; Erozan, 2005), and from the concerns, claims

and issues raised by the participants in the informal preliminary meetings and interviews conducted before the initiation of the study. It was designed to generate general data that could help to develop both an understanding about students' views towards the courses and the preparation and modification of the semi-structured formal interviews that were to be conducted at a later stage. The questionnaire was divided into themes. Each theme had items with closed endings and general open-ended questions to allow students to explain their views in more detail or to add any related information or suggestions.

The development of the questionnaire took a period of a few months, during which the instrument went through several draft stages. The first design was submitted to staff members of the Graduate School of Education of Exeter University for comments and further amendments. Next, further comments and changes were made by my supervisor. After refinements were made, a final draft of the three questionnaires was produced and translated into Arabic. Although the students are supposed to be proficient in English, since they have been accepted onto the English teacher education programme, many students were not able to express themselves in English freely or efficiently, nor to understand some of the technical words in English. Therefore, providing the questionnaire in Arabic would allow for more opinions and complete and detailed answers for the maximum number of items.

The questionnaires focused on six different areas: (1) the students' general background, (2) course objectives, (3) course content and materials, (4) course teaching-learning processes, (5) assessment and feedback, and (6) overall evaluation of the course.

The introductory cover page of the questionnaire presented participants with a description of the study and its purposes and informed the participants of the importance of the questionnaire and the value of their contribution to the study. Also, it stressed ethical considerations, such as their anonymity and their right to withdraw from participation and provided the researcher's contact details for any further comments.



The first part of the questionnaire consisted of four closed-ended items related to the students' non-academic details: age and academic background, and the skill that they find most difficult. Respondents had to specify the degree of difficulty they experienced in the four language skills using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "always" to "never". The Likert scale was chosen because it is a helpful method for acquiring individuals' views, as Brown and Rodgers (2002: 120) state: "Likert scales are generally useful for getting at respondents' views, judgments, or opinions about almost any aspect of language learning." Gender was not included, since all the participants were females. Also, because all the first-year students had to take the same three courses in their first semester in the programme, this section was attached to only one questionnaire, to avoid repetition.

The second part of the questionnaire, which was concerned with the course aims and objectives, included ten fixed-response items using a five-point Likert scale (1 equals strongly agree, 5 equals strongly disagree), where the respondents specified the extent of their agreement or disagreement with a particular statement. This scale was also used in all the following sections in answering the closed-ended items. This part of the questionnaire also included one open-ended item, where students were asked to give suggestions regarding the improvement of the course aims and objectives.

The third part of the questionnaire consisted of ten items, including eight closed-ended items related to the course content and the materials used in the course, in which students were able to express their opinions concerning the course contents and materials. The remaining two items in this part were open-ended, asking about students' opinions and suggestions for the improvement of different issues related to the course content and materials.

The fourth part was made up of ten items. The first part consisted of nine items asking students' opinions of the teaching approaches and techniques used by their lecturers in the classroom. The second part was an open-ended item asking the students to give suggestions of teaching methods and techniques that lecturers could use to help them improve their English language.

The fifth part of the questionnaire consisted of 11 items, focusing on the students' assessment and performance in the course. There were ten closed-ended items asking the students to express their views on different issues related to the measurement of their performance in the course as well as the efficiency of the assessment tools used by the lecturers to measure their progress. The last part consisted of one open-ended item asking the students' opinions of the best way to assess them in the course.

The final part consisted of three open-ended items asking about the overall evaluation, where students were asked for their opinions regarding the positive and negative aspects of the course as well as their suggestions for the improvement of the course. The last part of the questionnaire was optional, giving students the chance to provide their contact details if they were willing to be contacted to participate in an interview related to the same topic.

In constructing the questionnaire items, care was taken to be clear about the objectives of the study so that each item would be directly referenced against one or more of the research objectives. Similarly, the analysis of the data to be gathered was thought through carefully. Designing three evaluation questionnaires was not an easy task and, as noted above, they went through a continuum of revision to reach the final result. Many resources were of assistance including Weir & Roberts (1994: 276-289) and Alderson & Beretta's (1992: 305-330). The subsequent piloting process is discussed in section 4.11.1 below.

#### **4.7.2 Qualitative Data Collection**

In this study the qualitative data collection consisted of four different types of method. It included open-ended items in the questionnaire, two different semi-structured interviews with both students and lecturers on the three courses under investigation, students' diaries and document analysis related to the three courses and to the programme in general. The following sections will discuss the design and the process of development of each of these instruments.

#### **4.7.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

The interview method is the major data collection tool in this study. Unlike the questionnaires, which consisted of questions and pre-set answers to which participants were asked to specify the extent of their agreement or disagreement, the interview allows in-depth and detailed personal views to be elicited. According to Cohen et al. (2007), the use of interviews in research is based on the fact that knowledge can be generated between humans, often through conversations: the interviewer and the interviewee construct knowledge together by discussing the social situation. Moreover, interviews allow both the interviewer and the interviewee to exchange views on certain phenomena and explain their interpretations from their own points of view.

Three major forms of interviews were noted in the literature: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Neither a highly structured nor a completely open-ended interview was favoured in this research. Highly structured interviews do not allow for detailed in-depth views and explanations and serve almost the same purpose as questionnaires; unstructured interviews, on the other hand, require a lot of time to sieve through in order to elicit the type of information needed. Therefore, in this study, semi-structured interviews were used. In this kind of interview, “researchers usually prepare a list of questions to be asked but allow themselves the opportunity to probe beyond the protocol” (Lodico et al., 2006: 124). It was believed that this type of interview would optimise the use of the available time without risking much loss of information.

The semi-structured form of interview has many advantages in qualitative educational research: flexibility, allowing the interviewer probe for more detailed information, enabling the interviewer to clear up any misunderstanding, and testing the limits of the interviewee’s knowledge. Moreover, if an appropriate climate is created, a semi-structured interview permits the researcher to gain a picture of what the respondent really believes (Cohen & Manion, 1994). In a semi-structured interview, researchers have a general idea of what they want from the interview: that is, they are directed by a set of general themes to encourage the

interviewees to respond and explain their views regarding these specific aspects (Radnor, 1994).

The interviews were guided by the four general themes mentioned in section 4.7.1.1 above. The aim of the interviews is to state the answers to the research questions in a formal, organized way, while at the same time allowing participants to explain their world and realities in their own words. According to Kvale (2007: 51), in a semi-structured interview “there is openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the specific answers given and the stories told by the subjects”. This was the case while conducting the interviews. Additionally, in many cases, questions arose during the interviews that were not part of the prepared list, which allowed the interviewees to speak naturally and spontaneously about their own course.

It is recognized, however, that despite its strengths this research tool has some disadvantages, as with any type of research method. For instance, interviewing is time-consuming, as it requires attention to the functionality of the recording device and arranging a specific time and an appropriate place for the interview. Moreover, Cohen & Manion (1994) state that the interview as a method of research could suffer from a validity problem, suggesting that it should be combined with other research instruments that have already been tested and shown to be valid. Bearing such limitations in mind, an effort was made to illuminate problems while designing the interview schedule as well as the approach used in interviewing. In addition, the interview method was conducted to supplement the questionnaire, which has been tested for validity (see section 4.11.2 for a discussion of the reliability and validity of the questionnaire).

An interview is an interpersonal encounter; therefore, it is crucial that the interviewer establish rapport with the respondent. Also, it is important that the interviewee trusts the interviewer because without trust it is most likely that the answers obtained will be biased (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Consequently, in this study, I attempted to follow some techniques for establishing trust and rapport with the participants. For example, I explained why I was conducting the research, and confirmed to the interviewees that their responses would be

anonymous and confidential (ibid.). Such techniques have the potential to encourage respondents' greater co-operation with the interviewer (Hedrick et al., 2000).

### ***Lecturer Interviews***

The three lecturers who were teaching the three BLSCs during the 2008-2009 Spring semesters were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The list of interview questions (Appendix 4) was divided into five themes: the first four focused on fundamental aspects of this evaluation: the course objectives, course content and materials, course teaching/learning, and assessment and feedback in the course. The last theme was an overall evaluation of the courses, asking the lecturers about their views of the positive and negative aspects of their courses and their suggestions for improvement. During the interview, I allowed space for modification, deletion, and inclusion of certain questions depending on the interviewees' responses.

The aim of these interviews was to elicit the lecturers' spontaneous views concerning the current state of the BLSC, and also their views on the effectiveness (strengths and weaknesses) of these courses in terms of the four fundamental aspects specified in the evaluation model and the research questions of the study. The lecturers were also asked to give suggestions for the improvement of these courses, in order to enhance the linguistic competence of the students in the English Department.

### ***Student interviews***

After the administration of the course evaluation questionnaires, interviews were used as a second data collection technique aimed at gathering in-depth data regarding students' views on different aspects of the course they had taken, as well as their suggestions for the improvement of the course.

The interview schedule consisted of six parts: (1) General questions, asking about the students' general liking of a specific language skill, and whether they think it is important or not, (2) course aims and objectives, (3) course content and materials,

(4) course implementation/teaching-learning process, (5) assessment and student performance, (6) overall evaluation of the course (see Appendix 5).

#### **4.7.2.2 Students' Diaries**

Diaries provide a narrative record of things the students experience while attending the course. These could include problems encountered, critical incidents and other situations that arise in their everyday experiences on the course (Richards, 2001). Diaries can be useful in presenting relatively detailed and specific data, and can capture information that may be ignored or missed by other tools (ibid.), an advantage also noted by Given (2008), who argues that “diary writing is beneficial in eliciting personal yet structured responses ... Diaries are particularly appropriate in recording routine or everyday processes that are otherwise unnoticed if not documented” (2008: 213).

Self-completion diaries have many advantages over other types of data collections instrument. For example, diaries can provide reliable information on situations that are hard to remember or that might be easily forgotten, which other methods, such as traditional interviews, cannot provide. Moreover, diaries can help to overcome issues related to collecting sensitive information through regular personal interviews. Finally, they can be used to complement interview data to offer a rich source of information on individuals' behaviour and experiences on a daily basis. On the other hand, as with any other method of data collection, diaries have some disadvantages; for example they provide information that is unsystematic, which makes it difficult to decide how to use such information and also require time commitment on the part of the respondent (Richards, 2001).

In this study, three students on each of the three courses volunteered to write diaries about their daily experience in the programme. Respondents were asked to write freely about whatever they wished and express their feelings about the positive and negative matters concerning the course in any language they preferred.

Diaries can be in different formats, such as open-ended questions or a specific set of fixed responses (Given, 2008). In this study, participants were provided with a

form of diary with five broad statements to comment on (Appendix 6). For example, they were asked to “Describe a typical class of this course (from the beginning till the end, e.g. what the teacher usually does, etc.)”. Other statements included writing about their observations and the feelings that they experienced in the course, as well as describing any frustrations or successful events, and the things they liked and disliked about the course. Students were of course also free to write about additional topics.

The diary procedure used in this study has been useful for many reasons. For example, it contributed by giving specific detailed information about the daily practices and incidents concerning students in the English Department which other data tools, such as interviews, did not produce for reasons including limited time. In addition, the use of diaries has given the students the chance to speak freely and more honestly about their feelings towards their teachers which may have been difficult to express in an interview because of fear or shyness. Therefore, it can be safely said that the diary procedure in this study was deemed useful as it helped reveal more a detailed picture of the everyday practices in this English Department.

#### **4.7.2.3 Document Analysis**

Documents can play a critical role in explaining embedded practices and can sometimes provide information that can explain certain behaviours (Albaker, 2008). According to Cortazzi (2003) and Yin (2003), ‘documents’ include letters, agendas, administrative documents, progress reports, formal evaluations of the same site, policy documents, regulations and official statistics.

In this study, documents related to the English teacher education programme in general, and the BLSC specifically, were collected in order to be reviewed and analysed. Documents collected included:

1. Course policy sheets (course outlines or course descriptions).
2. Course materials (course books, handouts, supplementary materials).
3. Assessment tools (quizzes, midterm and final exams, homework tasks).
4. Official programme statistics (number of enrolled students).

Some of these documents were hard to obtain and review, while others were simply offered by the administration department. On the other hand, all documents were easy to store and contained exact names and references. Some documents tended to describe an ideal status and others contained information that contradicted what was obtained from the interviews; therefore, further exploration of some of the issues was needed.

The data obtained through the examination of course policy sheets, course materials and assessment tools were mainly useful in the description stage of the evaluation process to answer the first research question.

#### **4.7.3 Relationship of the Research Instruments to the Research Questions**

The following table (Table 4.1) clarifies how each of these research instruments helped to answer each of the research questions proposed in this study, which were discussed in detail in section 4.5 above.

Table 4.1: Instruments used to answer the research questions

<b>No.</b>	<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Research Instruments</b>
1	Description of the current status of the courses.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Document Analysis</li> <li>2. Questionnaires</li> </ol>
2	Evaluation of the three courses.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Questionnaires</li> <li>2. Interviews</li> <li>3. Students' Diaries</li> </ol>
3	Suggestions for improvements.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Questionnaires</li> <li>2. Interviews</li> <li>3. Students' Diaries</li> </ol>

#### **4.8 Participants**

Sampling is a crucial step in any research. Therefore, the careful selection of an appropriate sampling strategy is very important to all qualitative researchers (Cohen et al., 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The participants in this study can be categorized under two main groups: English language students enrolled on the BLSC and lecturers who were teaching these courses in the 2008/2009 academic year. According to the Registrar's Office in the Administration Department, there were 350 students in the whole English department, of whom



56 students were in their first year. All the students registered in this programme were female, simply because this programme is offered only for females. Since all the primary level teaching staff in Kuwait are female, and all graduates from this course will be employed in primary schools, the Ministry of Education has restricted enrolment on this programme to women.

Of the 56 enrolled first year students, 55 answered the questionnaires distributed to them in the classroom (one student was absent for medical reasons). Therefore, it is safe to say that almost the whole cohort participated in the questionnaire. Arabic was the mother tongue of all of the students and English is a foreign language to them. Most of the students (53) were Kuwaiti, while one was Syrian and one was Egyptian. The majority of the sample (44: 80%) were between the ages of 18 and 20, while eight (14.55%) were between the ages of 21 and 25, and only three (5.45%) were over 26 years of age. Regarding their schooling background, the majority of the students (53: 96.36%) had graduated from state schools where Arabic is the medium of instruction, while two had graduated from English or American schools, where the English language is most widely used. Most of the students were attending the programme immediately after graduation from high school. Basic information on the participants is presented in Table 4.2 below:

Table 4.2 Questionnaire respondents

Nationality	No. of cases	Age	No. of cases	Previous education	No. of cases
Kuwaiti	53	18-20 years	44	State	53
Non-Kuwaiti	2	21 and above	11	Private	2

The choice of student interviewees was based on the criterion sampling strategy according to which all cases who are willing to participate and meet some specific criteria of usefulness and importance for the study are selected (Patton, 1990; Kuzel, 1992). The criteria were any students who filled in the questionnaire, elaborated on their answers to the open-ended items and were willing and available to be interviewed. Students were asked not to write their names on the questionnaire unless they were willing to be contacted to participate in a follow-up

interview; I was therefore able to contact and interview all 18 students who showed their interest and willingness to participate (eight students for the writing course, six students for reading course and six for the conversation course).

Based on the same criteria as for the interview, students were asked if they would be willing to volunteer to write a diary of their daily experiences in the programme. Three students from each course were able to write a diary, which made a total of nine students diaries. All the diaries were collected at the end of the semester; the procedures by which all these data were collected is discussed in detail in section 4.9 below.

The Department of English has a total of 12 lecturers, of whom the three lecturers who taught each of the three BLSCs – the writing, reading and conversation courses – were interviewed. All three lecturers were Kuwaitis, two females and one male, aged between 35 and 50 years old. Since the college employs only PhD holders, all the lecturers hold PhDs, two from a UK university and one from the USA. They had between five and 20 years' teaching experience.

Although each course has its own aims and objectives, the lecturers were responsible for designing their own courses, selecting the teaching materials and aids, developing the assessment tools and the distribution of the grades system, bearing in mind the unified objectives to be achieved. In addition to teaching the BLSC lecturers were teaching other courses, such as methodology, applied linguistics, phonetics, etc. and undertook between ten and fifteen hours' teaching per week. The lecturers involved in this study participated in semi-structured interviews, where they evaluated the courses in terms of the four fundamental aspects specified in this study by showing their advantages and shortcomings, and suggested possible changes and recommendations to improve the quality of these courses.

#### **4.9 Data Collection Procedures**

In the current study, the data were collected in two main phases using a sequential process. The quantitative questionnaire data was collected and analysed in the first phase and the qualitative data were collected and analysed in the second

phase. The rationale for using this consecutive design is that the quantitative results provide a general understanding of the students' views, while the qualitative results are useful to refine and explain those statistical findings and explore participants' views in more depth (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell, 2003). Before starting the first phase, however, a visit was paid to the study site to gain permission and first contact with participants. Figure 4.2 represents visually the sequential mixed-methods design procedure of this study.

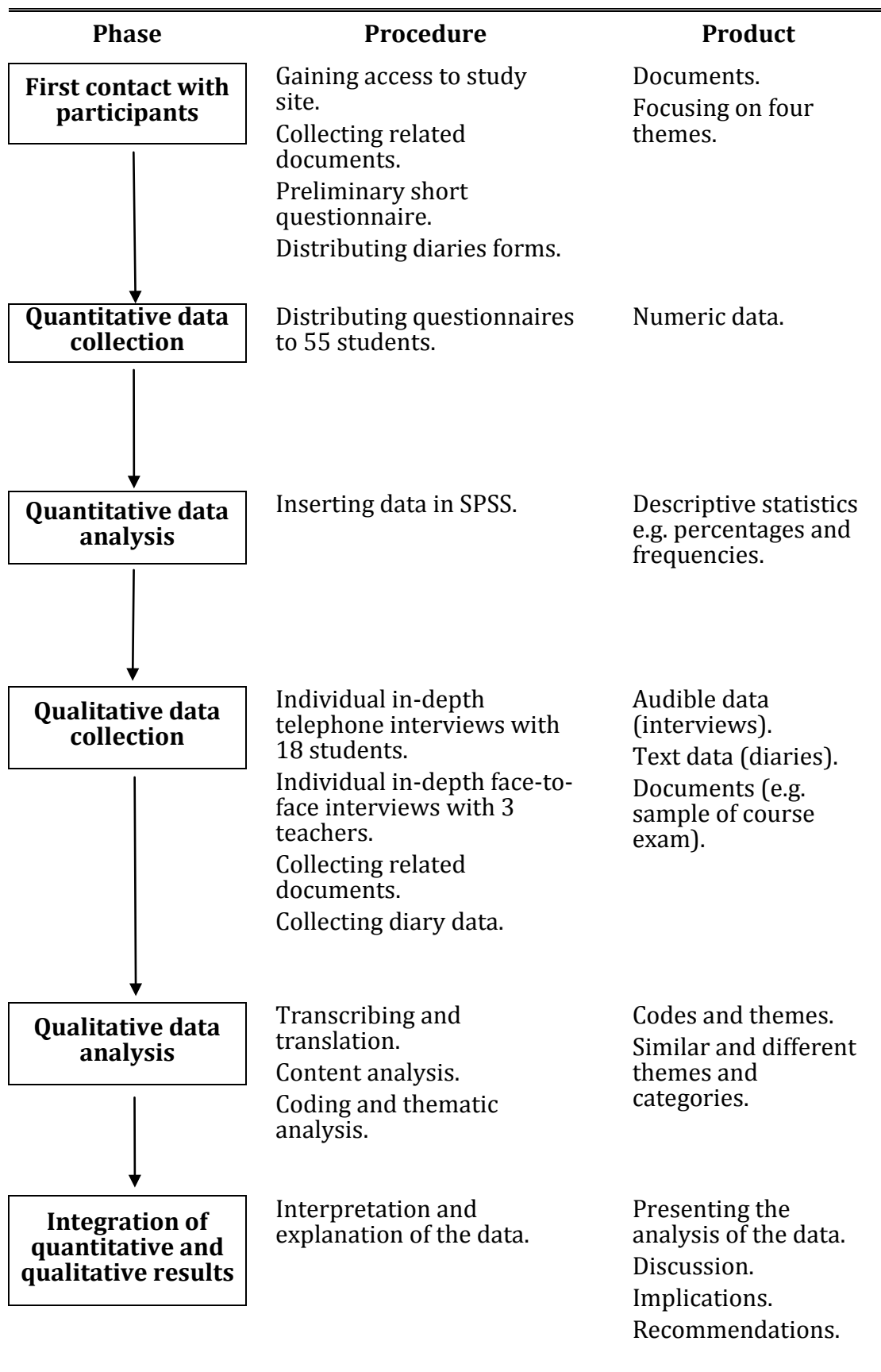


Figure 4.2 Sequential Mixed-Methods Design Procedure

#### **4.9.1 First Contact with Participants**

Permission to carry out the research was negotiated at the beginning of the second semester, 2009. Cultural and religious reasons prohibit unauthorised access to this all-female college, so the College of Education administrative office and the Department of English were contacted at an early stage to ask permission to visit the college and conduct the study, a request supported with a letter from my research supervisor clarifying the nature of the study. Having obtained this approval, I informed all the lecturers on the three courses about the study and what to expect during the research before arranging preliminary visits to the college.

The aim of these visits was to discuss and interview the students and lecturers informally, and to listen to what they had to say about the areas of weakness they face in these courses that need to be in focus in my evaluation study. As Osborne-Daponte points out, “the best way for the evaluator to start building an understanding of the program is for the evaluator to conduct informal interviews with a number of stakeholders” (2008: 12). I visited the college site regularly at different times of the day, aiming to meet different students from different sections of the three courses under study, and contacted the Registration Office to request information related to the study. A list of all 56 newly registered students in the department of English was provided. The Department of English provided copies of all the documents related to the programme, including the programme booklet, which has information about the entry requirements, the programme aims, objectives and policy, and the major course sheets with a detailed description of each of the courses.

At the study site I met a large number of students and asked them to speak freely and without fear, stressing that I was not a lecturer and that I was only here to help improve their learning quality in the programme. I was surprised to hear about the large number of difficulties that the students were facing, which left them struggling with their studies. After taking notes of all these problems, I realized that it would be almost impossible to cover all these aspects in one single study, given the time allotted and the fact that I was conducting the evaluation by myself.

As Patton accurately notes, “No evaluation can answer all potential questions equally well” (1997: 42).

Consequently, I designed a short one-item questionnaire, asking: “what are the most four negative aspects in the BLSC that you think need to be the focus of this study?” (see Appendix 7). The results would help identify the four most critical issues that students had difficulties with while attending these courses, and these issues would then form the focus of the study. The questionnaire was distributed to all 56 first year students in the English Department attending the BLSC. Analysis showed that four themes predominated: *course objectives, content and materials, teaching/learning, and student assessment and feedback*.

The subsequent process of designing the qualitative and quantitative research instruments in this mixed methods study has been described in detail in section 4.7 above. The next step was to ask the lecturers on all three courses to allow me to attend at the end of their lectures to ask the students for volunteers to write a diary of their experience of the programme in general, and these courses in particular, emphasising that this activity was totally optional and that diary entries should be written on a regular basis during the whole course, using whichever language they preferred, and that a form with some headings would be given to them to help them in generating ideas while writing their diary entries. Three students from each course were willing to participate in writing the diaries, and were informed that I would collect them at the end of the final exam of the course. The diary participants were recruited at an early stage to give them enough time to write about their daily experiences on the courses. Data collection continued in two phases over a period of approximately four months.

#### **4.9.2 Phase One**

The first phase of data collection comprised the main questionnaire, which was distributed to the classes over a period of ten days, putting aside a whole period of 45 to 50 minutes on each occasion, to give the students enough time to fill in their answers. The fact that the questionnaire was translated from English into Arabic played a major part in making it easy for the students to understand. Although students are supposed to be proficient in English, since they have been accepted

onto the English teacher education programme, many students were neither able to express themselves in English freely or efficiently, nor to understand some of the technical words in English. Therefore, providing the questionnaire in Arabic allowed for more opinions and detailed answers to be obtained for the maximum number of items. Owing to this, there was a 100% response rate. The closed-ended items were analysed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). After completing the analysis process, items of particular interest and significant results were highlighted and noted so that further details and explanations of these issues could be obtained during the interviews.

#### **4.9.3 Phase Two**

This phase started after the analysis of the questionnaires, at a point at which the statistical results had provided a general understanding of students' views regarding a variety of aspects in the BLSC. The diaries were collected from the nine volunteers and appointments were arranged with the 18 students who had expressed a willingness to be interviewed.

One of the interesting points I experienced in this study arose when I conducted the first interview face-to-face with a student. Because of lack of space, I asked one of the lecturers to allow me to use his office to conduct the interview. I started the interview by explaining the purpose of my study, the usefulness of the information and stressing her right to withdraw from the interview at any time. However, the student was very shy, although I tried my best to act normally to put her at ease. The result was a shallow interview with no depth of information. To some extent this could be expected since, for cultural and social reasons, females are not used to being alone with a male stranger and talking face-to-face with him. To solve this problem, I suggested doing the interview again by telephone, explaining that it would be recorded, and she happily agreed. Consequently, I prepared a special recording device with a landline telephone to record the interview. The result was surprisingly positive. The student was able to speak much more freely, giving a lot of examples and explanations, and it was evident that telephone interviews can help in eliminating an interviewee's discomfort. Consequently, other students were given the option of a face-to-face or a telephone interview, and almost all opted for

the latter. Therefore, all 18 interviews were conducted by telephone, a more culturally appropriate option in such a conservative society.

In the social science literature, telephone interviewing is an important method of data collection (Cohen et al., 2007). According to Borg & Gall (1996), it is a method that produces comparable information to the face-to-face interview. Moreover, telephone interviews “yield high response rates ... provide more control of the question ordering, allow you to use longer questions and skip patterns, and ask for respondents to recall information during the interview” (Newcomer & Triplett in Wholey, Hatry & Newcomer, 2004: 265). On the other hand, telephone interviews have some disadvantages. For instance, facial and body expressions cannot be captured while conducting the interview. In this study, however, given the nature and the aim of the research, this was not a crucial matter. While, according to Newcomer & Triplett, telephone interviews are relatively expensive (cited in Wholey, Hatry & Newcomer, 2004), all the interviews were conducted using a landline telephone, which is a free service in the context of the study.

Despite the usefulness of telephone interviews, many researchers contend that this technique demands special arrangements (Oppenheim, 1992; Miller, 1995; Frey & Oishi, 1995), which I tried to bear in mind while conducting the interviews. For example, when I arranged for the interviews, I made sure that students were aware that the interview may take one hour, and that they should be in a quiet place. Also, on the day of each interview, I made a preliminary call just to remind the student of the interview. Moreover, I tested the recording device and conducted a pilot interview with a friend beforehand. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and most took approximately 35 to 50 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, I explained the purpose of the study and the way it would proceed. All 18 interviews were completed over a period of two weeks.

On the other hand, specific times were arranged for face-to-face interviews with the lecturers of the three courses in their own offices. These interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. The interviews were tape-recorded, after gaining permission from the interviewees. The three interviews were completed over a period of three days. At the end of each



interview I asked the teacher to give me any documents related to the course which would help me in describing and evaluating the course, such as course descriptions and sample exams.

#### **4.10 Data Analysis Procedures**

In this case study, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The closed-ended data collected using the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively, while, the data from the interviews, diaries, documents and open-ended questions in the questionnaire were analysed qualitatively. The approach followed in presenting the data analysis is based on combining quantitative statistical results with qualitative findings, for better understanding of the different views and to reach a meaningful picture of the research problem. The data analysis is presented in line with the four research questions of this study.

##### **4.10.1 Questionnaire Data Analysis**

After collecting the three sets of questionnaires for the three courses, all the questionnaires were numbered for easy management. Closed-ended responses were entered onto computer and analysed using SPSS, presenting the percentage and frequency counts of the responses to each item of the questionnaire. According to Bryman & Cramer, one of the great advantages of using SPSS is that "it enables you to score and to analyse quantitative data very quickly and in many different ways" (2001: 15).

Although the percentages of the five-point Likert scales (strongly agree; agree; neutral; disagree; and strongly disagree) are presented separately in the tables, in the analysis itself, I calculated and rounded percentages of agreement and disagreement for all student questionnaire items and combined the 'strongly agree/agree' and 'strongly disagree/disagree' responses, leaving three categories; given the interpretive nature of this study, data is not being analysed as scientific statistics, and nor is statistical significance being sought. All the frequencies and percentages were calculated for each category in the questionnaire and the data was presented visually in the form of tables as shown in Chapter V below.

#### **4.10.2 Qualitative Data Analysis**

The documents related to the English programme, the students' responses to the open-ended questionnaire items, the data from semi-structured interviews with students and teachers and the students' diaries were all analysed and coded using exploratory content analysis. First, data were transcribed, translated where necessary, and codified (see Appendix 8 for an example of a transcribed interview and Appendix 9 for an example of an extract of coded transcript). Next, a constant comparison method of the whole data was performed by reading and rereading within and across the data (Lalik & Potts, 2001). This step helped analyse the data logically and sequentially in terms of formulating the codes, organising the categories and themes, creating thematic charts, weaving the data, and finally presenting interpretive comments in the form of a persuasive argument.

At the start of the data analysis process, it was challenging to combine all this data under specific themes and categories. I started reading the transcribed data line-by-line and coding each idea I came across, resulting in huge amounts of data coded according to the theme they were addressing. Microsoft Word was used to cut and paste quotations from the data, categorise them under a specific theme, and put them all in one file. Different colours available in Microsoft Word were used to distinguish the variety of themes generated. The transcribed data were read more than once to generate the initial categorisation of themes and sub-themes. The initial categories and themes underwent a continuous process of modification, including adding more relevant categories, deleting non-related ones and combining others. Direct quotes from participants' evidence was used as some of the category titles, one of the study's objectives being to bring in students' voice as clearly as possible. Confusingly, some pieces of data fitted into more than one category or theme; another challenge was when some categories proved impossible to classify under specific themes, a problem which led to the formulation of the third research question.

As mentioned earlier, the students' interviews were conducted in Arabic and then translated into English. In addition, since the participants of the diary procedure were free to write either in Arabic or in English, the Arabic diary entries were translated into English. The translation was checked and verified by a professor at Kuwait University,

who holds a PhD and is a bilingual speaker of English and Arabic, as well as two colleagues who are PhD candidates specialised in translation studies, to ensure that the translation was as accurate as possible. The process of transcribing the recorded interviews took a whole month and the translation of all data another two months. After transcribing the interviews, the data were e-mailed back to the interviewees for validation. Participants checked their transcripts and confirmed that the transcripts reflected the message they wanted to deliver. Then, the process of analysing the interviews began.

The analysis of the interview data followed the three concurrent flows of activity suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994): data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. I used different techniques and hints for data analysis, suggested in the literature (such as Radnor, 2001; Holliday 2002; Bryman, 2008). The first step was the reduction of the huge body of data, and carried out by cutting it into smaller chunks by coding and labelling to assign units of meaning to the data (Radnor, 2001). This process was successful, as it turned the huge amounts of data into more controllable fragments (Bryman, 2008). Next, the data were displayed by creating thematic charts; these charts were modified by combining similar categories and themes and creating others. Finally, conclusion drawing was achieved by what Holliday (2002) called the combination of the data, commenting and creating arguments to produce a detailed description and insightful views about the participants in relation to the English programme in general and the BLSC specifically.

#### **4.11 Strategies for Ensuring Quality Data and Verifiable Conclusions**

In research, specifically in evaluation studies, ensuring the quality of the data is essential. Thus, one of the major concerns of this study was to make sure that the data was reliable and valid, and that it reflected the reality of the BLSC. Several procedures have been followed to achieve this and the next sections will discuss these in detail.

##### **4.11.1 Piloting**

Problems may occur when collecting data using untested instruments, so researchers tend to test the instruments they use to forestall potential problems;

this piloting is an important step and De Vaus (1993: 54) recommends that researchers “do not take the risk. Pilot test first.”

In this study, a sample course evaluation questionnaire was pilot tested in two stages. First, the questionnaire was distributed to 30 students who had passed the BLSC the previous year. After the first pilot test it was obvious that there were some missing points in the design of the questionnaire and the evaluation model: the questions would not provide sufficient information to answer the research questions proposed in the study. Consequently, the form of the questionnaire was changed so items were categorized under four main themes, focusing on each of the four aspects of the evaluation model. This made it easier to compose enough items to cover different aspects for each theme, and also made the data analysis and presentation more systematic and easier to follow.

After categorizing the items under four themes, it became evident that some items were irrelevant or were repeated, therefore more revisions were made. In the second stage of piloting, 20 volunteer students from the same pilot year group were asked to complete the final draft of the questionnaire to ensure that there remained no ambiguity or misunderstanding. Only a few clarifications were needed related to the wording of some items, and these were dealt with after taking into account the students’ suggestions. The experience of piloting the questionnaire was useful in that it allowed me to test for comprehensibility of the questionnaire items, and to make sure that responses were relevant and sufficient in relation to the research questions and study objectives.

Since the study’s main data source was the interviews, it was crucial to trial the interview schedule and to develop interview skills. Therefore, before conducting the interviews, and as suggested by Dörnyei (2007), a trial run was conducted. To pilot the lecturers’ interview schedule, I interviewed three male colleagues at the University of Exeter who are specialised in TESOL and researching their PhDs. Many changes were made, as suggested by the participants, and I gained more confidence and learnt more skills while conducting these interviews. For example, I learnt that prompts are a very useful technique that I could use while interviewing participants: according to Leech (2002: 667), “Prompts are as

important as the questions themselves in semi-structured interviews. Prompts do two things: they keep people talking and they rescue you when responses turn to mush”.

Regarding the students’ semi-structured interviews, there was a clear need for piloting and practicing this instrument, especially after the change of plan from face-to-face to telephone interviews. The piloting took place with three female student volunteers who were in their second year of the programme. Since this was my first experience of conducting a telephone interview, practising helped me to get used to the method, and the comments and suggestions from the participants were informative and helpful. At the end of the piloting, changes and amendments were applied to the interview schedule.

#### **4.11.2 Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire**

In conducting questionnaires, the researcher needs to be aware of issues of reliability and validity; both factors can influence the quality of the data the researcher obtains. According to Osborne-Daponte (2008: 86), validity “refers to the extent to which there has been an approximation of truth” - that is, the degree to which it measures what it is supposed to measure (Pallant, 2005). To check the validity of the questionnaire, I used what is known as content validity or face validity. Content validity is defined as the extent to which the device represents the content of interest (Punch, 1998). This was achieved by showing the design of the questionnaire to my supervisor and other teaching staff at the School of Education at Exeter University and asking them to comment and suggest changes, additions or deletions to the questionnaire items. In addition, I asked some colleagues who specialise in TESOL and are in their final year of their PhDs to check the design of the questionnaire. Later, the final draft of the questionnaires was translated into Arabic. The translation was checked and verified by a professor at Kuwait University, who holds a PhD and is a bilingual speaker of English and Arabic, as well as two colleagues who are PhD candidates specialised in translation studies, to ensure that the translation was as accurate as possible. The pilot study discussed above also helped to ensure the validity of the questionnaire.

On the other hand, the reliability of a piece of research indicates how free it is from random error. In this study, I used internal consistency to check the reliability. According to Pallant (2005), internal consistency is the degree to which the items that make up the scale are all measuring the same underlying attribute. Internal consistency can be measured in several ways. This research used the most commonly used statistic: Cronbach's coefficient alpha test, which provides an indication of the average correlation among all of the items that make up the scale. Different levels of reliability are required, though Nunnally recommends a minimum level of 0.7 (cited in Pallant, 2005: 6). When the test to check the internal consistency reliability of the three course evaluation questionnaires had been carried out, it was found that the Writing questionnaire obtained a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.74, the Conversation questionnaire of 0.73, and the Reading questionnaire of 0.71, each of which are considered adequately internally reliable.

#### **4.11.3 Establishing Trustworthiness for the Qualitative Data**

Qualitative research has been criticized by many researchers for its limited reliability. Critics argue that the ways in which data are collected and analysed in qualitative research are affected by researcher bias, and therefore they are reluctant to accept its trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). Consequently, different frameworks and strategies for ensuring quality of qualitative research have come into existence. The application of the validity and reliability terms in qualitative/interpretive research differs from that in quantitative/scientific research. They are "conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in qualitative paradigm" (Golafshani, 2003: 604)

The strategies that a qualitative researcher can follow to ensure trustworthiness can be controversial. For instance, Eisner (1998) argues that there are predetermined tests to check the truth of qualitative research. He contends that the believability of a piece of research can be achieved by coherence, consensus, and tightness of the narrative style; that is, the presentation of the data and its analysis, as well as the link between the reported results and the researcher's conclusion. On the other hand a variety of criteria have been proposed for evaluating the quality of qualitative studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested a trustworthiness framework focusing on four major areas:

- 1) Credibility (parallel to internal validity in scientific research);
- 2) Transferability (parallel to external validity/generalisability);
- 3) Dependability (parallel to reliability);
- 4) Confirmability (parallel to objectivity).

Although Eisner's idea of believability as a criterion to check the validity of qualitative studies is an interesting one, Lincoln & Guba's trustworthiness framework is more appealing and precise (Albaker, 2008). Therefore, in this study, several strategies to address the four criteria were applied, as presented in the following sections.

#### **4.11.3.1 Credibility**

The term 'credibility' refers to "whether the participants' views of the setting or events match up with the researchers' portrayal of them in the research report" (Lodico et al., 2006: 273). In other words, because qualitative research normally derives its results from multiple constructed realities, it is essential for qualitative researchers to assure that their final conclusions are credible to their research participants (Gass & Mackey, 2005). In the current study different strategies were applied to achieve credibility. For example, the accuracy of the description and interpretation of the data were checked through triangulation on different levels and member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Moreover, I spent enough time - four months - in the study setting, and was involved in meaningful interactions with the students and lecturers. Such a period of time helped in establishing strong levels of trust and rapport with the participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003), and this facilitated my mission when I administered the questionnaires and conducted the interviews at the end of the semester.

#### **4.11.3.2 Transferability**

Transferability refers to the reader's judgment of the degree of similarity between one context and another and the ability to apply the same research, depending on the researcher's description of his/her setting (Given, 2008). This study, despite the fact that the findings relate to one specific college in Kuwait, offers an example within a broader group of first-year students of English in a similar context

(Shenton, 2004). The details and descriptions in this study may help the reader to decide on the similarity of the participants, site, resources, polices, culture and other characteristics in the study (Lodico at al., 2006).

It must be emphasised that the aim of this study is not to generalise across contexts; rather, to stress the unique characteristics of each teaching/learning situation. However, this is not to say that the methodology, analysis and conclusions presented here do not relate to other situations. The process of evaluation presents the reader with an example of one possible way to investigate and evaluate a language programme. Therefore, the study and its results and recommendations could be transferred to other contexts. Moreover, since other programmes in all colleges in Kuwait are controlled by one administration, namely the Ministry of Education, the study and its results and recommendations could be transferred to other local colleges.

#### **4.11.3.3 Dependability**

According to Lodico at al., (2006: 275), the term 'dependability' refers to "whether one can track the procedures and processes used to collect and interpret the data". In this study, I have tried to address the dependability issue by describing and explaining the processes within the study in detail. Such a description, I believe, may help to enable future researchers to use the evaluation model in other circumstances and contexts if deemed appropriate.

#### **4.11.3.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability reflects the need to ensure as far as possible that the findings and interpretations are the result of the views, opinions and experiences of the participants, rather than the preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004; Given, 2008). In other words, no claims are made that cannot be supported by the data. Confirmability was achieved in the current study by applying respondent validation, where original participants from whom the data was collected validated the results of the analysis as well as the interpreted data and its conclusions, to make sure that the researcher's interpretations were consistent with their views (Radnor, 2001). This was achieved by returning some of the interview transcripts to the participants by email and by telephoning other participants who did not give



email addresses, as time allowed. Participants were asked to confirm that the transcripts, and what I have interpreted, reflected their actual views and were consistent with their perceptions. Accordingly, a few changes were made. Moreover, I used an 'audit trail', where I received comments from an independent reviewer after showing him the details of the processes of the research step-by-step, and asked him to verify that they were consistent at both the literature and methodological stages.

#### **4.11.4 Triangulation**

The fourth procedure applied in this study to ensure its validity was triangulation. The necessity of triangulation comes from the fact that reality cannot be reached by one way alone (Guion, 2006). According to Golafshani (2003) triangulation is a strategy for improving the validity and reliability of research or evaluation processes, analysis and findings by implementing the use of multiple methods of obtaining data in one study (Gass & Mackey, 2005). In the literature, different types and levels of triangulation have been identified.

In the current study, investigator triangulation was used by asking two investigators to check and verify the translation of the students' Arabic transcripts of the interviews, to ensure as accurate a translation as possible. Also, data triangulation was achieved by collecting the data from two different participant groups: students and lecturers.

In addition, at the level of methods, this study uses methodological triangulation, which conforms to the application of a variety of research methods to investigate a certain phenomenon. In this regard, Patton asserts that "triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative methods" (2001: 247). Therefore, a variety of data collection methods were used, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, diaries and document analysis. The rationale behind this is that a single method is not sufficient in providing adequate support to the study (Gass & Mackey, 2005) and the weaknesses inherent in a single method are compensated by the strengths of other types of methods (Jack & Raturi, 2006). It must be acknowledged, however, that triangulation of such

different levels, sources and types is not an easy task; it requires massive effort and time.

#### **4.12 Ethical Considerations**

Doing social research means obtaining different sorts of data from a variety of individuals. According to Wellington (2000), the main criterion for any social research is that it should be ethical. He contends that it is very important for every researcher "to place it (ethics) foremost in the planning, conduct and presentation of his/her research" (Wellington, 2000: 54). This is because research scholars and communities involved in human research are becoming more aware of the risks they may expose participants to in their studies. Such awareness has led to the formation of a wide range of ethical guidelines and principles of procedures (Wellington, 2000; Busher, 2002; Stake, 2005).

While conducting the current study, I was aware of a number of ethical issues involved, especially given that I was tackling an evaluation study in a conservative context. I ensured that participants were respected as individuals and acted carefully not to harm them in any way. This was achieved by following various ethical guidelines.

At the beginning of the study, I submitted a Certificate of Ethical Research approval form to the school's Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter, explaining the purpose of my study and the procedures to be followed while collecting the data (see Appendix 10). The form was approved after confirming that particular attention would be paid to ethical considerations. The next step was to gain access to the research site. I made initial contact with the administration of the college, showing them an approval formal letter from my supervisor. Consequently, I was given permission to enter the college at any time. Creswell (2009) recommends that the researcher should develop an informed consent form, to allow participants to show their agreement before they engage in the study. Such a form will include the right to participate voluntarily and the right to withdraw at any time. In my study, an informed consent form was developed and attached to each of the questionnaires and each interviewee was also asked to give his or her consent before the interview (see Appendix 11).

According to the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) ethical guidelines, researchers must take the necessary steps to ensure that all participants in the research understand and agree to the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is important and how it will be used (BERA, 2004). Therefore, before the distribution of the questionnaire, I clearly introduced myself and my position and gave the students in each of the sections I entered detailed information about the purpose of the study and its importance. In addition, I explained to them that they were absolutely free to withdraw from participation at anytime. Also, I made sure that the students understood every item on the questionnaire, as I was available during the whole session.

In addition, I was very aware of the importance of anonymity and confidentiality issues due to the nature of this study. Hence, respondents were asked to return the questionnaires anonymously. Pseudonyms have been used for all interview participants in order to protect their identity. Also, respondents were given assurances, both written and verbal, that nobody would have access to their data except the researcher, and that no personal information about any participant would be disclosed.

#### **4.13 Limitations of the Study**

This part of the thesis presents the limitations of the current study. It indicates my awareness of the boundaries imposed by time, the nature of the study, and other circumstances. One of the main limitations of the current study, I believe, is the absence of the use of classroom observation. For my study, questionnaire, interview, diary and document analysis were used as methods of data collection; however, words may not be as informative as actual actions. As a researcher, I tried to arrange to attend some of the classes of the three courses under evaluation; however, lecturers refused access to their sessions. Within a similar context, several previous attempts by other researchers (Al-Edwani, 2005; Al-Haji, 2004; Osman, 1996) to observe classes in the college have also been unsuccessful. Al-Edwani explains: "within the ethos and hidden norms of the institution they were seen as an intrusion into the tutors' teaching methods or considered to be a

form of evaluation of their teaching skills” (Al-Edwani, 2005: 83). Kinnaman writes,

*Despite its promise for progress, program evaluation still has a tarnished reputation among educators. In fact, for many of us, just hearing the word evaluation evokes a negative response. It conveys the risk of failure and creates an atmosphere of vulnerability. It tends to conjure up fears, warranted or not, that someone’s position or program may be in jeopardy (1992: 2).*

In such a situation, I was obliged to find other methods to compensate for the lack of access to daily classroom procedures; hence student diaries were used. Participants in the diary method were asked to give a detailed picture of what normally happens in class; for example, one of the broad statements that students were asked to comment on was: “Describe a typical class from this course (from beginning to end, e.g. what the teacher usually does, etc.)”. Admittedly, however, observing the actual in-class activities would have given me a more useful and accurate picture than a diary, and would have helped in ascertaining whether specific claims and comments made by the participants of the study are, in fact, borne out in practice.

Another limitation of the study is concerned with the human data sources included in the study. The study did not involve the participation of subjects such as second, third and fourth year students who had completed the BLSC in previous years, or graduates of the English teacher education programme, who could have provided useful information, as actual teachers, regarding the future language needs of the students of this programme. In addition, other parties, such as administrators, the Head of the Department of English and the Dean of the College of Education could have added new dimensions to the study. I am aware that the participation of these parties would have strengthened this study; however, due to time constraints and access challenges, as well as the fact that I conducted this evaluation as a single researcher, this was not possible.

Admittedly, the accomplishment of this study was not an easy task in such a culture where the lecturer is the sole authority and students are considered as passive receivers. One of the challenges that I faced while conducting this study was to convince students to freely express their views and opinions about their lecturers’ performance and the course materials they used. In fact, many students

were hesitant to speak freely about their lecturers. This is typical in a traditional Arab system of teaching and learning (Safi, 1995).

#### **4.14 Summary**

In this chapter a detailed description of the methodology applied in this study has been presented. The current study is epistemologically consistent with social constructivism, adopting a mixed methods case study approach to explore and identify students' and lecturers' views on the three Basic Language Skills Courses from four different aspects. To achieve this, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods was used, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, student diaries and document analysis. Instruments were piloted and tested before application. A number of strategies were followed to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. Moreover, ethical issues were a major concern in the study and have been dealt with by applying different procedures and guidelines.

This study was designed as a mainly qualitative case study, aiming to evaluate the BLSC of the English teacher education programme at the College of Education from a variety of perspectives, using an adapted version of Bellon & Handler's (1982) formative evaluation model, in order to improve the programme. The methodology of this study is derived from the social constructivist perspective as an epistemological stance, under the umbrella of the interpretive naturalistic paradigm.

## Chapter V

### Findings and Data Analysis

#### 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the current study and their interpretation. Findings have been divided into four main sections, which will be presented sequentially, according to the four research questions of this study. Following a content analysis of the data from different sources – documents, questionnaires, interviews and diaries – a number of major themes, categories and sub-categories were developed. The first section describes the current situation in a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait, and specifically the English Department and its basic language skills component courses. The second section presents Kuwaiti students' and lecturers' views about the basic language skills courses (BLSC), focusing on the objectives, content, teaching/learning, and assessment of each of the three courses. This will be followed by the third section, which sheds light on the nature of the various challenges that students face in the English Department. Finally, the fourth section concludes with the participants' suggestions on how to improve their experience in a pioneering College of Education, and specifically the BLSC.

#### 5.2 Description of the Current Practices at the Study Site

*What are the current practices of the ELT teacher education programme at a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait?*

This section presents a description of the site of the study from different dimensions, aiming to provide an overall picture of the environment of the study site. It was shown above, in section 4.5, that the environment and working conditions greatly affect the students and teachers' experiences and quality of learning and teaching in the programme (Osborne-Daponte, 2008). Therefore, it is important to describe the site of the study, as this will help in interpreting the data, clarifying the picture and reaching a better understanding. The description includes the department of English Language and its general objectives, the college's admission policy, the physical learning environment, the resources and

facilities, the teaching staff of the three language courses and the course aims, content and assessment of each of the three BLSC.

It is worth mentioning that this part of the analysis is mainly descriptive, as it is based on the analysis of the documents collected while conducting the study in order to acquire basic information about the evaluand. This approach was supported by Holden & Zimmerman, who point out that “the evaluator must clarify what the program is intended to accomplish and determine the measurements of program performance that are feasible and relevant for the goals of the evaluation. This involves a review of program documents.” (2009: 21). In an attempt to answer this question, therefore, data obtained from written documents sourced from within the college, course description forms, the English department handbook and the directory of the College of Education are analysed.

### **5.2.1 The English Language Department**

The English department at the pioneering College of Education started out as a Language Unit, supplying the other college departments with English courses depending on the students’ subject areas. However, in the second term of the 2000/2001 academic year, the college established an independent specialisation in English language teaching and renamed the Unit as the English Language Department. Nowadays, this department provides the Ministry of Education with Kuwaiti English language teachers for public schools. The first cohort of student teachers graduated in 2004/2005. The language of instruction in this department is English.

The English teacher education programme was introduced to fulfil the needs of the Ministry of Education for qualified English language teachers. Its mission is to prepare academically, educationally and psychologically qualified teachers of English for Kuwaiti primary stage public schools.

The College Directory (2004: 25), describes the general aims and specific objectives of the English Department. The general objectives include:

- To contribute to the building, evaluation and development of the college’s curricula, programmes and output.
- To help enhance faculty professional development.

- To participate in different cultural activities at local and international levels.
- To participate in the evaluation and development of Community Service and Continuing Education programmes.
- To investigate English Language Teaching matters to improve the quality of teaching methods and techniques, and keep up with modern curricula in association with similar English Language departments in other colleges and institutions in the country.
- To address, when possible, local, regional and international academic and educational issues.

Apart from these general objectives, the English Department aims specifically to prepare student teachers to:

- Acquire knowledge about the general and specific educational aims for teaching English.
- Acquire an awareness and proficiency of the English Language.
- Explore teaching methods theoretically and practically.
- Acquire the special skills required to properly instruct children.
- Understand a child on all levels (physical, emotional, intellectual, and others).
- Interact well with young learners in a classroom.
- Explore methods that work best in teaching English to young learners.
- Create a good classroom atmosphere for learning English.
- Manage children's behaviour.
- Use teaching resources easily and efficiently.
- Develop their teaching career and increase their level of professionalism.

(English Department Handbook, 2005: 2)

The English language courses in the programme fall under five major headings: basic language skills, linguistics, literature, teaching English as a foreign language and vocational courses. The following Figure (5.1) shows how these headings are organised:



**Department of English**  
**English Major**

Course #	Course Title	Contact hours	Credit Units	Prerequisite	Type	
					Compulsory	Elective
<b>First Academic Year</b>						
<b>① First Semester</b>						
131	Conversation	5	3	---	✓	
132	Reading	5	3	---	✓	
133	Mechanics of Writing	3	3	---	✓	
<b>② Second Semester</b>						
233	Advanced Writing	3	3	133	✓	
275	Introduction to Linguistics	3	3	131, 132, 133	✓	
265	Introduction to Literature	3	3	131, 132, 133	✓	
<b>Second Academic Year</b>						
<b>③ First Semester</b>						
375	Phonetics & Phonology	3	3	275	✓	
240	Translation	3	3	233	✓	
376	Psycholinguistics OR ↻	3	3	275		✓
377	Sociolinguistics OR ↻					
378	Contrastive Linguistics OR ↻					
250	History of English			---		
<b>④ Second Semester</b>						
351	Applied Linguistics	3	3	275	✓	
365	Children's Literature	3	3	265	✓	
283	Curriculum	3	3	233	✓	
367	Readings in Poetry OR ↻	3	3	265		✓
368	Readings in Prose Fiction OR ↻					
369	Readings in Drama					

Figure 5.1 English Major Curriculum at a Pioneering College of Education

Figure (5.1) continued

Third Academic Year						
<b>Ⓔ First Semester</b>						
380	Syntax & Morphology	3	3	275	✓	
325	Teaching Methods	4	3	283	✓	
366	Modern Literature	3	3	265	✓	
376	Psycholinguistics <b>OR</b> ⇄			275		
377	Sociolinguistics <b>OR</b> ⇄	3	3	275		✓
378	Contrastive Linguistics <b>OR</b> ⇄			275		
250	History of English			---		
<b>Ⓕ Second Semester</b>						
385	Semantics	3	3	275	✓	
451	EFL/ESL	3	3	131, 132, 133	✓	
453	Testing	3	3	351	✓	
431	CALL <b>OR</b> ⇄			351		
432	Error Analysis <b>OR</b> ⇄	3	3	351		✓
433	Culture Learning			451		
Fourth Academic Year						
<b>Ⓖ First Semester</b>						
454	Micro-Teaching	3	3	275	✓	
494	Seminar	2	2	212, 214, 325, 380, 451	✓	
<b>Ⓖ Second Semester</b>						
492	Teaching Practice	23	9	212, 214, 325, 380, 451	✓	

- The program started in the spring of 2001-2002 (2 February 2002).
- The English Language courses of the program fall under **FIVE** major headings:
  - 1- Basic language skills ..... (4 compulsory courses)
  - 2- Linguistics ..... (5 compulsory courses + 2 electives)
  - 3- Literature ..... (3 compulsory courses + 1 elective)
  - 4- Teaching English as a foreign/second language (4 compulsory courses + 1 elective)
  - 5- Vocational courses ..... (4 compulsory courses) + Teaching practice

As it can be noted from the table, each of the five major headings has a specific focus. For example, the basic language skills component, which is the focus of this study, has courses that concentrate on improving students' language proficiency, such as Writing, Reading and Conversation. The second component focuses on linguistics and includes courses such as Introduction to Linguistics, Phonetics & Phonology, Morphology & Syntax, Semantics and Translation. The third component concentrates on literature and includes the following courses: Introduction to Literature, Children's Literature and Modern Literature. The fourth component deals with the teaching of English as a foreign/second language and has courses such as Applied Linguistics, EFL/ESL, Testing and Microteaching. The last

component is vocational, where students take courses such as ELT teaching methods, Curricula and Seminars, as well as undertaking teaching practice in public schools for a period of one semester, where they practise actual teaching under supervision.

### **5.2.2 Admission Policy**

To be accepted into the English language department, students must meet certain minimum requirements. First of all, applicants must hold the General Secondary Certificate of Education (GSCE) or its equivalent, with a minimum score of 70%, to be considered for admission (College of Education Directory, 2004). Because of the large number of applicants the administration of the Department of English has established two other requirements for students who seek to join the programme: an admission test and an interview. Each of these two requirements is marked out of 100. Due to the department's highly competitive admissions policy, applicants must score a total of 60% or more to be accepted. Since the college applies the credit hours system, students majoring in English have to complete 130 hours in eight semesters with a minimum GPA of 60% to be awarded a bachelor's degree.

### **5.2.3 The Learning Environment**

It is important to stress that the physical and educational environment greatly influences students' achievements (Brown, 2001). There follows, therefore, a description of the learning environment at the college including buildings and classrooms, as well as the resources and facilities available to students and lecturers.

As mentioned in Chapter II the study system at this pioneering College of Education calls for segregation by gender; therefore, the females' campus is separated from the males'. The college's female campus, where this study took place, is a fairly old one which was first established to be used as a government school. The campus consists of two separate buildings and classes are held in both; this arrangement causes many complaints in severe weather when students have to move from one building to another.

The college suffers from having to use such old buildings, which cannot accommodate the huge numbers of newly accepted students every year. The total number of students at the college is 10,000. Owing to political pressures the college accepts 1,400 students annually instead of 600, greatly exceeding its actual capacity (Alqabas Newspaper, 2010). Most of the classrooms have a capacity of 30 students; however, in many cases, more than 70 students attend classes (ibid.). The limited availability of rooms usually causes problems when the administration needs to open a new class to accommodate more students. While collecting the data, it was noticed that the desks in all classrooms are arranged in rows due to limited space, which sometimes affects the lecturers' teaching method and style (see Appendix 12). These cramped conditions contributed, for instance, to the reluctance of some teachers to try to put students into small groups or pairs in order to practice group activities and tasks.

Classrooms are equipped only with whiteboards and desks. Other teaching aids such as overhead projectors, computers, audio tape-recorders and TV sets need to be pre-arranged by the lecturer. Therefore, such important teaching aids are not available all the time in classrooms to all lecturers. The college has one audio-lingual laboratory, which is used only for its remedial course. Other English courses, such as the BLSC, gain no benefit from this laboratory as only the remedial course incorporates an audio-tape.

Three libraries are available to students and lecturers: two old ones and a small new one. The main library opening hours are from 8:00 a.m. to 1:20 p.m. This seems to be a short period of time for many students as some may have classes for the whole morning and therefore cannot visit the library until the afternoon. The library is well equipped, with an automatic system that allows the user to search its index. It has fifteen computers for students' personal use. Books are updated annually according to the lecturers' requests.

On the other hand, there is only one computer room with internet access, which is available for all lecturers to book. Also, there are no specific study rooms allocated for students to use in their free time. As a result, many students sit on the floor in

the corridors between classrooms or in empty classrooms while waiting for their next lecture.

#### **5.2.4 Teaching Staff**

According to the College Directory (2004: 3), “the faculty members of the English Department are a highly qualified group of academics and professionals who are committed to finding innovative ways to meet the educational needs of students”. There are a total of 11 lecturers in the English Department who hold PhDs in English Linguistics or Literature from either US or UK universities. Some of the specialities include applied linguistics, literature, sociolinguistics, course design and curriculum development. The lecturers consist of four males and seven female, eight Kuwaitis and three non-Kuwaitis from other countries such as Egypt and Jordan. However, none of the academic staff specialises in teaching any of the four language skills. All members take part in other duties, such as organising workshops and participating in conferences, and each has to join one of the Department councils and participate in other activities at the college.

#### **5.2.5 Course Objectives**

The data obtained from the Department Handbook (2005) reveals that each course in the programme has specific objectives listed, with a brief description of the course. It is noteworthy that these aims were set and determined by the Administration and the English Department when the English programme first started in 2001 and have not been revised or changed since then. The following section will present the objectives of each course.

##### **5.2.5.1 Writing Course**

According to the English Department Handbook, the writing course is “an introductory course in teaching writing to help students - not only to communicate in writing - but also to learn” (2005: 20). It states that this course reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary already taught, and aims specifically to help students to achieve the following objectives:

1. Express themselves clearly in writing.
2. Discover the close relationship between writing and thinking.
3. Recognize various approaches and techniques of teaching writing.
4. Reinforce the basic skills of writing: punctuation, spelling and composing

- more complex sentences.
5. Improve in writing different forms of letters, invitations and messages.
  6. Improve writing coherent and cohesive compositions (ibid).

#### **5.2.5.2 Reading Course**

This course is concerned with reading as a basic language skill. The course description states that, “this course focuses on the mastery of reading skills within the reading process” (English Department Handbook, 2005: 18). It introduces students in a systematic and progressive way to the reading techniques they need. It is designed to help students develop the ability to read successfully with speed and comprehension. The course aims to help students to achieve the following objectives:

1. Develop reading skills: skimming, scanning, identifying cause and effect, etc.
2. Build up vocabulary and terminology.
3. Be able to extract the theme and identify the main ideas when reading an English text.
4. Understand the structure
5. Argue for or against a subject.

(English Department Handbook, 2005: 18)

#### **5.2.5.3 Conversation Course**

This course focuses on the basic skills of oral expression and comprehension by providing experience of a wide range of everyday situations through group and individual exercises. It gives particular attention to structure and pronunciation. According to the English Department Handbook (2005), the course exposes students to a variety of drills in conversational English (by native speakers) with the help of audio-visual material. The course helps students to achieve the following objectives:

1. Develop production skills in sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation.
2. Identify and use common idiomatic expressions.
3. Gain experience and increase confidence in speaking English in public.
4. Develop listening strategies, such as note taking, through personal observation and listening tasks.
5. Translate orally symbolic forms (Diagrams, charts, tables, etc).
6. Recognise formal and informal patterns of speech.
7. Express ideas on a variety of topics in English clearly.
8. Increase English vocabulary.
9. Be able to respond to questions concerning many aspects of daily life.
10. Understand a variety of accents (Englishes) of spoken English language.

(English Department Handbook, 2005: 16)

From the findings above it seems that each of the BLSC has specific pre-set objectives which means that student needs assessment did not take place before setting the course objectives. These objectives should be borne in mind by the lecturer when preparing materials and content for the course. It would be interesting to see how those objectives are perceived by the students and lecturers on each course and the areas of agreement and disagreement between them. This issue will be examined later in this chapter.

### **5.2.6 Course Content and Materials**

This section presents and describes the content and materials used in the BLSC, using data obtained from the analysis of the English department handbook, course description form and course materials (i.e. textbooks and other supplementary materials). This data was collected from the Department itself and the teachers of each course.

#### **5.2.6.1 Writing Course**

According to the English Department Handbook (2005), the content of this course deals with the mechanics of writing required to produce clear and effective communication of ideas: handwriting, spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, word choice, paragraphing and content relevance. Hence, “students learn to produce the kind of practical writing that many people do in their everyday life, such as writing memos, writing to get things done, messages, forms, invitations, letters and giving written instructions and other types of writing that anyone might have to do at some time or other” (2005: 21).

The aforementioned content is from the course description of the writing course in the department handbook. However, when analysing the course description form, which was collected from the lecturer of the course himself, the actual content was found to be different. On the course description form, which is usually distributed to students at the first lecture of the semester, the course plan comprises the following:

- Part One: Writing Correctly
  1. Sentence construction – word order
  2. Punctuation
  3. Spelling and usage

- Part Two: Writing Confidently
  1. The well-crafted sentence
  2. Polished punctuation
  3. Spelling and usage
- Part Three: Writing with Style
  1. Paragraph writing
  2. Composition
  3. Punctuation and presentation
  4. Writing an essay

This surprising mismatch could be due to the fact that some teachers do not literally follow what is written in the department handbook; they use their own content and materials, which generally focus on only some of the course objectives set by the department.

As regards the course material one textbook is used, along with excerpts from a variety of sources. The textbook is called *Writing Skills - A Problem-Solving Approach* by Coe, Rycroft and Ernest, published by Cambridge University Press in 1983. The book aims to provide students with problem-solving activities by using a variety of text types and exercises. These exercises help students to practice using certain specific items of language and give them the ability to organise their ideas in a written form. The contents and topics of the textbook include both formal and informal letters, reports, brochures and guides, articles and writing a story. The book contains numerous tasks and exercises, such as re-arranging scrambled sentences and linking words and phrases. According to the authors of this textbook, the emphasis of its exercises is on group work. Surprisingly, it seems that the lecturer is relying on a fairly old edition of the textbook, which applies one approach to writing, namely problem-solving: however, this is not included as one of the aims and objectives of this course.

#### **5.2.6.2 Reading Course**

The Department Handbook states that “This course covers a broad range of topics pertaining to the students’ intrinsic interests, and focusing on the target reading skills which students are expected to develop throughout the course” (2005: 19). Moreover, the course includes varied exercises related to the subject matter of the text and concerned with reading skills.



The materials used in the course consist of one textbook, *More Reading Power* by Beatrice Mikulecky and Linda Jeffries, published by Longman in 2003. This textbook, which as stated concentrates on student-centred reading skills, focuses on the process approach to reading practice. It is designed for the intermediate to upper-intermediate level. The contents and topics covered in the textbook include comprehension skills such as scanning and skimming, thinking skills, reading faster, understanding main ideas and summarising. The purpose of the textbook is to develop students' awareness of their reading process so that they will be able to read in ways that are expected in college. Moreover, it aims to help students to acquire an accurate understanding of what it means to read in English. According to the textbook's authors, the teacher plays a vital role in a successful reading class. This textbook helps students by encouraging their awareness of reading and thinking processes through exercises that require students to work in pairs and groups. In short, the textbook does not primarily focus on the content of reading; rather, it focuses on directing the students' attention to their own reading processes. To accomplish this, it addresses the reading process in a direct manner, and the different reading skills involved are presented as part of that process.

#### **5.2.6.3 Conversation Course**

Since this course aims to improve students' competence in oral communication skills, the course content is flexible in design rather than falling into a strictly defined or rigid structure or a weekly schedule (English Department Handbook, 2005: 17). In this course students are encouraged at all times to react individually to questions concerning many aspects of their daily lives, express ideas on a variety of topics, enrich their vocabulary and acquire the art of conversation. According to the Department Handbook (2005), in this course, students are encouraged to engage in listening activities accompanied by note-taking exercises, which help them to enhance their comprehension and communication capabilities and expose them to a range of English accents. This course does not use a specific textbook; it depends on discussing different topics orally, such as summer destinations, people's rooms and lives, staging role-play exercises etc.

## 5.2.7 Course Assessment

This section describes the tools and mark distribution used in assessing students on the BLSC, based on an analysis of the course description form obtained from the lecturers on the three courses and exam tools (i.e. final exams).

According to the College of Education Directory (2004) the general criterion for student assessment is a standard final written English exam. This exam forms 50% of students' overall marks, while the rest is divided between homework, attendance and the midterm exam. However, not all the lecturers follow this rule. Some lecturers distribute marks according to their own methods. That said, each student's performance is assessed for each course in which s/he has been enrolled using the following criteria in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1 Marking Criteria. Source: College of Education Directory (2004: 36).

Grade	Signifies	Marks	Points
A	Distinction	90-100	4.00
B+	Very good	85-90	3.50
B	Very good	80-85	3.00
C+	Good	75-80	2.50
C	Good	70-75	2.00
D+	Satisfactory	65-70	1.50
D	Satisfactory	60-65	1.00
F	Fail	Less than 60	0.00

### 5.2.7.1 Writing Course

According to the course description form provided by the writing course lecturer, the assessment in this course may include surprise tests, short tests and achievement tests on taught subjects such as the following:

1. Punctuating a passage
2. Providing coherence and cohesion devices for a rambling passage
3. Marking the main part of an essay and extracting the main ideas in summary form.
4. Identifying errors on selected excerpts.
5. Writing on pre-assigned or freely selected topics.

6. Inserting some conjuncts, transition words or abbreviations into an assigned text.

Mark distribution in this course is as follows: course work (20%), mid-term exam (30%) and a final exam (50%). The final exam is divided into five sections, which test specific writing skills. These sections are: punctuation, editing, linking words and phrases, attitude words and phrases and free writing, where students are asked to write no more than ten lines about the possible causes of their poor standards in English.

### **5.2.7.2 Reading Course**

According to the course description form, the marks in the reading course are distributed thus: quizzes (10%), assignment (10%), mid-term exam (30%), final exam (40%) and attendance (10%). The final exam is divided into four sections related to different reading skills. The first section is a reading comprehension question, where students need to read two different passages and answer questions on them. The second question relates to vocabulary. The third question is about making inferences from a description. The last section is a mind-map question, where students read a passage and draw a map depicting the main idea and supporting sentences.

### **5.2.7.3 Conversation Course**

According to the course description form, the marking distribution in the conversation course is as follows: five oral presentations (50%) each of which is worth 10%, mid-term exam presentation (20%), final project presentation (20%), and participation (10%). In the five oral presentations, students work in groups, pairs and individually on a variety of topics such as summer holidays, acting out a children's story, describing a picture and discussing topics from the news. In the mid-term presentation, each student has to create an educational game. They then have to present the game in class, including its objectives, materials needed, time taken, rules and how they came up with the idea.

In the final exam, each student selects a bag full of different items, and then s/he has to use these items to create a narrative. The lecturer has set criteria to assess this presentation, where she gives certain aspects specific points, such as grammar,

pronunciation, voice pitch and body language, creativity, enjoyment and vocabulary.

### **5.2.8 Summary**

Analysis of the documents related to the English Department and the BLSC was used as the main method to answer the first research question of this study. The aim of this analysis was to describe the study site and highlight its main features in order to set the ground for the next sections of data analysis. The analysis of the data revealed that the physical environment of the study site is fairly old and the capacity of the buildings is limited. The aims and objectives of the English department are not set on the basis of the students' needs, but are dependent on the views of the administration. Although the lecturers in the English department are qualified, with PhD degrees, none specialised in teaching the four language skills. Finally, each lecturer of the BLSC provides his/her students with a course description form where aims, content and assessment in the course are described. The following section investigates the students' and lecturers' views of the BLSC.

### **5.3 Participants' Evaluative Views of the Basic Language Skills Component**

*What are Kuwaiti students and lecturers' evaluative views about the basic language skills component at a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait?*

This research question explores the different evaluative views of students and their lecturers about aspects of the BLSC at a pioneering College of Education. To answer this question, data obtained from both open and closed-ended questionnaire items, semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers and students' diaries are analysed. The analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data is combined, where appropriate, together with the views of both students and their lecturers. After analysing the data various themes and sub-themes emerged and were presented in sequence under the four major aspects on which this study focuses: (a) course objectives, (b) course content and teaching materials, (c) teaching and learning, and (d) assessment and feedback procedures in the course. Figure 5.2 represents these themes. It is important to stress that the evaluation of the BLSC is entirely based on the students' and lecturers' experiences and views.

The issue of voice is deemed central in this evaluative study, as this kind of evaluation has never been carried out in this department.

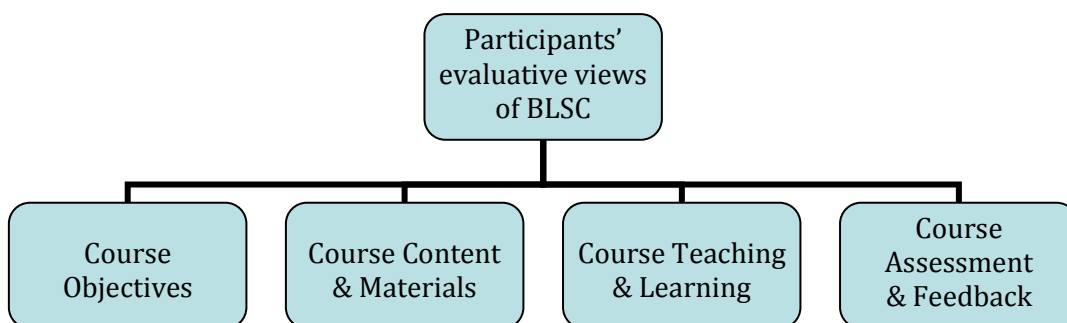


Figure 5.2 Participants' Evaluative Views of BLSC

### 5.3.1 Course Objectives

The first focus of the data analysis is the objectives of the BLSC. My major question was: in the view of students<sup>1</sup> and lecturers, to what extent has each of the courses achieved its objectives? The following sections will present the participants' views regarding each course's objectives.

#### 5.3.1.1 "A Grammar Course Disguised as Writing"

Analysis of the writing course evaluation questionnaire on the course objectives shows that questionnaire respondents agreed with three out of the ten listed writing objectives. Items (5), (1) and (10) attracted the highest levels of student agreement: 81% of students agreed with item (5) 'Reinforce the mechanics of writing (i.e. punctuation, and spelling)', 78% with item (1) 'Reinforce the grammatical structures', and 57% with item (10) 'Increase knowledge of English language vocabulary'. This may indicate that the lecturer is focusing on achieving the grammar objectives more than writing-related objectives. The other seven of the ten items attracted the lowest levels of student agreement, as shown in Table 5.2. This finding clearly shows that some fundamental writing skills and techniques are not being taught in this course. For instance, only 4% of participants agreed that different writing genres were taught (item 8), whereas 77% of students disagreed with this statement. This may show that the lecturer is neglecting to teach the genre approach to writing, which is considered a key

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<sup>1</sup> The word 'students' refers to student teachers of English and the words 'lecturer' and 'teacher' refer to the course lecturers to avoid confusion and to be consistent.

strength in teaching writing in EFL classrooms, and may indicate that the lecturer lacks the knowledge or ability to teach the genre approach to writing. Moreover, item (7) shows that 60% of students reported their disagreement with the statement that during this course they had learnt how to write a well-structured essay and understood its basic structure, e.g. introduction, body and conclusion. This shows that the lecturer is also ignoring another main writing objective of this course, for the sake of teaching grammatical rules. This could be due to the lecturer's lack of qualification to teach English writing; as we have already seen in the description of the teaching staff in section (5.2.4), none of the teachers are specialised in this topic.

Document analysis, as seen previously in Question One, section (5.2.5.1), reveals that the main stated objective of this course is to teach students how to write; according to the students, however, this objective has not been achieved. A clearer picture appears in the qualitative data analysis that follows.

Table 5.2 Students' views of the objectives of the writing course

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Reinforce grammatical structures	24%	54%	14%	5%	3%
2	Express myself clearly in writing	10%	11%	15%	38%	26%
3	Understand and learn 'creative writing'	8%	24%	38%	17%	13%
4	Recognize various approaches and techniques of teaching writing	10%	17%	29%	26%	28%
5	Reinforce the mechanics of writing (i.e. punctuation, and spelling)	45%	36%	3%	14%	2%
6	Write coherent essays	11%	15%	23%	31%	20%
7	Write a well-structured essay (i.e. introduction, body & conclusion)	14%	20%	6%	34%	26%
8	Write different genres (i.e. letters, invitations, and messages)	0%	4%	19%	45%	32%
9	Learn how to spell English words correctly	12%	27%	34%	26%	1%
10	Increase knowledge of English language vocabulary	18%	39%	28%	12%	3%

Data were collected from interviews with eight students, and in response to the question "What do you think the aims of this course are?" six out of eight students stated, albeit in different words, that this course aimed to teach them the basics of

grammar, punctuation and how to search for word meanings in dictionaries. For example, in her interview, Dalal<sup>2</sup> said:

*I believe that the teacher was insisting on improving our grammar and how to use punctuation marks correctly, I think this is the main aim of this course.*

This denotes that according to these students, the course aims to improve students' mechanics skills more than their writing skills. This was confirmed by Dr. Fahad, who mentioned the above-stated skills as one of the main course objectives:

*This writing course aims at improving students' punctuation, grammar, and spelling ... .actually, we have a broad range of focuses. We're talking about sentence-level editing, punctuation, sentence manipulation and summary making.*

This suggests that this teacher appears to believe that students should first acquire mechanics before they start learning how to write. To justify this view, Dr. Fahad gave the following quote:

*... In particular, for basic writing, based on facts and my experience, our students need to be instructed on a sentence level rather than an essay level. Why? Because they are so weak in terms of grammar, word order, and so on so forth.*

Reem commented critically in her interview on the underachievement of many course objectives, thus:

*The course, as it says in its description, should teach us how to write a paragraph and an essay, the basics of writing and research, but this did not take place in our current course. I don't think the aims of this course have been achieved.*

Confirming the quantitative findings seen previously, the objective of learning how to write about different genres in English was not achieved. For instance, Jenan said in her diary:

*We did not learn how to write invitations or letters. I don't know why the teacher ignored them. I wish I had learned this skill, as I have a friend in the UK and would like to send her a letter, but I don't know how.*

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<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I use pseudonyms to refer to student teachers of English, and the title 'Dr. + pseudonym' to refer to the teacher of the course.

There is a discrepancy between the lecturer's and his students' views regarding the achievement of the course objectives. The lecturer appears to believe that he has achieved the aims and objectives of this course. However, students revealed a contradictory view, stating that only the mechanics of writing were taught during the writing course. There are several possible reasons for such a discrepancy. It might show either that the teacher is not very clear about the exact objectives of this course, or that he felt the need to focus on the mechanics of writing more than anything else. Possibly the lecturer's understanding of writing in terms of grammar, punctuation and spelling may have affected his teaching focuses and techniques, or he may lack of qualifications relevant to the teaching of writing. A final possibility relates to his view of students as having low proficiency in English and particularly in English grammar, as they are new graduates from high school. There is no excuse from the teacher's side not to teach his students at least how the structure of an essay is formed in English.

The above findings are shocking, as it is evident from the students' responses that most of the course objectives were unfulfilled. If the lecturer is not committed to achieving the course objectives, then why do we establish them? One reason could be that because the lecturer knows that he is not accountable to the college administrators with regard to what goes on inside the classroom, he is teaching the course from his own point of view, reflecting his personal ability and interests. This raises a critical issue at the undergraduate level of Kuwaiti education, where teachers are not evaluated or observed to check whether or not they have achieved the objectives of the courses they teach.

### **5.3.1.2 Reinforcing Already Taught Reading Skills**

Analysis of the reading course evaluation questionnaire in relation to course objectives shows that the students agreed with eight out of the ten listed reading objectives, ranging from 53%-86% (see Table 5.3). This positive finding may indicate that the lecturer is committed to achieving the course objectives by focusing on developing students' reading skills, such as skimming, scanning and reading speed. Moreover, it shows general agreement among students that most of the course objectives were fulfilled. However, on the other hand, students reported their disagreement with two objectives. The statement in item (9) asked the



students if this course has achieved the objective of developing their critical stance in reading in English. Only 19% of students agreed with this statement, while 53% disagreed. This is not a surprising result given that students in the Kuwaiti context are not used to giving their opinions of what they read. In the Kuwaiti culture, from the beginning students are not asked to give their own opinions, but are used to accepting what they are taught. Therefore, such a result might be due to this culture of believing that everything they read or are taught is correct and unquestionable. Another possible reason for this result could be due to the style of learning that students have experienced in their school education, such as some of the characteristics of the grammar-translation approach, where students only imitate what the teacher says by drilling, with no opportunities for them to give their own critical views or opinions on the material. The teacher has responsibility for changing this habit by 'teaching' her students how to be critical and develop their own voice and opinion.

Another statement, item (10), showed that only 17% of students agreed that they had learnt how to summarise what they have read, while 60% disagreed with this statement. From the researcher's personal experience as a teacher of English, the art of summarisation is one of the hardest and most time-consuming for students to acquire. Therefore, it might be that the teacher did not have enough time to cover this objective, especially given that there are a large number of objectives in this course that need to be achieved.

Table 5.3 Students' views of the objectives of the reading course

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Develop my skimming skills.	25%	61%	9%	3%	2%
2	Develop my scanning skills.	30%	45%	13%	7%	5%
3	Build up vocabulary and terminology.	21%	57%	6%	9%	7%
4	Understand English sentence structure.	30%	36%	25%	8%	1%
5	Identify the main ideas of the text.	26%	51%	15%	4%	4%
6	Guess the meaning of new words from context.	17%	36%	40%	3%	4%
7	Express my opinion about a text that I have read.	5%	44%	21%	17%	13%
8	Improve my reading speed.	42%	44%	7%	6%	1%
9	Develop a critical stance in reading.	4%	15%	28%	41%	12%
10	Learn how to summarise what I have read.	3%	14%	23%	44%	16%

Analysis of the interview data, on the other hand, showed that most of the students, five out of six, stated that the main aim of this course was to improve their reading skills. They mostly expressed their perceptions of the course objectives as follows:

- ... to speed up our reading (Abrar).*
- ... to improve my reading skills such as skimming and scanning (Bedoor).*
- ... to enrich my English vocabulary (Mariam).*
- ... to get the main idea of a reading text (Jamela).*
- ... to guess the meaning of new words (Hadeel).*

On the other hand, the teacher of this reading course, Dr. Haneen, stressed the main aim of this course as follows:

*This course has been designed to help our students to be very good readers in the department of English, and also to be qualified English language teachers in their future profession as EFL teachers in the primary stage.*

The above finding shows that both the students and the teacher of this course are clear about what this course is aiming to achieve. However, in spite of the probable achievement of the objectives in this course, the analysis of the interview and diary data revealed more in-depth information in relation to the course objectives. Three out of six students seemed to be unhappy about what they had learnt from this

course. They believed that the teacher was focusing on some specific reading skills and giving less attention to others. This is exemplified by the following response given by Shahd in the interview:

*We did not cover all the skills: we only focused on a few. The teacher kept repeating the same tasks until we got fed up. I wanted to learn something new but the teacher insisted on progressing slowly.*

Other students went even further, criticizing the objectives of this course saying that they did not add much to their reading skills knowledge. In her diary, Sabeeka explained:

*This course did not add a lot for me, I didn't learn new skills. All it did was reinforcing the skills that I already know from school. I think scanning and skimming is something we have already learnt when we were at school, there was no need for such skills: come on, we need to learn something new.*

From the above findings, it seems that the teacher had successfully achieved most of the course objectives; however; many students expressed their dissatisfaction with these objectives. This finding could be ascribed to the students' familiarity with some of the reading skills this course aims to achieve, as these skills have been already taught at school. Also, it seems probable that the teacher does not have an accurate view of her students' level in English or their prior knowledge. Regardless, this finding directs attention to the importance of assessing students' needs before setting the aims and objectives of any course.

### **5.3.1.3 Inattention to Listening Skills in the Conversation Course**

Data analysis of the course objectives of the conversation course evaluation questionnaire shows that most of the students agreed that eight of the 14 listed course objectives related to speaking skills had been achieved. For instance, item (3) shows that 95% of students agreed that this course had helped them to gain confidence in speaking English in public. This may indicate that the teacher was successful in raising students' confidence about talking in English without the fear of making mistakes. This is an important issue, especially for students who will become future English teachers. Another interesting result was in item (1), where 89% of the students indicated their agreement that the course had developed their speaking skills such as sounds, stress and intonation, and item (7), where 86% of

the students expressed their agreement that the course had helped them to pronounce English sounds and words correctly.

This is interesting because personal experience of the Kuwaiti context indicates that many teachers tend to avoid such linguistic details (especially pronunciation) because they themselves lack the ability to pronounce some English sounds properly. This may be due to the mismatch between Arabic and English sounds: for example, Arab students find difficulty in differentiating between the English sounds /p/ and /b/ because in the Arabic language they are pronounced as only one sound, /b/. Therefore, the teacher of this course seems confident in teaching the students such skills, ultimately improving their pronunciation. With regard to item (9), a large number of students, 70%, agreed that the course had developed their vocabulary repertoire, while only 21% disagreed with this statement. This high percentage of agreement may indicate that the teacher is aware of the importance of having a rich vocabulary in order to be able to speak fluently in English, and has consequently focused on improving this linguistic aspect for her students.

Despite the positive responses seen above, respondents disagreed with the six course objectives concerning listening skills, as shown in Table 5.4. Item (11) revealed that only 9% of the students agreed that the course had helped them to understand a variety of spoken accents in English, while 70% disagreed with this statement. Because of the existence of a variety of foreign communities in Kuwait, such as Indians, Filipinos and others from Arab countries, students' exposure to those different spoken 'Englishes' would have been useful because of their daily interaction with these communities. Kuwaiti students are only exposed to the typical UK or USA English accents that they listen to on English textbook cassettes. Most Kuwaiti students are not even aware of the existence of other Englishes. Teacher education programmes have a responsibility to expose students to a variety of accents.

Table 5.4 Students' views of the objectives of the conversation course

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Develop speaking skills (i.e. sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation).	37%	52%	11%	0%	0%
2	Use common idiomatic expressions.	23%	47%	25%	1%	4%
3	Gain confidence in English speaking in public.	43%	52%	3%	2%	0%
4	Develop listening strategies such as note taking.	4%	12%	25%	39%	20%
5	Speak about visualised data (i.e. diagrams, charts & tables).	17%	29%	36%	14%	4%
6	Recognise formal and informal patterns of speech.	9%	13%	28%	32%	18%
7	Pronounce English sounds and words correctly.	30%	56%	13%	1%	0%
8	Express my ideas clearly on a variety of topics in English while speaking.	27%	43%	19%	8%	3%
9	Develop vocabulary repertoire.	12%	58%	9%	15%	6%
10	Respond to daily life questions.	21%	47%	18%	9%	5%
11	Understand a variety of spoken accents in English.	2%	7%	21%	51%	19%
12	Recognize main ideas in short audio listening segments.	17%	17%	22%	38%	16%
13	Develop my listening for details.	7%	21%	19%	33%	20%
14	Guess the meaning of spoken words from context.	13%	23%	10%	37%	17%

As seen previously in section 5.2.5.3, one of the objectives of this course is to “develop listening strategies, such as note taking, through personal observation and listening tasks”. When asked in item (4) if this objective had been achieved or not, only 16% of the students agreed that it had, while 59% disagreed. On this matter, Danah, in her interview, regretted not having the chance to learn this skill:

*We did not practice any listening activity during this course. The teacher did not teach us how to take notes when listening to something in English, which I believe is a very important skill that I was waiting to learn before attending this course.*

In congruence with the views expressed in the questionnaire, analysis of the interview data shows that students agreed that most of the objectives concerning speaking skills had been achieved, while other objectives relating to listening skills had been completely neglected. More specifically, Amal commented in her interview:

*I think this course was aiming at increasing our self-confidence in speaking in public, to be fluent in speaking without hesitance, and to*

*increase our vocabulary repertoire. However, we didn't focus on listening at all.*

The above quotation indicates that the teacher was successful in covering most of the objectives related to speaking skills but gave no attention to listening skills.

The following response from the teacher, Dr. Hebah, confirms this view:

*Mainly, this course aims at teaching students the development and production of the skills of intonations, rhythm and stress (when to put stress on words). They also have to know how to produce different types of vocabulary, so they expand their vocabularies. They have to learn how to integrate the four skills at the same time, but all in speaking. Eventually you will see that almost all of them [course objectives] go around one thing, which is vocabulary and speaking fluently. That's mainly what it is.*

It was surprising to find that the teacher did not mention any objective, activity or task related to listening skills. This result can be attributed to many factors. It is probable that, from the teacher's point of view, most of the students greatly lack speaking skills, such as fluency and pronunciation: hence, the primary aim is to address these shortcomings. Another reason could be the lack of teaching aids available to the teacher, such as a tape recorder or a cassette, which may have contributed to the lack of attention to listening skills exercises in this course.

A further reason might be that the teacher did not have enough time to cover both skills in one single course. This draws our attention to the fact that the planners of the English programme were not being realistic when they set the objectives of this course. I believe that it is not possible for a teacher to achieve all these objectives in one single course. This unrealistic aim may eventually lead to the course being deemed inefficient. The issue of limited time is discussed in more detail in section 5.4.1.

Generally, from the above analysis, it seems that some issues relating to the objectives of the three courses need to be addressed. For example, in the writing course, the objectives focused more on the mechanics of writing than on the skills of writing itself, as if it were a grammar course. In the reading course, the students clearly disapproved of the objectives, suggesting that most of them were repeated and go over old ground, and that the course did not provide them with any new

skills. Finally, in the conversation course, although the teacher and students expressed their satisfaction regarding the speaking skills objectives, there was huge disappointment from students with regard to listening skills. In addition, there seems to be no balance between the objectives in theory and the reality of practice.

### 5.3.2 Course Content and Materials

This section sheds light on the different topics covered in the three Basic Language Skills courses as well as the selection of teaching materials of each course. A number of different themes emerged, including a limited range of topics in the writing course, boring and unchallenging reading topics, interesting and creative topics in the conversation course and teachers' autonomy in choosing topics. In relation to the selection of teaching materials, the use of textbooks and handouts, including their availability, suitability, attitude, evaluation and use are analysed.

#### 5.3.2.1 Language Skills Topics

##### 5.3.2.1.1 Scarcity of Topics in the Writing Course

Data analysis of the writing course questionnaire revealed that only 19% of the respondents agreed that the course covers a variety of topics, while 74% disagreed with this statement, as shown in item (3) in Table 5.5. This high percentage of disagreement is explained in more detail in the interview data as follows.

Table 5.5 Students' views of the content & materials of the writing course

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Course topics are appropriate to my interests.	16%	26%	14%	32%	12%
2	Course materials are chosen by the teacher and me.	13%	23%	8%	38%	18%
3	This course had a variety of topics.	5%	14%	7%	49%	25%
4	The materials used in this course were attractive	0%	9%	19%	48%	24%
5	Course materials are easy to use and understand.	16%	29%	32%	11%	12%
6	Audio-visual aids were used in class.	9%	13%	25%	30%	23%
7	Course materials are appropriate to my proficiency level in English.	18%	20%	23%	26%	13%
8	Supplementary materials e.g. notes, games, and stories. are used	3%	13%	16%	46%	22%

In line with the above questionnaire results, analysis of the interview data revealed that there is a serious lack of topics covered in the writing course. This was clearly expressed by all of the eight students from this course who were interviewed. For instance, Fatima pinpointed in her interview that:

*During the whole course, I remember that we only wrote about three topics. First, at the beginning of the course, the teacher asked us to write about any topic of our choice to diagnose our level. The second time, which was in the Midterm exam, we were asked to write about our favourite pet. Finally, in the final exam, we were asked to write about our plans for the summer holiday.*

This denotes that most of what the students wrote about was related to their assessment, and hence was not part of their everyday learning exercises in class. This was confirmed by another student, Norah, who commented in her interview:

*We have not written about any topics of writing at all during the course. I want to learn how to write, as I will be a teacher of English.*

On the other hand, when interviewed, the teacher expressed a different opinion. Dr. Fahad, in answering a question about the topics that have been covered in this course, said:

*Well, we have a broad range of topics. We're talking about sentence-level editing, punctuation, sentence manipulation and summary making.*

This finding shows a probable misunderstanding from the teacher's perspective regarding the writing topics. It is possible that the teacher has a strong belief that grammar should play a major role in his writing course, which is why he has failed to teach his students how to write about different general topics, such as sport or fashion or even to choose their own favourite topics. In this regard, in her interview, Aseel expressed her negative view about focusing on teaching grammar-related items in this course by suggesting the following:

*I think we need to focus on writing about the topics that we are interested in more than the other aspects of writing, which I see as complementary, such as the use of punctuation marks. We did not learn how to write about a topic or to express the main idea, the opening sentence or anything related to writing.*



The result demonstrates that the teacher appears to believe that students should first acquire the mechanics of writing before engaging in any writing task. This result comes as no surprise in light of the teacher’s own view of the aims and objectives of this writing course, as seen in section 5.3.1.1. This attitude has its impact on other related aspects of this course, such as course objectives, methods of teaching and student assessment.

### 5.3.2.1.2 Boring and Non-challenging Reading Topics

In relation to the reading course, on the other hand, item (3) of the questionnaire revealed that 53% of students agreed that the course includes a diversity of topics, while only 15% disagreed and 26% were neutral, as shown in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Students’ views of the content & materials of the reading course

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Course topics were appropriate to my interests.	9%	23%	15%	39%	16%
2	Course materials were chosen by the teacher and me.	11%	29%	24%	23%	13%
3	This course had a variety of topics.	10%	43%	26%	8%	7%
4	The materials used in this course were attractive	15%	28%	35%	14%	8%
5	Course materials were easy to use and understand.	42%	39%	8%	11%	0%
6	Audio-visual aids are used in class.	18%	30%	25%	14%	13%
7	Course materials were appropriate to my proficiency level in English.	9%	26%	15%	38%	12%
8	Supplementary materials were used.	26%	22%	25%	19%	8%

This result was confirmed in the analysis of the interview data, which showed that a variety of topics were taught in the reading course. However, despite this diversity of topics, four of the six students interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the topics that they read about on this course.

Item (1) in Table 5.6 above indicates that 55% of students disagreed that the topics covered in the course were of interest to them. Bedoor, for example, expressed her view regarding the topics taught in this course by saying in her interview:

*All we read were topics from the textbook, and it was too long and old. I think it is better if we read from other sources than the textbook: for example, reading interesting essays from newspapers*

*or magazines.*

This finding indicates that the teacher was heavily dependent on the topics in the textbook, which are lengthy and outdated, and consequently are not of interest to students. Students seem to be more attracted to reading about topics related to their own interests.

Another student, Mariam, raised the issue of time distribution of the topics during the class. In her interview, she explained:

*One of the negative aspects of this course was that sometimes we spend a lot of time discussing a single topic; it gets boring since we keep repeating ourselves.*

This result reveals that the teacher may have a weakness in terms of time management, which leads to boredom. Moreover, this result probably shows that the teacher does not communicate with her students or ask their opinions of the topics they read. This is a typical case in the Kuwaiti context, where students' opinions are not taken into account. Students tend to listen to what their teacher asks them to do without daring to express their views about it. This issue is examined further in forthcoming sections.

Moreover, in their interviews, a majority of students (five out of six) expressed their dissatisfaction with the level of difficulty of the topics they read in this course. For instance, Jamela stated:

*We need more difficult passages to get some more new vocabulary, because a lot of the passages that we read in this course are not that challenging.*

This result may indicate that the teacher is probably underestimating her students' English level, and is thus giving them very easy passages to read. This clearly highlights the importance of assessing students' needs before starting any course or programme.

Despite the students' criticisms, Dr. Haneen, surprisingly, gave a different view of the selected topics in the course. She said:

*I ask them to bring some articles that challenge their own thinking,*

*bring things that reflect the culture of native speakers of English, like American, British or even non-English-speaking countries. From time to time, I talk about educational leaders like Montessori and other leaders like Martin Luther King and others so they can discover the identity of leaders and why you would want to follow these kinds of leaders. Sometimes we have debates on topics from the target culture, like Thanksgiving, Halloween, and Easter and so on.*

This finding shows that the teacher does give the students the choice to express their opinions to see whether or not they are happy with the topics they read; however, students may have not responded. The teacher knows that her students come from an educational culture where they are spoon-fed and are used to obeying whatever the teacher says, even if it is not to their interest. Therefore, she clarified that she encourages them to have their say, to change this culture of passivity in decision-making and class participation:

*I am very open-minded to their criticism. I'm always trying to challenge them and give them the choice to say yes or no for things.*

The students' passivity could be attributed to the Kuwaiti learning culture, which has made them shy and afraid of expressing their opinions, especially on topics of the teacher's choice. Throughout their schooling, Kuwaiti students have almost no voice in selecting the topics to be taught, which are generally determined by the teacher or the textbook.

#### **5.3.2.1.3 Interesting and Creative Topics in the Conversation Course**

When it comes to the conversation course, analysis of the questionnaire data, item (3), shows that 82% of the respondents agreed that there was a variety of topics in this course. In item (1), according to 74% of students, these topics were appropriate to their interests (see Table 5.7). This result shows that students view the topics covered in this course positively. More details on this matter emerged while analysing the qualitative data.

Table 5.7 Students' views of the content & materials of the conversation course

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Course topics were appropriate to my interests.	27%	47%	21%	5%	0%
2	Course materials were chosen by the teacher and me.	6%	28%	37%	19%	10%
3	This course had a variety of topics.	29%	53%	12%	5%	3%
4	The materials used in this course were attractive	27%	35%	5%	17%	16%
5	Course materials were easy to use and understand.	22%	39%	31%	7%	1%
6	Audio-visual aids are used in class.	27%	48%	20%	5%	0%
7	Course materials were appropriate to my proficiency level in English.	22%	31%	39%	8%	0%
8	Supplementary materials e.g. videotapes, recorder, etc. were used.	25%	40%	22%	11%	2%

Both the students and the lecturer confirmed that a variety of topics were presented on this course. All six students interviewed reported positive views of the topics covered in the course. For instance, Lolwah commented:

*The varied topics of conversation made us very happy, as if you are flipping through a magazine of interesting topics. We covered some topics such as Kuwait traditions, weddings in Kuwait. The teacher helped us to compare weddings in Kuwait to those in the USA. The teacher also related the topic of weddings in Kuwait to her personal experiences, as she talked about her son's wedding.*

The above quote may show that the teacher is choosing topics that are familiar to the students, such as Kuwaiti traditions and weddings, which are usually taught below university level. This can be attributed to the fact that the teacher is aware of her students' level and is therefore avoiding difficult or unfamiliar topics that may deter the students from participating. However, on the other hand, this finding may indicate that the teacher is choosing topics that are not challenging enough for the students and therefore are not conducive to university level learning.

Other topics were also reported in this course. Alaa, for example, highlighted in her interview some of these topics as follows:

*We had an interesting activity like showing the difference between minimal pairs such as night and knight, knew and new. In addition, there was an activity in which the teacher gave me an envelope full of objects to describe orally.*

Another student, Nouf, stated in her interview that the teacher was very creative and that they used topics that they had not experienced before in class: *'I remember that the teacher also used some educational games such as Sudoku and shipwreck'*.

Dr. Hebah seemed confident when answering the question about how varied the topics discussed in this conversation course were. She said:

*I have discussed a lot of them [topics]. For example, we have discussed summer destinations, the secret code game and the preposition game. We have talked about recipes. We have words where students have to know meanings in context. There are educational games. There is acting out children's stories. There are many things they are doing.*

Dr. Hebah gave an interesting and logical reason for this variety of topics. She explained:

*Students are different and they have different backgrounds. I always try to expand speaking activities on different issues. For example, I go into home economics, family issues, politics, religion, modelling and makeup: anything to make it interesting for some students. You'll find that other students are not interested in this, so the next day you will see the topic that I raise in the classroom will be for those students who were not interested in the previous day's topic. Then they will be interested that day.*

From the above analysis, it seems that this course is an interesting one in terms of its content, and that the lecturer has been successful in attracting students' attention by selecting a variety of topics to cover. However, although this seems to be positive, it probably shows how this course is focusing on speaking skills more than listening skills. It is clear from the lecturer's response that she has ignored any activities or tasks related to listening skills.

#### **5.3.2.1.4 "Dreaming of choosing topics of my interest"**

The issue of ignoring the student voice in choosing the topics in the BLSC is apparent in most of the courses. For example, in the writing course, data analysis of questionnaire item (2), related to the students' ability to choose the content of the course, revealed that only 36% of the respondents agreed that course

materials are a mutual choice between the teacher and his students (see Table 5.5). This means that more than half of the respondents - 56% - believe that they have little say in the choice of topics in the writing course. This finding is in line with the analysis of the qualitative data, in which six of the students expressed their frustration with the way their views about topics of study were not taken into account. For instance, Wafa commented in her diary as follows:

*I'm really bored and frustrated with writing about topics that are dictated by the teacher. Every time we come to write about a topic, it should be what the teacher imposes upon us. I'm not allowed to write about topics that relate to my needs, problems, tendencies, interests or even personal issues such as teenage problems. I am dreaming of writing about a topic of personal interest to me. I told myself: why not write on my own? I did it once and stopped afterwards because I was not motivated to write more, as nobody will read them.*

On the other hand, Dr. Fahad, the lecturer on this course, blamed the students themselves. When asked about giving the students the opportunity to choose topics of interest to write about, he explained, rather surprisingly:

*I'll tell you something. Unless the teacher instructs them, they won't respond. Yes, we give them the choice to write about anything of their choice, but unfortunately they have a misconception about what research is. Research is not cut and paste, plagiarizing from the internet and books and so on with their names at the bottom. We always tell them that this is not right. Whatever you read, you have to rewrite using your own words. Usually this doesn't happen because they can't do it.*

There seems to be a mismatch between what the students say and what the lecturer believes to be correct. While the students blame their teacher for not giving them the chance to choose their own topics to write about, which is causing boredom and frustration, the teacher, on the other hand, believes that the students are not motivated to write until they receive instructions from their teacher, and that if he gave them the chance to write about their own choice of topic, they would plagiarise. This inconsistency could be due to many reasons. The lecturer might be underestimating his students' ability to choose their own topics of interest to write about, or he might have caught one case of plagiarism and generalised it to the whole class. As reported by the majority of the students, this particular lecturer

tends to follow the traditional or old-school approach to teaching, where the teacher is the centre of the teaching and learning process. Despite all this, it seems to be important that the teacher gives the students the chance to choose topics that they are interested in, as this will motivate them and encourage them to participate in class, and thus achieve their learning objectives.

With regard to the reading course, item (2) in Table 5.6 indicates that 40% of students agreed that they had the chance to choose the topics and materials with their teacher, while 36% expressed their disagreement. In this regard, in her interview, one of the students, Abrar, stated the following:

*I remember that Dr. Haneen gave us the chance to select any article or story about any topic of our own interest to read and comment on. But this has happened only once during the whole semester. I wish that we did this more often.*

Although this is a slightly better case, students on the reading course were not given enough chances to select the topics or materials that they wished to study. I believe that this is a critical issue that has affected students' experience in this course. For example, as we have seen earlier, the majority of the students were bored with the topics they read about in this course, and this could be attributed to the fact that the teacher rarely allows them to choose their own topics. When students have the chance to study something of interest, they will be more motivated to participate and cooperate with their teacher.

On the other hand, although the analysis of item (2) of the conversation course questionnaire shows that although only 34% of students agreed that they had the chance to select topics with their teacher, students who were interviewed reported differently. Five of the six students interviewed stated that they had the freedom to choose which topics to talk about in class. For example, in her interview, Eqbal emphasised the teacher's flexibility in topic choice as follows:

*We were given the chance to choose whatever we want to talk about. At the end of each class, Dr. Hebah often asked us 'girls, what would you like us to talk about in the next lecture?' Sometimes we even have a vote on this.*

The above mismatch between the questionnaire results and the interview findings can be attributed to the fact that different persons have different views. Generally, this finding indicates that the lecturer was open-minded and more accepting of the idea of students' needs. This way of dealing with students has proved to be successful, as we will see later when examining how much students enjoyed this course.

### **5.3.2.2 Selection of Teaching Materials**

This section will highlight the use of different teaching materials, such as textbooks and handouts, in the three different courses: writing, reading and conversation.

#### **5.3.2.2.1 Wasting money on a textbook that has never been used**

In relation to the writing course, a number of issues have been revealed concerning the use of teaching materials. According to the analysis of the questionnaire data (see Table 5.5), item (4) shows that a very low percentage, only 9% of students, agreed that the materials used in this course were attractive, while 72% disagreed. This result can be attributed to the fact that the textbook used is a fairly old one, as we have seen earlier in section 5.2.6.1 of this chapter, which may suggest that it has poor quality paper and pictures. Moreover, item (5) revealed that only 45% of the students agreed that the materials in this course were easy to use and understand, and only 38% believed that the materials were appropriate to their English proficiency. This indicates that students' views regarding the teaching materials in this course are mostly negative. Therefore, the follow-up methods - interviews and diaries - were useful to investigate this matter in more detail.

In his interview, Dr. Fahad mentioned that he uses varied teaching materials:

*I depend on different sources rather than a fixed book. Yes, there is a prescribed book. I think that, as a teacher, I have to adjust to the level of the students. If I see that a book is a little bit inaccessible, then I will resort to my own material. I select some excerpts from the internet for students for their reading. I have two books. I have tried to select some excerpts from each of the books.*

Furthermore, Dr. Fahad clarified how he adjusts his teaching materials according to his students' level:

*Changing the course materials depends on the teacher and the level*



*of the students. It depends on how teachers look at the level of the students and adjust. It is widely known that published textbooks address a certain group of learners. This is based on learners from different parts of the world. We have to adjust the material sometimes to suit our students. What I mean by "adjust" is to give them more time to understand the terms and the instructions.*

In contrast, many students expressed different views. Five students highlighted in their interview responses that the teacher did not use the textbook that he had forced them to buy. For example, Dalal said:

*At the beginning of the course, the teacher asked us to buy a writing book that we never used. I don't know why he asked us to buy it since we are not going use it. Maybe the teacher wants us to read it by ourselves, but we are not used to this. Our secondary school teacher used to tell us what to study and what not to study. We cannot figure out what is important to us and what is not. We really need guidance on how to use the book.*

This response sheds light on a critical issue in Kuwaiti pre-university education: students' dependence on the teacher. Based on personal experience as a Kuwaiti student who graduated from the same pre-university education, I can argue here that students were not taught how to be independent in their studies. We were either reliant on the teacher at school, who would summarise and spoon-feed us, or the private tutor at home who would sum up the whole book in the form of important questions and answers to be memorised for exam purposes. This kind of educational culture did not help us to read for pleasure, to write for any other purpose except homework or exams or even to learn English as a language and not as a subject at school. Therefore, there is a strong call to bring this educational culture to an end and substitute it with a learner-driven environment.

Another student, Sarah, wrote in her diary the following extract in advocacy of the same claim mentioned above:

*We have finished the course and we have not read one page of the book that the teacher asked us to buy. This is really frustrating. It is a waste of money.*

In her interview, Reem, made fun of the disuse of the textbook:

*I think the writing textbook is used as a decoration, as we have*

*never used it during the course. Therefore, I could not comment on the suitability of the book to our level, as I don't know what is inside it.*

The use of the word 'decoration' is symbolic, reminiscent of an antique in a museum that is never touched or used.

In her diary, Farah wrote the following comment on this issue:

*The book that the teacher asked us to buy was not opened to read a single page in class or to do any homework.*

It is very interesting to note here that students see the textbook as part and parcel of the educational process, without which they cannot study. Commenting on this issue, in her interview, Fatima said:

*The textbook is very important to me. I'm used to studying in class or at home from a book. Since we were young at school, we used to carry our school bags full of textbooks, study from the textbook, and answer the textbook exercises. The textbook for us is like a strong weapon in our hands.*

In the same vein, another interviewee, Norah, spelled out her inability to study any course without a textbook as follows:

*Having no textbook to study is a new concept for me, which I did not like, as I feel that I am lost without it.*

Surprisingly, Aseel was courageous enough to say in her interview that she had dared to not buy the textbook for the following reason:

*I did not buy the textbook, as I heard from previous students that we would not use it. So, I thought of saving my money.*

The above contradiction in views bring to our attention that it is useful for teachers to understand and value students' image of the textbook. For them, it is a gem that lights their way to knowledge. Having no book, or having one that is not used, is considered very inconvenient to their habitual approach to. However, this does not mean that teachers cannot use any other teaching materials in the writing course, but rather that the textbook can be used to reinforce them.

### 5.3.2.2.2 Easiness of the textbook led to boredom

The only available teaching material on the reading course is represented by the textbook. The analysis of questionnaire item (5) revealed that a high percentage of students, 81%, agreed that the textbook used in the course was easy to use and understand, while only 8% disagreed with this statement (see Table 5.6). While this result may seem positive, if a teacher chooses a very easy textbook, this may sometimes lead to boredom among students, as we will see later. In addition, item (7) of the questionnaire shows that only 35% of the students agreed that the textbook was appropriate to their proficiency level in English, while 50% disagreed. This may indicate that although, as reported earlier, the textbook is easy to use and understand, students believe that this is because it is below their proficiency level. This issue is further investigated in the next section.

The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that there are some controversial issues related to the textbook and its use. The teacher, Dr. Haneen, was honest and acknowledged the unsuitability of the textbook to her students' level. She expressed her view by stating the following:

*I think it's below their level. It's for the general course, not for major English student teachers.*

Dr. Haneen also indicated that she is herself unhappy about the textbook and is seeking a replacement:

*I'm looking to find another book that's really suitable for the needs of English language undergraduates, either from secondary school or from our department.*

Consistent with the views of their teacher, some students saw the textbook as being below their level. For example, Abrar said in her interview:

*I found the textbook and its exercises extremely easy to answer; even if you had given me these questions before taking this course, I could easily have answered them. I always get bored when doing the tasks from the textbook because they are way below my English level.*

Describing the textbook as dull, in their interviews, Bedoor and Mariam commented thus respectively:

*This textbook is very boring; most of its exercises are not useful. Although the reading course is very useful for us, this book is not helping at all.*

*Please change this textbook! It is really below our level as English major students at a college; it is suitable for schools, not us!*

Obviously, the textbook has been shown to be boring, too easy and lacking variety. The teacher herself supports this view, which may indicate that she is not aware of her students' true level and has selected the course materials based on her own preconceptions. I think the teacher needs to be competent enough to assess her students' needs and select textbooks accordingly, based on the students' preferences and needs. Moreover, the College administration should support the teacher in selecting a relevant textbook and review that selection periodically.

#### **5.3.2.2.3 Textbook Controversy**

With regards to the conversation course, analysis of the questionnaire data indicated that in response to item (4), 62% of the students found the materials in this course attractive. Moreover, in item (5), the analysis shows that 61% of the respondents agreed that the materials in this course are easy to use and understand (see Table 5.7). These findings may indicate that students are fairly satisfied with the materials used in this course. In response to item (7), 53% of students agreed that the materials were appropriate to their proficiency level in English, whereas only 8% disagreed with that statement. Again, this finding confirms the students' satisfaction with the materials used in this course.

As we have seen previously when we described the materials in the conversation course, no specific textbook was used in this course. The teacher used handouts, as mentioned by one of the students, Danah, in her interview: "*The teacher used to distribute hand-outs and topics that we sometimes choose and then we discuss them in the class.*" Interestingly, students had different views about the matter of having no textbook for the conversation course. Two interviewees liked the idea of having no textbook. For example, in her interview, Eqbal related the existence of textbooks to monotony:

*There was no conversation textbook, which I personally see as a good idea. It got rid of the traditional teaching methods where the*

*textbook is a symbol of the burden and boredom of study.*

I find this an interesting quote, as it suggests that some students resent dependence on a textbook, seeing it as a tool of control, which hinders their creativity. I find this response interesting because Kuwaiti students are generally highly attached to the use of textbook, and such a response is thus unexpected. On the other hand, however, another view came from Danah, who highlights in her interview how important and useful the textbook is for her:

*When I have a textbook for conversation, I know what I will study tomorrow, instead of being surprised by the new topic. I also need to revise what we have studied in this course, but I can't do it properly, as there is no book, to which I am used.*

In line with the students' views about having no textbook, Dr. Hebah justified her lack of a textbook in the conversation course thus:

*I don't think we need a textbook in a conversation course: it will not be useful, plus the topics will be as old as the date of publication of that book. We depend on our own choice of topics, and this is much more enjoyable for me.*

It can be argued here that the use of textbooks can be related to the nature of the course taught. For example, in a writing course, students need to have a book from which they can study examples and rules of basic writing. However, when it comes to a course like conversation, giving students handouts and encouraging them to talk confidently and fluently is a priority for students who will be the English teachers of tomorrow. Admittedly, Kuwaiti students are used to textbooks and depend heavily on them in their learning process. However, at a higher level, such as university, Kuwaiti students need to have the freedom and opportunity to be creative and not to restrict their abilities with a fixed textbook.

To summarise, the content and materials used in the BLSC elicited various views, both positive and negative, from participants. Firstly, the topics and the teaching materials used in the writing course attracted huge criticism from the students. Secondly, the reading course was specifically criticised in terms of the boring topics and the very easy textbook, which is below the students' level. Finally, the

conversation course received broadly positive comments in terms of its varied and interesting topics and easy to understand handouts.

### **5.3.3 Teaching and Learning**

This section presents the third focus of this study: teaching and learning practices in the BLSC. It analyses the teaching approaches and techniques that teachers apply and then presents the students' view about the teaching aids that lecturers use in their teaching.

#### **5.3.3.1 Approaches and Techniques to Teaching the Basic Language Skills Component**

With reference to the lecturers' approaches to teaching the three courses, a variety of issues were revealed by the data. The following sections will analyse each course in more detail.

##### **5.3.3.1.1 Writing Course**

###### ***Passive and Weak Students Lead to a Certain Approach and Teaching Style***

Analysis of the interview data revealed that the teacher's approach to teaching writing is teacher-centred. This was clearly shown in the words of Dr. Fahad:

*I'll tell you something. Unless the teacher instructs them, they won't respond. I always lead the class because these students are always being passive!*

It seems that the learning style that the students are used to has pushed the teacher to sometimes follow a certain approach – in this case, teacher-centred – despite the fact that he is against it. This may indicate that the teacher is not trying hard enough to change or modify his style and consequently has surrendered to a teaching style where students are passive most of the time. This solution may have an influence on the students in the future, when they enrol in actual teaching, as they may imitate their former teacher's style.

On the other hand, it was reported that one of the teacher's techniques is to work with the most able students in class and leave the rest. In respect to this, Dr. Fahad said:

*Unfortunately, we actually have to sometimes select only a few*

*students who are really hard workers. The rest, they just sit and do nothing and receive nothing.*

This interesting quote may show that the teacher is working with only a few students and has no idea what to do with the rest of the class to encourage them to participate and be active. This might be due to his lack of techniques to motivate students and encourage them to be active in class. This highlights the importance of teachers' professional development.

Moreover, data analysis indicated that the writing teacher has a specific strategy when dealing with weak or low-proficiency students in class. Dr. Fahad illustrated his viewpoint thus:

*Well, I'll tell you something which is really honest. Sometimes we have to teach students very little things in order for them to actually cope with the course. Do you know what I mean? If we try to treat them as a native speaker, it won't work at all. They will actually have a catastrophe in terms of success. We try to actually treat them gently, bearing in my mind that the objective is achieved. We do this as much as we possibly can.*

From the above quotation, it seems that this teacher is going from one extreme, where he treats and describes the students as incapable learners with low proficiency, to another, where he may treat them as native speakers. It is clear that there is an issue of expectation from the teacher's side. I believe that the teacher should find a balance, understanding the students' real proficiency level and consequently teaching them on that basis.

The above findings highlight certain contradictions in the views of the writing teacher. He mentioned that he works with the able students only and ignores the rest, while an earlier quotation, however, he stressed that he teaches them in small increments to help them to cope with the course. In a third quotation, he refers to the competitive learning that he uses in class. These three issues need to be consistent and the teacher should address all students' needs, create an encouraging and motivating learning environment and use different assessment techniques and differentiated instruction.

### ***Lack of Writing Practice and Discussion***

Generally speaking, the findings presented in Table 5.8 below demonstrate that most students were dissatisfied with the teaching methods and approaches currently used on the writing course. One of the most frequent complaints was regarding the lack of writing practice in the classroom. In the analysis of the questionnaire data, item (1) revealed that only 16% of students agreed, whereas 72% disagreed, that they practised a variety of activities in this course, as shown in Table 5.8. In addition, another interesting result is that for item (2), which revealed that only 19% of students agreed, whereas 48% disagreed, that there was good student-teacher interaction in the classroom. These findings may show that the teacher did not give the students a variety of writing exercises, which led to weak and negative student-teacher interaction. This result shows a serious lack of writing practice in the writing course and therefore this matter is investigated in more detail in the following qualitative data analysis.

Table 5.8 Students' views about the teaching & learning in the writing course

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Varied activities are used	3%	13%	12%	38%	34%
2	Good student-teacher interaction.	2%	17%	27%	40%	8%
3	Teaching methods are interesting.	4%	11%	24%	43%	18%
4	Class participation is encouraged.	12%	24%	19%	36%	9%
5	Class environment is motivating.	10%	21%	39%	25%	5%
6	Course exercises/tasks are effective in improving my writing skills.	14%	24%	10%	35%	17%
7	Group work is encouraged in class.	12%	31%	16%	29%	12%
8	English is the only language of instruction.	25%	40%	7%	10%	18%
9	The teacher talks more than me.	31%	52%	3%	12%	2%

In line with the quantitative results, the analysis of the qualitative data revealed that the majority of the students confirmed the shortage of writing practice on this course. For instance, two students wrote in their diaries about their dissatisfaction with the lack of writing practice. Samera, for example, explained:

*Actually, it is called a writing course, but no actual writing takes place in this course. It should be called any other name except writing. We have never been taught how to write an introduction,*



*developmental paragraphs or a conclusion. What we actually learnt was punctuation marks such as the semi-colon, apostrophe and comma. Only the semi-colon is new for me, but other than that, I have learnt them all at secondary school.*

The above quote gives a sad picture of how students perceive this course. The repeated response received from the majority of the students was that they did not actually practice how to write a paragraph in English in this course. This became particularly evident when the teacher was asked to give an example of the teaching methods that he used; he responded as follows:

*If we take punctuation, first they are taught how punctuation should take place, types of punctuation and the place and time for using specific punctuation.*

Even the example he gave was a grammar one, supporting the statements given by the students.

Moreover, most of the students added that they had not been given any tasks to complete outside the classroom. For example, one respondent to the open-ended question and one respondent to the diary questions referred to the lack of homework, which the teacher had claimed to be giving to his students:

*We don't practise how to write a full paragraph. We have no homework or assignments to write, although we should do so in a writing course.*

*Jenan: ... Also, the teacher did not give us any homework; all he gave us was exercises, exercises and exercises in class from the hand-outs that he gives us.*

This finding can be attributed to many factors. The teacher may be of the opinion that by doing grammatical exercises and activities, he is covering the course objectives, although it is a writing course and not a grammar course. In addition, he may lack the required skills and experience to teach such a writing course. On the other hand, it could be that the students are very weak in terms of grammar, which obviously cannot be separated from writing, and that has led to the increased focus on grammar rather than writing itself. Despite all these reasons, this course was set as an English writing one and aimed to improve students' writing, not their

grammar. All of the students interviewed insisted on expressing their need to practice writing in class. A typical example is given by Dalal:

*I like writing; however, I can't write ... they didn't teach us how to write when we were at school. I don't practice writing at home ... I thought that our teacher would teach us how to write. I think writing is very important for my future career, because in any job I will need to write in English and also of course if I become a teacher of English.*

Another interesting result revealed in the questionnaire item (9) shows that the overwhelming majority of the students (83%) reported that the teacher dominated classroom discussion, leaving little room for them to practice the language, whereas only 14% believed that their lessons were not dominated by continuous talk from the teacher, as shown in Table 5.8. These findings, of course, are not surprising, although they may not seem pedagogically desirable, as many classroom observation studies have shown that teachers tend to talk more than students (this issue will be discussed in the following chapter). In the same vein, in the interview and the diary data the majority of the students stated that the teacher did not give them enough time to talk in class, and consequently there was no discussion practice. This view was confirmed by the next quotation, from Samera's diary:

*I left my job, my kids, my home and woke up at 6:30 to go to university to listen to what you will say, but you did not even let me talk in class. You just commanded us to listen. No talking! No participation! No objection! You laugh, talk and reply to your own questions and we are just listeners. This is unfair.*

The above quote is interesting in that it shows that this student is aware of what she needs and the way she expresses herself indicates that she is highly motivated to benefit from the course in order to improve her English. This is a major issue in the Kuwaiti educational context, where some teachers take sole charge and leave no opportunity for the students to take part in the decisions or activities practiced in the classroom. Teachers must be reminded that students need to have their say in class and that it is important to give them this opportunity, as it will help them to be more self-reliant and active and consequently improve their English.

### ***Time Consuming and Over-Emphasised Grammatical Activities***

Another issue raised was that the students considered their teacher's focus on punctuation in the EFL writing course to be time-consuming and limited in scope. For example, in her interview, Wafa, referred to the protracted focus on punctuation in class as follows:

*I think the teacher has taught us how to use the punctuation marks. However, we spent a lot of time on learning how to punctuate and how to use them in writing. All we used to do was to write down a sentence from the handout and punctuate it on the board and the teacher would tell me what was wrong with it.*

In the same vein, students reported that all the exercises they were given were related to grammar. This view is documented in Dalal's words who said in her interview:

*The teacher in this course only focused on two things: punctuation marks and grammar exercises in the form of multiple-choice questions. He did not explain the grammar rules to us, but he used to photocopy handouts full of grammar exercises and help us to answer them correctly. He said to us, I'm not supposed to teach you grammar, but I will give you an idea of what it is like.*

The above findings suggest that the teacher is treating this course as a grammar one. This could be because, being aware of his students' weakness in English grammar, the teacher focuses on this aspect as the main element in the writing course:

*We insist that you have to be consistent using grammar. If you use the past tense, you have to use the past or past perfect, when there are actually two verbs in succession, and so on and so forth. Sometimes we are forced to do some grammar work, which is not actually our job to do. You can't do it without it. When we talk about writing, we talk about accuracy.*

This quote may show the teacher's idea of why it is necessary to focus on grammar. The word 'insist' suggests that the teacher has a strong belief that accuracy is a major issue in writing and is therefore devoting the whole semester to making sure that students do not make grammatical mistakes. It seems that teacher-centeredness and the grammar-translation approach is what the teacher is applying in this class. In addition to the reasons mentioned earlier, this might also

reflect the ways in which the teacher himself was taught when he was a student, as the grammar-translation approach was widespread in Kuwait in that time.

### ***Boring Exercises and Inappropriate Techniques***

Data analysis of the questionnaire item (3) revealed an interesting result, in that only 15% of students agreed that the teaching methods used by the writing course teacher are interesting (see Table 5.8). This result was confirmed and further investigated when analysing the qualitative data. The teacher's use of discovery learning was revealed to be one technique adopted in the writing class. Commenting on this issue, Dr. Fahad said:

*I'll give an in-class task, for instance. Each student is given a chance to come to the board, write part of the task, and discuss it in front of all students. The students share these common mistakes. When they look at the board, they will realise and write down their mistakes relating to punctuation, grammar, spelling, cohesion and coherence. They are made aware of it.*

This teaching technique was repeated in almost every class. The majority of the students reported that they were fed up with this repetition. In reaction to this, Hanan made the following comment in her interview:

*We found this very boring to the extent that some of us were yawning and others were sleepy in class.*

Moreover, despite the fact that this is a quite good teaching technique for some students in class, it is not appropriate for everyone. That is why there is a need to differentiate instruction according to students' needs, interests, proficiency levels and learning styles.

On the other hand, some of the reported teaching techniques from the writing course seem to be inappropriate in the Kuwaiti context. As part of the Kuwaiti educational culture, competitiveness of learning is an issue that preoccupies the minds of students and their parents. This issue was highlighted and encouraged by Dr. Fahad, who said:

*We [teachers] give them [students] colours or names to create some sort of rivalry in the writing class.*

Despite the benefits of rivalry in class, there is a risk that it may create an atmosphere of jealousy and enmity among students. Therefore, students should be encouraged to study and work in teams and motivating them to study and learn in other ways that would breed a feeling of interest and cooperation, which would make their learning more memorable and enjoyable.

Another issue that attracted criticism was the teachers' lack of comprehension checks in class. Jenan wrote the following in her diary:

*The teacher should be able to check our comprehension instead of saying 'Do you understand?' I am too shy to say that I did not understand, as I would lose face in front of my colleagues. We are used, in our secondary schools, to never saying that we don't understand, even if we don't. This is because I am afraid that my classmates will say that I am stupid and I don't understand quickly from the first time. I am sure there are other techniques to check our comprehension other than "do you understand?"*

This response may show that the teacher lacks techniques to test students' understanding of the material that they have studied. Checking students' comprehension is crucial and should be carried out after each class.

### ***Teaching Vocabulary through Dictionaries***

One of the reported methods of teaching on the writing course was that the teacher focused on the use of a dictionary to help students gain more vocabulary. In her diary, Sarah, referred to a teaching technique involving dictionaries thus:

*The teacher told us to write down a piece of news from the magazine or the newspaper in our notebook. This piece of news should have at least five new words that the teacher would help us to look up in the dictionary. In another class, he gives 3-4 words to different students to look up in the dictionary. After that, he double-checks the answers with many students.*

Kuwaiti students are not well trained in the use of manual dictionaries at the pre-university level. Therefore, this seems to be a good technique in that it exposes students to a wide range of vocabulary that will help them with their writing.

However, students seem to be dissatisfied with the fact that this is the only thing they have learnt from this course. Reem explicitly stated in her interview that the

teacher advised students to buy different dictionaries in the very first lecture. In this regard, she said:

*The teacher showed us different types of dictionaries and asked us to buy some good ones. This was helpful, but all we do in the writing course is to find out about the new words in text and how to look them up in the dictionary, nothing more! I know that dictionary helps, but I see my problems not in how to look up the words in the dictionary, but in how to write well in English.*

In line with this, Samera explicitly stated in her diary that the only thing that the teacher had taught in this writing course was how to use the dictionary. The following excerpt shows how the student was not happy with buying and using the dictionary:

*I finished my basic writing course, but the outcome is nothing. The only thing that I remember learning out of this course was using the dictionary that the teacher asked us to buy. One day he said 'buy this dictionary'. The next lecture he gave us the name of another dictionary to buy. This teacher may think that I have a bank full of money to buy these different types of dictionary. OK. I bought what you recommended, but where is your teaching?*

The above findings may indicate that the teacher has made assumptions about students' weaknesses in grammar and vocabulary and is consequently paying more attention to these two issues in his teaching. Again, although I understand the reasons given by the teacher, I believe he still needs to find a balance between the students' areas of weakness and what they need to learn in this specific course. I believe that teachers have to remain aware of the objectives of any course they teach, and do their best to achieve those objectives.

While analysing the teacher's responses it was clear that he was putting the blame for any weaknesses in this course on the students. For instance, the writing teacher's view of writing was surprising, and must influence his way of teaching it to his students; he said:

*I'll tell you something. Writing is un-teachable. Writing comes with practice, and with actual intensive reading and receiving good quality education right from the first steps. You can only teach writing to students who are already qualified for writing. This is my point of view.*

In the above response the teacher seems to be suggesting that the students are not qualified enough and therefore the writing skill is not teachable to them. The above quotation seems to confirm students' views later in the analysis when they shed light on their inability to write. When a teacher perceives writing as un-teachable, this might mean that he believes that students should learn writing independently, in contrast to the pre-university culture of dependent learning. In fact, Kuwaiti university students in general, and first years in particular, are not used to practicing writing – or any other skill – on their own. These students are not competent enough in EFL writing when they start university, therefore, they need teachers who are capable of scaffolding students' learning of writing. Students need to be taught at university level how to write in English first, and then comes academic writing with all its features. Asking students to do something that they have not been taught or that is beyond their level is unfair. Therefore, teachers should plan, teach and assess students according to their needs prior to making any judgments on their levels and competencies.

In short, this teacher's approach to teaching on this writing course was mostly teacher-centred, with some elements of the grammar-translation approach: he was leading the class most of the time and focusing on accuracy. The majority of the students were not satisfied with the teaching methods and techniques that the teacher was applying. The most critical issue was the lack of practice and discussion. Therefore, the teacher needs to be aware of the importance of giving the students the chance to participate in his class. In addition, it appears that the teacher does not focus on many of the important skills that first year students need to learn in the very first writing course, including cohesion, coherence, style, unity, lexical variation and revision. This draws our attention to the importance of having qualified teachers who are aware of their course components and how to teach them. Moreover, providing teachers with orientation sessions and workshops could be useful to develop them professionally through updating their knowledge and exchanging experiences.

### 5.3.3.1.2 The Reading Course

#### *Varied Techniques and Activities Practiced in Classroom*

Analysis of the questionnaire data concerning the reading course (Table 5.9) shows that the teaching methods used by the lecturer were mostly received positively by the students. For example, item (1) shows that 82% of students agreed that a variety of activities were used in class. Item (2) indicates that 91% of students believed that there was good student-teacher interaction. Moreover, in item (3) 71% of the students agreed that the teaching methods used by their teacher were interesting. These percentages clearly show the students' satisfaction with regard to the teaching and learning practices in the reading course.

Table 5.9 Students' views about teaching & learning in the reading course

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Varied activities were used	38%	44%	9%	9%	0%
2	Good student-teacher interaction.	57%	34%	4%	2%	3%
3	Teaching methods were interesting.	28%	43%	17%	7%	5%
4	Class participation was encouraged.	33%	48%	15%	4%	0%
5	Class environment was motivating.	29%	44%	22%	5%	0%
6	Course exercises/tasks were effective in improving my reading skills.	35%	42%	4%	14%	5%
7	Group work was encouraged in class.	18%	35%	30%	10%	7%
8	English is the only language of instruction.	22%	40%	32%	6%	0%
9	The teacher talks more than me.	26%	32%	28%	6%	8%

The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that the reading teacher uses a number of techniques. Different accounts were given by the teacher and her students. When asked about them the teacher, Dr. Haneen, gave a comprehensive account of her focuses when teaching EFL reading:

*We're trying to present and address so many skills under the reading skills, like predicting, scanning, skimming, guessing meaning, identifying cause and effect, identifying main and supporting ideas, identifying facts and opinions, and arguing. In addition I use different techniques such as speed-reading, guest speakers, discussion, book critique, debates and free reading.*



From the above response, it seems that the teacher covers a good range of reading skills in this class. When asked about the most frequently used activity, Dr. Haneen highlighted that she focuses on speed-reading:

*Usually, we start with reading speed. They [students] have a chart. Before the final, they have to submit this chart of their speed at reading 500 or 1,000 words. They start with seven or eight minutes, and by the end they should reach two or three minutes. I'm challenging them to see their graphs and the graphics of their reading. I'll do it here in the classroom with them. This reading chart goes over their reading speed from the beginning of the course until the end. This is one part. We do this for the first ten minutes.*

The focus on this activity could be due to the fact that the teacher has found that her students take a long time to finish reading what is required from them. This is expected in the Kuwaiti context, since reading is not a habit for the majority of students. Kuwaiti students and Kuwaiti people in general do not read even in their first language. Therefore, encouraging students to read in every class is a positive aspect of this course.

Additionally, drawing on students' low proficiency levels, Dr Haneen reported that vocabulary building is another focus in teaching EFL reading:

*Also, I am focusing on building their vocabulary. They lack a lot of vocabulary, synonyms or antonyms, understanding parts of the grammatical structure. What's the difference between an adjective and an adverb and so on in terms of reading skill? These are the scope of this course.*

Another interesting activity practiced in the reading course is book critique. In this regard, Dr. Haneen said:

*As I told you, I have free reading. They have to choose any book. It should be English language, and it should be written by a native speaker. It should be a book they choose. They have to write and be critical about the author, what they liked and what they didn't like about the characters. They have to submit a written critique of their chosen book before the midterm and before the final too.*

This kind of teaching technique seems to be interesting and challenging at the same time. It is interesting because it is based on students' choice and gives the students the ability to think about what they read and critique it. It is challenging

because Kuwaiti students are not used to such critical thinking in their pre-university education. However, I was not sure why the teacher insisted on that the book “*should be written by a native speaker*”. It could be that the teacher has no trust in the quality of any book written by a non-native speaker and believes that books written by native speakers must be ideal. I am not sure about this view, as there are many books written by non-native speakers with a very high standard of content and presentation.

In addition, Dr Haneen made reference in her interview to the use of debate in the reading class. The following extract sheds light on how she organises this kind of debate to develop students’ critical thinking skills in reading:

*Also, there is a reflection from time to time. They have to bring an extract from a newspaper, magazine or any English-language product. They bring it to the class and we have a debate about it. It’s on any controversial issue.*

The above quotation shows that the teacher is doing her best to encourage participation in class by asking students to bring in any extract that had captured their interest for debate. This is an interesting technique to motivate students to get excited about and practice the English language.

The final teaching technique that the reading teacher discussed in her interview is guest speakers:

*I tried to contact native speakers to be my guests. I contacted people in journals or magazines, and the Times and other newspapers. We have two or three. I contact them, but most of them are reluctant to come because this is the first time somebody has asked them to participate in an educational setting.*

This quotation highlights the teacher’s serious attempt to invite guest speakers to her classroom, albeit in vain, as they were not used to taking part in classroom discussions and also because they wanted to be paid. In addition, it must be questioned whether inviting a native speaker to a reading course would be as useful as inviting one to a speaking course, for example.

### ***Traditional Teaching Methods***

Despite the positive responses reported above by the teacher and the students' questionnaire data, there is a clear mismatch between students' views and those of their teacher in the interview data. When students were questioned, a range of negative aspects were raised. The majority of the students mentioned that the most widely used methods of teaching on this course were lecturing and question-and-answer techniques. Students indicated that they were not in favour of such methods, which they had been used to at pre-university level, as they expected to see new or different methods of teaching at university level. In her interview, Hadeel expressed the following opinion on the teaching methods used:

*Our reading teacher usually asks us question and we respond to these questions; most of the questions were coming from her [the teacher]. I always see the teacher in front of the class talking about a topic and explaining it while we are setting and listening. I think these methods are fine, however; if she used other methods these may be suitable and more interesting for us.*

The above quotation shows that students are fed up with the traditional lecturing style of teaching and are searching for other new methods where they have the chance to play a bigger role in the classroom. This lecturing method has its impact on students, as it contributes to their passivity. This view was confirmed by Mariam, who commented in her interview:

*Most of the time the teacher was using one method, that is lecturing. We do not have enough time to participate in class. Her aim was to complete the course objectives and finish them within a specific time.*

The above findings show that the students think that their teacher should reduce her reliance on the lecture method and employ other teaching methods that give more space for students' participation in the teaching-learning process. This suggests that students do not enjoy their learning and highlights how teachers' choice of interactive activities affects their students' attitudes towards learning. This serves as a call for teachers to be more aware and attentive to strategies that can make their teaching style more effective and attractive for their students.

### ***Focusing on Some Skills at the Expense of Others***

Another negative aspect of the reading course reported by the students was that the teacher was over-focusing on some skills and techniques and ignoring other important reading skills. For example, in her interview, Jamela referred to the teacher's excessive focus on reading speed:

*I think the focus of the reading course was only on how to read faster. Sometimes I feel that we took this course only to improve our speed in reading.*

This extract draws our attention to students' criticism of their teacher, giving the impression that the teacher focused on reading speed more than on any other reading skill. This may indicate that the teacher may suffer from poor time management. Over-emphasis on specific skills will create boredom among students and leave limited time to practice other important reading skills. What is more, four students mentioned in their interviews that they actually lack the basic reading skills. Hadeel, for example, said the following:

*The teacher is focusing on some reading skills such as skimming and scanning, and forgets that we first need to learn the basics of how to read correctly before any other reading skills.*

The above extract highlights that students are aware of their poor reading level and they are also conscious that their teacher should have assessed their needs prior to the start of the course.

### ***Ignoring students' level while teaching***

Despite the lecturer's efforts to develop students' EFL reading level, a number of students reported in their interviews that the teacher ignored their English language proficiency level. Two expressive examples of this view, by Shahad and Mariam respectively, are shown below:

*The teacher speaks very fast; I find it difficult to understand her when she does that. I'm not used to listening to English at this speed.*

*I think we need to be taught English from scratch, because when I joined the English department at this college, we started right away to be taught advanced English. I feel that I cannot cope with it; it's above my level right now.*

This evidence can be linked to students' pre-university learning experiences, where they were taught English using Arabic as the medium of instruction. This might explain why they cannot cope with what the teacher is saying in class.

Overall, in spite of the teacher's assertion that she focuses on teaching many reading skills in class, only skimming, scanning and speed-reading were confirmed by the students. It is possible that this discrepancy might be due to the teacher's fear of appearing less than ideal in the researcher's eyes. It could also be attributed to the gap between theory and practice and the teacher's lack of professional development.

### 5.3.3.1.3 Positive Reactions to the Teaching in the Conversation course

The analysis of the conversation course questionnaire data revealed that students seem to be very satisfied with the teaching style that the lecturer applied in class. As can be seen in Table 5.10, items (4), (3), (2) and (1) attracted the highest levels of student agreement: 98% of students agreed with item (4), 'class participation was encouraged', 95% with item (3), 'teaching methods were interesting', and 88% with items (2) and (1), '[there was] good student-teacher interaction' and 'varied activities were used [in class]'.

Table 5.10 Students' views about the teaching & learning in the conversation course

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Varied activities were used	16%	72%	12%	0%	0%
2	Good student-teacher interaction.	71%	17%	11%	1%	0%
3	Teaching methods were interesting.	86%	9%	5%	0%	0%
4	Class participation was encouraged.	51%	47%	2%	0%	0%
5	Class environment was motivating.	43%	36%	21%	0%	0%
6	Course exercises/tasks were effective in improving my speaking skills.	39%	46%	9%	6%	0%
7	Course exercises/tasks were effective in improving my listening skills.	20%	18%	32%	24%	6%
8	Group work was encouraged in class.	30%	41%	7%	18%	4%
9	English is the only language of instruction.	22%	34%	13%	16%	15%
10	The teacher talks more than me.	2%	23%	30%	35%	10%

It can be noticed from the above table that item (2) and (3) show clearly that students 'strongly' agree that there was a good student-teacher interaction and that the teaching methods were interesting. This implies how positively students view these issues. The above results indicate that students were very satisfied with the teaching methods and techniques that the teacher applies in this course. Therefore, it was essential to investigate the reasons behind this satisfaction. The following qualitative data analysis provided a more in-depth explanation of this matter.

### ***Teaching and Learning through Educational Games***

As we have seen previously, the teachers of the writing and reading courses used traditional methods of teaching, such as the grammar translation approach, lecturing, and question-and-answer techniques. These were received negatively by the majority of the students. However, in the conversation course, the case was different. The teacher was employing different methods in her teaching. One of these methods, which seems interesting, is the educational game. When asked about her teaching approach in the conversation course, Dr. Hebah said:

*What I'm doing with these students is games and activities. From group activities, they go to pair activities, then to individual activities.*

The teacher clarified her use of educational games thus:

*I do give papers because they have the secret code game. It needs paper and it has letters. They have to work out what type of letters these stand for. If I have the letter "B" which doesn't stand for "B," it stands for the letter before "B," which is "A," you see? They have to figure it out and then they come up with sentences.*

The above two quotations showed how the teacher is employing non-traditional methods of teaching such as educational games. This kind of teaching seems to attract students' attention and motivate them to participate in classroom activities. This interesting finding is supported in the questionnaire data analysis (Table 5.10, item 5), where 79% of the students agreed that the classroom environment was motivating for them while no one (0%) disagreed with this statement. Such a positive response from the students indicates that they are happy with the new methods of teaching. It is worth mentioning here that 'new methods of teaching' is

used to indicate that such methods are not widespread in the Kuwaiti educational context. Kuwaiti students are used to more traditional approaches to teaching at pre-university level. Therefore, such methods would appear new and interesting to most of them and hence attract their attention and encourage them to be more active in class.

### ***Group Work & Discussion***

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis indicated that the conversation course teacher was successful in her selection of teaching methods. When asked about her view of her teaching in this course, Dr. Hebah responded as follows:

*I don't want them to be shy with each other. I want them to be more confident. That's number one. Number two, at the very beginning, we start as a whole class, talking to each other. From a whole class, we divide into two groups, like a debate that we do. Then after the two groups, we go into four smaller groups, then to pairs and individuals. It's a process of very general to very specific.*

The above finding may indicate that the teacher is fully aware of the importance of breaking the ice in such a conversation class from the outset. That is why it was a priority for her to help the students know each other. She quite rightly insists that gaining confidence is an important aspect of any EFL conversation course. Moreover, Dr. Hebah uses graded teaching activities, from whole-class activities to working with individual students. Group activities were mentioned several times while analysing the data on this course. Item (8) in Table 5.10 indicates that 71% of the students agree that group activities are encouraged in the course. An example of the teacher's many group activities was given by Dr. Hebah herself:

*There are so many activities. One is cooking. As long as I'm teaching students, females, I bring small cards with recipes, ingredients and the procedure. I'll divide them into groups of three. They look at the recipe or the dish. I give them 10 minutes to look at it and discuss it. They come in front of the class. They have to divide into different parts. One of them tells the ingredients. The other one would say half of the procedure, and the third one would say the other half. This is one way we can do it if it's a group of three.*

In line with this, all of the six students interviewed confirmed that they worked in groups, pairs and individually. Amal, for example, pinpointed this view thus:

*We worked in groups. There were five presentations, two in groups,*

*two in pairs and the last individually. Each presentation equals ten marks, so the total is fifty.*

In reference to discussion, Amal said that it is a frequent classroom activity in the conversation course: *“discussion was something that we would do every day”*. It is important for such a conversation course to have as much discussion and interaction among students as possible. The frequent application of discussion activity is a positive aspect of this course, as it indicates that the teacher is aware of the various methods and techniques that can be used in such a course.

It is worth mentioning that the activities mentioned above were done spontaneously. Three students highlighted in their interviews that the teacher is against memorisation and rote learning. An example of this view is given by Danah:

*I remember once, the teacher told us to tell a story spontaneously; however, I was very anxious, so I went and memorized it by heart, word for word. Unfortunately, the teacher was angry with me for doing this.*

Most students indicated that they benefit from the exercises and the most frequent reply that I received was as follows: *“The exercises were very useful”*. Similarly, Lolwah commented in her interview on the effective teaching practices in the conversation course thus:

*I was not so fluent in English before I started this course. Now, I have gained much confidence and fluency in my skills and abilities. I am not worried about any speaking tests, as I feel that I have improved greatly during the course.*

In the above section, the conversation teacher shed light on her approach to teaching conversation, focusing on her use of educational games, group work, pair work and individual work. However, she limited her view of the conversation course to speaking only, neglecting listening. Neither the students nor the teacher referred to any type of listening being taught in class, yet this aspect has to be given due attention. Students need to be exposed to authentic English in their listening classes to be able to improve their conversation skills.



### 5.3.3.2 Teaching Aids

The use of teaching aids is part of teaching technique. This section will highlight the use of different teaching aids in the BLSC. Data analysis of the writing course questionnaire shows that 68% of students disagreed that supplementary materials were used in class, whereas only 16% agreed with this statement. Furthermore, in item (6), only 22% of students stated that audio-visual aids were used in this class (see Table 5.5). Both the lecturer and his students referred to the whiteboard as the only teaching aid used. For example, Dr. Fahad referred to his use of the board: *"I'll give an in-class task, for instance. Each student is given a chance to come to the board [and] write part of the task"*.

Two students referred in their interviews to the use of the whiteboard in their writing course. The first example comes from Fatima, who sheds light on the use of the board in relation to punctuation as follows:

*All we used to do was to write down a sentence from the handout and punctuate it on the board and the teacher will tell me what is wrong with it.*

Another student, Norah, reported the minimal use of the board in the writing course:

*It is a shame to come to class every other day, leaving our family and commitments, just to write two sentences on the board and correct their punctuation mistakes.*

This finding may show that the lecturer is not making any effort to use different teaching aids, relying solely on what is already in the class: the whiteboard. This may also indicate that the lecturer lacks the ability to use a variety of teaching aids and therefore does not seek to bring any of these aids to class. In such an important language course, where students have different learning styles, teachers need to use different types of teaching aids to capture students' attention and to facilitate the delivery of the information. For example, Computer Assisted Language Learning, CALL, could be very effective in developing students' learning skills.

On the other hand, in relation to the reading course, in item (8) almost half of students (48%) agreed that supplementary materials were used in class.

Moreover, in item (6), 48% of students said that audio-visual aids were used in class (see Table 5.6). While analysing the qualitative data, the majority of the students referred to the whiteboard as the main teaching aid used. However, only the teacher referred to her occasional use of audiotapes and PowerPoint. Dr. Haneen expressed her view thus:

*Sometimes I help them with audiotapes and PowerPoint presentations, but not all of the time.*

The majority of the answers from students confirm that they did not use any teaching aids apart from the whiteboard in this class. Consequently, it seems that the teacher does not want to lose face and thus claims that she has used other aids, albeit '*not all the time*'. Sadly, English teachers in this department seem to be ignorant of the importance of using a variety of educational aids in their teaching or have deliberately decided not to employ them. In fact, the only method they seem to employ is lecturing with the use of a whiteboard. Unfortunately, this is a typical issue in Kuwait's university-level education. From personal experience as a student in one of Kuwait's universities, almost all of the courses were taught using the lecturing method.

As far as the conversation course is concerned, in item (8), 65% of students agreed that supplementary materials were used in this class, whereas only 13% disagreed. In item (6), a large number of students (75%) mentioned that audio-visual aids were used in class, and very few (5%) disagreed (see Table 5.7). It seems that the situation in the conversation course is much better than in the previous two courses. Students' responses indicate that the teacher did use different educational aids. In the interview, the teacher indicated that she frequently uses overhead projectors and realia. Dr. Hebah spelled out her view about these teaching aids as follows:

*I mainly use overhead projectors and reality, bringing real objects inside the classrooms. I like to bring different teaching aids with me to class; I can see how these aids attract my students.*

Based on the above findings, there are some possible reasons why teachers fail to use varied teaching aids in the different courses. One reason could be that teachers are not methodologically qualified, as they are all graduates of the English Department at the College of Arts. Another might be that they underestimate the

value of the teaching aids. Finally, teachers' lack of continuous professional development is likely to impede the exchange of experiences and the updating of their knowledge base. Despite the above factors, teachers should not depend on a single set of teaching aids: they need to diversify their methods and educational aids, and search for the most suitable and relevant ones for their students.

#### **5.3.4 Assessment & Feedback**

This section addresses the findings on both assessment and feedback practices at a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait, which is the fourth focus of this study. The first section presents the findings related to the formative and the summative assessment practices in the BLSC and students' views about them. The second section demonstrates participants' views regarding the feedback practices.

Assessment is an essential element that does not take place in isolation from other phases of teaching. It plays a crucial role in feeding back into the teachers' practices. The analysis of this study's data revealed two main assessment practices that have been employed in the BLSC, namely formative and summative practices.

##### **5.3.4.1 Formative and Summative Assessment Practices**

Having asked the teachers about the most commonly used formative assessment practices, data from the interviews and the diaries revealed that each of the three courses has a different approach to formative assessment. Starting with the writing course, interviews, homework and a midterm exam were used as methods of formative assessment. With regard to this, Dr. Fahad said:

*I interviewed the students. Also, when they do homework assignments, sometimes they write essays, each and every one of them. Only a portion of that is discussed. The next portion is discussed later on, so we keep them on alert all the time. This is more effective than quizzes and tests. They also have mid-term exam.*

In the above statement, the teacher referred to conducting interviews with his students; I am not sure how helpful interviewing students can be in a writing course. Moreover, the teacher stated that he asked the students to do homework assignments, however, as will be seen in the next section, students denied that this was the case. This clear contradiction could be for many reasons: perhaps the

teacher was trying to present himself in the best possible light and did not want to lose face in front of a researcher/interviewer.

A number of formative assessment techniques were reported for the reading course, including book critiques, speed reading charts, debates, group presentations, quizzes and midterm exams. Dr. Haneen elaborated on this as follows:

*They [students] have to choose any two books. They should be books according to their choice. They have to write and be critical about the author, what did they like and what they didn't like about the characters. They have to submit it before the mid-term, and before the final too.*

From the above quotation, it seems that the reading course teacher is giving her students a variety of formative assessment methods. This, of course, would help in giving the students a wide range of chances to improve their final results, leading to fairer grades.

The conversation course teacher, Dr. Hebah, stated that she assessed her students formatively using group activities and a mid-term exam. With regard to group activities, she said:

*When it's a whole class activity, there is no assessment. I just keep them talking. When we start a group, pair or individual activity, then the assessment is based on voice pitch, pronunciation and their grammar. Do they make any grammar mistakes?*

Dr. Hebah referred to her use of the mid-term exam, giving special attention to the individual oral presentation, in which the teacher assesses students' mastery of grammar, voice pitch, body language and vocabulary repertoire, as follows:

*For the midterm, I ask them at the beginning of the class to come up with an educational game, their own creation and creativity. Individually, each student talks for 15 to 20 minutes. Then based on the mistakes that she's making or not making, I have to assess her. This is another type of assessment. It's based on the grammar points, how many grammar mistakes she makes as she's talking, and the pronunciation of words. The voice pitch and body language are together. Also, creativity: did she come up with something new? Was it interesting and entertaining? Who is this one for? Is this enjoyable for the children? She might say this is a game for the*

*second grade, but is it good for the second grade? Would second graders love to play this game? What kind of vocabulary is she using? These are the things that I use.*

It is interesting to see how Dr. Hebah is being creative and allowing the students to use their imagination when it comes to assessment. Although this is an interesting activity, there is a potential problem because most Kuwaiti students are not used to such new methods, and this may affect their performance. Consequently, the teacher needs to prepare her students for such activities beforehand and ensure that they understand the requirements of such tests.

On the other hand, the summative assessment practices used in the three courses were reported to be mostly identical. The assessment approach and philosophy in the English Department, and in Kuwaiti pre-university education generally, is purely concerned with how much knowledge and information the students are able to remember at the end of the course. In other words, in measuring students' academic achievement, the knowledge that students gain from either the textbook or their teacher directly is what matters, and not the skills that they may acquire during the learning process. In the writing course, the teacher indicated that students have to take a final written exam to pass the course. Dr. Fahad stated: *"They [students] have to answer some questions in writing in the final exam"*. In a similar fashion, in the reading course, the teacher mentioned that she uses final written exams to assess students summatively. Dr. Haneen said: *"... then writing through the assessments, which is the midterm, quizzes, and also the final"*.

The reading course teacher, Dr. Haneen, clarified how her teaching during the course is interlinked with her summative assessment at the end of the course:

*I think it reflects. For example, in the assessment part, the final covers all these items: predicting, scanning, skimming and guessing. It's not just one skill that I'm going to check. For the reading comprehension, it's out of five. For example, the skimming or identifying or vocabulary building or structure, this is also another part that should be covered. I think it's covered more than once, besides when I'm talking about critique. When they critique or argue or do a group presentation, they present themselves.*

This suggests that this teacher is aware of what she is teaching during the course. In other words, she plans, teaches and assesses her students on what they have studied during the course.

In relation to the conversation course, the situation was different: the teacher told me that it is the final oral exam through which students are assessed at the end of the course. Dr. Hebah commented thus:

*Yes, for the final, I have a large bag. Inside this large bag are small plastic bags. Inside each small plastic bag, I have six or seven items. I have five students every day for the final exam. They come in and pick their own small bag from this large bag. Then they put the items in front of them, and they have to come up with a narrative. They have to tell me a story using these items. It's based again on these criteria. Does she make grammar mistakes? What type of vocabulary is she using? Sometimes there are items she doesn't know the meaning of, or the vocabulary or word for. Let's see her use her imagination, how she does it. That's how it goes.*

Again, as with the formative practices seen previously in this course, the teacher seems to be creative and to emphasise the imaginative style of learning and assessment. Despite this interesting method of assessment, many students commented negatively when asked about this exam. We shall see these comments and views in the next section.

#### **5.3.4.2 Students' Views of Assessment**

The majority of students were critical about the assessment and feedback they received in the BLSC. Students indicated that the assessment system used in the BLSC, and in the college in general, was one of the worst aspects. Despite the colourful picture presented previously by the teachers regarding the assessment practices, another version of reality came to light when students started to reveal their own views in the open-ended responses, diaries and interviews. In the following sections, views on each of the three courses are analysed.

In the writing course, the analysis of the questionnaire data shows that in general students were unhappy with their assessment. For instance, item (9) shows that only 19% of the students agreed that the exam results demonstrate their actual ability and proficiency, whereas 53% disagreed. This finding may indicate that

there is a defect in either the exams or the marking criteria. Another very interesting finding is shown in item (10), where only 15% of the students agreed that the final grades they received were fair, and a considerable number of students, 64%, disagreed. It seems that the majority of the students believed that the teacher was unjust when it came to the final grades (see Table 5.11).

Table 5.11 Students' views of writing course assessment & feedback

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Feedback is understandable	15%	20%	28%	34%	3%
2	Feedback is constructive	10%	55%	27%	8%	0%
3	Written feedback was given on my progress	22%	38%	27%	13%	0%
4	The most common mistakes are discussed in class	8%	47%	16%	24%	5%
5	I was informed about the assessment criteria	9%	21%	21%	42%	7%
6	We were assessed on the topics that we learned in the lessons	9%	44%	15%	20%	12%
7	The tests questions were easy to answer.	12%	25%	25%	28%	10%
8	The instructions for the tests were clear	6%	23%	42%	26%	3%
9	The exams results demonstrate my actual ability/proficiency	2%	17%	28%	38%	15%
10	I am happy with the final grade, it was fair	0%	15%	21%	44%	20%

In line with this, qualitative data analysis shows that students expressed their dissatisfaction about their formative assessment in the writing course. For example, one major problem was the teacher's lack of formative assessment. In this regard, Sarah said in her interview:

*There were no quizzes, only midterm and final exams. The teacher said that we would have spot quizzes every week, but this did not happen.*

The above finding contradicts what the teacher has said previously. The teacher seems to make promises that he does not keep. This could be due to his huge workload or to the limited time compared to the number of students in the course. Despite these factors, the teacher should not underestimate the importance of continuous assessment through tests and homework.

Moreover, data analysis showed that there was not only a lack of formative assessment but also that students' work was rarely marked. For example, three

students referred to teachers' failure to mark their writing. With reference to this, in her interview, Fatima said:

*The teacher told us to write a composition on any topic of our choice. Consequently, we all wrote as requested, but he marked the first two lines of three students only. After that, he started complaining about our writing performance. This is unfair, as he did not read all the written essays.*

Another student, Aseel, gave a more detailed response in her interview:

*All the teacher does during the course is to ask for homework that he collects, and he never marks or returns it to us. The only time we write essays and they are marked is in our final exams. Unfortunately, we don't get them back, as we only get a score without any kind of report detailing the good and bad points in our writing. We really need help. I think the teacher is forced to mark the written essays this time because the head of the department will ask him about the mark. Other than that, he would never think of marking them. I think teachers need a higher authority to supervise them.*

The above findings seem to be very critical. When the students do homework, they expect their teacher to correct it and return it so they can learn from their mistakes. However, the writing course teacher seems not to be taking this issue seriously. The students' responses indicate that they are very frustrated and desperate to get their written essays and homework back.

In addition, item (6) in the analysis of the questionnaire shows that 53% of the students agreed that they were assessed on the topics learned in class. However, this style of assessment attracts criticism from some students. In the interview data analysis, students criticised their teacher's assessment, which emphasises memorisation and rote learning. They argued that they need a writing course that teaches them how to write using a range of different writing skills. As Dalal said:

*I don't like the way our writing teacher assesses us. He gives us some handouts to memorise in the last lecture, from which all the exercises came in the exam. This helps us to pass the exam, but not to acquire a lifelong learning skill as undergraduate students and as future teachers. Since you are critical of the memorisation and rote learning that we did at school, why do you encourage us to memorise the answers to your exam questions?*



The above extract shows that students are bored of the memorisation and rote learning techniques to which they were used at the pre-university stages. They need a writing teacher who can enable them to write coherently and cohesively, especially given that they will be teachers of English by the end of the teacher education programme.

Despite the fact that the teacher has informed the students about the general distribution of marks in the course, it seems that detailed marking criteria for each exam are still missing and are needed. This was stressed in Dalal's response regarding the serious need to know how written essays are marked as follows:

*I really do not know how our teacher assesses our pieces of writing at the end of the semester.*

This ambiguity in marking led to the suspicions of double standards in marking students' writing, as Aseel said:

*The teacher lacks clear criteria for distributing the marks in the exam. He has double standards, as he gives me one mark and then gives my friend a higher mark for the same answer.*

The above quotations show clearly that the teacher has no specific marking criteria. This is a serious issue. Students need to understand the distribution of marks on each exam. The teacher needs to be clear and explain this distribution; by doing so, the teacher will put his students' minds at ease.

With regard to the summative assessment and their final grade, students claimed in their interviews that the teacher was unfair in his assessment. This was mentioned by five interviewees. Reem, for example, said:

*He was unfair in our assessment. I think that he doesn't mark our exam papers. He might have given us a random mark based on his subjectivity. He has given us the same exam questions before the final; therefore, it is expected that all of us will get (A), but this was an unfulfilled dream.*

The above quotation indicates that the majority of the students were very dissatisfied with their final grade. It seems that the teacher's marking criteria were harsh, leading to what the students perceived as the unjust final results. The above finding draws our attention to the importance of continuous assessment, which

could result in a fairer assessment of students' levels during the whole semester, rather than judging their level on one single exam.

On the other hand, in relation to the reading course, students expressed a variety of views regarding assessment. Surprisingly, despite their approval of the teaching methods used in the reading course and the achievement of most of the course objectives, item (10) in Table 5.12 indicates that only 27% of students were satisfied with the final grade they received in this course. Moreover, item (9) shows that only 25% of the students believed that the test results reflected their actual level, whereas 58% disagreed. These findings suggest that the students are not happy with their final results, and analyses of the interview and diary data enable us to explore this issue further.

Table 5.12 Students' views of reading course assessment & feedback

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Feedback is understandable	21%	45%	28%	6%	0%
2	Feedback is constructive	38%	53%	9%	0%	0%
3	Written feedback was given on my progress	23%	56%	15%	6%	0%
4	The most common mistakes were discussed in class	16%	67%	8%	9%	0%
5	I was informed about the assessment criteria	16%	38%	13%	23%	10%
6	We were assessed on the topics that we learned in the lessons	11%	23%	18%	40%	8%
7	The tests questions were easy to answer.	0%	15%	16%	45%	24%
8	The instructions for the tests were clear.	9%	28%	34%	22%	7%
9	The exams results demonstrate my actual ability/proficiency	5%	20%	17%	36%	22%
10	I am happy with the final grade, it was fair	3%	24%	39%	30%	4%

Analysis of the qualitative data provides more detailed information regarding the above issue. The teacher pinpointed that students' learning experience is positive prior to the formative assessment phase. Once they are assessed, their disappointing marks change their attitude towards learning to a negative one. Dr. Haneen commented on this learning-assessment relationship thus:

*They enjoy it, but when they reach the level of their assessment, they get frustrated. Either they overcome their weakness in this part of the skill or not. So, they are doing fine until the midterm, and then*

*their attitudes shift.*

The above finding shows that the teacher is aware of the students' frustration of the grades they get, however; she has no idea how to solve this issue. Also, she seems not to be making any effort to find out the reasons for this dissatisfaction.

Students gave some explanation for the weak grades they received. For example, Bedoor, along with five other students, highlighted in their interviews that the final exam was not fair, as it was above their actual level. Her view was expressed as follows:

*Although we have been tested on the topics that we studied, the majority of us found the final exam questions very difficult to answer.*

The above finding was confirmed in the analysis of the questionnaire data for item (7), as a very low percentage (15%) of students found the exam questions to be easy to answer, while 69% found it difficult. One possible reason for this might be unclear instructions. Another reason could be that the teacher did not prepare her students very well on the types of question included in the final exam.

Another issue found while analysing the data was the poor assessment system applied by the teachers in this college. In the interview, Abrar, commented as follows:

*There is no proper assessment in this college. They only judge us on our final exam result and forget all the achievements that we have done during the whole semester. This is unfair!*

The above quotation shows that this assessment system, with just one final exam, led to frustration about being judged unfairly. Students are calling for continuous assessment to be taken into account in awarding the final grade, rather than just one final exam. The following comment was received from Hadeel, who expressed her anger in her interview as follows:

*I just want to ask my teacher one question: "On what basis have you given me this low grade?"*

Another reason for such dissatisfaction with grades is that the time allotted for the final exam is less than 90 minutes, which students find too short. The teacher

might not have trained her students to read under pressure during her classroom teaching practices.

With regard to the conversation course, and in relation to the types of questions asked in the different formative and summative conversation exams, students gave a number of accounts. For example, Jomana wrote the following response in her diary to show how they were assessed formatively during the course:

*Our Midterm exam was acting a play called Cinderella in the form of a group of students on the stage. Later on, we made an individual presentation, which was more difficult, but it increased and encouraged our self-confidence. It helped us to use more new vocabulary as we studied and prepared well for these presentations.*

A comprehensive picture of the conversation teacher's assessment practices during the course was given in the interview with Lolwah as follows:

*We had three exams during the course plus the final one. There was a play as the first exam, followed by some random questions as the second exam and finally another play. She assessed the three exams and gave us the highest mark, which was great. This was good preparation for the final exam. The teacher gave us the chance to think and wait. I like her testing techniques, but the final was a bit challenging and different. In the final exam, four girls were examined per day. The teacher was recording what we were saying, which increased our anxiety. There was a small bag and you have to find relations between the items in this bag and maybe tell a story if you can.*

On the other hand, Dr. Hebah highlighted that assessment affects students' attitudes. In other words, assessment plays an important role in awakening students' minds while working together in class. Dr. Hebah elaborated on this view thus:

*With certain activities, when they know that they are going to be graded based on these activities and these assignments; then they take it really seriously.*

The above finding reflects the reality of the educational practices in Kuwait, where marks are the main objective for students rather than learning itself. In other words, the focus of the learning-teaching process is upon memorisation and obtaining a pass grade. This is why the students become more encouraged and involved in any activity if they know it is graded. This way of thinking has many

causes; for instance, parents tend to ask if their children have passed a course rather than if they have learnt anything from it. Therefore, students' main objective is to pass the course in order to satisfy their parents.

Analysis of the students' questionnaire regarding the conversation course (Table 5.13) revealed that students expressed their disagreement with items 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10. The highest degree of disagreement was in relation to items concerning tests and final grades. A total of 78% of the students' responses to item (6) revealed that students disagreed that they were assessed based on the topics they learned in the lessons, whereas only 15% agreed with that statement. This could be due to the fact that the teacher tried to be more creative with the exams she used in order to test her students' understanding rather than memorisation. Furthermore, students reacted negatively to item (7): 56% disagreed that the test questions were easy to answer. In relation to whether students were informed about the assessment criteria before being tested, item (5) shows that only 26% of the students replied that they had, while 55% disagreed. Item (10) revealed that only 19% of the students were happy with their final grade and believed that they were fair, while 53% expressed dissatisfaction with their grades. These questionnaire data results indicate how negatively the assessment is viewed by the students in this course.

Table 5.13 Students' views of conversation course assessment & feedback

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Feedback is understandable	15%	57%	22%	6%	0%
2	Feedback is constructive	12%	61%	23%	4%	0%
3	Oral feedback was given on my progress	32%	55%	3%	9%	1%
4	The most common mistakes were discussed in class	4%	48%	34%	8%	6%
5	I was informed about the assessment criteria	0%	26%	19%	43%	12%
6	We were assessed on the topics that we learned in the lessons	0%	15%	7%	45%	33%
7	The tests questions were easy to answer.	8%	24%	12%	39%	17%
8	The instructions for the tests were clear	3%	26%	34%	28%	9%
9	The exams results demonstrate my actual ability/proficiency	5%	23%	21%	40%	11%
10	I am happy with the final grade, it was fair	1%	18%	28%	43%	10%

Students gave more detailed information about this negative picture in their interviews, diaries and open-ended questionnaire responses. One of the participants, Nouf, complained in her interview about the teacher's unfair assessment as follows:

*I think her assessment was unfair. If you do not attend, you lose ten marks. She did not give me the chance to discuss my mark with her - she said: "Who are you to discuss the mark that I gave you? This is final." I think she is stubborn in her assessment.*

The above quotation shows a typical reaction of some teachers at the university educational level in Kuwait. Teachers are not monitored by any higher authority with regard to what they do in class and what grades they give their students, and this freedom could result in many unjust judgments of students. Teachers need to be more open with their students and allow discussion of results in order for the students to learn from their mistakes and understand what went wrong.

Some participants complained about the difficulty of the midterm exam, which was in the form of an educational game. An example of this view was expressed in the interview with Alaa as follows:

*The educational game in the midterm was so difficult. We were just starting the course and the teacher wanted us to present and explain in detail. This is not fair, as we hadn't done much in the course yet, we hadn't learned much. How can we give a presentation? As expected, my grade was not good, similar to the grades given to most of my classmates.*

From the above finding, it seems that the teacher is expecting a lot from her students, and is not considering the students' level when assessing them. Students needed more time to adjust to university level work, since they are in their first semester in the college. Moreover, students are not used to such assessment methods, having been assessed using traditional methods during pre-university education. Confirming this perception, Dr. Haneen views students as recipients who are used to being spoon-fed:

*May I add something? Most of our students come to class with the idea of receiving instructions through the old methods, the grammar translation method or teacher-centred approaches. Sometimes for a teacher like me who applies a technique of creative thinking and innovation, voices a point of view in class, and gives feedback and expresses views on certain topics, it doesn't work at*

*all, unfortunately.*

Although the conversation course teacher did not state clear assessment criteria, she referred to a number of criteria in her interview. First of all, Dr. Hebah stated her belief in the use of multiple assessments in her course as follows:

*When we start a group, pair or individual activity, then the assessment is based on voice pitch, pronunciation and their grammar. Do they make any grammar mistakes?*

She also highlighted her focus on making eye contact with the interlocutor, the use of body language, the choice of words, pronunciation and grammar thus:

*I always check the following: are they making eye contact? Are their eyes always on the floor because they are shy, or do they look at every individual when they are talking because they are more confident? Even their body language: are they nervous? Do you feel like she can't stand, like she's going to fall? It's also on the subject matter and their enjoyment. All of these go into it. ... I look at the choice of words she's using. Maybe she's not using the right words because she doesn't know the meaning of them ... Sometimes, even though they are fluent, they might speak, but they still make a lot of pronunciation mistakes. Even the structure or syntax is wrong. These things have to do with how they speak.*

The above finding shows that the teacher is assessing her students on a wide range of aspects. I believe that this is a very demanding style of assessment, especially given that these students are not native speakers of English and have just graduated from high school. These tough assessment criteria may explain the low final grades that students received at the end of the semester, which were heavily criticised by most of the students, as we will see next.

Five out of the six students complained about the low grades that they had been given at the end of this course. For example, in her interview Eqbal said:

*The final grade does not at all reflect my personal performance during the whole semester in this course. This is not my level: I should have got a higher grade. I'm not sure why, but it is well known to all the students in the college that this teacher does not give high grades. Many students warned us not take this course with this teacher.*

Similarly, an open-ended response came as follows: "My final grade was not fair. I deserved a much better grade". Moreover, two participants expressed, in writing,

the same issue of underestimated grades. For example, Haleema wrote in her diary:

*The teacher was a miser when giving us marks. Honestly, we were so shocked when we saw our final grade. The other teachers were generous with their students. Now, I feel that I have been let down and I am even seriously thinking of withdrawing from the summer course.*

From the above quotations, it was clear that the students were dissatisfied with their final grades and believed that the teacher was unfair. In response to this, Dr. Hebah justified students' marks as follows:

*When I think of what I did with the students from the beginning of the course to the end and how I evaluated each one of them, they deserved the grades that they got. That's their level – no more and no less.*

The teacher believes that she has worked hard to raise her students' level in conversation and therefore she expects them to show this in their final assessment. It seems to me that the teacher has very stringent assessment criteria, which exceed the actual proficiency level of most of the students. I believe that she needs to be more tolerant of her students when it comes to the final grades and bear in mind their real level and their performance during the whole semester.

Another reason for the students' low grades could be related to the teachers' strict treatment. Three interviewees commented on the teacher's rigidity in the classroom. With regard to this, Nouf's view is representative: "My teacher makes me study in a scary atmosphere, as if I'm in a military school." Another student gave the following response to the open-ended question:

*She is a very severe teacher in her marking and corrections. She asks difficult questions that we can't answer. The teacher is very frightening; to the extent that I could not ask her any questions for fear that she would shout at me as she did to my classmates.*

Moreover, it is worth mentioning one issue that was repeatedly highlighted by students and which may have affected their performance in the final exams, namely their concern about the presence of the external examiner in the final oral exam. For example, in her interview Eqbal said:

*The final exam was OK for me, but I was frightened of her colleague, who was just watching and listening to what I was saying. They agreed the mark for each of us before calling on*



*the next student. How can the other teacher judge my level in such a short time? I was working hard all semester and he simply judged me in minutes!*

This is a serious issue, which may have played a major role in lowering students' performance and hence their final grade. The teacher needs to bear in mind that some students are shy and others become distracted when they see another 'unexpected' examiner.

Based on personal teaching experience in the Kuwaiti context, it seems that the students' description of the assessment practices used in the different courses are typical of Kuwaiti teachers. This might be ascribed to a number of reasons. First, the style of assessment used by the teachers is concentrated on the cognitive element of the subject. Teachers appear to be unaware of the different formative and summative assessment practices; they tend to apply traditional tests, such as final written examinations. Other forms of assessment such as practical tests, open-book tests and self-assessment were not conducted. I believe that this is because teachers do not update their content knowledge regularly. Moreover, the administrative work assigned to university teachers might be time-consuming and might thus hinder their professional development. Finally, teachers are not accustomed to the habit of meeting regularly to exchange experiences and update their background knowledge. The above data brings the assessment procedure for the BLSC into question. Overall, it can be safely said that the general assessment philosophy used by the lecturers in this English department is traditional, focusing on a final exam that tests rote-learned materials.

#### **5.3.4.3 Feedback**

Feedback played an important role in the three BLSCs. Analysis of the questionnaire clearly revealed that for the writing course, item (1) reveals that 35% of the respondents agreed that the feedback is understandable, whereas 37% disagreed; in item (2) 65% agreed that feedback is constructive, while only 8% disagreed, and item (3) shows that 60% agreed that written feedback is given on their work, whereas only 13% disagreed (see Table 5.11). In relation to the reading course, item (1) shows that 66% of the respondents agreed that the feedback is understandable, while only 6% disagreed; item (2) reveals that a very

high percentage (91%) agreed that it is constructive, while in item (3), 79% agreed that written feedback is given on their work and in item (4), 83% agreed that the most common mistakes are discussed in class (see Table 5.12). In reference to the conversation course, item (1) shows that 72% of the respondents agreed that the feedback is understandable, whereas only 6% disagreed; item (2) 73% agreed that it is constructive, while only 4% disagreed, and item (3) revealed that a high percentage (87%) of the students agreed that oral feedback was given on their progress (see Table 5.13).

Analysis of the qualitative data shows that the writing teacher prefers to use discovery learning when giving feedback to his students. The reading teacher most frequently uses constructive feedback, while for the conversation teacher, a combination of constructive and corrective feedback was reported. On the other hand, students had a range of views about the type of feedback given, as will be illustrated in the following sections.

The writing teacher, Dr. Fahad, gave a general reply about his constructive feedback. He commented on this issue thus:

*No, we shouldn't say it's wrong or not. There is a better way of doing that. You know what I mean? We should say, "There is a better way of doing this. You are doing it okay, but if you had done it this way it would be more acceptable for the reader."*

It seems that the writing teacher wishes to appear knowledgeable about what each teacher should or should not do, but he has nothing else to say. The above quote indicates that he leaves it for the students to figure out the answer without his help. I think this teacher is trying to use discovery learning in giving feedback. While this form of feedback can be useful, it is important to realise that first year students need solid guidance in their writing, particularly when they have not learned how to write competently in English at the pre-university stage.

On the other hand, surprisingly, despite the positive views shown in the quantitative data analysis, students' attitudes towards the feedback given by the writing course teacher in the qualitative data analysis were mostly negative. For

example, Wafa highlighted in her diary that the teacher is hesitant and not competent in teaching writing:

*When the teacher doesn't know the right answer, he says 'this is wrong' without telling us exactly what is wrong with the sentence.*

Moreover, in reference to the issue of delayed feedback, a student responded to an open-ended question as follows: "I need timely feedback from the teacher on what I write; I've never experienced this in the writing class". In addition, another student commented on the teacher's written feedback in terms of grammar and punctuation only. The following response shows that students need to learn other writing skills that enable them to be competent writers.

*I think that the teacher gives us constructive feedback as far as grammar and punctuation marks are concerned. We don't write; therefore, there is no feedback on our writing performance.*

The reading course teacher, Dr. Haneen, stated that she adopts constructive feedback in class. When asked about this, she said:

*I won't say "That's wrong." I never do it this way. It's more constructive. I'm always constructive because otherwise it really underestimates the students and their ability to help each other. It builds a block between you and her. I hate saying that. In the teaching process, you have to build a relationship, not blocks.*

This extract highlights that the teacher's type of feedback is fruitful and useful. She is aware of students' psychological state while learning, as denoted by the phrase "It builds a block between you and her". This is a good example to be followed in giving feedback to students. However, she did not state how she gives constructive feedback to her students. In other words, she does not state her specific techniques. This does not mean that she does not use such techniques, but it would have been useful if she had given some examples.

In line with the above, the following quote from the interview with Abrar expresses students' satisfaction with what the teacher is doing during the course:

*I think the teachers' comments and feedback are very important to me; they encourage me and tell me what my mistakes are and how to correct them.*

In contrast, the conversation teacher, Dr. Hebah, confirmed that she uses a mix of corrective and constructive feedback in her classes. With regard to this, she said:

*I do both. You need to show them the mistakes that they have made. That's what I do. After each presentation, I have some comments. Then I talk to each student by herself and I'll tell her exactly. She knows that she made this mistake. I tell her what she did and how to avoid the same mistakes next time.*

In contrast to the other teachers, the conversation teacher is most likely to be aware of the meanings of corrective and constructive feedback. She not only informs students of their mistakes, but also teaches them how to do things correctly.

In short, the views about the different feedback types are varied: constructive, discovery-based and a combination of corrective and constructive feedback. This denotes that the teachers need to update their knowledge about the different teaching practices, including oral feedback, written feedback, peer review and student-centred as well as teacher-centred feedback. This will help students to learn from their mistakes and avoid repeating them further.

To sum up, the above section attempted to find answers to the second research question of the current study. Different views about the four dimensions (i.e. course objectives, content and materials, teaching and learning, and assessment and feedback of the basic language skills courses) related to this question were expressed. These different views might be attributed to the gap between theory and practice, among other factors that will be highlighted in the discussion chapter.

#### **5.4 The Nature of Students' Challenges in the English Department**

*What is the nature of Kuwaiti students' challenges in the English Department in a pioneering Education College in Kuwait?*

This research question looks into the different challenges that English major students face in the English Department. It has been found that these challenges play a critical role in affecting students' evaluative views about the BLSC; hence, it

was vital to investigate them. To answer this research question, data obtained from both open and closed-ended questionnaire items, semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers and students' diaries are analysed. The analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data is combined, where appropriate, together with the views of both students and their lecturers.

Data analysis revealed that students' challenges can be grouped under two main themes: challenges related to individual characteristics and others related to socio-cultural issues. Furthermore, the individual characteristics theme is divided into two sub-themes: linguistic difficulties and psychological issues. The following Figure (5.3) represents these themes.

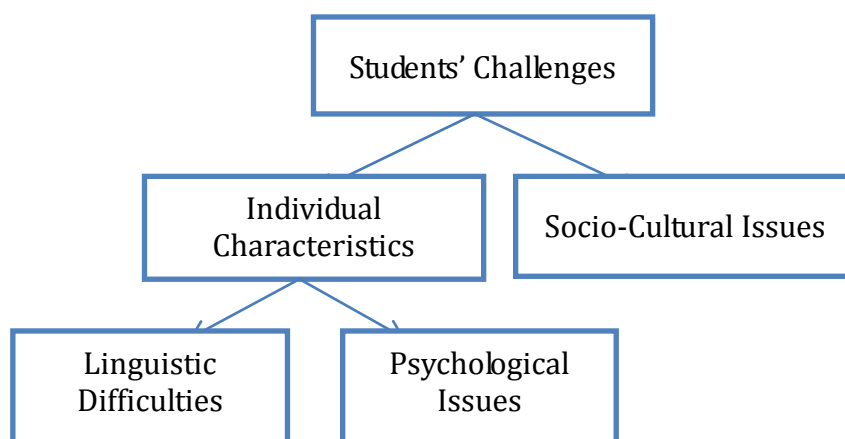


Figure 5.3 Students' Challenges in the English Department

#### **5.4.1 Socio-Cultural Issues**

While analysing the transcribed data, various socio-cultural themes emerged from the participants' responses. Some of these issues were related to the Kuwaiti local culture and others were connected to pre-university education. These issues will help the reader to develop a thorough picture of the factors that form a Kuwaiti student.

##### **5.4.1.1 Issues Related to Local Culture**

###### ***Ignoring Students' Voice***

It is widely accepted in Kuwaiti society that Kuwaiti students have no power when it comes to learning choices. In line with this, a written response to the questionnaire confirms that Kuwaiti students are denied an opinion:

*I hope one day I have a say about our classroom teachers in the different courses before I graduate and it is too late.*

The issue of ignoring students' voice could be due to the nature of the Kuwaiti local culture. For example, from their childhood, Kuwaiti students are taught to listen to what older people say and obey their parents or elder siblings without question. This is seen as a matter of respect and politeness, but has enhanced the mentality of ignoring the voice of younger people.

Similarly, another interviewee, Reem, shed light on how students' voices are constrained, as follows:

*Our voice is restricted in class, as there is no chance of discussing what is being taught. There is no space during the lecture time to express my opinion.*

After collecting the data for this study, many students approached me and thanked me for doing this research. One of the interesting comments I heard was: *"Please, deliver our voice to all the teachers. This is the first time someone has asked us about our opinions"*. Kuwaiti students are used to top-down education, where their voices and preferences are mostly ignored. It is important that administrations and teachers in the field of education listen to the students' needs and give them the chance to have their say on different matters.

### ***Students' lack of collaboration***

One of the teachers, Dr. Hebah, highlighted that her students do not collaborate in class, as a result of habit. She clarified her view in the following words:

*What I notice is that students are unwilling to collaborate simply because they are not used to it. Unfortunately, we actually have to sometimes select only a few students who are really hard workers. The rest just sit and do nothing and receive nothing.*

Students' lack of collaboration could be due to socio-cultural norms, wherein they are encouraged to compete with their colleagues in order to get higher marks and gain the distinction of being top of the class. Parents tend to encourage their children to keep information to themselves, as this will help them to be easily identified as clever by their teachers. Consequently, students tend to study and

learn individually. As a result of being passive recipients, Dr. Hebah revealed that collaborative learning is deemed to be inappropriate for Kuwaiti students:

*If you try to make them collaborate and work as a team, it might not work. It might work for five or ten minutes and then everyone will work individually, which is not good. It slows down the process of teaching.*

It is worth saying here that teachers have a role to play in increasing students' awareness of the importance of collaboration and teamwork. Teachers need to encourage each student to be actively involved in learning and discussion to make sure that everybody participates in class.

### ***University teachers' power relations***

Kuwaiti university teachers have absolute power in their classrooms. This view was manifested in a number of students' interviews. For example, in her interview Eqbal commented on her conversation teacher's teaching and exam styles as follows:

*This teacher follows her own style without caring much about our needs. When she says something, we can't argue with her: that's it. In the final speaking exam, she recorded our voices without our permission, and what is worse is that she asked another teacher to attend and evaluate our presentations. We were so uncomfortable because we were already stressed as we did not know what we would have to present about, and having this teacher added much pressure on us. When we asked her, 'Why is he here?' she said 'I just want him to see such kind of students like you!' This is really humiliating!*

The above quotation shows that students are unhappy about their teachers' suppression of their opinions in class. It also indicates that the teacher was negligent of students' psychological state in the conversation exam and made fun of their lack of proficiency. This should not be the case, as teachers have a responsibility to their students psychologically as well as academically and pedagogically.

In relation to students' inability to approach their teacher to ask about their exam mark, Aseel said in her interview:

*I would like to add that as a university student, I can't argue with my teacher about my exam mark. When some of my*

*classmates tried to ask him about their low marks, he said that they had given the wrong answer.*

Some Kuwaiti university teachers are known to fail students if they disagree with their viewpoints. This is an issue that one of the students, Samera, wrote about in her diary as follows:

*We thought of asking the teacher to change his teaching method and teach us how to write, but we were frightened of failure as he might take our names and fail us in the course for doing so.*

The above quotation reveals a major issue, which is the climate of fear. This sad picture of students' fear of their teachers is well known in the Kuwaiti educational context. This is due to the fact that teachers have complete authority to judge their students' level and hence make a unilateral decision on each student's final grade. It is the teacher's responsibility to eliminate these worries, since a climate of fear is not conducive to learning.

### ***Marginalizing local cultures***

Another issue that emerged from the data analysis process is that the Kuwaiti local culture is marginalized in BLSC classrooms. This was expressed by three participants. An example of this view is explicitly stated in the interview with Jamela who said:

*The topics that we discuss are all talking about the western culture, such as the USA and its traditions and habits, nothing about our country or our Islamic culture. Why do we need to learn all this about the USA? Although the topics were sometimes interesting, I would prefer to study topics related to local issues.*

The above extract reveals that the topics studied in the BLSC courses tend to focus on the traditions of the western culture, with no mention of the local Kuwaiti culture. This could be for many reasons. It seems that the teachers are being influenced by the western culture from which they have received their PhDs and depend on western resources they have brought back with them. Another reason could be that the teachers are attached to the content found in the western-written textbook, and are not sufficiently creative to introduce local cultural topics to the classroom.



In line with this, the teacher of the reading course imposed some international topics, which were irrelevant to the students' interests or preferences. I think that her hidden agenda is to open students' minds to other cultures, especially in light of this comment:

*... I ask them to bring some articles that challenge their own thinking, bring things that reflect the culture of native speakers of English, like American, Australian or even non-English-speaking countries.*

Although it is important to learn about the target language culture, local culture should not be completely ignored. Data analysis revealed that students would prefer to learn English through topics related to the local Kuwaiti culture.

#### **5.4.1.2 Influence of Pre-University Education**

##### ***Exam-Oriented Education System***

In the Kuwaiti pre-university education system, English is taught for exam purposes only at secondary schools. This was clearly expressed by Dr. Hebah:

*This is the first time they will just sit for 15 minutes in the classroom and talk in English. They have not done this before in their secondary schools, where English is a subject like any other subjects for which students need to pass.*

Dr. Fahad highlighted that the teaching of English in pre-university education is mechanical. He commented in detail on this, saying:

*They just teach them vocabulary; fill in the space, no writing. I don't think there is any type of writing skill development. They are exam oriented in their teaching. They tend to spoon-feed students to memorise and pass the exams.*

In the same vein, a student wrote in one of her open-ended responses that she studied for the sake of exams only. This was clearly stated as follows:

*I haven't learnt English in school. When I was in school, the most important thing was how to pass the exam; the teacher focused on the stuff that would come up in the exam. I didn't learn anything for my own sake: my ultimate aim was to pass the exam. All we learnt was for the exam.*

The above extracts show that there is a defect at the pre-university level. Kuwaiti students have the mentality of attending school only to pass exams; they see passing exams as the ultimate objective. This could be due to family pressure,

which pushes students to focus on memorising what is in the textbook and passing exams with high marks, without paying any attention to whether or not they have really learned anything. The responsibility lies with the administrators and the teachers to change this mentality by, for example, applying a continuous assessment method for the whole semester to eliminate the value of one single exam.

### ***Rote learning and memorisation***

Rote learning and memorisation are some of the features characterising Kuwaiti pre-university education. Students are encouraged to memorise what they study rather than pursuing creative and critical thinking processes. It is culturally known that students who do well at memorising what they study are regarded as being cleverer than those who do not. While learning by heart is a useful strategy that helps students to remember English, it leaves no space for the development of creative and critical thinking skills. Analysis of this study's data revealed that teachers' views about rote learning and memorisation contrasted with those of their students.

Two teachers expressed their unhappiness about students' memorisation. Dr Fahad attributed memorisation and rote learning to pre-university education:

*Also, the traditional way of our school teaching in Kuwait is always rote learning and memorisation. They [school teachers] are very rigid with it.*

Another illustrative example was given by Dr Haneen, who felt sorry for these future teachers of English: *"most of them [students] join university with memorisation in mind"*.

On the other hand, students defended their resorting to rote learning, saying that they were treated like machines to be filled with information and programmed to recall it in times of need. In relation to this, in her interview, Dalal commented:

*Teachers at school used to tell us to study our school subjects by heart. Next lesson, the teacher asks us questions to check our memorisation. If we made a mistake, we were physically beaten because we didn't memorise it well. To be honest, our minds have been programmed to memorise what is inside the textbook.*

The above extract gives a sad picture of one aspect of pre-university education in Kuwait. Students are not just encouraged but obliged to memorise what the teachers ask them to remember.

Another student, Fatima, who was critical of the university teachers' encouragement of memorisation, said in her interview:

*... Since you are so critical of the memorisation and rote learning that we did at school, why do you encourage us to memorise the answers to your exam questions?*

This finding could be attributed to the style of teaching applied by teachers in Kuwait. Students are encouraged to memorise everything that they have been taught, leaving no space for creativity or imagination. Despite the fact that this issue goes back to school level, teachers at college have the responsibility to try to change it.

### ***Poor Teaching Quality in Secondary Schools***

Students in pre-university education receive a kind of teaching that is seen as unskilful. When teaching writing, secondary school English teachers force students to memorize chunks of text to help them in their composition writing in the final exam. Unfortunately, they are not taught how to write coherently and cohesively. This view is spelt out by the writing teacher, Dr. Fahad, as follows:

*... The problem mainly lies in the quality of early education. They have not been taught how to write coherently. They're not taught how to be accurate. They claim to use the CLT, which focuses on fluency rather than accuracy. At this point, they come over with a standard that leaves much to be desired in writing, particularly writing meaningful, coherent sentences. We have to bear the price for that.*

The same teacher added that these students are the product of an educational system which, in his words, "*leaves much to be desired. Most of them actually come as a blank sheet.*"

Students are barely exposed to spoken English at the pre-university level, as Dr. Hebah said:

*It is like the first time they are exposed to spoken English in their life, even though they have studied this language for twelve years. I had never seen anything like this. It looked like they had just listened to something called English for the first time. That's the problem we had.*

Dr. Fahad referred to students' unwillingness to read for any other purpose except studying:

*Unfortunately, students are not accustomed to having further reading. They lack what we call integrative motivation. Their motivation is mainly instrumental, to get to the bloom and that's it, by hook or by crook, except for a handful of them.*

In the same vein, Jenan justified why she and her Kuwaiti classmates do not read. She wrote the following in her diary:

*In reality, we don't read except for study purposes. This is because we are not used to it. At home, our parents encourage us to read for exam purposes. At school, we read to study or to prepare for a test. I think there should be some encouragement to read for other purposes such as hobbies, interests or general knowledge. We need an external motivation to help us read for many reasons, not only for study purposes. We are not recommended to read any articles, not only in English, but also in Arabic. I wonder why there is no encouragement from the teacher's side to help us increase our information about different topics of writing.*

In conclusion, the previous section has shown that Kuwaiti students are plagued by a number of socio-cultural obstacles. It is not only the responsibility of the teachers, parents or students; Kuwaiti society at large plays a role as well. All of these issues need to be addressed in order to improve students' levels in all aspects of language learning.

#### **5.4.2 Individual Characteristics**

This section presents and analyses the students' challenges that are related to certain individual characteristics. It is divided into two parts: challenges related to the students' linguistic difficulties and those related to psychological issues.

##### **5.4.2.1 Linguistic Difficulties**

The analysis of the study data revealed that students indicated that they have difficulty in learning and understanding all of the four English language skills and

this has been the case since their pre-university education. Consequently, this has affected their experience when taking the BLSC, as they were less confident, which made their study more challenging.

Findings are presented sequentially as follows: difficulties in writing, reading and conversation skills. It should be noted that only the most frequently-repeated difficulties are reported, and many of these difficulties are interrelated. For example; *students' lack of vocabulary* is a common problem; however, it was reported most clearly in the writing course, and therefore it has been classified under the writing skill section.

#### 5.4.2.1.1 Difficulties in EFL Writing

Writing skills were associated with the most difficulties, according to the majority of the students. This is shown clearly in the results obtained from the questionnaire data in Table 5.14. Students were asked: “*to what degree do you have difficulties in the following language skills of English?*” and the analysis revealed that 83% of the students found writing the most difficult of the four language skills.

Table 5.14 Students’ ratings of the degree of difficulty of the four language skills

Skill	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Writing	25%	58%	9%	8%	0%
Reading	5%	28%	55%	10%	2%
Speaking	19%	46%	23%	8%	4%
Listening	8%	52%	25%	6%	9%

Analysis of the interview data also revealed that seven out of eight students on the writing course reported facing major difficulties in writing. These difficulties can be divided into: lack of vocabulary and semantic errors, lack of knowledge of different writing styles, and problems with English grammar.

#### ***Lack of Vocabulary and Semantic Errors***

The first difficulty that participants reported facing in writing was that they had a serious lack of English vocabulary. One of the students, Norah, explained in her interview how this had hindered her ability to write English compositions:

*My problem is that I do not know many words in English: sometimes I have an idea in my mind, but because I lack the words to express this idea, I keep silent and stop writing. This is my main problem and that's why I really wanted to increase my knowledge of English words in this course.*

One reason for this limited vocabulary might be a lack of reading. As demonstrated earlier Kuwaiti students lack the habit of reading, and thus it is a logic consequence that most students lack vocabulary.

Another student, Aseel, directs our attention to the problem of using the wrong English words when writing, as this happened to her once and she did not discover her mistake until the teacher had marked her paper. She explained in her diary:

*I always memorise English words by heart, this is what we all Kuwaiti students used to do in school, as instructed and encouraged by our teachers. I was good at it. I remember once, I wrote, "I went to the library to buy a pen." and I thought this was a correct sentence; however, my teacher crossed that word out and wrote "Stationery shop". I wasn't aware of the difference before he explained it to me.*

The sources of these errors vary: they could be attributed to the students' dependence on memorising literal translations of English words from Arabic in isolation from their context. The word "Maktaba" in Arabic is usually used to mean both "library" and "stationery shop". Dr. Fahad confirms the previous students' problems by stating: "... I am focusing on building their vocabulary. They lack a lot of vocabulary, synonyms and antonyms". The reason for this problem might be the fact that students are used to using bilingual dictionaries, which tend to employ a single lexical item that may not convey the intended meaning. It would be more appropriate if teachers trained students to use monolingual dictionaries, which give the definition of any vocabulary in more than one way, and thus allow students to choose the correct lexical item to express their own intended meaning.

### ***Lack of Knowledge of Different Writing Styles***

At school level, when it comes to writing compositions, the emphasis is on spelling correction and memorising grammatical rules out of context. Most Kuwaiti students who have graduated from public governmental schools have practiced compositions by imitating a model provided by their teachers, which the whole

class would discuss as the perfect style to follow. This writing style, which I call “copying”, has led to a lack of knowledge of a variety of writing styles. In this regard, many students complained about their inability to differentiate between a variety of writing styles such as writing a letter to a friend and writing a job application. Wafa, for example, commented in her interview on this matter as follows:

*I am not sure how to write about anything other than the model the teacher gave us, which was about “how did you spend your summer holiday?” I still use the same words and sentences. This makes it really frustrating when the teacher asks us to write about other topics.*

This finding may explain the reason behind the difficulties that students face when they write in English and the low grades they achieve at the end of the course. English teachers need to teach their students how to write about a wide variety of topics, and to make sure that students understand that the model they give is there only as an example and is not meant to be the only correct answer.

### ***Students’ Problems with English Grammar***

Another problem raised by students is the difficulty they have with English grammar. Seven students and 20 responses to the open-ended questionnaire revealed that they encountered many grammatical difficulties in different forms. For instance, Nouf had difficulty using the right tenses: *“I always find some difficulty to use the correct time...”*

Another five students faced difficulty in applying grammatical rules in practice. For example, Hadeel commented in her interview:

*When it comes to memorising grammatical rules, I have no problems with that. The real problem I have is when I want to use these rules in real life or in writing my essays.*

Other grammatical difficulties were revealed in the responses to the open-ended questions. For example, one response summarised several different forms of grammatical difficulty as follows:

*I have heard many technical words from my teacher, such as prepositions, phrasal verbs and linking words, yet I am not sure how to use them in my writings.*

It seems that most students are aware of the importance of grammar and how it affects their academic progress in the college. For instance, Hanan argued that it is grammar more than anything else that has led to the low grade she received in the writing course; she commented in her interview:

*I've lost most of my marks because of grammar: all my mistakes were grammar-related mistakes not fluency.*

This finding may explain why the writing course teacher has set grammar as his primary objective, and also confirms the teacher's statement that the students' major weakness is grammar. In this regard, Dr. Fahad commented: "*they [students] are so weak in terms of grammar, word order, sentence linkage and so on and so forth*".

From this, it is not surprising to conclude that English grammar is still a major obstacle for these students for many reasons. One reason could be related to the fact that there is no separate dedicated grammar course for students, and all the grammar that students learn is taught as part of the writing course, which is supposed to focus on developing their writing skills, not their grammar. In addition, while students might have been taught to master grammatical rules, they have not been trained on how to put them into context. Another reason might be the interference of the students' mother tongue, Arabic, as sentence structures differ greatly between the two languages.

#### **5.4.2.1.2 Difficulties in EFL Reading**

The findings of the interview data analysis revealed that students have many difficulties in the reading skill. The most frequently mentioned difficulties are divided into two categories: students' difficulty with critical reading and thinking, and lack of exposure to different reading topics.

##### ***Students' Difficulty in Critical Reading and Thinking***

The responses from the lecturers' and students' interviews indicated that the lack of critical reading and thinking is an obvious weakness among English major students. Dr. Haneen underlined this with her assessment of Kuwaiti students' abilities to comment on any article or story they read:



*They [students] don't know how to be critical in their opinion and how to defend their opinion. Usually, I urge my students to express themselves and to be critical about anything, even our traditions and everything else. When it comes to critical thinking, mind maps, brainstorming and accepting others' opinions, this is not what they're used to. I think this goes back to their pre-university education, as they come to us without having any prior knowledge about how to have and express your own opinion, and what's worse, many students don't even know what the term 'critical thinking' means.*

Five students showed that they did not know how to be critical while reading and put the blame on their teachers and on the educational system. For example, Hadeel argued in her interview:

*... How do you expect something from me when you did not teach me how to do it? I have never been taught how to be critical or how to defend my own opinion. I thought this would end when I joined this college; however, it is still the same. They ask us to memorise and to repeat the same opinion, without asking us to give our own view.*

Another student, Abrar, was not sure of the meaning of 'critical thinking', she replied in her interview as follows:

*What do you mean by critical thinking? All we do after reading a text is to answer the comprehension questions that follow: is this what you mean?*

This finding may show that students were capable of analysing a text to answer comprehension questions, but they comprehended the text just enough, without critiquing it at any depth. The use of the verb 'urge' in the teacher's response may indicate that she tried hard to encourage her students to be critical, and she stated that she used two classroom activities to develop students' critical thinking: mind mapping and thinking aloud. However, from the students' responses, it seems that the teacher has not made enough effort to teach them how to be critical.

This finding could possibly be attributed to an academic culture that does not expect critical thinking from students. This may illustrate that the reading comprehension is practiced with the focus on memorisation rather than critical understanding. The reading class consists of an introduction to abstract words, reading a text, studying the structure of some sentences and literal translation of

the difficult words, without developing students' reading skills through either critical thinking or reading strategies.

### ***Lack of Exposure to Different Reading Topics***

Three students revealed that they have difficulties in reading any English text other than those they study at school or college, and that reading their English textbooks had not received as much focus as grammar, for example. In fact, their reading lacked depth and was only as good as the amount of vocabulary they had learned and memorised.

In her diaries, Sabeka explained her problems with reading, and issued this desperate plea:

*I am very desperate today, I just bought a story called "The Lord of the Rings" thinking that it would be easy to understand, but I found it very difficult and I stopped reading straight away. Why is this happening? Why this is not the case when I read my reading course textbook? When my teacher asks me to read a page in my textbook, I read it easily without any problem. Please, my teacher, teach me how to read something other than this boring textbook. I want to read English stories!*

It seems that students are not exposed to any material in English other than their English course textbook. Students are bored of reading the same non-authentic textbook style, and they expressed their need to read other forms and genres of their own choice, such as English stories or newspapers. This lack of exposure has other consequences. For instance, it may explain students' limited vocabulary, since they are always reading the same genre - the course textbook - which repeatedly exposes them to similar types of words. In addition, this lack of exposure has left many students with problems in understanding and guessing the meaning of what they read outside the classroom. This finding reveals how important it is for English lecturers to expose their students to a variety of genres of English texts in order to expand students' knowledge and vocabulary.

#### **5.4.2.1.3 Difficulties in EFL Conversation**

Most students reported having considerable difficulty in speaking and listening to English. Data analysis of the interviews with students is consistent with the

quantitative results from the questionnaire, in which they ranked speaking as the second and listening as the third greatest difficulty in learning English (see Table 5.14). Students' main speaking and listening difficulties can be classified under the following categories: problems with fluency, pronunciation difficulties and listening comprehension difficulties.

### ***Students' Problems with Fluency***

It was revealed by almost all the students that fluency was a major problem in speaking English. Data analysis showed that all students reported weaknesses in English fluency. For instance, in her interview, Amal disclosed how this problem affected her participation in class:

*I always wanted to participate in the conversation class, but when I want to express my opinion in English, I can't say it as fast as needed: I say it word by word. Consequently, I stopped participating because I was afraid that my teacher would think that I'm weak in English, although I'm not: I have the information and I only lack the ability to say it fluently.*

In the interview data, another student, Eqbal, expressed her frustration with her level of fluency in English language speaking and explained its cause:

*I am not sure how to solve this major problem that I have; I struggle a lot to express something in English. When I start to talk, I think in Arabic then I translate my thoughts to English and then start saying it bit by bit. This seems to be the wrong way to do it, as I need to think in English from the beginning. This difficult task needs more practice, which we unfortunately lack in this course.*

It seems that there are a variety of reasons for students' problems with fluency. As a consequence of the culture of teacher-centred and passive learning, students are too shy to participate in class. Students' lack of engagement in class because of their shyness may greatly impact their fluency levels. Another reason could be students' low proficiency in English, which decreases their self-confidence. Only when a student has no problems with these issues will he/she gain the full benefit of this kind of course, as Danah confirmed in her interview:

*Although I was not so fluent in English before I started this course, my English was good enough, which helped me to participate in most classes confidently. Now, after finishing this course, I think that I have gained much more confidence and fluency in my speaking skills and abilities.*

### ***Pronunciation Difficulties***

All students revealed that they had difficulty in pronouncing English words. Some placed the responsibility for this on their teacher. For example, Lolwah argued in her interview that no one had trained her how to pronounce English words:

*Although the teacher assessed us on our pronunciation, she did not teach us how to pronounce correctly. Most of my colleagues, including me, have huge mistakes in pronunciation.*

Other students blamed their teacher's Arabic accent when speaking English. For instance, Alaa emphasised that they had had no opportunity to listen to native English speakers in class, while the teacher's pronunciation was quite different from what she heard when watching English movies and listening to English songs. She explained her views in her diaries as follows:

*... I have never met a native English speaker before, either during my years in public schools nor during my study in this college. All my teachers are Arabs who speak English with an Arabic accent, Kuwaiti, Syrian or Egyptian accent. I remember that my teacher used to pronounce 'th' as 'z'; for example, the word 'that' is pronounced as 'zat'. Consequently, I unconsciously started to imitate my teacher. Now, when I watch an American movie it feels like I'm listening to a new language, different from what my teacher speaks!*

This finding might be attributed to many factors. It seems that the teachers are responsible for not helping to improve students' English pronunciation. In addition, as mentioned previously, teachers are not exposing their students to native speakers of English using, for example, audio-recordings, which would help students to learn how to pronounce English words correctly.

### ***Students' Listening Comprehension Difficulties***

The majority of the students indicated that they have difficulty with listening comprehension at various levels. For example, the teacher's speech rate while teaching was considered much too fast by many of the students. In her interview, Amal complained that sometimes she could not follow her teacher:

*The teacher speaks very fast; we find it difficult to understand her when she does that. We're not used to listening to English, let alone listening at this speed! It is embarrassing to ask the teacher to slow down.*

It seems that students are not used to being taught in English in their pre-university education, as many English teachers used Arabic as a medium of instruction in English classes; this teacher, who received her PhD from the USA, appears to neglect the fact that these students have just graduated from secondary school and are not used to such a fast speech rate, and thus need intense practice through listening exercises.

Another difficulty mentioned by many students was that, when listening to their teacher, there were a lot of words that they did not understand. For instance, in her interview, Nouf said:

*... for example, I feel very disappointed when my teacher discusses a topic and says many words that I don't understand. It feels so awkward to listen to someone who thinks that you are following what he/she says, where in fact you are not!*

There are many possible causes for these vocabulary problems; the teacher may be neglecting the importance of enhancing students' prior knowledge about the topic to be discussed, which would help them to understand the new vocabulary related to this topic. Another reason could be that students are not trained to use listening techniques and strategies, such as guessing meaning from context. Having such techniques would have helped them to overcome this kind of difficulty. Of course, the complete lack of listening comprehension practice in the conversation course, mentioned earlier, cannot be justified after such complaints from students about the difficulties they have in listening comprehension.

#### **5.4.2.2 Psychological Issues**

Data analysis revealed a number of noteworthy psychological issues. First of all, students referred to their anxiety. This was represented in EFL speaking anxiety and test anxiety. Participants were reported to be lacking self-confidence. In addition, participants were demotivated about learning the different language skills due to their sense of disappointment and frustration. These issues will be presented next.

It is quite normal for EFL learners to be anxious when they try to speak in English. This is particularly true of Kuwaiti first years in English departments. On this subject, Dr. Haneen said:

*At the very beginning, we start with group activities because the students are still afraid and nervous. They are not that confident.*

In the same vein, five participants showed their concern about speaking in English. For example, in her interview Eqbal said:

*When I try to speak in English, I hesitate a lot. I don't know why. Maybe because I am clever in English and I don't want to make mistakes. I might also not be confident enough in my pronunciation, as I am a graduate of a governmental school and not a private one. To be honest, speaking in English irritates me, as I was not used to doing it in secondary school.*

One possible reason for students being anxious about speaking in English in public could be due to the college context, where English is not widely used and is considered a difficult subject. Therefore, those who do speak English are considered to be conceited or to be showing off in front of others.

On the other hand, a number of students revealed that tests are sources of irritation and fear. In the interview, Nouf expressed this well:

*I don't know what happens to me when I know that I have an exam. I lose concentration and feel as if I am going to be killed. In a speaking test, words fly from my mind and I start to sweat. In a writing test, I waste a lot of time encouraging myself to write anything that will help me pass the test. Oh! It is awful; please don't remind me.*

In reference to students' lack of self-confidence, the conversation teacher, Dr. Hebah, seems aware of the importance of confidence in education and reported that she had tried to increase this with her students:

*I don't want them [students] to be shy with each other. I want them to be more confident. That's number one.*

However, some students attributed their low self-confidence to the teacher's mistreatment. In the interview, Lolwah commented thus:

*My classmates and I were only listeners in class. We were expecting that we would fail. We lost our self-confidence*

*because of his sarcastic comments all the time. Our main hope was to pass this course in any way and by any means.*

Students expressed frustration in different ways. With regard to the teacher's harsh treatment of his students, Farah said in her diary:

*I really feel frustrated when the teacher makes fun of my answers to certain questions, to the extent that I stop raising my hand to take part in what is being taught. In this way the teacher discourages me from participating in the learning process. I think university teachers should respect students' responses to any question regardless of their level. We are not all at the same level in class. Some of us are good, some are average and others have learning problems. It is not polite to mock me in front of my classmates. This is really rude!!*

In the same vein, Aseel stated in her interview that her teacher mocked her all the time. She illustrated her view as follows:

*Our teacher always makes fun of me for every mistake I make. I asked him once in class about starting a story in English saying "Once upon a time" and he started laughing and said that this is not what we should write in English to start a story. When I asked him what to write, he kept silent.*

The above extracts show that students are suffering from the fear of being mocked by their teachers in front of their colleagues. Some teachers find this amusing, but in fact it is a serious issue for many students and will make them feel uncomfortable during the whole lecture. It is important for teachers to bear this in mind and act carefully when it comes to students' different personalities.

Similarly, some students spelt out their dislike of the teacher's harsh treatment of their mistakes. An example of this is clarified by Alaa who said in her interview:

*The teacher was hard on us when we made mistakes, this was so embarrassing, that's why most of the students were frightened not to participate, only two students who were older than us and have more experience ... I can't understand this, the teacher kept encouraging us and telling us to participate, but when we participate she becomes hard on us, I'm not sure why.*

Being disappointed with her teacher, Jenan wrote the following words in her diary, which indicate that all her dreams have turned into nightmares:

*When I heard that I would study basic writing, I said to myself, Wow. I really like writing and it should be an easy and encouraging course because I love writing and I was used to it even before I knew that I would study it. I dreamt that I would learn the basics of writing to empower me to be a very good writer later on, but I am so disappointed, as all my dreams failed because of my teacher. I will go to bed now.*

Fear of failure was another issue mentioned by students. For example, Amal commented in her interview on one discouraging and frightening phrase that was typical of her teacher's speech in class as follows:

*The sentence "You will automatically get zero" was an idiosyncratic feature of her talk in class. She made us fear her. She used to threaten us that if we made such a mistake in any exam, we would automatically get zero.*

One last issue mentioned by students was the demotivating treatment and discouragement received from their teachers. For example, Samera wrote the following comment in her diary to express her helplessness about learning English in general, and writing in particular, from university professors:

*Nobody will improve my English at university. OK!! I decided to join the British Council, but it was hard to study at the university and at the British Council at the same time. I started to listen to the BBC on the radio at 10:00. I also started to watch English channels without reading the translation in Arabic to improve my English language. Nobody cares about what I was doing. There is no encouragement of any sort.*

In her diary, Dalal narrates an embarrassing situation in which she was exposed to the teacher's sarcasm:

*Today, I brought my children with me to university because I have one lecture only, which is basic writing. I left them with my maid in the corridor outside the lecture hall until I finished. After some time, one of children started to cry and the teacher knew that he was mine. He asked me to bring my child in class. After that, he mockingly said: Why do you complete your studies? Staying home and raising your children is the best thing to do! However, he knows quite well that there is a shortage of female English teachers in Kuwait. I am determined to finish my undergraduate studies: I will be patient and work until the end.*



These psychological issues are not necessarily peculiar to the Kuwaiti context on which this study is based. Other countries where English is taught as a foreign language possibly share the similar issues. Generally speaking, these different descriptions of the teachers' behaviour tend to be fair and realistic pictures of what happens inside the classroom from participants' perspectives. According to the majority of students, teachers have a responsibility to make the course a useful one. It is not the course itself that matters; it is the teacher who teaches it. The following response from the interview with one of the students, Reem, explains this view clearly:

*I believe that the problem is not the course itself as much as the teacher who will teach it. Believe it or not, all the students, when they want to choose a course to register, care more about who gives this course more than what it is about! If I took this course with another teacher, I'm sure that I would improve my English hugely and my final grade would be very different. It's all about the teacher, not the course.*

This evidence indicates that teachers play a crucial role in the students' progress in these courses, and in the English teacher education programme in general. Therefore, developing teachers professionally and making them aware of the different psychological issues their students encounter has become a pressing need in Kuwait in order to help improve the learning and teaching processes. Teachers need to deal with their students academically and pedagogically in an appropriate way, so they can help their students to master the different language skills, as they in turn will impart these skills to their future students.

### **5.5 Suggestions for Improving the Basic Language Skills Courses**

*What do Kuwaiti students and lecturers suggest for improving the Basic Language Skills Component (BLSC)?*

This part of the analysis is concerned with revealing Kuwaiti students' and lecturers' suggestions for improving the three BLSC courses: writing, reading and conversation. To answer this research question, data was obtained from open-ended questionnaire items, semi-structured interviews with both students and lecturers and students' diaries. This analysis is presented under different themes, including suggestions for (1) objectives, (2) content and teaching materials, (3)

teaching and learning, (4) assessment and feedback, (5) the need for more language skills courses and (6) English as a medium of instruction. It is worth mentioning that many of the suggestions have been referred to in the previous themes, and they reflect aspects in which the English teacher education programme, and specifically the BLSC, is lacking and which must be addressed in order for it to be an efficient and satisfying programme.

### 5.5.1 Suggestions for Course Objectives

When teachers were asked “*Should there have been other objectives for this course?*” a range of different views and suggestions were given, depending on the course. The writing course teacher, Dr. Fahad, suggested that the grammar objectives should be covered in the writing course:

*I think they should be taught grammar that is related to writing specifically, what we call biological grammar. They are not taught that either there, in area schooling, or here.*

Dr. Fahad’s suggestion could be attributed to his students’ weaknesses in grammar. In addition, he suggested a further step the introduction of a separate dedicated grammar course as well as the writing one:

*The next thing is that they will actually get involved in grammar class. That compels those basic writers into engaging into good writing, to understand what they write and maintain the accuracy that writing insists on.*

With regards to the reading course, Dr. Haneen was more open to suggestions and expressed her acceptance of any ideas that might help to improve the course. She replied: “*I think they [objectives] are adequate. If there is something that comes up in this content or this skill, why not? Yes, I would accept it*”. Although she did not suggest any specific aim or objective to be added to the course, Dr. Haneen showed a positive attitude towards any suggestions.

In reference to the conversation course, Dr. Hebah was confident that the current course objectives were sufficient:

*I think the aims and objectives of this course are more than enough. They have covered the entire aspect of this language”.*

It was surprising that this lecturer did not suggest additional objectives concerning the listening skill, especially given that this course is called a conversation course (involving, therefore, both listening and speaking) and not a speaking course.

### **5.5.2 More Time for the BLSC**

Despite the different responses received from the three teachers, all agreed on the one obstacle that would make it difficult to add new objectives, or even to achieve the current objectives, which is limited time. This was clearly stated by Dr. Fahad as follows:

*The time is so tight. It's only an hour and a half on Mondays and Tuesdays. Therefore, if we would like to add more, we might not have sufficient time to cover it.*

The above findings show that the time allotted for the language courses is limited. Therefore, teachers are obliged to work within this time frame, which consequently hinders any chance of creativity or extra activities that teachers might introduce.

### **5.5.3 Suggestions for Course Content and Teaching Materials**

#### ***Ability to Choose Topics and New Learning Aids***

Various suggestions were given by students and their lecturers regarding the content of the BLSC course and the types of materials that could be used to improve students' learning opportunities.

With regard to the content of the course, most students in all three courses suggested that they should be given the opportunity to choose the topics to study. For example, in her interview Reem said:

*I would really like the teacher to give us the opportunity to choose topics that interest us when we have a reading task. Unfortunately, many topics that the teacher chooses are not of interest to me.*

In an interview with another student, Danah, suggested sharing the choice of topics between students and lecturer as follows: *"A mix between teachers' suggested topic and students' chosen topics would be a good idea"*. She also suggested her own topics of interest, saying: *"I myself like to write about literary and scientific topics"*. In addition, a number of topics were suggested by students, including how to write

a poem, how to write official letters in English, how to write a summary of something that has been read and so on.

On the other hand, a variety of suggestions were given with regard to the preferred teaching materials and aids that could be used in teaching these courses. Most students expressed their preference for modern teaching aids in class, indicating that this would help to increase their interest. This view is clearly presented in the interview with Abrar who commented:

*I would really like to learn by using new learning aids, other than the typical standard ones such as our textbook. For example, reading from a PC or a video on a huge screen would attract me to read more. I would also like our teacher to use PowerPoint presentations to show us what he is talking about. This would help to generate discussion in class.*

Along the same lines, in her diaries, Hadeel expressed her disappointment at the lack of modern teaching aids in the reading course:

*I wish we could have used DVDs or videos in this course; I'm really fed up with the traditional way of reading. Using electronic devices attracts me very much. For example, at home, I always use my iPad to read stories and books; since I bought this interesting device, I haven't opened any regular book at all!*

Teachers also supported this view and wished that they had such teaching devices.

For example, Dr. Hebah commented thus:

*I would love to have a video so I could bring some movies. This would be really nice. They could listen or see perhaps half an hour of a movie. They could listen to it and then come up with their own comments, like what's going to happen in the rest of the movie, if they haven't seen it before. I have to make sure that they haven't seen it. This is one thing we can ask for.*

Clearly, students are more attracted to the new modern technology in teaching materials and aids. It is important to have these devices available for the teachers, and more importantly, to train them to make full use of them.

## 5.5.4 Suggestions for Course Teaching and Learning

### *More Practice and Discussion*

Students studying the BLSC suggested a variety of preferred teaching methodologies and methods that could be applied by their lecturers. Data analysis revealed that students generally agreed on some of the teaching methods. First of all, most students expressed a need for more practice. For example, in reference to the reading course, Bedoor commented in her interview:

*We didn't practise much; I think we need more training in reading different passages. For example, I still cannot understand the meaning of a word from the context when reading something; I think the more we practise, the easier this will be.*

Another student in the writing course, Reem, suggested practising writing in each lecture, as this would help them to improve their English writing. She said in her interview:

*We need to practice writing more often, and unfortunately this is not happening in this course. We study writing three times a week; therefore, if we write three times a week, I'm sure our writing skills will improve by the end of the course.*

Not only practice, but also discussion was reported as a need. The majority of the students expressed their need for discussion in class, which at present they do not do at all. As Farah highlighted in her diary:

*Despite having a good teacher who explains his syllabus in class, I really need to discuss my work or ideas with either the teacher or my classmates. I think discussion will help us learn from each other and exchange ideas. Sitting silent in class may kill my ideas and views and this will consequently affect my willingness to participate and take part in class in a small circle and in society at large. Classroom discussion is something that I really need because it helps me to think critically about others' views.*

It seems that the BLSC greatly lacks the element of practice, which is crucial to help students improve their English fluency. This could be attributed to the style of teaching, such as the lecturing or teacher-centred approach that is favoured by some lecturers.

### ***More Presentations to Gain Confidence***

Another suggestion emphasised by many students was the need to do more presentations in class. In her interview, Lolwah stated:

*I wish in each lecture we could do a presentation about a specific topic of our choice and then discuss it in general with its advantages and disadvantages.*

It seems that some students are too shy to talk in front of others; therefore, they ask for solutions from their lecturers. For example, Nouf argued in her interview:

*I hope that the teacher will explore the hidden skills and abilities of her/his students, and encourage them to participate in class, specially shy students, like myself, by allowing some time, ten minutes, to make individual discussion with each student in class, instead of the general discussion with the whole class.*

Another solution for this problem was suggested by Wafa, who pinpointed in her interview the following:

*Reading aloud during class in front of other students will help break the ice of shyness and fear; I think this will give me more confidence when I become a teacher later on.*

It is interesting to find that students are aware of their own problems and are asking, consciously or unconsciously, for teaching methods to overcome these difficulties. This shows the importance of listening to students' views and suggestions.

### ***Collaborative Learning***

Learning in groups was another method suggested by many students. For example, in her interview, Hanan highlighted group work in the reading course as follows:

*I find it interesting if the teacher divides us into groups and asks each group to choose a page or two on a topic of our own choice and come and read it in front of the class and then ask the whole class to discuss these topics.*

In addition, an open-ended questionnaire response suggested a collaborative method in the writing course, which is known as joint construction:

*I suggest that the teacher should divide us into groups and ask each group to write about a book they have read. In other words, each member of the group will be involved in writing*

*about the book that they have read to come up with a general idea about the book.*

### ***Learning in a Different Environment***

Apart from the methods suggested above, data analysis revealed that students are keen to learn in an environment that is different from the one they have now. For instance, one of the students' responses to the open-ended questions suggested the following:

*I really enjoy it when we study outside our classroom, like for example going to the computer room and surfing the internet as an aid to improve our reading - it is more fun and very encouraging.*

Another student, Sabeeka, explained in her diary why she hated the course:

*I love games ...this class was boring because we did not learn by playing games. The teacher was in a serious mood most of the time, and I hate that and I got bored quickly.*

This finding suggests that some classes were 'tough' and boring. This negative environment does not encourage students to learn and participate positively in class. Moreover, and most importantly, this learning environment will have its effect on students when they become teachers in the near future.

### ***Learning from One's Own Mistakes***

One last potential teaching method was given in the interview with Aseel, who suggested that previous students' written essays be made available so current students could learn from their mistakes. She explained:

*I need to see examples of other students' written essays and the mistakes they committed to learn from them. This will make me pay attention to these mistakes and never repeat them in my writing.*

It seems that there is a variety of suggestions regarding the teaching methods that could potentially be used in the BLSC that need to be addressed by teachers. Most importantly, the teaching style needs to be changed from traditional lecturing to a more open style that promotes student-centred discussion.

### 5.5.5 Suggestions for Course Assessment and Feedback

Data analysis revealed numerous suggestions with regard to course assessment and feedback. Most participants were critical of the assessment and evaluation system applied in the three courses and in the programme in general. Lecturers and students seemed to believe that the assessment procedures and the evaluation system were one of the reasons for students' weak English proficiency and lack of competence.

The first criticism was related to the admission test that students take before they are accepted onto the programme. Lecturers blamed this test for not reflecting students' real proficiency and thus allowing weak students onto the programme.

Dr. Fahad highlighted the following concerns:

*The negative dimension here is the quality of students we receive, which needs a sort of polishing. It needs to be more closely scrutinized and checked and rechecked before they are accepted. Writing should be more emphasized on proficiency tests. I'll tell you something that is really amazing. There are a number of students that are positively and clearly fluent in English, but when it comes to writing, they don't know the alphabet. This is really a catastrophe. You can't judge a learner just because he or she speaks fluent English. If you'd like to check his education, ask him to write something for you.*

It seems that it is not only the writing skills in which students are poor, as Dr. Hebah surprisingly gave an even worse image of the quality of students accepted onto the programme. She explained:

*Most of the time, I try to speak in English. Then, they try to speak. It is like the first time they have been exposed to something like this, even though they have studied English for twelve years. This is really weird. It looked like they just listened to something called English for the first time. That's the problem we had.*

This finding shows that lecturers would welcome a more challenging admission test, with more focus on testing students' writing skills, as this would help to improve the quality of students in the programme and consequently raise the standard of the graduate English teachers in future.



Some participants criticised the distribution of marks and suggesting changing it. For example, Dr. Fahad stated clearly that he was unhappy with the distribution of marks that the college assessment policy applies:

*For writing, it's really unfair to have 50 for the final. Effort should take quite a big portion of that because it's a portfolio. When we talk about writing, we talk about their portfolio, the whole work. It's all the hard work they've done throughout the semester. It should go into their marks, actually. I suggest that we should actually take 30 marks off the whole thing.*

In the interview data, Bedoor, along with five other students, highlighted a preference for written exams in the reading course. Her representative view was as follows:

*I think exams are the best way, but written ones, not oral, because it is the fairest way. If I write something correct, the teacher will give me what I deserve: s/he cannot give me a lower grade.*

This view can be attributed to the fact that students have been used to being assessed in writing since the pre-university stage. Moreover, students do not trust teachers' judgment of their oral abilities, and feel safer with something solid in the form of a written exam.

Another group of interviewees shed light on the developmental progress from joining to finishing the course. A sample of this view was found in the words of Mariam who stated in her interview the following:

*I believe that the best way to assess me is according to my level: that is, to compare my level at the beginning of the course and see how I am improving gradually in English by the end of the course.*

This indicates that students prefer the idea of being assessed on the basis of their progress during the whole course. This could be achieved by conducting a pre-test at the beginning of the course, formative assessment during the course and a summative assessment at the end; then students' marks would show their level of improvement and they could be assessed accordingly.

Moreover, one of the students, Lamees, wrote in her diary about the importance of taking participation into account while assessing students formatively:

*I think participation is very important; the teacher should give more grades to those who participate more in class. In the near future, we will be teachers of English, we need to break the ice and get used to speaking in front of people.*

In relation to the feedback students receive from their lecturers, one of the students, Norah, complained in her interview about having poor feedback and suggested taking more care about this important issue:

*I need a caring teacher who is committed to his duties as a writing lecturer. I think it is only through writing practice that I can develop my writing skills. What should happen is that the writing teacher assigns some topics to us and then corrects them, not neglects them till the end of the course as usual, and then sets aside a lecture in which he highlights the most common mistakes that we have made. I am saying this because I want to learn from my mistakes.*

Farah, in her diary, gave an interesting suggestion with regard to feedback. She argued:

*The teacher should assign a tutorial for each student once he corrects her essay. In this tutorial, the teacher could discuss what the student has written. We have different needs and I need to know what my points of weakness and my points of strength are. Thank God we are not like other developing countries in which there are many students in class with whom the teacher cannot cope. I think it just needs some organisation and effort on the part of the teacher on one hand and some follow-up from the administration before it is too late and we graduate as unqualified teachers of English.*

This finding shows that students need to have what is called 'individual conferences' where teachers look at each student's mistakes and suggest ways to correct and improve these mistakes constructively.

With regard to the evaluation of the college lecturers' performance, Dr. Hebah gave an honest and surprising answer:

*We lack a serious element in this programme. There is no follow up or real evaluation of the teachers' performance. I know that there is an evaluation form that students fill in at the end of each semester; however, I don't know what the administration does with the results. I don't think anyone takes this form seriously. I am sure that there are many weak*

*teachers who receive negative evaluation; however, no action has been taken towards them.*

From the researcher's personal experience of the Kuwaiti university context, the general assumption held by students is that nobody is able to ask a university lecturer about what s/he has been doing inside the classroom. Teachers at this level are reluctant to accept criticism, as they know that nobody is going to evaluate them. The system is in need of a serious evaluation mechanism for teachers, without which we cannot guarantee that each teacher is doing his/her best and that appropriate teaching and learning is taking place.

In short, the assessment and feedback element in the BLSC and in the whole English programme received considerable criticism from most of the participants in this study. Consequently, it seems very important to review these issues and suggestions in order to overcome the numerous weaknesses in this part of the programme.

#### **5.5.6 The Need for More Language Skills Courses**

Data analysis revealed that the current number of BLSCs is not sufficient, and that there is a serious need for more courses. This suggestion was repeated by almost all participants. However, suggestions as to how to achieve this varied from one participant to another. For instance, all three lecturers suggested adding more than one course for each skill. Dr. Haneen highlighted:

*No, I don't think the current courses are enough. I was one of the biggest callers for adding more conversation. We have only one conversation course. I asked for two conversation courses as well as two reading courses.*

A response to one of the open-ended questions suggested even more than two courses, and explained the reason as follows:

*I suggest having more classes for these skills courses. For example, Conversation 1, 2, 3; Reading 1, 2, 3 and so on. The current courses are not enough at all. That's why a huge number of my friends attend special private afternoon courses to improve their English in writing, reading and conversation.*

This finding indicates how weak students are in the basic English skills and how useful it would be to increase the number of these courses. When asked why there were such a limited number of courses, Dr. Fahad explained:

*... They are not enough, but the rules and regulations might not allow for more; as there is no space or time to include more courses.*

Another suggestion was given by Dr. Hebah, who argued that if adding more courses is not possible, the teaching hours of the current courses need to be increased. She said:

*Of course they [current teaching hours] are not enough. There should be more hours in writing. You see, we have fewer hours in writing. They give them only three hours of basic writing, which I think needs to be five hours. These types of students join the department and they don't even know what a sentence is. They haven't learned these things in public school. They just teach them vocabulary: fill in the spaces, no writing. I don't think there is any type of writing. That's why I believe more teaching hours are needed.*

Another important suggestion that was mentioned by most of the participants was the need for a grammar course. As shown at the beginning of this chapter, the English teacher education programme has no grammar courses and grammar is taught within the writing course. As discussed earlier in section 5.3.5.1.1, participants identified many difficulties with English grammar; therefore, the need for a separate grammar course was strongly articulated by, among others, Dr. Haneen:

*I really emphasize the need for a grammar course. Most of them [students] are used to just memorisation. They don't know the difference between an adjective and an adverb. What's the difference between adjectives themselves and indirect and direct speech? They will be English teachers, so we should emphasize this part.*

Most students also insisted on the need for a grammar course. In the interview data, Shahd, for example, explained how important such a course would be as follows:

*I really wish that we had a grammar course before attending the writing course. We really need a grammar course. I have a friend who will graduate soon and will be a teacher of English, and she keeps saying that she is still very weak in grammar in spite of all the English classes that she attended in the college.*

*When I see the Major Sheet Courses, I noticed that it is full of courses related to literature and linguistics, which are not as important to us as grammar.*

The need for a grammar course was made clear by the majority of the participants. Obviously, it is important for students to have a grammar course along with the other basic language skills, as grammar plays a crucial role in each of the four language skills.

### **5.5.7 English as a Medium of Instruction**

Data analysis revealed that one of the reasons for students' poor English proficiency is related to their lack of exposure to the English language at the pre-university level. Some participant students claimed that English teachers in Kuwait teach English using the Arabic language. This came as a surprise, since English classes need to be taught in English. This view was clarified in the interview data by five students. A typical example is given by Abeer:

*Sometimes I forget that I am in an English class, the teacher was teaching us most of the time in Arabic. I remember when the teacher first talked in English, many students complained that they didn't understand what she was saying, so she decided to speak in Arabic.*

Analysis of the data from the three questionnaires highlighted that respondents agreed to some extent that English was the medium of instruction in the BLSC. These are the percentages in sequence: Writing 65% agreed; Reading 62% agreed; Conversation 56% agreed. On the other hand, in the interviews with the course lecturers, all three expressed their anger about the poor exposure to English that students receive at the college and that English is not used more frequently as a medium of instruction. For example, Dr. Hebah argued:

*Here in Kuwait, we don't have remedial instruction. Everything is in Arabic. Even some of the teachers here speak Arabic, even though we are an English department. It isn't effective for the students. I wish somebody would impose a rule that says, 'As long as you are in this college and this department, you should speak English'.*

Dr. Haneen blamed other lecturers for talking to their students in Arabic all the time and rarely using English. She commented:

*All of the teachers have to speak in English with them [students]. If you speak to them for 45 or 50 minutes and they leave your class to go to the next class, e.g. 'Introduction to Linguistics' and the teacher of this class talks to them in Arabic, then it's useless.*

Some lecturers are strict when it comes to the use of Arabic in class. For instance, Dr. Hebah explained how she deals with the use of Arabic in class as follows:

*As long as they are inside the classroom, if anyone wants to talk to her friend or classmate, it has to be in English because otherwise she will be penalized and I'll mark her down. They insist on speaking. Even if she cannot come up with the word, she uses her hands, with gestures, just to make sure that she can come up with something in English.*

Since students are not used to listening to English, it is important to encourage them to speak only in English when they are at college, and lecturers need to be aware of this issue and try to keep English widely used within the college borders. It is understandable that some teachers of English are compelled to use Arabic in English classes, as they are sometimes faced with students with very low English proficiency, who cannot understand what they are saying at all. However, teachers need to use Arabic only when giving instructions, and only if instructions in English are not understood. By doing so, teachers are exposing their students to more English and eventually their English will improve. Also, the Ministry of Education should be responsible for encouraging teachers of English to use only English in classes and to be strict with those who do not apply this rule.

### **5.5.8 Teachers' Professional Development**

Professional development is an important element for any teacher in any field. When asked about whether they were provided with any professional development activities at the college, all the teachers replied negatively. Some blamed the Ministry of Education and asked for such activities. For instance, Dr. Hebah commented:

*No, we don't have training, nothing of this kind. I wish there was, but there isn't. It depends on what your connections are. Sometimes the American embassy has these things back in the States. If you do have a connection, you can find out. Otherwise, nobody tells you. You have to look for them and spend most of your time on the internet trying to find them.*

When asked if they had requested such training, she replied:

*I was hoping to go to the Minister of Education and present the idea of a centre for training the college's lecturers. This centre could teach them how to teach the language through different forms rather than books, like aesthetic education, through music and writing. However, no one is listening. That's the problem here in Kuwait. They are all following the old-fashioned way, the book from cover to cover and that's it.*

Other lecturers place the responsibility on the lecturers themselves. Dr. Haneen believes that teachers need to update their knowledge in teaching such courses:

*... If you get your PhD certificate and you stay where you are, there is no point in your certificate. If this is your specialist area and your PhD, that's fine. Otherwise, you have to update yourself with your own workshops, going to conferences, trying to be part of the British Council. They have lots of activities at the American embassy. I've been invited to a hearing this week.*

Dr. Fahad also commented on this issue:

*Teachers have to rely on themselves and train themselves because now the world is a small village. If you can get on the internet, you can access conferences and research findings. It depends. Like a student, a teacher is actually responsible for updating himself or herself.*

From the analysis of this data, it seems that some BLSC teachers lack many of the skills needed to teach such courses. Training these teachers on how to teach the language skills would help to overcome their weaknesses and encourage them to apply up-to-date teaching methods, such as modern technology teaching aids.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a descriptive and interpretive analysis of the data collected from different perspectives, based on the research questions of the current study. Findings from the qualitative thematic content analysis have been combined with results from the quantitative analysis, where appropriate, to present the study findings in an integrated manner and to avoid repetition. Many factors were found to hinder students from getting the most benefit from the BLSC. These weaknesses in the courses and difficulties encountered by first-year Kuwaiti student teachers were also emphasised by their lecturers. However, students attributed these difficulties to a number of factors, whereas teachers attributed the

same difficulties to other factors. This will be discussed and interpreted in more detail in the following discussion chapter.



## **Chapter VI**

### **Discussion of the Research Findings**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the key findings drawn from the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collected in the course of the current study. Derived from social constructivism as a theoretical framework, the discussion is based on the fact that all who are involved in learning understand that environmental, social and emotional dimensions influence learning; thus, improvements to the learning experience can be undertaken by evaluating and examining the quality of each dimension. The chapter is divided into two sections. Section one discusses the results that stemmed directly from the evaluation, including the physical environment of the study site, findings of the main four aspects of the study, and learning and socio-cultural issues. Section two presents a discussion of broader issues emerging from the evaluation that are related to ELT teacher education, including responsibilities and role perceptions, teacher perceptions of students, power in the teacher education classroom, and unexpected student voices.

#### **SECTION ONE: Discussion of the Results of the Evaluation**

##### **6.2 Physical Environment**

The context and the physical environment within which a language is learnt play a significant role in effective teaching and learning. Regarding this issue, Brown (2001) argues that the teaching and the context are inseparable. As acknowledged by Hymes (1972), “the key to understanding language in context is to start not with language, but with context” (cited in Kramsch, 1993: 34). Consequently, it was important for the current study to look into the context of the study site and describe it to evaluate its quality. In fact, many researchers have also described the contexts within which their programme evaluation studies took place, and they have suggested that any programme evaluation study should examine and reflect on its social and institutional environment (Yildiz, 2004; Cabatoff, 1996; Dulay et al., 1982).

Data analysis of the current study revealed that the buildings of the college campus are very old, with a limited number of classrooms; these conditions are not

suitable for the huge number of students being accepted each year. It was understood that, due to certain political pressures, the number of students the college accepts greatly exceeds its actual capacity. The consequences of such a decision affect the quality of the students experience in the college. For example, desks have to be arranged in rows due to limited space, which affects teachers' approaches to teaching; as Carrier (2006) contends, the application of recent teaching approaches, concepts, and theories in the field of ELT require an appropriate arrangement of the physical learning environment. In their report, Jago & Tanner (1999) suggest that the spaces and places of the educational environment can affect the students' academic and emotional state. This was confirmed by a study conducted by Chan (1996) regarding the impact of the environment on student learning; his findings clearly revealed that the design of a building can have a significant influence on student learning, and the instructional process can be hugely enhanced by the design of the facility. It seems bizarre to be discussing such an issue in a country like Kuwait, which is known for its wealth and luxurious facilities in all aspects of life. This raises the question of how serious the country's authorities and decision makers are when it comes to funding educational institutes and universities, and it comes as no surprise that there is only one government-funded university in Kuwait. Perhaps this suggests that higher education is not a political priority in Kuwait. Therefore, I believe that decision makers in Kuwait need to invest more in building a healthy, safe, and encouraging environment for Kuwaiti students, as environment can play a vital role in their learning experience.

In addition to the lack of sufficient space to accommodate the students comfortably, the problem of underfunding is reflected by other resources and facilities within the college. The findings revealed that classrooms are not well equipped with teaching aids, such as overhead projectors, computers, audio tape-recorders or TV sets, as these need to be pre-arranged by the teacher and are not available all the time. Moreover, the findings revealed that there is a need for an audio-lingual laboratory which can be used specifically for the BLSC. The use of such technology could bring vast benefits to the classroom context (Christie et al., 1996), and exposure to such technological teaching aids will help students not only in their pre-service programme, but will also enable them to use these aids in their

professional work. This finding of the current study is consistent with a study conducted in a neighbouring country, Saudi Arabia, 20 years ago by Al-Dkheel (1992), who, when evaluating the teacher education programme for teaching adult education, found that the physical environment was inappropriate in that the buildings used were not suitable for adult students, and there was a lack of audio-visual teaching aids.

With regard to the library facilities, the findings revealed that the college library is not sufficiently well resourced to provide appropriate services to all teachers and students. For example, dedicated places for reading are limited due to the large number of students, and books are updated only on a yearly basis. Furthermore, one major criticism of the library is that it is open for less than six hours a day, which is obviously not adequate for students' use. Research has shown that inadequate library facilities, resources and insufficient funding are among the many factors leading to poor student performance, hindering students' learning opportunities and access to resources and facilities (Legotlo et al., 2002; Manjunath & Mallinath, 2007; Oyewusi & Oyeboade, 2009).

One depressing finding of the physical environment was that students sit on the floor in the corridors between classrooms or in empty classrooms while waiting for their next lecture. Providing a large communal room, such as a multi-purpose area, together with a variety of activities such as sports or cultural competitions, would help develop a sense of community among students. It is important to promote group identity, collegial relationships and a sense of belonging among students, since the experience that the students have is as important as the education they receive. Consequently, the authorities need to provide a fruitful environment for the students to achieve maximum benefit from their experience during their study in the college

Overall, an adequate and enriching professional preparation of pre-service students should be facilitated by the provision of a suitable physical environment including proper teaching aids and facilities, adequate library resources and services, and a supportive reading environment; all of these are indispensable for enhancing students' intellectual, cultural, and technical development (Ainley,

1987). It is recommended that decision makers and educational authorities bear in mind that the physical learning environment is of great importance, as it can have an effect on a variety of variables that are known to have strong links to increasing student achievement, motivation, and student-teacher interaction (Loukas et al., 2006; Lackney, 1999).

### **6.3 Findings on the Four Main Aspects of the Programme**

This section discusses the findings regarding the four main aspects of the BLSC on which the current study focuses, namely: goals and objectives, content and materials, teaching and learning, and assessment and feedback; each of which is presented below.

#### **6.3.1 Goals and Objectives**

According to Stake (2010), the evaluation of any educational programme should include an evaluation of its goals and objectives. The findings of the analysis related to the goals and objectives in the current study revealed some critical issues and shortcomings. For example, all of the objectives in the three courses were set by the programme planners without any assessment of teachers' or students' needs, a policy which opposes what many researchers and educationalists have recommended, as seen in the review of the literature in Chapter III. Accordingly, this has had many consequences. One major criticism is that the objectives place too much emphasis on skills that have already been taught to students in their pre-university stage. In the writing course, for instance, most of the objectives focus on the mechanics of writing; this issue deals with grammatical rules and ignores other aspects of writing. The over-emphasis on grammatical rules wastes students' time and results in them becoming bored, whereas the time could be used to teach students new writing skills. This finding is similar to that of Kamil (2011), who conducted a study in the same college in Kuwait to investigate the perceptions of Kuwaiti EFL student teachers towards EFL writing. She points out that "it is clear that the descriptions and the objectives of the two EFL writing courses of the participants emphasise teaching EFL grammatical characteristics" (Kamil, 2011: 232). On the other hand, one explanation for such an emphasis can be found in the responses of the writing course teacher, who clarified that the students are seriously weak in terms of

grammar and sentence structure. Therefore, re-emphasising grammatical rules may actually be helpful in ensuring that the students have the minimum ability to structure correct English sentences.

According to Nunan (1992: 192), one of the roles of an evaluator is to check the “objectives that appear to be misguided or unrealistic (for example, the objective in a writing program of having foreign students attain the same proficiency level as native speakers)”. The findings show that the planners seem to have been unrealistic when they set the objectives of the courses, as they included a large number of objectives to be achieved in a short time. This issue was particularly clear in the conversation course, which was one of the possible reasons for the teacher ignoring those objectives that relate to listening skills. Moreover, certain aspects of some objectives contradict the general aim of the course. For instance, in the writing course, if the general aim is to “help students – not only to communicate in writing – but also to learn” (English Department Handbook, 2005: 20), it is not clear how this aim can be fulfilled when the objectives focus mainly on the mechanics of writing and grammatical rules.

The findings revealed that there is a discrepancy between the writing course lecturer and his students’ views regarding the achievement of the course objectives. The lecturer appears to believe that he has achieved the aims and objectives of this course. However, students revealed a contradictory view, stating that only the mechanics of writing were taught during the writing course. There are several possible reasons for such a discrepancy. One possible reason is that some objectives have not been stated clearly. Ediger (2000) advises that it is imperative to state each objective clearly, so that teachers and students can understand what is to be achieved. Moreover, although the teacher of the reading course seemed to have successfully fulfilled most of the course objectives, it was found that the other two course teachers ignored some objectives, or were not aware how to achieve them. For example, this was the case in the writing course, where the teacher did not cover some course objectives such as ‘writing different forms of letters’, and also in the conversation course, in relation to ignoring the ‘listening skills’ objectives. This raises the following question: If the programme objectives are not taken seriously, then why are they set? This, of course, also

raises the issue of teachers' lack of accountability, as they are not accountable either for their performance in the classroom or for achieving the required objectives. This issue has been noted in international research studies and has led to a call for the greater accountability of higher education teachers regarding what they do in classrooms (Ramsden, 1991; Wilson et al., 1997; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998; Ballantyne et al., 2000).

To conclude, in general, the objectives of the BLSC seem to require a certain degree of revision. In other words, some objectives are unclear to the teachers, who are unsure of how to achieve them, while other objectives are not contributing to the students' knowledge. Consequently, the involvement of teachers and students when setting course objectives is not only advisable but is considered essential because, as pointed out by Scriven (1972), "the predetermined goals might be inappropriate or insufficient for the students [and teachers]" (cited in Gredler, 1996: 53). Moreover, the experience of the participants reflected a different result from what was listed in the objectives of the BLSC courses. It seems that the problem lies in the actual application of those objectives. In other words, some teachers are not carrying out in practice the objectives that, in theory, are required.

### **6.3.2 Content and Materials**

The findings of the current study regarding the content and materials used by teachers of the BLSC revealed some critical issues. The review of the literature in Chapter III suggests that the content of a course can play a major role in the students' learning process. While students in the conversation course reported that the topics they studied were interesting, and viewed them positively, other students in the writing and reading courses reported that the topics they study in classroom are boring and non-challenging. This may indicate that the topics in these two courses neither correspond to the students' preferences nor are they suitable for their proficiency level. The reason for this, I believe, is that students are not asked for their opinions on what type of topics they would like to study, which raises the importance of a needs analysis. When Kikuchi & Apple (2006) conducted a needs analysis study it was discovered that simple tasks, such as taking class notes and asking students for their opinions about the class, allowed teachers to learn more about their students' preferences and whether the teacher's

perceptions were in line with those of his/her students. The study also found that students felt happier and were more actively involved when their opinions and needs were requested and discussed, with the intention of meeting them. Moreover, unlike the writing and reading courses, it was found that in the conversation course the topics which were chosen by the teacher were familiar to the students, such as Kuwaiti traditions and weddings, and such topics were successful in grasping students' attention and made them more involved and active. This may indicate that being creative in selecting topics helps in encouraging students to participate actively and positively in the classroom.

Furthermore, it seems that most of the students who participated in this study wanted topic choice in all four basic language skills. For example, in the writing course, students claimed that they would write much better if they had the opportunity to choose their topics. The majority of the students reported wanting ownership of their learning. They would prefer to write or speak about their previous experiences, express their feelings, and discuss their hobbies. Although the teacher blamed the students themselves for being passive and unresponsive when given the chance to choose their own topics, more than half of the students in the writing course thought that their teachers decided almost everything that happens in the classroom. This indicates that the role of the teacher is more that of a controller, rather than a facilitator. This finding confirms the findings of Kamil's (2011) study, mentioned earlier; she found that pre-service students have no choice regarding the topics to be studied. Hyland considers it advisable that "L2 writing teachers base their writing courses on topics students select themselves" (2003: 15). On the other hand, despite the mismatch between the questionnaire results and the interview findings, it was found that the conversation teacher was open-minded and more accepting of the idea of students' needs. The main benefits of providing the students with the opportunity to choose which topics to write or speak about are to help them to be creative, to generate knowledge, and improve their writing and speaking skills.

### **6.3.2.1 Inappropriate Selection of Textbooks**

As demonstrated in Chapter III, textbooks play a key role in EFL language programmes (McGrath, 2006). When a teacher selects a textbook, he/she needs to

bear in mind that it “generally serve[s] as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom” (Richards, 2001: 251). Therefore, careful selection of the right textbook and materials is a pre-requisite for fulfilling the curriculum goals (ibid.). The findings of the current study revealed major problems with the selection of textbooks in the BLSC. For example in the writing course, in addition to the dependence on an old edition of a textbook, from 1983, there is a clear mismatch between the objectives of the textbook and the objectives of the course. The textbook applies one approach to writing, namely problem-solving, but this is not one of the aims and objectives of the course on which the book is used, indicating that the teacher’s selection of textbook was not based on a systematic analysis. According to Brewster et al. (2002), the aims of the course book should complement the aims of the course. Teachers need to bear in mind that all the elements in their courses should be linked together and not contradict each other. McGrath (2002: 217) argues that “in a carefully designed approach to language teaching we might expect a high degree of consistency between aims, objectives, syllabus, materials and method”. Moreover, although the writing course teacher seemed to be convinced of the appropriateness of his choice and of his ability to adjust the textbook to his students’ ability and interests, the reading course teacher indicates that she is herself unhappy about her selection of the textbook, and views it as unsuitable. This may indicate that the reading course teacher has the courage to admit any shortcomings on her part and is willing to change her selection, while the writing course teacher lacks this attitude.

The centrality of the textbook in the reading course was another issue in the BLSC. Despite the fact that students found the textbook to be boring and below their proficiency level, the teacher seems heavily dependent on the limited topics it provides, and seems to ignore other reading resources, such as web-based reading materials. Using technological teaching aids has been proved to be helpful and can attract students’ attention, and consequently, motivate them to participate in the classroom (Dokur, 2008).

Overall, the content and materials of the BLSC have some critical weaknesses that need to be addressed. One of the most repeated suggestions made by students was



for them to be able to choose the topics, which indicates that teachers do not give their students any freedom of choice. Furthermore, the literature suggests that, when making course-planning decisions, teachers may rely more on their perception than on an informed assessment of their learners' needs (Barkhuizen 1998; Spratt 1999). Hence, it is recommended that when teachers choose the content of the course, they undergo evaluative reviews to ensure "that careful selection is made and that the materials selected closely reflect the aims, methods, and values of the teaching program" (Cunningsworth, 1995: 7).

### **6.3.3 Teaching and Learning**

The element of teaching and learning in the BLSC has revealed a variety of critical findings. With the exception of the conversation course, where students were very satisfied with the teaching style that the lecturer applied in class, one widely criticized issue in the other courses was that teachers take sole charge and leave no opportunity for the students to participate in class. In other words, most of the lessons are teacher-centred, whereby the teacher continuously dominates the talk in the classroom. This is a typical finding in the Kuwaiti educational context. For instance, in a study conducted by Al-Nouh (2008: 172), she concludes that:

*The general impression one gets from EFL classrooms in Kuwait, based on classroom observation as well as the examination of textbook/materials and assessment, is that they are teacher-centred and form-focused.*

The high degree of control that some teachers exercise over their classrooms has also been found in neighbouring countries. For example, Al-Khwaiter (2001) found similar findings in his study of 18 Qatari classrooms. He found that all the teachers dominated the classroom activities indirectly, through repetitive and insistent questioning during classroom activities. His findings also revealed that the typical mode of interaction in ELT classrooms in Qatar is very much teacher-centred.

Despite teachers' claim that they are against teacher-centeredness, their actions often prove otherwise. Al-Mutawa (1997: 39) gives a logical explanation for this: "Teachers in Kuwait tend to be eclectic, employing an approach which is more influenced by their personal experience than by the established methods of FL teaching". This clearly indicates how pre-service students can be influenced by the

teaching approach that their own teachers apply, which they then carry with them in their future teaching careers. Admittedly, it is unrealistic to suggest applying a typical learner-centred method of teaching in Kuwait, at the current time at least, when teacher-centred learning has been, and still is, widely used. Consequently, it is recommended that teachers of BLSC courses focus on achieving a balance in their teaching between a teacher-centred and a learner-centred approach. Teachers need to realise that although the teacher-centred approach helps to make the class more organised and driven by the teacher, it is not likely to make the students fluent speakers. As Brewster et al. rightly suggest, “teachers need to create a balance in their classrooms between providing support and providing a challenge. If all language work is over-guided then it becomes too easy, safe or repetitive” (2004: 40). When balancing a teacher-centred method with a learner-centred one, students will “have a chance to work on tasks in order to engage in organized talk with each other, that is, to use language in a less controlled, more creative way” (ibid.: 41).

### **6.3.3.1 Teaching Grammar as Writing**

Another critical issue was found in the writing course, where the teacher’s understanding of writing, in terms of grammar, punctuation, and spelling, affects his teaching focuses and techniques. Although the mechanics of writing and grammar are fundamental elements of writing and no proper writing work can be completed without grammar, such a writing course should focus on other writing skills. Teaching EFL writing is not limited to teaching linguistic knowledge. Harmer (2001) suggests that students of writing must learn more than just grammar and vocabulary: words, text formation, layout, and punctuation are all vital keys to successful writing. Moreover, he proposes a number of writing approaches, such as the genre-based approach, creative writing (poetry, stories, and plays), cooperative writing (group writing), and computer-based writing (using computer programs to write). In addition, Truscott, (1996, 1999, 2004) takes a strong position against focusing on correcting grammatical errors; he argues that grammatical correction is ineffective in improving students’ writing, and therefore should be eliminated. The findings of the current study also confirmed Truscott’s (1996, 1999, 2004) argument that teaching grammar does not help the students’ writing fluency; not only did students lack the confidence to write fluently in

English, but also the skill to write correct sentences or paragraphs. In the current study, the writing teacher's focus on grammar has led him to ignore other useful writing forms, such as the genre approach in EFL writing.

The main problem appears to lie in the misconception some teachers have of these language improvement courses; some teachers confuse language improvement (how to use and practise the language) with the linguistic component (theoretical knowledge about the structure of the language) (Luchini, 2004; Bartles, 1999). This explains the students' argument that whereas their writing teacher teaches them how a sentence is structured in English, they need to use and practise writing in English, which is the main objective of this course. This is supported by Cullen's argument that this aspect often consists of a study of the English grammatical and phonological systems, concentrating on students' understanding of how the language works, rather than how it is actually used in real conversations and communications (1994). It must be stressed, however, that this argument does not mean that other language programme components, such as the linguistics component, are not important and should be removed from pre-service EFL programmes. Indeed, as Halliday (1982: 13) rightly suggests:

*a linguistics course for teachers is fundamental. But I don't think it should be a sort of watered down academic linguistic course. It should be something new, designed and worked out by linguists and teachers together. (cited in Van Lier 1995: 108)*

In fact a linguistics component, as well as other components, can be useful for language development when it aims to improve the ability to use the language in real communications, that is, improve the understanding of how the language really works, which may contribute directly to the students' proficiency in using the language itself (Wright & Bolitho, 1993).

### **6.3.3.2 Genre Writing Approach**

The findings of the study revealed that the writing teacher is unclear about genres as an approach to teaching writing. Although it is one of the objectives of the writing course, he does not ask his students to write different types of writing, which indicates that he lacks the knowledge of how to teach such an important approach. Genre writing is "socially recognised ways of using language" (Hyland, 2007: 149). The genre-based approach is manifested through activities that study,

analyse, summarise, and combine different genres (Silva & Matsuda, 2002). Such an approach offers valuable resources for EFL writing teachers to assist their students to write efficient and meaningful English texts.

Another issue worth mentioning is that students complained that the writing teacher emphasises grammatical rules out of context. In the classroom, students reported that their teacher works with them on grammatical exercises without linking them to their context. Obviously, this has led to students memorising grammatical rules without understanding how to use them properly in their writing. The focus on addressing grammatical mistakes is a missed opportunity to develop students' comprehension of how the different genres are constructed. Consequently, they become more concerned about making grammatical mistakes than about the actual process of writing, such as brainstorming to generate ideas and setting purposes for the text they want to write. In this regard, Weigle (2002) highlights that students need to be taught how to work effectively with the language because writing is not just a product of the individual but is a social and cultural act. Thus, I believe that grammatical rules are best taught slowly, linked with the teaching and exploration of the conventions of the writing genre.

Hyland states that "in genre teaching, grammar is integrated into exploration of texts and contexts rather than taught as a discrete component" (2007: 153). For Hyland, students' writing in the classroom has to be linked to the outside real world; he clarifies that the writing genre approach "is largely a response to changing views of discourse and of learning to write which incorporate better understandings of how language is structured to achieve social purposes in particular contexts of use" (Hyland, 2007: 148). Teachers need to understand that writing is socially constructed and, therefore, teaching students grammatical rules in isolation will not help them communicate through their writing. Apparently, teachers' teaching practice is hugely affected by their previous negative educational experiences. In other words, it is a cyclical process; most teachers apply what they acquired and inherited as EFL learners, and their students, in turn, are influenced by their teachers' negative experiences in teaching and learning. Finally, the students, when they qualify as teachers, may in turn pass it on to their future students.

### 6.3.3.3 Lack of Practice and Limited Use of Technological Teaching Aids

Some students reported that they lacked the opportunity to practice language skills in their classrooms. This situation arises clearly from the data of the writing course when students reported that the teacher wastes time and keeps discussing subjects that are irrelevant to the course. As revealed by the data concerning the conversation course, practising the skills through a variety of activities and tasks is a crucial element in improving students' language proficiency. This view is supported by Harmer (1991: 39), who points out the importance of practising tasks and activities, as:

*It certainly seems that the use of tasks and the provision of a lot of comprehensible input will help our students in a lot of ways. The former will allow students to activate their knowledge and the latter will help to provide them with a rich language store.*

The findings also revealed that the majority of the students reported that neither they nor their teachers use any technological teaching aids; what they use most is the whiteboard. English teachers in this department seem to be neglecting the use of technological teaching aids despite the importance of technology. The literature review chapter of this study revealed how useful technological teaching aids can be for teachers. For example, Devlin & Samarawickrema (2010) suggest that effective teaching in higher education is linked to technological changes, and lecturers in pre-service programmes are expected to use technology effectively and be aware of such changes. Despite the usefulness of these aids, however, before any steps are taken to introduce them into classrooms teachers need to be given sufficient training and experience in on how to use such technological devices (Milton, 2002). This step seems to be neglected in Kuwait. Many universities and institutions are making technological teaching aids available, however many teachers encounter difficulties in using them. This was confirmed by Alharbi (2012), who conducted a study which sought to discover how useful ICT (Information Communication Technology) is within classes in Kuwait. Her study found that teachers lacked sufficient training in ICT usage as a teaching aid. The authorities seem to take it for granted that merely making such devices available will improve students' learning experience. However, technological devices do not in themselves automatically produce a positive impact; their influence on learning outcomes depends heavily on how they are used. Many Kuwaiti teachers use these

devices to teach the same things in the same ways as before; they do not change their way of teaching and yet expect learning outcomes to improve (Ehrmann, 1995). In support of this view Christie et al. (1996) assert that technological material in itself does not add much to a teacher's productivity unless the teacher's skills and knowledge can be combined with the features of the technological device in a manner that allows the technology to support the teacher.

#### **6.3.4 Assessment and Feedback**

Despite having little say regarding decisions on assessment methods and criteria, the students in this study voiced major concerns about the assessment practices in the English Department. The majority were hugely critical about the assessment and feedback they received from the BLSC, and considered it one of the worst aspects they had encountered in this college. The findings show that the general assessment philosophy used by the lecturers in this English department is traditional, focusing on a final exam that tests rote-learned materials. Based on my experience of and familiarity with the Kuwaiti context, this is a typical picture of assessment practices. This finding was also confirmed by Kamil (2011) in her study of Kuwaiti EFL pre-service students' perceptions of EFL writing, when she found that all EFL writing teachers assess their students' writing through grading and exams. Mirroring the findings of the current study, Kamil (2011) reported that students are unhappy about the methods of assessing their writing and would like to see more alternatives. As Hyland emphasizes:

*Writing assessment is not simply a matter of setting exams and giving grades. Scores and evaluative feedback contribute enormously to the learning of individual students and to the development of an effective and responsive writing course ... understanding of assessment procedures is necessary to ensure that teaching is having the desired impact and that students are being judged fairly (2003: 212).*

As discussed previously in the literature review chapter, there is a difference between testing and assessment. While the different forms of traditional testing methods are still of value in EFL education contexts, other assessment techniques can play a significant role. Students should not always be tested only at the end of any learning event to measure their achievement. Instead, they should be assessed on a regular basis using various methods of assessment. For example, students should be given more autonomy in their particular learning situations; methods

such as self-assessment and portfolios are able to assess their learning gains in autonomous learning environments (Benson, 2006; Morrison, 2005). Peer-assessment can also facilitate students' development of numerous learning and life skills, including learner responsibility, metacognitive strategies, and assessment skills (Mok, 2010). Teachers need to update their knowledge of how to assess their students using a variety of methods.

The issue of fairness also seems to be a controversial aspect of the BLSC. The results of the current study show that the majority of students criticised their teachers for given them an unjust final grade. This finding is consistent with previous ELT studies in Kuwait regarding assessment. A study by Al-Bazzaz (1994) of EFL students in the College of Business in Kuwait revealed that the assessment system used by the English Department was not reliable. The same result was reported by Al-Edwani (2005) who conducted a study to investigate the factors contributing to language difficulties in learning EFL among Kuwaiti pre-service students; she also found that students were dissatisfied with the assessment system teachers apply. The current finding suggests that in spite of the findings and recommendations of former studies, nothing has improved. Consequently, I believe that the authorities and decision makers hold the responsibility to make changes to the assessment system and procedures to improve the situation. For example, multiple measures of assessment, as an approach, may guarantee that tests and final grades are fair and that students are not unfairly disadvantaged.

With regard to the findings related to the feedback, various types were applied by the teachers of BLSC including corrective, constructive, and discovery-based feedback. However, some students were unhappy with the delayed feedback they received. As noted in Chapter III, Scheeler & Lee (2002: 232) acknowledge that the timing of feedback is all-important:

*precise, immediate, and frequent feedback increases efficacy and efficiency of learning in school aged students. If feedback is delayed, it allows learners to practice errors, especially in the acquisition phase of learning and when learners are allowed to repeat errors, they learn to perform skills incorrectly.*

It is not easy to learn a language if one does not know the accuracy of one's responses. In fact, "current thinking appears to favour the idea that in languages,

correction and encouragement are crucial to success” (Steinberg, in Milton, 2002: 12). Consequently, teachers need to bear in mind the value of feedback, and to use the type that best suits their students’ linguistic needs and proficiency level. Hyland (2003) suggests that a teacher’s feedback should be given not only for the purpose of evaluation, but because it contributes enormously to the learning of individual students. Nation adds that “learners should receive helpful feedback which will allow them to improve the quality of their language use” (1996: 34).

#### **6.4 Learning and Teaching Issues**

This section discusses the findings related to issues that affect students’ learning and teachers’ teaching processes. These issues are divided into linguistic and psychological challenges, as well as teachers’ professional development.

##### **6.4.1 Students’ Linguistic Challenges**

The findings of the study revealed that the low proficiency level of the students played a major role in their performance on the BLSC. This result is consistent with the findings of Al-Mutawa (1997), who conducted a study to evaluate EFL primary school teachers’ competences in Kuwait; one major finding of the study was that language deficiency represents a bigger problem for EFL Kuwaiti teachers than classroom implementation. Other studies have also confirmed that the linguistic standard of the EFL teachers in Kuwait and their quality of teaching is weak (see Al-Mutawa, 1997; 1992; 1994; Al-Bazzaz, 1994; Affifi, 1991). In the current study, different challenges were reported by students in all the four basic language skills.

If writing constitutes a critical problem for native speakers of English (Myhill, 2005; Alber-Morgan et al., 2007), it is also recognized that it is the most difficult skill for Arab students (Al Kamil & Troudi, 2008). The results of the current study revealed that the majority (83%) of the students found writing the most difficult of the four language skills. This result contradicts results of earlier studies on Kuwaiti samples, which found that speaking was the problem most frequently reported by students (Kharma, 1977; Al-Mutawa, 1986; Osman, 1996). For example, Al-Mutawa (1986) asked a sample of Kuwait University students who were studying to be English teachers to rate their English proficiency in the basic four English language skills; she reported that the majority (89%) stated that they had difficulty



with speaking. The results of the current study are interesting because they indicate that nowadays speaking skills are no longer the most difficult skills for students to master, due to changes made by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education in the approach to ELT, which changed from the audio-lingual approach to focus on communicative language teaching (CLT). The emphasis on oral fluency and communication may have led to the students being weak in other language skills, such as writing, a possibility which is supported by Aldhafiri (1998) who contends that it was inevitable that reading and writing skills would be neglected.

Students in the current study acknowledged that they have technical difficulties in writing in English, such as grammar and vocabulary. Previous studies have revealed that most Arabic speaking students have the same problems (see Elkhatib, 1984; Kamel, 1989; Al-Sharah, 1997; Abdel-Latif, 2009; Ahmed, 2011, Kamil, 2011). These studies identified mother tongue interference as the main cause of problems (Al-Edwani, 2005). For instance, Dudley-Evans & Swales (1980) discuss the problem of writing in English for Arabic-speaking students from a linguistic point of view. They conclude that these problems are due purely to syntactic differences between Arabic and English.

Findings of the current study show that reading skills are the least problematic for the students. However, students reported having difficulty in critical reading and thinking, as well as lacking exposure to different reading topics. These findings are similar to those identified by Al-Edwani (2005), who found that Kuwaiti students are capable of analysing texts in order to answer comprehension questions, but are unable to conduct a deep critical analysis, or express an opinion about an article. She attributed this problem to an academic culture that does not encourage students to engage in a critical analysis of their reading. Another reason for this problem is that Kuwaiti students do not read extensively in their mother tongue, Arabic. Reading, even in Arabic, is not part of the daily lives of Kuwaiti students. Research studies have shown that there is a relationship between reading habits and attitudes in L1 and L2. For instance, Yamashita argues that, "L1 reading attitude is one of the factors forming L2 attitude" (2004: 13). A study conducted by Day & Bamford (1998) has provided evidence confirming the transfer of reading attitudes from L1 to L2. Hence, parents and society have the responsibility for

encouraging students in the habit of reading by showing how important it is for improving other language skills such as writing. Pedagogically, it was advocated that L2 reading would help improve L2 writing at the beginner's and advanced levels (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Bell, 1998). In addition, it is recommended that teachers in the English Department encourage their students to change the aim of their reading from answering comprehension questions to thinking about what a text means to them, and analysing it critically. Moreover, students are not exposed to any materials in English other than their English course textbook. Despite the fact that there is no lack of English books in Kuwait, students rarely choose to read other forms and genres. This suggests that students have a 'spoon-fed' mentality where they are able to read only with the help of their teacher.

With regard to speaking skills, it seems that a lack of vocabulary is one of the main reasons for the Kuwaiti students' difficulty in speaking English. This difficulty is not, however, confined to Kuwait. For example two different studies, one in China and one in Hong Kong, conducted by Liu & Jackson (2008) and Gan (2012) respectively, revealed that a lack of vocabulary was regarded by Chinese learners of English as the main obstacle to spoken communication. Another reason for the students' speaking difficulty was a lack of practice, because of their hesitation and shyness. This finding is also consistent with those of broader EFL studies (As-Sayabi, 1995; Flowerdew & Miller, 1992), conducted in EFL contexts in which speaking and practising orally in the classroom were students' most challenging areas of learning.

Lastly, the majority of the students indicated that they have difficulty with listening comprehension at various levels. They ranked listening as the third greatest difficulty they face in learning English. This finding is very similar to that of a study conducted in Kuwait by Al-Edwani (2005). It is obvious from the current findings that teachers are almost completely ignoring listening comprehension practice; this cannot be justified, given that listening difficulties may play an even more critical role than other language skills in overall language learning (Richards & Renandya, 2002). It is indispensable that students have opportunities to practise the behaviour of effective listeners. According to Richards & Renandya (2002: 205), listening "is the basic mechanism through which the rules of language are

internalized". Therefore, improving students' listening abilities cannot be left to chance.

To conclude, the question that arises now is: How aware is the college of all these challenges students face? Unfortunately, it seems that the English Department and the college administration are not taking these challenges seriously, as no action is being taken to investigate the details of these challenges. In addition, there are currently no practical steps being taken to overcome them. I believe that these challenges for students are worth looking into, and it is essential to find solutions for them, given that these students are the future teachers of Kuwait, and we look forward to seeing their achievements in developing the education in the country. In support of this view, Cullen accurately argues that

*A poor or rusty command of English undermines the teacher's confidence in the classroom, affects his or her self-esteem and professional status, and makes it difficult for him or her to follow even fairly straightforward teaching procedures ... Low levels in English among the teaching force are thus not just a concern among the teachers themselves but should also be a concern of those involved in planning both pre-service and in-service teacher-training programmes. (1994: 165)*

One of the solutions that the system can implement is to increase the time allotted for language improvement courses, something many of the teachers were asking for. A number of educators have stated that the time allocated for any subject plays an important role in improving students' language proficiency. Doyle, for instance, notes that "Students' achievement is influenced by the way time is allocated" (1987: 93). The finding of the current study is similar to the findings of Coskun & Daloglu's (2010) evaluative study, in the conclusion of which they state:

*They [students] all point out that the number of courses offered to improve student teachers' linguistic competence, especially in the first year, does not suffice and student teachers' linguistic competence can be improved through increasing the number of relevant courses in the first year (2010: 36).*

#### **6.4.2 Students' Psychological Challenges**

The findings of the current study revealed that Kuwaiti students face some psychological challenges which affect their learning process during their pre-

service education, including students being demotivated about learning, lack of self-confidence, and test anxiety.

In relation to motivation, the data suggest that students in the English Department are sometimes demotivated. This might be attributed to a number of reasons, including contextual influence, and social and cultural features of the language learning and teaching environment. This is consistent with a social constructivist perspective on learning (Williams & Burden, 1997; Dörnyei, 2001). Studies have identified other factors relevant to the learning situation, such as the teaching methods applied by teachers, school facilities, course textbooks used in classrooms, teaching materials and aids, and the teacher's behaviour and personality; all of these contribute to students' motivation or lack of it (Dörnyei 1998; Inbar et al., 2001). For example, in the current study, the unpleasant physical environment has played a role in demotivating students who started college with an enthusiastic attitude, as previously discussed in this chapter. Therefore, a nurturing learning environment is needed within the Kuwaiti context to boost students' self-confidence and lessen their psychological challenges.

Furthermore, teachers in this study seem to play a major role in demotivating the students by their lack of respect for students, described above. This is consistent with Dörnyei's (1998) study of the factors that account for student motivation, which revealed that one of the main demotivating factors is teachers: their personalities, commitment, competence, and teaching methods. Albertson (2006) accurately argues that when students are self-confident and competent in their reading and writing skills, they are able to adapt to new teaching/learning methods quickly.

Another psychological factor is lack of self-confidence. This was clearly stated in the students' responses as well as being noted by their teachers, who reported that their students lack of self-confidence was shown by their fear of talking or expressing their own opinions. The data indicated that there is a relationship between language competence and students' self-confidence. Indeed, the relevant literature on the role and importance of the language component in both pre-service teacher education and pre-university level shows that an increase in the

level of students' language proficiency may lead to a direct boost in their confidence (see Luchini, 2004; Berry, 1990; Cullen, 1994; Murdoch, 1994; Hundleby & Breet, 1988; among others). The lack of confidence could be ascribed to other socio-cultural issues. For instance, parents' culture of control and power might be affecting their children's self-confidence as they are indirectly marginalizing their views and voice in the family. Furthermore, Kuwaiti students have a culture of dependence on someone else, mostly someone older and more expert than them, to tell them what and how to act in a variety of life situations; this can be seen at home where they are totally dependent on their parents. All these issues might contribute to the lack of self-confidence among Kuwaiti students.

Language anxiety can also develop as a result of repeated negative experiences with the second language. If these experiences continue to happen, students can expect to feel anxious and perform poorly. Poor performance and negative emotional reactions reinforce expectations of anxiety and failure. Obviously, there is a strong link between anxiety and motivation, as one can affect the other. In this regard, Dörnyei & Csizér (1998) argue that "any practising teacher is aware of the fact that student anxiety created by a tense classroom climate is one of the most potent factors that undermine L2 motivation" (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998: 215).

A review of the related literature shows that the level of the language course, language skills, motivation, proficiency, teachers, tests, and culture are some of the factors that cause anxiety (Bailey, 1983; Ellis & Rathbone, 1987; Young, 1990; Price, 1991; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991; Oxford, 1992). In the current study, students referred particularly to test anxiety. Test anxiety "could be defined as a fear of failing in tests and an unpleasant experience held either consciously or unconsciously by learners in many situations" (Rahimi, 2008: 20). This form of anxiety concerns apprehension about academic evaluation, which is created by a fear of failure (Horwitz & Young, 1991). This issue was mentioned by students; they cited becoming anxious when they heard their teacher threatening them, saying, "*You will automatically get zero*". It seems that most of the factors that contribute to students' psychological challenges can be somehow avoided. Teachers play a crucial role in the students' journey in the English Department.

Thus, teachers need to deal with their students academically, pedagogically, and psychologically in an appropriate way in order to create a safe and healthy learning environment.

#### **6.4.3 Teachers' Professional Development**

Despite the fact that all the teachers of the BLSC hold PhDs in English Linguistics or Literature from either US or UK universities, none of them has specialised in teaching any of the four language skills, which may explain the traditional teaching methods they use. BLSC classes are assigned to any teacher who has a low workload, a policy which clearly indicates how the decision makers in this college underestimate the value of the BLSC. This finding is consistent with Ahmed's (2011) results from his study investigating the writing difficulties encountered by Egyptian student EFL teachers. His findings showed that in addition to being inexperienced, teachers held qualifications in English Literature and Linguistics but had no teaching expertise in essay writing. In the case of the current study, as well as being inexperienced in teaching the four language skills, teachers in the English Department lack any professional development.

According to Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995), staff development provides teachers with opportunities to reflect extensively on their practice and to acquire new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners. Professional development can occur through dedicated special programmes or by encouraging greater teacher collegiality; the latter is essential for two reasons (Jarzabkowski, 2001): it enhances working relationships that may yield quality teaching and learning, and it encourages, through social interaction, a better emotional health environment among staff, which decreases emotional tension and fatigue.

Teachers of BLSC in the English Department are assumed to be developing themselves, both professionally and academically. Yet only individual efforts are taking place, and not all teachers undergo development regularly in their areas of expertise. Teachers rarely conduct research studies that are related to their classroom teaching practices because the system does not oblige them to do so. They aim for research productivity only in order to obtain promotion, one of the requirements for which is to produce five research papers in five years. In view of

the weaknesses in teaching mentioned earlier, the establishment of professional development programmes or workshops should be a priority, as should measures to encourage teachers to improve their research productivity. According to Cochran-Smith (2005), there are various advantages for teachers when they work as researchers. For example, teachers can relate research to practice in a meaningful way that will positively affect their way of thinking and their teaching practices (Ross et al., 1999; Fox, 2000; Knight et al., 2000; Simm & Ingram, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2009). Moreover, teachers can research new problems among their students and find ways to overcome them (Hong et al., 2007). In this way, they would be professional in researching their disciplines and would be pioneers in supporting the development of more critical and creative students.

## **6.5 Socio-Cultural Issues**

Some researchers advocate that “culture and language are inseparable” (Hinkel, 1999: 6). In support of this view, it is believed that the development of EFL pre-service students is influenced by a number of socio-cultural issues, including: pre-university learning experience, a marginalizing local culture, and students’ lack of reading culture.

### **6.5.1 Students’ Pre-University Learning Experience**

In general, most of the linguistic difficulties that lead to students’ lack of EFL fluency are inherited from their negative EFL language-learning experiences. This argument reflects the findings of many studies conducted in Kuwait (see Osman, 1996; Al-Mutawa, 1997; Al Edwani, 2005). A variety of issues related to pre-university education, including memorisation and lack of criticality and creativity, along with an exam-oriented education system, will be highlighted in the next sections.

#### **6.5.1.1 Memorisation and Lack of Criticality and Creativity**

Rote learning and memorisation are features that characterise Kuwaiti pre-university education. Students are encouraged to memorise what they study rather than pursuing creative and critical thinking processes. In Kuwait, it is culturally known that students who do well at memorising what they study are regarded as being cleverer than those who do not. A variety of previous studies conducted in

Kuwait mirror the findings of the current study, that some Kuwait schools and some teachers focus on repetition and memorization (Safi, 1986; El-Dib, 2004; Al-Edwani, 2005; Aldhafeeri et al., 2006; Kamil, 2011).

The current study revealed that students are sometimes encouraged by some teachers to ~~not just encouraged, but obliged to~~ memorise what the teachers ask them to remember. In order for students to pass the course with high grades, some teachers ask them to learn by heart everything that they have been taught, rather than using high level intellectual abilities to improve their language skills or help them be creative EFL learners. While learning by heart is a useful strategy that helps students to remember English, it leaves no space for the development of creativity, critical thinking skills, or imagination. Klippel (1993) argues that learning a foreign language is not just memorising words; it is a whole educational experience.

Decision-makers and administrators at the College of Education which is the subject of this study need to realise that depending heavily on the memorisation approach will not produce creative teachers who are able to deal with different situations in the classroom. The programmes in the college need to allow more space for creativity. McKernan (2008: 3) contends, "A curriculum, to be truly educational, will lead the student to unanticipated, rather than predicted, outcomes". He adds, "The primary aim of a curriculum is to enable students to think and to make critically informed choices." (ibid.: 4). I believe that both pre-university education and pre-service education are responsible for narrowing the minds of students by encouraging them to 'copy and paste' the same information from the same source, such as textbooks. I wholeheartedly agree with Connelly and Clandinin, who argue that the

*curriculum is often taken to mean a course of study. When we set our imaginations free from the narrow notion that a course of study is a series of textbooks or specific outline of topics to be covered and objectives to be attained, broader more meaningful notions emerge. (1988, cited in McKernan, 2008: 12)*

McKernan also points out that "the curriculum must, if successful, ignite the human imagination" (2008: 3). Hence, it is recommended that teachers in pre-service



teacher education try to change their students' narrow-minded outlook by giving them the chance to think critically and to create their own ideas.

#### **6.5.1.2 Exam-Oriented Education System**

Findings derived from the data revealed another defect in Kuwaiti pre-university education. Personal experience of the Kuwaiti context indicates that many students have the mindset of attending school only to pass exams; they see passing exams as the ultimate objective. This could be due to the fact that teachers, parents, and society believe that, in order to gain privileges at school, home, and in society, as well as to be respected more than his/her peers, a student needs to focus on getting high grades in school without paying any attention to whether or not they have really learned anything.

This belief leads to the link between memorising and getting high grades in exams. Students' memorisation is reinforced by most exams in the different educational stages in most courses, which demand that students answer questions that mostly require them to recall information memorised during the course. These exams not only cause a culture of fear and frustration for students, but also reinforce memorization and learning by rote, and suppress critical thinking and creative expression (Cochran, 1986; Dhillon et al., 2008). The responsibility lies with the education administrators and teachers to change this mentality by, for example, applying a continuous assessment method for the whole semester to eliminate the value of one single exam.

To conclude, the negative issues described above, experienced by students at pre-university level, raise the following question: Does pre-university education in Kuwait prepare students adequately to enter English departments at university level? It would be interesting to investigate this issue which is, however, beyond the scope of the current research.

#### **6.5.2 Marginalizing Local Culture**

One of the findings of the current study is that Kuwaiti local culture is marginalized in BLSC classrooms. This finding is consistent with Al-Mutawa's (1997) study; she evaluated 101 EFL teachers in Kuwaiti schools: 35 males and 66 females. She

concluded that Arab teachers “have limited exposure to the use of English in appropriate cultural and social contexts” (ibid.: 50). Consequently, it is important that pre-service students in Kuwait receive regular input with respect to contextual factors of their local culture in which eventually they are going to apply their professional knowledge (Rahimi, 2008).

With the exception of the conversation course, topics studied on the BLSC courses tend to focus on the traditions of western culture with little mention of the local Kuwaiti, or even the wider Arab culture. This focus on western culture may sometimes contradict the traditions of Arab students in a conservative Muslim country like Kuwait. For example, issues like alcohol or sex need to be avoided because they are perceived to be sensitive or offensive, and contradict the local cultural values (Gray, 2002; Hurst, 2008). Although it is important to learn about the target language culture, local culture should not be completely ignored. Rahimi argues that, “teaching materials should place a strong emphasis on contextual factors of the local culture” (2008: 12). Hence, it is recommended that both administrators and teachers in the English Department bear in mind the need to include topics related to the Kuwaiti context. Many researchers have stressed that within the processes of curriculum planning and design and of materials development certain factors, such as the political climate, traditional beliefs, and cultural values of the local culture, should be taken into account (McLaughlin, 1996; Kanu, 2005; Zajda, 2004).

### **6.5.3 Students’ Lack of Reading Culture**

The findings of the current study have highlighted that pre-service teachers have voiced their concern about their students’ lack of reading, especially reading authentic English texts, resulting in considerable challenges with regard to their writing skills. Studies regarding the correlation between reading and the development of other language skills advise that the more a learner reads, the better their performance in both reading and writing will be (Krashen, 1993; Stotsky, 1993). This finding was also echoed in previous studies of students in Kuwait (see, for example, Kamil, 2011).

As has already been noted, one possible reason for the students' linguistic challenge caused by lack of reading is that Kuwaiti society lacks a culture of reading in general, even in the mother tongue. Accordingly, students bring this problem, the lack of reading, from the wider context to the college context. Consequently, when the teacher tries to teach anything related to reading, students try to avoid it. Students tend to blame their teachers for not teaching them how to read while, in fact, the students themselves are not actually making any effort to remedy this problem. It is worth mentioning here that, for a variety of reasons, many Arab students are not good readers, though that issue is beyond the scope of this research. However, the effect of the lack of reading was obvious in the students' performance in a variety of language skills.

## **SECTION TWO: Broader Issues Emerging from the Evaluation**

### **6.6 Responsibilities and Role Perceptions**

Of relevance to contexts outside Kuwait is the issue of the responsibilities and role perceptions of major stakeholders, including decision makers, teachers, and students in ELT teacher education. As shown in the data analysis chapter, the current study revealed that there is a clear mismatch between teachers' and students' perceptions of their responsibilities and roles in the classroom. In fact, this mismatch is not specific to the Kuwaiti context. Many scholars around the world have focused on tracing the relationship between student and teacher perceptions and found that the perceptions of teachers and their learners do not always match (see Brown, 2009; Levine, 2003; Block, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 1991). Before going into detail and considering how such a mismatch can affect the learning process, it is useful to define what is meant by perception and discuss its importance.

In the literature, learner perceptions have been commonly linked with two aspects: perceptions of themselves, and perceptions of the learning situation (Wesely, 2012). Perceptions of themselves have often been defined as how students understand and make sense of themselves and their own learning (Liskin-Gasparro, 1998; Williams & Burden, 1999). On the other hand, learner perceptions of the learning situation have included how students experience and understand aspects of the classroom, like the teacher's role and behaviour (Brown, 2009).

The issue of perceptions plays a major role in teacher education programmes. Williams and Burden claimed that “learners’ perceptions and interpretations ... have been found to have the greatest influence on achievement” (1997: 98). Furthermore, Kumaravadivelu clarifies that “the more we know about the learner’s personal approaches and personal concepts, the better and more productive our intervention will be” (1991: 107). Therefore if a teacher is aware of where his/her students are coming from, being aware, for example, of what is their preferred method of language learning, what they feel about their language learning experiences, what is their understanding of their responsibility and role in the classroom, and what they expect from their teacher, then he/she will be able to facilitate desired learning outcomes in the classroom. In addition, Ahmad and Aziz comment on the importance of perception in a teaching and learning situation “as it reinforces teachers’ decision-making on how to handle classroom situations ... [while] students’ perception contribute as much to the teaching-learning process by providing suggestions and directions for teachers’ future improvement” (2009: 19).

Perceptions of responsibilities and roles differ, based on many factors. For example, if students’ perceive their teacher to be an elder who should be respected, and whose statements should not be questioned, then it is to be expected that these students will be less active, and consequently there will be a teacher-centred classroom. (Kasanda et al., 2005). On the other hand, learner-centredness emphasises putting students at the centre of the learning process and involves their participation in making choices about all issues related to their learning. Hence, the realisation of this aim requires students’ perception of themselves as active participants in the learning process, and their teachers as facilitators of their learning (Marshall, 1998; Weimer, 2002). Research shows that English language learners do not seem to be well supported by classroom teachers because many such teachers lack understanding of how their roles and teaching approaches can best support their students’ needs (Yoon, 2008).

The issue of responsibility and role perception is complex in the sense that teachers and students need to realise that their perception of their roles can

change, depending on various choices. For example, in the current study one of the teachers claims to be applying a learner-centred method of teaching in his classroom while, in fact, students reported that he was doing most of the talking inside the classroom. This clearly indicates that the teacher's perception of his role contradicts the type of method he is claiming to apply. It is therefore crucial that teachers apply transparency concerning the methods they use in classroom, and communicate this to their students. Such communication will help students to realise what their responsibilities and roles are, and what they may expect from their teacher, and consequently contradictions and mismatches of role perception may be avoided.

In the current study, it was clear that every party was blaming the other. That is, the students and the society are blaming teachers for the weakness of future teachers, while the teachers blame on the low English proficiency levels of the students, as well as blaming the administration for not providing teacher development courses. In fact, it can be argued that if there are mismatches between students' and teachers' expectations and conceptions of responsibilities and roles, then problems within the classroom can be foreseen. These problems could include the demotivation, feelings of dissatisfaction, and passiveness that have been identified in the current study. Indeed Horwitz (1990), Kern (1995), and Schulz (1996) have found that mismatches between FL students' and teachers' expectations can negatively affect the students' satisfaction with the language class and can potentially lead to the discontinuation of study.

Accurate perception of the match – or mismatch – between students' and teachers' perceptions of their responsibilities and roles can improve the understanding of each group's perspective on effective teaching in ELT teacher education classrooms. Not only can students and teachers benefit from this increased awareness, so too can basic language directors, administrators, and teacher educators (Brown, 2009). When a teaching supervisor or director is confronted with dissatisfaction among teachers or students, it may be helpful to look at each group's expectations and perceptions of what goes on in the classroom (ibid).

Furthermore, perception of roles can also differ based on experience. If students are used to being taught in a certain way (for example, being receivers and talking less in the classroom), then it can be expected that they will keep this perception even when they are taught in a learner-centred classroom. Shihiba (2011), for example, confirms that from the literature can be identified many challenges that students face in a learner-centred classroom, one of them being students' lack of understanding of their new role. This may show the importance of bridging the gap between teachers' and students' perceptions of their roles, which can be done by encouraging students to express their own perceptions clearly, both to themselves and their teachers.

Understanding the perceptions of roles and responsibilities can have its effect on other aspects that are important in any educational context. Brown accurately suggests that

“If students feel their teachers understand their perspectives and, likewise, if teachers feel that students understand their expectations, an increase in motivation and satisfaction may result for both groups. Teachers who take the time to determine their students' perspectives on L2 teaching, either through questionnaires or in-class discussions, will validate their students' opinions while producing students who feel that their perceptions are an essential consideration in preparing classroom activities” (2009: 55).

It is suggested, therefore, that teachers constantly monitor their learners' perceptions of classroom life by helping their students to speak freely about their conceptions of their roles, responsibilities, and their learning in the classroom. Once teachers are aware of their students' perceptions they can, if needed, design and implement alternative teaching methods and activities in their classes (see Breen, 1989; Fanselow, 1992; Nunan, 1988). The teachers' role is to allow learners to consider the importance of why they are participating in certain activities, how these activities help them learn English, and what use they can make of them both for academic purposes and outside of the classroom (Barkhuizen, 1998). Moreover, the findings of the current study reconfirm those of other researchers (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994) that teaching students goes beyond language issues, and teachers' roles should extend to include their cultural and social needs as well as the psychological element; these are important issues that need to be taken

seriously by teachers. On the other hand, students need to express their perceptions of all aspects of the learning and teaching situation, including their role and what they expect from their teacher. In addition, it is important that students do not over-depend on their teachers in the learning process, as their role is to participate with their teachers in improving their own learning and increase their own knowledge of the subject.

### **6.7 Teacher Perceptions of Students**

An issue that is related to the previous discussion is teachers' perception of their students and how they think about them. Of serious concern to all students in this study were the teachers' negative attitudes towards them. The findings show that students believed the teachers were always criticising their students and making fun of their mistakes, which can be seen as a lack of respect. The majority of the students reported that they were seeking respect from, and better relationships with, their teachers. They considered their teachers to be authoritarian and thought they looked down on them. They were afraid to ask for help for fear the teacher would make fun of them and comment negatively on their work. In fact, some teachers' responses in the interview clearly showed that they have no faith in their students; they think that students are already spoiled by pre-university education and thus the teachers cannot do anything to improve the students' language proficiency. For example, some of the teachers' responses were: *"Unless the teacher instructs them, they won't respond"*, *"I always lead the class because these students are always being passive"*, *"They just sit and do nothing and receive nothing"*, and *"The problem mainly lies in the quality of early education ... We have to pay the price for that"*.

The issue of how teachers perceive their teacher is very important in teacher education. Ahmad and Aziz contend that "our students must be valued and respected for the experience and opinions they bring to the language classrooms" (2009: 25). Negative attitudes towards students have many consequences, both for the teachers' actions in the classroom and for the students themselves. For instance, if teachers view their students as bad, weak, and unmotivated learners, they will not do their best to teach them, on the assumption that whatever they do will be useless with this type of student; such a view may force them to use

teaching methods based on pressure or obligation, rather than seeking ways of helping their students to overcome their weaknesses (Williams & Burden, 1997). This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted in Kuwait (see Al-Rubaie, 2010; Kamil, 2011).

From the students' point of view, listening repeatedly to such negative comments from their teachers will be demotivating and sap their self-confidence. Several studies have shown that the teacher's personality and behaviour are influential in accounting for students' motivation, or lack of it (Dörnyei, 1998; Inbar et al., 2001). Some teachers seem to believe that the use of negative comments will motivate their students to work harder. However, the reality reflected by the data is the opposite, as most of the students' responses revealed that they had lost their confidence in their ability to be proficient in English; as Schriver (1995) argues, students who keep blaming themselves become incompetent.

The role of the teacher in general is to respect their students' feelings, ambitions, and personality. When the writing course teacher mockingly said to his student, "*Why do you complete your studies? Staying home and raising your children is the best thing to do*", he needed to bear in mind that such words could demotivate not only this particular student but all the other students who were listening to his harsh words in the classroom. Teachers need to understand that their negative behaviour and comments do not help their students to work better but, on the contrary, make them feel frustrated and unconfident and lead to their suffering high levels of anxiety. According to Pajares (1992), teachers' own heritage as learners, including educational, social and cultural experiences, dominate the way they act and communicate with their students. Therefore teachers need to be very careful when dealing with their students, as the latter will be influenced by their beliefs, values, educational experiences, and social and cultural background. Teachers should understand the serious consequences of any lack of respect for their students and the effect this will have on their learning. Authoritarian treatment and a loss of respect widen the gap between teachers and their students. Students in teacher education programmes need to be respected by their teachers and have a good relationship with them.



In spite of the difficulties involved in changing one's perceptions, ELT teacher education must develop the curriculum in a way that induces elements of trust and self-confidence between students and teachers which indicate their importance, and the value of their contribution to society. Turney and Wright (1990) made a series of recommendations to address their own concerns about the image of lecturers in teacher education programmes. One major concern they found was that lecturers did not seem to realise the importance that their work had for the quality of teaching. Hence, teachers and students in teacher education programmes have to realise that their programme does not only serve their immediate needs, it is serving the future of a nation as development and success in many different fields depends heavily on their contributions. Of course, teachers and students must first believe in their standing in society in order to alter society's belief in them. Such realisation can have its impact on students' and teachers' perceptions of each other. In addition, Morris (2001) calls for the recognition of teachers as a national asset of priceless value, and for teaching to be acknowledged as a top profession. Such a perception of teachers, I believe, will create positive reflections on the learning and teaching situation. Obviously, a change of attitude and perception toward teachers and students needs to occur at all levels in a society before any progress can be achieved. Yet giving more emphasis to positive improvements in students' and teachers' perceptions of each other can be a start.

## **6.8 Unexpected Student Voices**

### **“Please, deliver our voices to all teachers”**

Although Kuwaiti students have become used to a top-down approach in their pre-university education, where their voices and preferences are mostly ignored, interestingly, the findings of this study revealed that students in the pre-service teacher education programme are no longer happy with their voices being ignored. In fact, during the data collection for this research, the majority of students expressed great appreciation of being given the chance to have their say and, hopefully, be heard by their teachers and the administrators in the English Department. This ignorance of students' opinions and voice has negative effects on the learning experience in that department. According to Davies (2006), when teachers ignore the student voice, “The resulting divergence of teacher and learner beliefs and expectations can spell trouble for language courses as the teacher-

learner gap widens and becomes increasingly difficult to close as the course progresses” (Davies, 2006: 3). Students reported that some teachers alone tend to take decisions in the classroom, ignoring their views, suggestions, and criticism. Bojovic (2006: 490) points out that “teachers need to have considerable flexibility, be willing to listen to learners, take interest in the disciplines or professional activities the students are involved in, and to take some risks in their teaching”.

The importance of the student voice is well documented in the literature. Korthagen et al. (2006: 1029) point out that, “Student teachers need opportunities to understand what is involved in planning the teaching, doing the teaching, and reflecting on the teaching”; this can be achieved when pre-service students are given the opportunity to be actively engaged in performing a variety of tasks, participating in a wide range of activities, and having a say and influencing the whole process of learning and teaching (Rahimi, 2008); indeed, it has been argued that

*the selection, ordering, presentation, and assessment of the material in a language course should be based on a careful consideration of the learners and their needs, the teaching conditions, and the time and resources available. (Nation, 1996: 34)*

Teachers in ELT pre-service programmes need to create a democratic education by applying a participatory approach in their teaching and relationships with students. According to Gutmann (1999: 89) “Participatory approaches aim to increase students’ commitment to learning by building upon and extending their existing interests in intellectually productive ways”. By applying such an approach, teachers will have the potential to understand their students’ needs, and eventually achieve more progress in improving their learning experience. Gutmann further argues that “teachers committed to a more participatory approach appear to be more successful both in getting their students to work and in increasing their commitment to learning” (ibid.: 89).

Every day, teachers in ELT teacher education programmes make a variety of decisions in their classrooms about language teaching/learning processes. These include decisions about which tasks and activities their learners might possibly enjoy, which are most effective, and which would provide learners with skills that they could use for academic and communicative purposes. The learners, however,

are rarely involved in this decision-making process (Barkhuizen, 1998). Ignorance of students' voices will make it very challenging for the teacher to make a proper selection of different elements in the classroom.

Another related issue is students' ability to be critical of educational elements and processes in their context. The current study revealed that students are highly capable of being critical when they have been given the chance to be heard. Barkhuizen (1998: 104) claims that "it is not always easy for teachers to hear what learners think about their teaching", however, he asserts that "often learners are very critical". In this regard Allwright says that "very many teachers seem to find it difficult to accept their learners as people with a positive contribution to make to the instructional process" (1984: 167). On the other hand, Block (1994) suggests that learners do have an awareness of what goes on in class and that teachers should therefore make an attempt to bring into line their task orientation with that of learners (cited in Barkhuizen, 1998). Supporting this view, Breen (1989) claims that "all learners already critically evaluate the tasks they undertake" (1989: 205). As revealed in the current study, learners have the ability to interpret tasks and other classroom events from their own perspectives and criticise them when given the chance to do so. Students' apparent silence does not always mean that they do not discuss and criticise what happens inside classroom among each other. Therefore, I argue that all different stakeholders in ELT teacher education, including decision makers, teachers, and parents, should not underestimate students' critical thinking and should work continuously to communicate with them, as this will help to understand the challenges they have. Teachers need to realise that students have different experiences, perceptions, and backgrounds, therefore it is normal to receive criticism and to accept it, since one will never be able to satisfy all this variety of aspects.

Students' voices and criticality are issues that need to be recognised and accepted among teachers and decision makers in ELT teacher education. Stones accurately suggests that "The human brain is not a jug to be filled nor a letter box to receive a delivery. Teaching depends on interaction between human beings not one-way traffic" (1992: 4). Teachers should not be reluctant to listen to their students' voices and to accept their criticism. In fact, they are advised to encourage their

students to express their views and opinions on all aspects of what happens inside the classroom.

### **6.9 Power in the Teacher Education Classroom**

The findings of the current study have revealed that students clearly showed their dissatisfaction with the over-use of power by their teachers. The literature shows that there is a continuous contest between teachers and students as to who has more power inside the classroom. This tension in relation between teachers and students in ELT teacher education classrooms is an issue that need to be investigated in depth.

The issue of power need to be carefully considered in ELT teacher education programmes (Holliday, 1994; Weimer, 2002; Garret & Shortall, 2002). The current study demonstrates that college administrators seem to give the teacher an ample power, which has led to abusive practices by some teachers who erroneously consider such actions to be their right. Misapplication of power by some teachers obliged us to re-think how can we control and manage these practices. From the researcher's personal experience of the Kuwaiti university context, the general assumption of students is that lecturers at university level have absolute power to pass or fail students. Teachers at this level are reluctant to accept criticism, as they know that nobody is going to evaluate them. I believe that the system is in need of a serious evaluation mechanism for teacher performance as well as behaviour towards students; without such a mechanism, it cannot be guaranteed that every teacher is treating his/her students fairly and in a respectful manner, and that appropriate teaching and learning is taking place.

Garret and Shortall (2002) pointed out the common belief among teachers that their professional judgement should be unquestioned and that students have no contribution to make in the instructional process. They emphasised that this misconception has a negative impact on teachers' willingness to implement certain methodologies, such as learner-centredness. In fact, the common belief in the literature about teachers' resistance to implementing learner-centredness is their interest in maintaining their power and fear of losing control over classrooms (O'Neill, 1991; Nunan, 1999; Garret & Shortall, 2002; Sowden, 2007). Brandes and

Ginnis believed that “any move to transfer ownership from teacher to students is likely to be met with fierce resistance because it may be perceived as a threat to the profession as a whole” (1986: 27). Weimer (2002) believed that the idea of giving up control or involving students in making decisions often worries many teachers due to their belief about the superiority of their role in teacher-centred classrooms over their role inside student-centred classrooms. Likewise, Holliday argued that the concept of learner-centredness is “inherently problematic” for EFL teachers because they would perceive it in terms of affecting their authority (1994: 7).

One possible reason behind teachers’ reluctance to empower their students is the fear that if the teacher does not any power or authority over students, they will spoil the whole learning and teaching process by their disruptive behaviour. However, this may not be the case in such a mature level of education as ELT teacher education programmes. In fact, lecturers in ELT teacher education classrooms are advised to enhance the character development of their students by offering more options and by sharing some of their power in the classroom, since power sharing can encourage students to be engaged in their own learning processes (Humphreys, 2009).

It can be seen, therefore, that there is a need to balance power relations between teachers and students in ELT teacher education. Although teachers’ resistance is somehow understandable, Manke accurately emphasis that

teachers and students, like any group of participants in a particular context, are jointly responsible for constructing power in the classroom. The teacher is not solely responsible, but instead bears a share of the responsibility for classroom events and outcomes; students make their own contributions, influencing both their own actions and those of the teacher (1997: 2).

Moreover, it is important to understand that students in teacher education level are no longer school students, who may be considered not to be fully aware of what is best for their education. Students at the level of teacher education are mature enough to produce positive contributions to the learning experience when they are given the power to do so.

In short, a point that many educators and decision makers in other contexts with similar ELT teacher education programmes might want to consider is how complex and interlinked all the above mentioned issues are, and the great impact they may have on the teaching and learning process. Hence, it is recommended that findings of this kind be taken into consideration when designing future ELT teacher education programmes. Decision-makers, teachers, and students need to understand the argument that “What teachers learn in their previous educational experiences is transformed greatly and subconsciously into their beliefs about how L2 are learnt and how they should or should not be taught” (Kubanyiova, 2006: 6). This brings to attention the importance of teacher education practices and how they may be transferred from generation to generation.

### **6.10 Summary**

This chapter discussed the key findings drawn from the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data of the current research. Derived from social constructivism as a theoretical framework, a variety of environmental, socio-cultural and psychological dimensions were found to affect students and teachers' learning/teaching experiences in the English Department in this college. Other emerging issues such as responsibilities and roles perceptions, teacher perceptions of students, unexpected student voices, and power in teacher education were identified to play a critical role in the learning and teaching process. The following chapter will draw final general conclusion of the findings.

## **Chapter VII**

### **Conclusions, Implications and Contributions**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the findings of the current research and offers some final remarks and conclusions. It also presents the implications arising from this study and sets out its theoretical and pedagogical contributions to knowledge. Finally, the chapter ends with suggestions for possible further research and a reflection upon the researcher's PhD journey.

#### **7.2 Summary of the Research Findings**

This research was conducted at the Department of English in a pioneering College of Education in Kuwait. The primary focus was to evaluate the basic language skills component (BLSC), which consists of writing, reading, and conversation courses, with the purpose of improving it. This was done by eliciting students' and teachers' views on those courses and presenting their suggestions and recommendations for improvement. The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data from the current study revealed some key findings.

The findings related to the study site and learning environment indicated that there were some major shortcomings in the physical environment of the college site. This includes very old buildings, a limited number of classrooms, shortages in learning and teaching resources and facilities, insufficient library resources, and a lack of a communal room for students to use in their free time. All these conditions clearly show that the physical environment of the college site is inadequate, and this negatively affects students' learning experience in the English Department (Jago & Tanner, 1999; Brown, 2001).

With regard to the goals and objectives of the BLSC, the findings revealed some critical issues and the need for a certain degree of revision. Some objectives were not stated clearly, which made it difficult for teachers to understand. Others placed too much emphasis on skills that had already been taught to students at school level, so they were not enhancing the students' knowledge. Furthermore, some

courses' objectives were not achieved by the teachers, which may indicate that the objectives were either superficial or not adequate for such a limited course.

As far as the content and materials are concerned, the findings revealed students' dissatisfaction with some aspects, which would benefit from being addressed. Students reported that the topics they study in class were either boring or not challenging. Students also reported their need to select the topics of their own interest. Moreover, some of the textbooks used by the teachers have major flaws: some were old and others were clearly mismatched with the objectives of the course.

Teaching and learning practices in the BLSC revealed a variety of critical findings. One widely criticized issue was the teacher-centred approach applied by the staff. In other words, teachers were taking sole charge and leaving no opportunity for their students to have their say in class. In addition, teaching on the writing course was heavily focused on the mechanics of writing, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling, instead of on other useful writing forms, such as the genre-writing approach. Moreover, students were complaining about the lack of practice and the absence of technological learning aids in classroom.

The findings also revealed some major concerns about feedback and assessment practices in the English Department. Students were extremely critical of the traditional assessment philosophy used by their teachers, most of which depends on a final exam that tests rote-learned materials. This philosophy, students believe, has led to an increase in their anxiety and to their receiving an unjust final grade at the end of the semester, which does not reflect their actual skills. Furthermore, some students were unhappy with the delayed feedback they received.

The data from the current study also revealed some issues that have contributed in varying degrees to the previously mentioned shortcomings and weaknesses. This includes instructional issues related to the teachers of the BLSC. Irrelevant qualifications and a lack of professional development were found to be among the possible reasons for the inadequate teaching methods applied by the teachers. In addition, the findings showed that some teachers had negative attitudes towards



students, viewing them as poor, passive, or demotivated. Moreover, learning issues were found to be affecting students' experience in the English Department; students were found to be suffering from linguistic and psychological challenges, as well as their voice opinions and preferences being ignored.

### **7.3 Implications of the Study**

The key findings of this study have implications for policy as well as practice with respect to the English teacher education programme inside and outside Kuwait. The various problems with the BLSC, and the programme in general, need due consideration. The recommendations made by this study suggests stem from the actual users of the programme, that is teachers and students. Other recommendations are made based on the interpretations of the findings of the current study as well as on the literature. The implications of this study are divided into two sections; implications arising from the current evaluation, and implications arising from the discussion of broader issues related to ELT teacher education.

#### **7.3.1 Implications arising from the current evaluation**

This section presents implications that were raised directly by the current evaluation study and organised according to its relation to different groups of stakeholders as follows:

##### ***Implications for planners and decision makers:***

- It was found that the physical environment of the college site is in real need of improvement. It is recommended that the planners and decision makers at the Ministry of Education strive to cooperate with the Ministry of Finance to provide financial support to teacher education programmes. This may include building a new campus or renewing the current one, as well as providing the necessary resources and facilities for students and teachers of the college.
- Teachers on pre-service teacher education programmes need to be given more authority in planning and designing their courses. According to Troudi (2007: 6), "Teachers are often excluded from educational policy and play an insignificant role in decision-making". McKernan concurs, pointing out that

“many key decision-makers call for the acknowledgment that the teacher, as a professional, at whatever level of the education system, has a role to play in curriculum decisions, inquiry and improvement” (2008: 6). As Carroll (2007: 6) maintains, “If managers of top-down curriculum changes recognize teachers’ crucial role in implementation, they must take responsibility for supporting teachers through implementation by listening to and acting on their concerns”.

- It is recommended that the test taken by students prior to admission be reviewed and revised. It was found that the test is inadequate and is blamed for representing students’ proficiency inaccurately, thus allowing weak students onto the programme. It is recommended that the admission assessment procedure should include conducting oral interviews, setting a listening comprehension test and other types of assessment which will ensure that only capable and enthusiastic students are enrolled on this major.
- Conducting a needs analysis should be the first stage when designing or re-designing language improvement courses (Brown, 1995; Graves, 2001). It is important to set the goals and objectives, select content and materials, and decide on specific teaching methods and assessment procedures based on the needs and expectations of the students and the teachers in the English Department.
- Teachers in the Kuwaiti context do not approve of observing one another in the process of teaching, despite the proven value of peer observation (Sabuncuoğlu, 2006). The English Department administrators have the responsibility of enhancing team spirit among teachers and improving their collaboration.
- The system at this college of education is in need of an effective evaluation mechanism for teachers, without which it is impossible to guarantee that each teacher is doing his/her best and that appropriate teaching and learning processes are taking place.
- It is strongly recommended that a mechanism for teacher professional development be implemented. To equip student teachers with the necessary skills and competences, and to have a high-quality initial teacher education, it is necessary to provide a coherent process of continuous professional

development, keeping lecturers up to date with the skills required in a knowledge based society (Menon et al., 2007).

- There is a serious need for more language improvement courses. Students, as well as teachers, complained about the insufficient number of language improvement courses. It is understood that the administrators of the English Department claim that they cannot increase the number of BLSC courses due to the limited time allotted to the English programme. However, this issue could be solved by taking off some of the courses on English literature or history, which are seen by many students as irrelevant and less beneficial to them. This has been suggested by many educationalists (see Brickel & Paul, 1981; Morain, 1990).
- It is recommended that a grammar course be established which could then be included in the BLSC. Teachers of the writing course were hugely critical of students' weakness in grammar which, in turn, obliges them to focus on improving this aspect in their writing course. Therefore, a dedicated grammar course would be beneficial for both students and teachers.
- This study indicates that Kuwaiti students are not academically advised about what to expect in an English department. Consequently, many of them were surprised that the programme is very challenging and they wished they had not joined it. Therefore, it is recommended that students' transition to university level be supported by pre-service teacher education colleges. This can be achieved in the form of workshops or public lectures before the registration and admission period for new secondary school graduates, or by assigning academic advisers for newly applicants.
- Another implication for the institutions and policy-makers in Kuwait is the suggested adapted evaluation model which was applied in the current study. Although such a model is commonly found in many institutions around the world, it was not conducted in previous evaluation studies in Kuwait. Therefore, Kuwaiti policy makers are recommended to apply such a model in their evaluation studies as it has proven to be useful in providing valuable data about different stakeholders of the programme and their views about many aspects of it. Such data can be beneficial when designing a new programme or improving the existing ones.

### ***Implications for teachers and teacher educators:***

- Classroom practices in the BLSC showed that there was a big gap between theory and practice. For instance, the teacher of the writing course focused on teaching the form of the language and the writing product, while the skills and processes of writing were given little attention. Moreover, in the conversation course, objectives related to listening skills were almost completely ignored in classroom practice. Therefore, a mechanism should be instigated to establish whether or not teachers are achieving the set objectives.
- The study demonstrated that difficulties arise from teachers' methods of instruction. Teachers tend to depend heavily on a teacher-centred approach and neglect other teaching methods. Teachers need to realise that students have different learning styles and should be encouraged to differentiate their teaching methods to meet students' needs. Furthermore, teachers should make use of technological teaching aids, as these can help attract students' attention and increase their understanding of the subject.
- More practice and classroom activities are recommended. BLSC classes were found to be lacking the element of practice, which is crucial in helping students improve their English fluency. In addition, students repeatedly asked that they should be given the opportunity to make presentations in the classroom in order to increase their self-confidence when they teach in the future.
- It is recommended that various different assessment tools be considered, so the results reflect the actual ability or knowledge of the students. Many students complained about the unfair final grades they received. Using different assessment tools will help eliminate such disadvantage.

### ***Implications for students:***

- The current study revealed that many Kuwaiti student-teachers tend to blame other stakeholders in the programme for their low English proficiency level. However, it seems that some students are in fact not doing

their own job in improving their English proficiency. For example, the study revealed that Kuwaiti students rarely read in English in their free times. It is recommended, therefore, that students search for ways which are suitable for their own preference in order to be more proficient in English.

- One of the implications of the current study is that students need to re-think the mentality of being complete dependant on their school and teacher in their education. I believe that students should take more responsibility for improving their own learning and act more independently in creating proper chances for learning.

### ***Implications relevant to different ELT stakeholders***

- The performance of students in the English Department is usually assessed as the end product of a process, rather than being treated as “the reflection of an on-going process which, if carefully controlled, would assure a more reliable final product” (Giménez, 1996: 233). Because of this, Kuwaiti students tend to believe that the only purpose of attending school is to pass exams; they see exam success as the ultimate objective, and pay no attention to whether or not they have really learned anything. The administrators and teachers have the responsibility to change this mentality by, for example, applying a continuous assessment method for the whole semester to eliminate the value of one single exam.
- There is a need for a closer examination of the course content. In this study it was evident that students found the content of some courses boring and irrelevant to their needs, as well as ignoring the local culture. The majority of students were hoping to be given the opportunity to choose topics for language exercises that were relevant to their own interests. Hence, it is recommended that the course content be revised and be re-built in accordance with students’ needs and preferences.
- The teaching materials, such as textbooks, used by the teachers on the BLSC were much criticised. It is recommended that these materials be evaluated at some point in order to check not only whether they meet students’ preferences but also whether or not they are successful in meeting the aims

and objectives of the course (Khafaji, 2004, cited in Abu-Rizaizah, 2010: 164).

### **7.3.2 Wider implications for the field of ELT teacher education:**

This section includes implications resulting from the discussion of the emerging broader issues related to the ELT teacher education as follows:

- Listening to the student voice is a very important issue that need to be considered in any teacher education programme. In fact, the current study revealed that ignoring the student voice could have many consequences for the students' experience during their teacher education. Therefore, it is recommended that both decision makers and lecturers in teacher education programmes to give students the chance to criticise and have their say regarding different elements of their programme such as: methods, content, and assessment procedures. This implication is relatively most important in countries where the educational system employs a top-down policy, such as Kuwait, and other similar contexts.
- It is important for any ELT teacher education programmes that perception of the roles and responsibilities of both teachers and students to be highlighted. A low level of shared perceptions may contribute to inefficient communication between the teacher and student. Further clarification and raising the awareness of the specific roles and responsibilities may reduce the mismatch that occurs at present between major stakeholders regarding their roles and responsibilities in ELT teacher education programmes around the world. It is recommended, therefore, that teachers and students communicate their perceptions of what their responsibilities and roles are from the beginning of the educational year, creating clear guidelines of the rights and duties of each stakeholder and ensuring that every party is informed and aware of his/her own roles and responsibilities.
- The psychological element is a critical issue that need to be taken seriously in any ELT teacher education. Issues such as motivation, lack of self-confidence, and language anxiety play a major role in the students' journey in a teacher education programme. Hence, teachers and administrators need not only deal with their students academically and pedagogically, but also

psychologically in an appropriate way, in order to create a safe and healthy learning environment.

- Another issue that has been raised by the current study that has implications for ELT teacher education is the issue of power in the teacher education classroom. Although it is understandable that teachers would normally have a higher degree of power than students, it is recognised that some teachers misuse this power and authority. Some teachers are dictatorial, controlling, and play the role of error detector which may seriously affect students' self-confidence and motivation. Teachers need to understand that their practices inside classrooms have the ability to influence the way that these future teachers themselves act when they are involved in actual teaching. Therefore, it is recommended that the issue of power in teacher education be addressed and monitored. In addition, increasing the power of students in teacher education classrooms will have positive consequences on the learning and teaching processes. This implication is very important in contexts, e.g. Kuwait, where the system is giving absolute power to the teachers to control the whole educational process in classroom.
- It is crucial to consider the attitudes of the main stakeholders of any teacher education programme, such as planners, teachers, and students, have towards learning. In order to establish a solid teacher education programme positive attitudes toward education are needed from all stakeholders, especially teachers and students, so that such positive attitudes can overcome any weaknesses and negative circumstances that may occur during the process of designing and running a programme. Therefore, it is recommended that positive attitudes be encouraged by showing stakeholders a higher level of appreciation of the importance of their function. This can be done by raising the awareness of how significant it is to have positive attitude and conception towards learning by conducting workshops and seminars which discuss this issue.
- It was evident from the current study that the quality of educational experience that students and teachers have in their teacher education programme play a major role in whether the programme is successful or not. The learning environment, facilities, activities, type of teaching

methods, teaching materials, student-teacher relationship, and other factors need to be considered in any teacher education programme. The current study demonstrates that it is important to consider the quality of educational experience that students and teachers receive in their teacher education. Improving the quality of such an experience will most certainly have positive consequences on the educational process and the ELT teacher education field in general.

#### **7.4 Contributions of the Study**

The current study contributes to the knowledge of language programme evaluation from different perspectives. First, it fills a gap in the literature regarding language programme evaluation in the Kuwaiti educational context. This is, to my knowledge, the first study conducted in Kuwait to evaluate the language improvement component in a pre-service EFL programme. Hence, not only is it useful in helping the Kuwaiti educational authorities to understand how such a programme is performing, but it will also inform them of Kuwaiti pre-service students' needs and preferences, which can be significant when building a new programme or making amendments to the current ones. It is hoped that the current study will trigger some interest among ELT researchers in the Kuwaiti context and those in the wider ELT community, encouraging them to pursue social constructivism forms of inquiry in their evaluation studies, which are deemed to reflect valuable information about students.

Second, at the level of educational research, the current study makes a theoretical contribution with regard to the social constructivism mode of enquiry in the Kuwaiti context. As discussed in previous chapters, most evaluation studies that have been conducted in Kuwait take a positivistic scientific stance as a theoretical framework to underpin their studies (e.g., Safi, 1986; Safi, 1995; Al-Mutawa & Al-Dabbous, 1997; Al-Mutawa, 1997). This is due to the assumption that the Kuwaiti educational system is conservative when it comes to evaluation. Many researchers avoid applying the social constructivism theory in evaluation where students, for example, are asked to evaluate their teachers' performance. Most of the evaluation is conducted in the form of a questionnaire, which is distributed to students at the end of the semester with fixed, close-ended items. Consequently, students' voices



are barely heard in the Kuwaiti educational system. Education in Kuwait is therefore out of step with education in much of the rest of the world, where attention is increasingly paid to students' and teachers' voices. As Troudi points out:

*the field of TESOL has also seen in the last two decades an increasing number of research studies based on a social constructivist view of language learning that allows readers to hear teachers' [and students] voices and views on the nature of teaching and how they learn to teach in different social contexts. (2005: 17)*

Hence, this study could serve as an example for further evaluative studies, since it gives an example of how social constructivism can be used in a conservative society such as Kuwait.

Third, from a practical point of view, adopting a sequential mixed methods research design combining both quantitative and qualitative research in the form of close-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, diaries, and document analysis has not been extensively used in Kuwait and lays the ground for further research. Similarly, the study suggests a practical alternative to using interviews in any given conservative society. For example, one obstacle faced during the process of collecting the data for this study was that female students were very reluctant to speak face-to-face in an interview with a male interviewer, due to well-recognised cultural and traditional habits in Kuwait. Yamani (2000: 152) points out that due to social concepts, "most women would not agree to meet and converse with men who were not family members". In addition, Kuwaiti students are not used to speaking freely and expressing their opinions about their teachers to someone they do not know personally. This situation is typical and can be expected to occur in any study of this type in Kuwaiti society or in similar contexts. Therefore, this study suggests using a telephone interview to overcome such an obstacle. Telephone interviews have been found to be effective in such situations, as students were more relaxed and enthusiastic about speaking.

Finally, this study contributes to knowledge by proposing a model for evaluation that can be applied, and modified, depending on the specifications of any given context. The proposed model is based on the process followed in the current study. It is worth mentioning that one of the major concerns that was borne in mind while

planning this evaluation model was to make it as simple and straightforward as possible. The reason for this is to make it easier and more encouraging for educationalists and evaluators in Kuwaiti and other similar contexts to conduct more evaluation studies. The following figure (7.1) summarises the model:

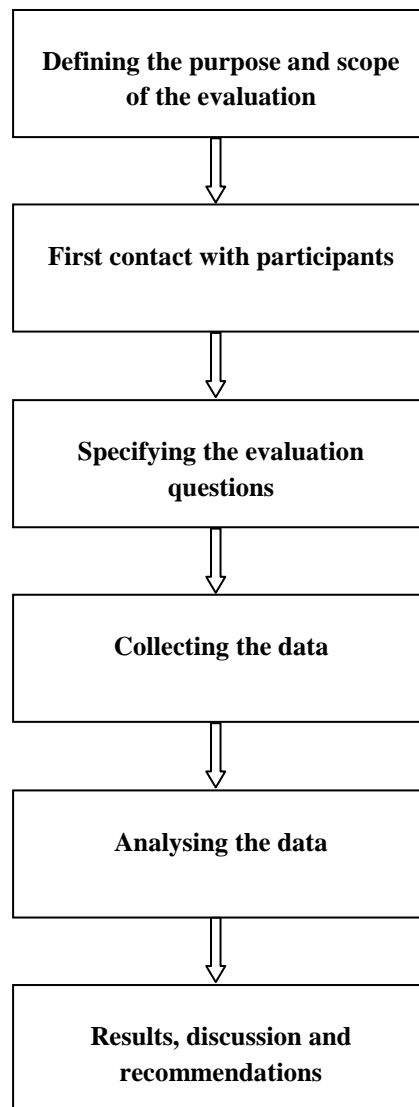


Figure 7.1 Proposed Model for Evaluation

The proposed model consists of six steps, as follows:

1. ***Defining the purpose and scope of the evaluation***: the first step is to define the main purpose(s) of the evaluation and limit its scope. This includes determining whether to evaluate the whole programme or only one component, and specifying the main participants in the study.

2. ***First contact with participants***: this step is a very important one, where the evaluator goes to the study site and familiarises him/herself with the context and holds informal interviews and conversations with participants to investigate and elicit the main problematic areas, as reported by them. This step may also include collecting documents related to the programme.
3. ***Specifying the evaluation questions***: after consulting with the participants in the programme and specifying the problematic areas in the programme, the evaluator can now formulate the main evaluation questions, based on the participants' views, to investigate the problematic aspects of a component or of the programme in general.
4. ***Collecting the data***: preferably, the data can be collected using variety of quantitative and qualitative methods.
5. ***Analysing the data***: in this step, the collected data are analysed using different methods of analysis, as outlined above.
6. ***Results, discussion and recommendations***: this is the last step, where an evaluator presents and discusses the results and findings of the study data; at the end, recommendations and suggestions are presented for the programme's planners and decision makers.

In general, no major problems were experienced when conducting the evaluation model employed in this study. The variety of data sources was the major strength of the model, because this provided detailed data, which made it possible to put forward recommendations for the English teacher education programme. It is worth mentioning that this model is only suggested as a guideline for evaluators in the Kuwaiti context, and does not imply a fixed procedure. Evaluators need to be flexible when conducting similar studies. What is special about this model, though, is that an evaluator establishes his/her evaluation questions and focuses based on the views and concerns of the participants when he/she first meets with them. By doing so, I believe, we may guarantee that the evaluation is going to address the problematic aspects of the programme that give participants cause for concern. I felt that by building on the work of others, extending the body of knowledge through adaptation and applying common sense drawn out of experience, I could forge the next step in the knowledge base and articulate a method of inquiry that reflected my experience, my context, and what I believed in. Consequently, I took

the position that it was for others to reflect on the transferability of my research findings, suggestions, or proposed model to their own circumstances.

### **7.5 Suggestions for Further Research**

The findings of the current study suggest a number of areas that need further investigation. For example, this research focused on only four aspects of the basic language skills component of the English Department programme. It is suggested that other aspects of the programme, such as the admissions policy or needs analysis, as well as other components, such as literature or linguistics, be investigated, as they can also yield valuable information about the effectiveness of the whole programme.

The findings of the current study have produced contradictory results about which of the four basic language skills is the most difficult for students in Kuwait. Hence, it is worth studying this further to investigate which are the most problematic language skills for students, and the reasons why students experience particular difficulty in these areas.

As it had not been possible to conduct an observation during the current study, it is suggested that future attempts be made to observe teaching and learning practices from inside the classroom. Such a study can yield valuable information about what happens inside the classroom of pre-service teacher education in Kuwait.

The participants of the current study are students and teachers in the English Department; however gathering information from other interested parties, such as decision makers, administrators and parents, may provide a wide range of viewpoints which could be very valuable in identifying important differences of opinion, as well as commonly held perceptions regarding the programme.

It was found that students in the English Department face a variety of linguistic and psychological challenges. Hence, a detailed investigation of the nature of these challenges would be useful, since such challenges are believed to play a major role in hindering improvement in students' proficiency.

The nature of the relationship between the teachers and their students in the English Department seems to be significant. The results of this research proved that teachers play the role of controller and authority figure more than facilitator of their students' learning. This has a negative impact on student learning and motivation. Therefore, this area deserves more research in order to understand this relationship and how it affects each of the parties.

Additional research is also needed to investigate the possible reasons that prevent teachers using technological teaching aids in their classroom. Teachers in this study were found to be neglecting such aids, which indicates that there are some possible challenges that stop teachers from using them.

Another area of further investigation and understanding relates to the gap between pre-university education and college and university-level studies, and comparing and evaluating the curricula to see if pre-university education is adequately preparing Kuwaiti students for programmes such as the English teacher education programme. This study found that students felt that there was a gap between the EFL curriculum at high school and the curriculum in this college.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the students who participated in this study were very enthusiastic, and eager to share their EFL experiences with the researcher. They said that this was the first time that anyone had sought their views and opinions. Their experiences provided valuable information regarding the shortcomings from which the English teacher education programme suffers, as well highlighting the challenges they face and identifying what hinders their improvement. Therefore, it is recommended that future evaluation research consider highlighting and investigating students' voices and experiences.

## **7.6 Final Remarks and Conclusions**

The overall goal of this study was to evaluate and explore the BLSC programme in the Department of English and use the results as a basis for suggesting practical amendments and improvements. This was done by eliciting students' and teachers' views about the three language courses and presenting their suggestions and recommendations for improvement.

Examining the findings of the current study, it is apparent that the issues brought to light are interlinked, and affect one another. For example, when content and materials are not designed and selected carefully, this can lead to students becoming demotivated regarding their learning (McGrath, 2006). Moreover, when teachers undertake no professional development, their teaching methods will be affected negatively (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Hence, in such a case solving one issue and leaving another unsolved is neither logical nor effective. Administrators in the English Department tend to look at each problem separately; that is, on a micro level. I argue here that if the decision makers and educational authorities wish to improve the quality of this programme, one cannot ignore other factors. The picture is too complex to think about improving single elements, such as changing the textbook; this may not necessarily lead to improving students' learning experience and their English language proficiency. It is crucial to look at the whole programme at a macro level, identify the links between the weaknesses, and consider solutions for all of them. These conclusions clearly indicate the importance of programme evaluation studies in pre-service teacher education, which can give a clear picture of the whole situation, identify any weaknesses, and suggest possible solutions.

Unfortunately, language programme evaluation in Kuwaiti is still not given appropriate recognition by the authorities. As discussed earlier in the literature review chapter, many studies acknowledge the increasing recognition of the value of language programme evaluation. For instance, Yang accurately states that "language program evaluation is experiencing renewed recognition along with increasing demands in language education programs and in applied linguistics more broadly" (2009: 77). It would be invaluable, therefore, for more evaluation studies to be conducted in the English teacher education programmes in Kuwait. Such evaluation studies can be designed to ensure that, during the course of one academic year, students grasp a satisfactory level of English, which will enable them to follow their courses effectively and be successful future English teachers. Since this is the purpose of teacher education programmes, it is essential that these programmes be evaluated regularly so that their strengths and weaknesses can be identified and hence their goals can be achieved.

I recognise, however, that in the real world and in the history of language programme evaluation practices, making evaluation beneficial and making use of it have been major challenges. This was asserted by Kiely & Rea-Dickins, who pointed out that “[e]valuation use has been a persistent problem” (2005: 39). What makes evaluation even more problematic in Kuwait, and probably throughout the Arab world, is the common misconception some authorities have of the term ‘evaluation’, which is linked with criticism or failure. In other words, evaluation is perceived as an attempt to seek out shortcomings, to criticise and publicly condemn. This problem plagues evaluation and makes authorities very reluctant to accept any evaluation of their programmes (Ogle, 2002). However, as Kinnaman writes, “program evaluation is not about criticism and failure; it’s about improving the quality of educational programs” (1992: 5). If the negative connotations can be avoided, I believe that evaluation might find its way into the agendas of authorities and decision-makers, leading to evaluation plans and results that benefit the teachers, the students, and the program being evaluated.

It can be argued that this study demonstrates that one of the reasons for the lack of effectiveness of the language improvement component in English teacher education programmes in Kuwait is that it is not being taken seriously. The language improvement component is generally treated as a ‘warm-up’ for students before they progress onto the more advanced and specialised courses included in the literature, linguistics, and practical components. Some students seemed to consider the language improvement courses as unimportant; their ultimate goal is just to gain a pass grade, not to benefit from these courses. Consequently, this component needs to be given more weight in the English teacher education programmes in Kuwait. I believe that it should be a central component in the programme and that all other components should be planned around it. As Cullen (1994) suggests, this can be done by deriving the ‘content’ of the literature/linguistics components from the language course which the students undergo; consequently, the language course would be the central element and provide the input for the other components of the programme. As Richards (1998: 13) indicates, “Communication skills and proficiency in the teaching language would seem to be prerequisites to the development of basic teaching skills”. Therefore, in order to produce trusted and well-qualified English language

teachers, we need to provide the pre-service English language student teachers with the necessary training to improve their language proficiency.

Teachers in the English Department in this college play a major role in the students' experience. Unfortunately, most of them display a negative attitude towards their students. Indeed, most of the teachers in the English Department send their own children to private British or American schools, where they are taught by non-Kuwaiti teachers from the UK or the USA, thus clearly indicating how little confidence these lecturers have in the teachers they have themselves trained. It is recommended that teachers in the English Department change their attitude towards their students, demonstrate that they have faith in them, and do their best to provide them with an adequate learning experience.

Overall, it is hoped that this study will make a valuable contribution to the improvement of the language component and the English teacher programme in Kuwait. Knowledge of the English language is at the heart of the expertise of teachers of English (Borg, 2011). Hence, it is significant to examine the effectiveness of pre-service education in improving the language skills of these future English teachers. It is worth mentioning that this study is only a step forward on the path to more evaluation studies of this type, ensuring that teachers' and students' voices are clearly heard and highlighted. It is an attempt to understand, in order to illuminate the obstacles and challenges that students and teachers meet in their programme, as well as lighten the heavy dependence on administrative evaluation, which has been found to be ineffective by giving an alternative way of approaching such a programme.

### **7.7 Reflection on my PhD Journey of Research**

As a Kuwaiti student, I came to study in the UK with enthusiasm and with the belief that I would build on the knowledge, skills and experience that I had acquired up to that time. I was slightly worried, as it was my first experience of studying abroad. However, I overcame my first challenge successfully as I received my MA in TESOL degree at the University of Leeds, with merit. This encouraged me even more to join a prestigious university, such as Exeter University, to pursue my PhD in Education. In the first semester I started to learn about the different theories



and concepts, such as ontology and epistemology in education, an area that was completely new for me. I was somewhat anxious about it at the beginning and it took me some time to realise the relationship and importance of such concepts to my PhD research. I learned a lot from the Nature of Educational Enquiry, Interpretive Methodologies, Communicating Educational Research and Scientific Methodologies modules.

Having successfully finished my MSc modules as part of the PhD programme, I started my journey of research which, I hope, will lead me to achieve my dream of having a doctorate. At the beginning, my aim was to evaluate the whole English teacher education programme at a college of education in Kuwait. This topic came to mind after noticing, from my own experience of learning English and becoming an English language teacher, that low levels of proficiency in English are considered a major obstacle for many of my Kuwaiti colleague teachers. In addition, being familiar with evaluation, the area of study in my MA, played a part in my choosing this topic. However, after extensive reading and investigation I realised that evaluating a whole programme can be a daunting task that often requires a team and not a single researcher; hence, I might have run the risk of not completing the research successfully within the time frame specified by the university. Thus, I rethought and tried to narrow down my options as much as possible and then I identified my problem. This led me to realise that there is one component in the programme that is supposed to help improve students' language proficiency, namely the basic language skills component. At this point I discussed the idea of focusing on this component instead of on the whole programme with my supervisor, who liked the idea and encouraged me to accept the challenge. Soon after that discussion I paid a visit to the library to explore a number of PhD theses to get an approximate idea about the structure and layout. I also consulted some PhD colleagues who were reaching the end of their PhD and received suggestions from them about how to outline a plan for my PhD journey.

During my PhD study, I acquired a number of skills from the four modules, conferences, and effective researcher workshops at Exeter University. From the MSc modules I learnt how to compare and criticise two published articles from different research paradigms. Also, I learnt how to design a small scale quantitative

study and how to communicate my study findings and present them at a conference. Participating in the Annual Staff and Student Research Conference at the University of Exeter was an excellent opportunity for me and my doctoral student colleagues to give presentations in front of an experienced audience, as well as receive helpful feedback that will assist in me in conducting future presentations in a more professional manner. Furthermore, I learnt how to use different computer software such as PowerPoint, Nvivo, SPSS, and EndNote. Finally, the effective researcher workshops offered useful sessions such as rapid reading, how to present data visually, and how to tackle PhD research, from all of which I learnt a great deal.

I faced a number of challenges during my PhD study. First, the style of writing in English I used at Kuwait University is different from that used in the research culture in the UK. Academic writing is something that I had not been taught and of which I had no experience. Therefore, I worked hard at the beginning of my period of study in the UK to learn how to write academically at both Masters and PhD level. In addition, I was not a good reader; therefore, it took me some time to adopt the habit of reading academic journals and books on a regular basis. Furthermore, I was almost frustrated when I first heard some of the technical words of research, such as 'ontology' and 'epistemology', and tried to understand their meaning. Moreover, time management was another challenge for me, as I was not well organised at the beginning of my study. However, with the guidance of my supervisor, I started to learn how to dedicate a specific amount of time for each mission. On the personal level, one of the saddest moments during my study in the UK was when I received a phone call from my brother telling me that my father had passed away. Thankfully, my supervisor and colleagues were there to support me, and make sure that this did not majorly affect my studies.

In the light of the reflections mentioned above, I believe that I have a responsibility to take with me to the Kuwaiti educational setting all the positive aspects and methods I learnt during my study in the UK. I have the intention of continuing my work and publishing in the area of language programme evaluation in Kuwait, in order to help improve the learning environment for both Kuwaiti teachers and students. Consequently, this study is only a start.

**Appendix (1)**  
**Course Evaluation Questionnaire**  
**Course: Writing**

Dear Student,

This questionnaire has been designed to collect your opinions about this course for evaluation purposes. The course will be evaluated in terms of its features such as aims and objectives, content and materials, course conduct, and assessment.

It is essential that you express your views realistically. The data to be collected through your responses will be of great value to the improvement of the basic language skills courses in the English Department at your college.

This is not a test, and there are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is the main consideration. Please, express your feelings freely.

Your identity and individual responses will be kept strictly confidential, and the results of the questionnaire will be used only for research purposes.

I thank you in advance for your participation and cooperation, and I wish you a successful and happy life.

Ahmad Al-Nwaiem  
PhD Student, School of Education  
University of Exeter  
E-mail: Dr\_ahmedh@hotmail.com

**General Information:**

*Please circle one of the following choices as appropriate:*

**1. My age group is:**

- (a) 18 to 20                      (b) 21 to 25 years old                      (c) 26 years and above

**2. I have graduated from:**

- (a) Public (Governmental) School                      (b) Private (or English) School

*Please read the following questions/statements and put (✓) as appropriate:*

**3. To what degree do you have difficulties in the following language skills of English?**

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Reading					
Writing					
Speaking					
Listening					

**I. COURSE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

*Please give your opinion about this course aims and objectives. Please circle only one number of the following phrases.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

**4. I think this course is helping me to achieve the following aims:**

1.	Reinforce the grammatical structures.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Express myself clearly in writing.	1	5	3	4	5
3	Understand and learn 'creative writing'	1	2	3	4	5
4	Recognize various approaches and techniques of teaching writing.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Reinforce the basic skills of writing: punctuation, spelling, and composing more complex sentences.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I have improved in writing coherent and unified essays.	1	2	3	4	5
7	This course has helped me to learn how to organise essays, e.g. introduction, body, conclusion, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
8	This course has helped me to improve in writing different forms of letters, invitations, and messages.	1	2	3	4	5
9	This course has helped me to improve in spelling English words correctly.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Increase knowledge of English language vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5

5. Which *other writing skills* you would like to have developed/improved in this course? Please explain.

.....  
 .....

**II. COURSE CONTENT AND MATERIALS:**

*Circle only one number of the following phrases.*

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>

6. Please express your opinion about the following issues in this course:

1.	The course materials were appropriate to my own interests.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Course materials were chosen by the teacher and me.	1	2	3	4	5
3	This course had a variety of topics.	1	2	3	4	5
4	The materials used in this course were attractive.	1	2	3	4	5
5	It was easy to use and understand the course materials.	1	2	3	4	5
6	We have used modern audio-visual technological aids in class.	1	2	3	4	5
7	The course materials were appropriate to my proficiency level in English.	1	2	3	4	5
8	The teacher used supplementary materials in this course to improve my writing skills: notes, games, and stories.	1	2	3	4	5

7. Are there any other things (i.e. topics, tasks, etc.) you **HAVE NOT** done in this course but you would like to have done? Please explain.

.....  
 .....

8. What were the good (positive) and bad (negative) points about the *materials* (Textbook, handouts, etc.) you were working with in this course?

(positive) points:

.....  
 .....

(negative) points:

.....  
 .....

**III. COURSE CONDUCT / TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS:**

*Circle only one number of the following phrases.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

**9. Please express your opinion about the following issues in this course:**

1.	A variety of activities were used in the course.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	There was a good student-teacher interaction in the course.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	The teacher was teaching in an interesting way.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The teacher was encouraging us to participate in the lessons.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	The class environment motivates me to participate in class.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Course exercises/tasks are effective in improving my writing skills.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Group work is encouraged in class.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The teacher uses only English in class.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	The teacher talk is more than students talk.	1	2	3	4	5

**10. What could the teacher have done in order to help you more in this course?  
Please give suggestions**

.....  
.....

**IV. ASSESSMENT AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE:**

*Circle only one number of the following phrases.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

**11. Express your opinion about the following issues in this course:**

1.	The feedback I received from my teacher was understandable.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I received constructive feedback on my assignments.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Written feedback was given on my progress.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The most common mistakes are discussed in class.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I was informed about the assessment criteria.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I was assessed on the topics that I learned in the lessons.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	The tests questions were easy to answer for me.	1	2	3	4	5

8	The instructions on the tests were clear.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	The exams results demonstrate my actual ability/proficiency.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I am happy with the final grade, it was fair.	1	2	3	4	5

**12. What do you think is the best way to assess you in this course? Why?**

.....

**V. OVERALL EVALUATION:**

**13. List 3 things** in this course that helped you the most to improve your writing skills (**3 POSITIVE aspects** of the course).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**14. List 3 things** in this course that **DID NOT help you** to improve your writing skills (**3 NEGATIVE aspects** of the course).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**15. List your SUGGESTIONS** to make this course more useful and better adjusted to students' needs:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

NB.

If you would like to participate in short interview related to this topic, please leave a phone/mobile number/email address to contact you to arrange for the interview at your convenience.

Name: .....

Phone/Mobile No.....

E-mail address: .....

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION  
 HAVE A NICE DAY!**

## **Appendix (2)**

### **Course Evaluation Questionnaire**

#### **Course: Reading**

Dear Student,

This questionnaire has been designed to collect your opinions about this course for evaluation purposes. The course will be evaluated in terms of its features such as aims and objectives, content and materials, course conduct, and assessment.

It is essential that you express your views realistically. The data to be collected through your responses will be of great value to the improvement of the basic language skills courses in the English Department at your college.

This is not a test, and there are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is the main consideration. Please, express your feelings freely.

Your identity and individual responses will be kept strictly confidential, and the results of the questionnaire will be used only for research purposes.

I thank you in advance for your participation and cooperation, and I wish you a successful and happy life.

Ahmad Al-Nwaiem  
PhD Student, School of Education  
University of Exeter  
E-mail: Dr\_ahmedh@hotmail.com



**I. COURSE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

*Please give your opinion about the aims and objectives of this course. Please circle only one number of the following phrases.*

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>

**1. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:**

1.	This course has helped me to develop my skimming reading skills.	1	2	3	4	5
2	This course has helped me to develop my scanning reading skills.	1	2	3	4	5
3	This course has helped me to build up vocabulary and terminology.	1	2	3	4	5
4	This course has helped me to understand structure.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I have now the ability to extract the theme and identify the main ideas when reading an English text.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I have now the ability to figure out the meaning of new words from the context.	1	2	3	4	5
7	This course has helped me to express my opinion about a text I have read.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Improve my reading speed.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Develop a critical stance in reading.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Learn how to summarise what I have read.	1	2	3	4	5

**2. Which *other reading skills* you would like to have developed/improved in this course? Please explain.**

.....  
.....  
.....

**II. COURSE CONTENT AND MATERIALS:**

Please give your opinion about the content and materials of this course. Please circle only one number of the following phrases.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>

**3. Please express your opinion about the following issues in this course:**

1.	The course materials were appropriate to my own interests.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Course materials were chosen by the teacher and me.	1	2	3	4	5
3	This course had a variety of topics.	1	2	3	4	5
4	The materials used in this course were attractive.	1	2	3	4	5
5	It was easy to use and understand the course materials.	1	2	3	4	5
6	We have used modern audio-visual technological aids in class.	1	2	3	4	5
7	The course materials were appropriate to my proficiency level in English.	1	2	3	4	5
8	The teacher used supplementary materials in this course.	1	2	3	4	5

**4. Are there any other things (i.e. topics, tasks, etc.) you HAVE NOT done in this course but you would like to have done? Please explain.**

.....  
 .....

**5. What were the good (positive) and bad (negative) points about the materials (Textbook, handouts, etc.) you were working with in this course?**

(positive) points:

.....  
 .....

(negative) points:

.....  
 .....

**III. COURSE CONDUCT / TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS:**

*Please give your opinion about the teaching and learning experience in this course. Please circle only one number of the following phrases.*

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>

**6. Please express your opinion about the following issues in this course:**

1.	A variety of activities were used in the course.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	There was a good student-teacher interaction in the course.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	The teacher was teaching in an interesting way.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The teacher was encouraging us to participate in the lessons.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	The class environment motivates me to participate in class.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Course exercises/tasks are effective in improving my reading skills.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Group work is encouraged in class.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The teacher uses only English in class.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	The teacher talk is more than students talk.	1	2	3	4	5

**7. What could the teacher have done in order to help you more in this course? Please give suggestions**

.....  
 .....

**IV. ASSESSMENT AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE:**

*Please give your opinion about the assessment in this course. Please circle only one number of the following phrases.*

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>

**8. Express your opinion about the following issues in this course:**

1.	The instructor gave me feedback that I can understand.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I received constructive feedback on my assignments.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Written feedback was given on my progress.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The most common mistakes are discussed in class.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I was informed about the assessment criteria.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I was assessed on the topics that I learned in the lessons.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	The tests questions were easy to answer for me.	1	2	3	4	5

8	The instructions on the tests were clear.	1	2	3	4	5
9	The exams results demonstrate my actual ability/proficiency.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I am happy with the final grade, it was fair.	1	2	3	4	5

**9. What do you think the best way to assess you in this course? Why?**  
 .....

**V. OVERALL EVALUATION:**

**10. List 3 things** in this course that helped you the most to improve your reading skills (**3 POSITIVE aspects** of the course).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**11. List 3 things** in this course that **DID NOT help you** to improve your reading skills (**3 NEGATIVE aspects** of the course).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**12. List your SUGGESTIONS** to make this course more useful and better adjusted to students' needs:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**NB.**

If you would like to participate in short interview related to this topic, please leave a phone/mobile number/email address to contact you to arrange for the interview at your convenience.

Name: .....

Phone/Mobile No.....

E-mail address: .....

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION**

**HAVE A NICE DAY!**

## **Appendix (3)**

### **Course Evaluation Questionnaire** **Course: Conversation**

Dear Student,

This questionnaire has been designed to collect your opinions about this course for evaluation purposes. The course will be evaluated in terms of its features such as aims and objectives, content and materials, course conduct, and assessment.

It is essential that you express your views realistically. The data to be collected through your responses will be of great value to the improvement of the basic language skills courses in the English Department at your college.

This is not a test, and there are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is the main consideration. Please, express your feelings freely.

Your identity and individual responses will be kept strictly confidential, and the results of the questionnaire will be used only for research purposes.

I thank you in advance for your participation and cooperation, and I wish you a successful and happy life.

Ahmad Al-Nwaiem  
PhD Student, School of Education  
University of Exeter  
E-mail: Dr\_ahmedh@hotmail.com

**I. COURSE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

Please give your opinion about this course aims and objectives. Please circle only one number of the following phrases.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>

**1. I think this course is helping me to achieve the following aims:**

1.	Develop production skills in sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Identify and use common idiomatic expressions.	1	5	3	4	5
3	Gain experience and increase confidence in speaking English in public.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Develop listening strategies such as note taking.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Translate orally symbolic forms (Diagrams, charts, tables, etc).	1	2	3	4	5
6	Recognise formal and informal patterns of speech.	1	2	3	4	5
7	This course helped me to improve in pronouncing English sounds and words correctly.	1	2	3	4	5
8	This course helped me to express my ideas on a variety of topics in English clearly.	1	2	3	4	5
9	This course helped me to increase my English vocabulary.	1	2	3	4	5
10	This course helped me to be able to respond to questions concerning many aspects of daily life.	1	2	3	4	5
11	This course helped me to understand a variety of accents of spoken English language.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Recognize main ideas in short audio listening segments.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Develop my listening for details.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Guess the meaning of spoken words from context.	1	2	3	4	5

**2. Which *other listening skills* you would like to have developed/improved in this course? Please explain.**

.....

**3. Which *other speaking skills* you would like to have developed/improved in this course? Please explain.**

.....

**II. COURSE CONTENT AND MATERIALS:**

Please give your opinion about the content and materials of this course. Please circle only one number of the following phrases.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>

**4. Please express your opinion about the following issues in this course:**

1.	The course materials were appropriate to my own interests.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Course materials were chosen by the teacher and me.	1	2	3	4	5
3	This course had a variety of topics.	1	2	3	4	5
4	The materials used in this course were attractive	1	2	3	4	5
5	It was easy to use and understand the course materials.	1	2	3	4	5
6	We have used modern audio-visual technological aids in class.	1	2	3	4	5
7	The course materials were appropriate to my proficiency level in English.	1	2	3	4	5
8	The teacher used supplementary materials in this course e.g. videotapes, recorder, etc.	1	2	3	4	5

**5. Are there any other things (i.e. topics, tasks, etc.) you HAVE NOT done in this course but you would like to have done? Please explain.**

.....  
 .....

**6. What were the good (positive) and bad (negative) points about the materials (Textbook, handouts, etc.) you were working with in this course?**

(Positive) points:

.....  
 .....

(Negative) points:

.....  
 .....

**III. COURSE CONDUCT / TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS:**

Please give your opinion about the teaching and learning experience in this course. Please circle only one number of the following phrases.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>

**7. Please express your opinion about the following issues in this course:**

1.	A variety of activities were used in the course.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	There was a good student-teacher interaction in the course.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	The teacher was teaching in an interesting way.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The teacher was encouraging us to participate in the lessons.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	The class environment motivates me to participate in class.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Course exercises/tasks are effective in improving my speaking skills.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Course exercises/tasks were effective in improving my listening skills.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Group work is encouraged in class.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	The teacher uses only English in class.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	The teacher talk is more than students talk.	1	2	3	4	5

**8. What could the teacher have done in order to help you more in this course? Please give suggestions**

.....  
 .....

**IV. ASSESSMENT AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE:**

*Please give your opinion about the assessment in this course. Please circle only one number of the following phrases.*

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>

**9. Express your opinion about the following issues in this course:**

1.	The instructor gave me feedback that I can understand.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I received constructive feedback on my assignments.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Oral feedback was given on my progress.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The most common mistakes are discussed in class.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I was informed about the assessment criteria.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I was assessed on the topics that I learned in the lessons.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	The tests questions were easy to answer for me.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The instructions on the tests were clear.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	The exams results demonstrate my actual ability/proficiency.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I am happy with the final grade, it was fair.	1	2	3	4	5

**10. What do you think the best way to assess you in this course? Why?**

.....



**V. OVERALL EVALUATION:**

**11. List 3 things** in this course that helped you the most to improve your listening and speaking skills (**3 POSITIVE aspects** of the course).

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

**12. List 3 things** in this course that **DID NOT help you** to improve your listening and speaking skills (**3 NEGATIVE aspects** of the course).

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

**13. List your SUGGESTIONS** to make this course more useful and better adjusted to students' needs:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**NB.**

If you would like to participate in short interview related to this topic, please leave a phone/mobile number/email address to contact you to arrange for the interview at your convenience.

Name: .....

Phone/Mobile No.....

E-mail address: .....

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION**

**HAVE A NICE DAY!**

## Appendix (4)

### **Teacher Course Evaluation Interview**

This interview aims at getting the tutors' spontaneous views and perceptions about this course.

#### **Part I – Course Objectives**

1. What were the objectives/aims of this course?
2. Do you believe that all these objectives have been achieved? Please explain.
3. Should there have been other objectives of this course? What do you suggest?
4. To what extent, do you think, this course met your students' expectations and needs?
5. What do you think your students still need in terms of listening / speaking / writing / reading skills?

#### **Part II – Course Content & Materials**

1. Which topics/themes were covered in this course? *Were they authentic? Were they Culture-centred? (Focuses only on the American and British contexts)*
2. Which other topics/themes that you think are missing in this course?
3. What changes do you suggest in the course content?
4. What materials or teaching aids did you use in this course?
5. What was good and not so good about the materials used in this course?
6. Should some changes be made in the course materials? Please explain.
7. Have the students been encouraged to look at other books and materials? E.g. going to the library? Why or why not?
8. Did the students have the chance to choose a topic or bring their own materials to the class? Why or why not?

#### **Part III – Course Conduct & Implementation**

1. How was teaching-learning process in this course? How would you describe your teaching approach?
2. What kinds of activities/tasks were done in the lessons?
3. Do you believe that you provided variety in terms of activities/tasks?
4. Do you believe that the teaching-learning process was effective?

5. What were the student and teacher roles in this course? How should they have been?
6. Did the students have the chance to generate ideas and express themselves about specific topic freely in class? Why or why not? Do you think it's important?
7. Have the students been given the chance to exchange and comment on each others' ideas? Why or why not? Do you think it's important?
8. Have the students been given the chance to critique? Why or why not? Do you think it's important?  
*Prompts: critique an article that they've read, critique each others' written work, etc.*

#### **Part IV – Assessment in the Course**

1. Which assessment tools did you use in this course?
2. What do you think about these assessment tools? Were they effective?
3. To what extent do the assessment results (students' grades) reflect your students' actual performance/success?
4. Is the feedback you give corrective or constructive? How?  
*Probes. Correction focused or suggesting improvements, changes, rather than informing you of what is wrong.*
5. Are you satisfied with your students' performance/success in this course?
6. Have their listening / speaking / writing / reading skills improved as you expected?

#### **Part VI – Overall Evaluation**

1. What was positive/good about this course? Which aspects should continue to exist ( shouldn't be changed) in this course?
2. What was negative/not so good about this course? Which aspects should NOT continue to exist in this course? What are the things that need to be changed?
3. What are your suggestions for making this course more effective and useful, better adjusted to students' needs? What are your suggestions for improvement?
4. Do you think this course is enough to improve and prepare students to complete their programme and to be proficient teachers? Or more similar courses are needed?
5. Do the teachers in charge of these courses have any professional development activities? Do they get the chance to update their knowledge on the teaching of the language skills?
6. What support system is put in place for the teachers?

## Appendix (5)

### Student Course Evaluation Interview

This interview has been designed to explore some of the categories of enquiry from the questionnaire in more detail and depth. The interview aims at getting English major student teachers' spontaneous views and perceptions about this course.

#### General Question:

In general, do you like reading/writing?  
Do you think reading/writing is important to you?

#### PART I – Course Aims or Objectives

1. What were the objectives/aims of **this course**? (If they do not remember, students will be provided some course objectives to remind them the rest)

2. Do you believe that you have achieved all these objectives? Please explain.

3. What should have been the objectives/aims of this course?

What should this course aim to develop in students? What are your suggestions?

4. What are your needs in terms of (listening/ speaking /writing/ reading) skills that could have been met (but haven't been met) in this course?

5. To what extent did this course meet your expectations/needs?

6. Which of your expectations/needs have been met, and which ones have NOT been met?

#### PART II – Course Content and Materials

1. What do you think about the **topics/themes** and **skills** covered in this course? (sufficient/insufficient, simple/OK/difficult/relevant/irrelevant to your interests, proficiency level, age, etc.)

2. What other **topics/themes** and **skills** that you think is missing in this course?

3. What do you think about the course materials (textbook (s), handouts, etc.)? What was good and not so good about the materials you were working with in this course?

4. What changes should be made in the course materials? What kinds of materials you would like to be used in this course?
5. What changes do you suggest in the course content (topics/themes, skills, etc.)
6. Did the teacher encourage you to look at other books and materials? E.g. going to the library?
7. Have you been given the chance to choose a topic or bring your own materials to the class?

### **PART III – Course Conduct & Implementation**

1. What activities/tasks have you done in this course?
2. What do you think about these activities/tasks? (interesting/boring, simple /difficult /OK, useful/not useful for improving your listening/speaking/writing/reading skills, etc.)
3. What kinds of activities/tasks you would like to have been used in this course to help you learn more?
4. What are the student and teacher roles in this course? How should they have been?
5. Were there any class rules, routines and variety in the lessons? What do you think about these issues?
6. How was teaching-learning process in the course? How were the lessons conducted? How did the teacher teach? How did you (students) behave?
7. How should teaching-learning process have been in this course? How should the lessons be conducted? What should the teacher and other students do which would help you the most in this course? Please indicate your suggestions.
8. Have you been given the chance to generate ideas and express yourself freely in class?  
*Prompts: about specific topic...etc*
9. Have you been given the chance to exchange and comment on each others' ideas?
10. Have you been given the chance to critique?  
*Prompts: critique an article that you've read, critique your colleagues' written work, etc.*

#### **PART IV – Assessment in the Course**

1. How was the relationship between the classroom practice (what was done in the lessons) and the assessment (i.e. what was required in the tests or assignments)? parallel or different?
2. What do you think about the assessment tools (e.g. exams, quizzes, assignments, etc.) used in this course?
3. To what extent do the assessment results reflect your actual success/performance?
4. Have you been given the choice to choose the ways of how you will be assessed?
5. How should students' performance/success in this course be measured? Which assessment methods should be used?
6. What kind of feedback do you receive?  
*Probes. Oral/Written - formal/Informal – Tutor's Comments- Peer-Review- Dialogue Journals Individual/Pairs/Group/Whole Class- Justified/Unjustified Feedback.*
7. Is the feedback you receive corrective or constructive?  
*Probes. Correction focused or suggesting improvements, changes, rather than informing you of what is wrong.*
8. How do you feel about the feedback given?  
*Probes. Satisfied- needs change – Unsatisfied.*
9. Have your listening/speaking/writing/ reading skills improved, as you expected?

#### **PART VI – Overall Evaluation**

1. What were **the positive/ good aspects** about this course? Aspects that should continue to exist in this course?
2. What were **the negative aspects** about this course? Aspects that should NOT continue to exist in this course?
3. What changes do you suggest to this course to make it better and more useful?

## Appendix (6)

### Student Diary Form

This form aims at getting your views, perceptions, and your daily experiences of this course. Please feel free to write whatever you wish and express your feelings (In English or Arabic) freely about the things and matters concerning this course. Some headings are included to help you.

تهدف هذه الورقة للحصول على رأيك ومشاعرك وتجربتك اليومية في هذا المقرر . ارجوا ان تكتب بكل حرية عن اي شي تود ان تتكلم عنه متعلقا بهذا المقرر، حاول التعبير عن مشاعرك سواء بالعربي او بالانجليزي عن اي شي يخص هذا المقرر. أظفتك لك في الاسفل بعض الجمل للمساعدة.

1. Describe a typical class of this course (from the beginning until the end, e.g. what the teacher usually does, etc.)

1- الرجاء وصف روتين المحاضره (من بداية دخول المدرس الى نهاية المحاضره، مثال: ماذا يفعل الدكتور عادة خلال المحاضره؟)

2. Write about your observations, feelings, and attitudes that you experienced in this course (Describe and comment on any special events or situation that happened to you in class?)

2. اكتب عن ملاحظاتك، مشاعرك، والمواقف التي مررت بها في هذا المقرر (الرجاء وصف او التعليق على اي حدث او موقف حدث لك خلال فترة دراستك في هذا المقرر)

3. Write about frustrating and successful experiences in this course; identifying good experiences and transactions or objectives you have achieved or not achieved...

3. اكتب عن الاحباطات او المواقف الناجحه التي حصلت لك في هذا المقرر، حدد الاشياء او الاهداف الناجحه التي قمت بانجازها او حتى فشلت في تحقيقها)

4. Write about the things that you most liked or disliked in this course...

4. تكلم عن اكثر الاشياء التي احببتها او كرهتها في هذا المقرر...

5. Anything else you would like to say about this course?

5. هل هناك اي شي اخر تود اضافة او التعليق عليه في هذا المقرر؟

Thank you very much for your time!

شكرا جزيلا لك!

**Appendix (7)**

**Preliminary Questionnaire**

Please, write down the most four negative aspects in the BSLC that needs to be the focus of this study:

1- .....

2- .....

3- .....

4- .....

Thank you!



## Appendix (8)

### Example of Transcribed Interview with Basic Writing Course Lecturer, Dr Fahad

**Ahmad: Can you tell me what the objectives or aims of the basic writing course are in general?**

Dr. Fahad: To make students write coherently clearly in terms of punctuation, grammar, spelling, cohesion and coherence.

In particular for basic writing, based on facts and my experience, our students need to be instructed on a sentence level rather than an essay level. Why? Because they are so anaemic in terms of grammar, word order, sentence linkage and so on and so forth.

**Ahmad: You think these are the main objectives of the course?**

Dr. Fahad: Yes, to make them actually write comprehensible, coherent sentences. From there, we move on into paragraphs and essays later on.

**Ahmad: Do you believe that all of these objectives have been achieved?**

Dr. Fahad: Unfortunately, I can't say that they have been achieved because you can't remedy what years have been eroding. There is a big gap. This gap, unfortunately, we can't repair in a matter of one or two courses.

The problem mainly lies on the quality of early education. They have not been taught how to write coherently. They're not taught how to be accurate. They claim to use the CLT, which focuses on fluency rather than accuracy.

At this point, they come over with a standard that leaves much to be desired in writing, particularly writing meaningful, coherent sentences. We have to bear the price for that. In order to be a good writer, you have to be a good reader first. This, they lack intensively.

**Ahmad: On the other hand, should there have been other objectives for this course?**

Dr. Fahad: I think they should be taught grammar which is related to writing specifically, what we call biological grammar. They are not taught that neither there, in area schooling, nor here.

The next thing is that they will actually get involved in grammar class. That compels those basic writers into engaging into good writing, to understand what they write and maintain the accuracy that writing insists on.

**Ahmad: To what extent do you think this course met your students' expectations and needs?**

Dr. Fahad: To be honest, my students had no expectations because they were treated as passive recipients. You can't actually tell someone what your expectations are while they are not being treated as partners rather than recipients.

Unfortunately, most of them have no expectations. They think that this is a course, and they have to get an A or B. That's it.

**Ahmad: And move on.**

Dr. Fahad: And move on, that's it.

**Ahmad: What do you think your students still need in terms of writing?**

Dr. Fahad: I usually tell them, "Before you think of writing, you should read intensively, and you should have started this a very long time ago." Because reading gives you the information and style, and accustoms your head mechanics to the word order, the grammar that is used.

This will be unconsciously assimilated as you read. Even if you don't know the rule, you know how to put this right. Do you know what I mean? As discussed by Chomsky, it's called universal grammar.

**Ahmad: Let's move on to the course content and materials. Which topics or themes were covered in this course?**

Dr. Fahad: Well, we have a broad range of topics. We're talking about sentence-level editing, punctuation, sentence manipulation and summary making. Sometimes

we'll have acrostics, making up a poem whereby the first lines of each poem give a name or something.

**Ahmad: Which other topics do you think are missing in this course, if you had the chance to add other topics?**

Dr. Fahad: The time is so tight. It's only one and a half hours on Mondays and Tuesdays. Therefore if we would like to add more, we might not have sufficient time to cover it.

It depends on the level of the students, by the way. If they are not so good, you have to slow down. It always takes too much time. It depends on the level of the students. It depends on the work line of the teacher.

**Ahmad: Can you tell me what materials or teaching aids you used in this course?**

Dr. Fahad: For writing, we don't use aids. We could ask them to search the internet for pieces of writing for the topics that we have already discussed, punctuation, editing, sentence, word order, grammar, and so on and so forth. We discuss these together.

**Ahmad: You have a book, right?**

Dr. Fahad: I depend on different sources rather than a fixed book.

**Ahmad: A book and from the internet.**

Dr. Fahad: From the internet for students for their reading. I have two books. I tried to select some excerpts from each of the books.

**Ahmad: So you photocopy pages.**

Dr. Fahad: Yes. There is a prescribed book. I think that, as a teacher, I have to adjust to the level of the students. If I see that a book is a little bit inaccessible, then I will resort to my own material.

**Ahmad: What do you think was good or not so good about the materials you used?**

Dr. Fahad: It is widely known that published textbooks address a certain group of learners. This is based on learners from different parts of the world. We have to adjust the material sometimes to suit our students.

What I mean by "adjust" is to give them more time to understand the terms and the instructions because, particularly through their earlier education, they haven't received good quality writing instruction. Sometimes they haven't actually received writing courses at all.

**Ahmad: Should some changes be made in the course materials?**

Dr. Fahad: Like I told you, it depends on the teacher and the level of the students. It depends on how teachers look at the level of the students and adjust.

**Ahmad: Do their levels change from course to course?**

Dr. Fahad: There are some good comers, but unfortunately they are only a handful. They are decreasing over time. The majority are actually the product of the public education, which leaves much to be desired. Most of them actually come as a blank sheet.

**Ahmad: Have the students been encouraged to look at other books and materials, for example, going to the library?**

Dr. Fahad: This is part of our policy, to encourage them to look for further readings and look through references, the internet and so on and so forth.

Unfortunately, students are not accustomed to having further reading. They lack what we call integrative motivation. Their motivation is mainly instrumental, to get to the bloom and that's it, by hook or by crook, except for a handful of them.

**Ahmad: Do the students have the chance to choose a topic or bring their own materials to the class?**

Dr. Fahad: I'll tell you something. Unless the teacher instructs them, they won't respond. Yes, we give them assignments to write at home, but unfortunately they have a misconception of what research is.

Research is not cut and paste, plagiarizing from the internet and books and so on with their names at the bottom. We always tell them that this is not right. Whatever you read, you have to rewrite using your own words. Usually this doesn't happen because they can't do it.

**Ahmad: Let's move on to the course conduct and implementation. How was the learning and teaching process in this course? How would you describe your teaching approach?**

Dr. Fahad: I use a learner-centred approach. Students are divided into groups. We give them colours or names to create some sort of rivalry in class. They are given an assignment and they have to do that assignment collaboratively, whether in class or outside class, as a homework assignment or class work assignment.

What I notice is that there is a lack of collaboration between the students, simply because they are not used to it. Unfortunately, we actually have to sometimes select only a few students who are really hard workers. The rest, they just sit and do nothing and receive nothing.

**Ahmad: What kinds of tasks are done in the lessons?**

Dr. Fahad: I'll give an assignment, for instance. Each student is given a chance to come to the board, write part of the assignment, and discuss it front of all the students. The students share these common mistakes. When they look at the board, they will realize and write down their mistakes relating to punctuation, grammar, spelling, cohesion and coherence. They are made aware of it.

If we take punctuation, first they are taught how punctuation should take place, types of punctuation and place and time of using specific punctuation. For grammar, we insist that you have to be consistent using grammar. If you use the past tense, you have to use the past or past perfect, when there are actually two verbs in succession, and so on and so forth.

Unfortunately, students have no idea about these. Sometimes we are forced to do some grammar work, which is not actually our job to do. You can't do it without it. When we talk about writing, we talk about accuracy.

They are students who are going to specialize in English language teaching, who will graduate and be responsible for teaching young children. Young children are very vulnerable. It's a very sensitive issue, very crucial. If the teachers are not very well-prepared, probably students will not be prepared. This ailment of the teacher will be transmitted to the students. This is a very serious business.

**Ahmad: Do you believe you have provided variety in terms of activities?**

Dr. Fahad: Yes, all types of activities: teamwork, problem solving, creative thinking, group discussion, and so on and so forth.

**Ahmad: Do you believe that these teaching processes are effective?**

Dr. Fahad: Sometimes they are effective with good students. With students who had, and still have, the role of being a recipient, it's not very effective.

May I add something? Most of our students come to class with the idea of receiving instructions through the old methods, the grammar translation method or teacher-centred approaches. If you try to make them collaborate and work as a team, it might not work. It might work for five or 10 minutes and then everyone will work individually, which is not good. It slows down the process of teaching.

**Ahmad: I see. Can you describe the student and teacher roles in the course?**

Dr. Fahad: What do you mean by "roles"?

**Ahmad: Their role in the class.**

Dr. Fahad: The teacher's role is as facilitator. It's not as instructor anymore. He is a facilitator and a partner. It's a partnership now. I say 95% of the load, at this point, is on the student. Teachers give instructions and directions. If things come to a halt, the teacher will actually interfere and try to solve the problem, but that's it.

**Ahmad: Do the students have the chance to generate ideas and express themselves about specific topics?**

Dr. Fahad: I'm afraid not, actually. In all courses, students are passive. They are spoon fed. Sometimes for a teacher like me who applies a technique of creative thinking and innovation, voices a point of view in class, and gives feedback and expresses views on certain topics, it doesn't work at all, unfortunately.

**Ahmad: They are very passive.**

Dr. Fahad: They are very passive.

**Ahmad: I see. Thank you. Let's move to the last part, which is the assessment of the course. What assessment tools did you use in this course?**

Dr. Fahad: I used interviews. I gave them an assignment. We reviewed assignments for things we'd discussed in class. I interviewed the students. There were tests and quizzes. There was ongoing assessment. This is what I focus on.

That means that every time, as I've already noted, I divided the class into groups. Each group would be focused for one or two sessions. They will be asked one at a time about the material, what they've done, what they've been assigned, and so on and so forth. They're asked about lesson plans we've discussed and homework assignments we've done already.

When they do homework assignments, sometimes they write essays, each and every one of them. Only a portion of that is discussed. The next portion is discussed later on, so we keep them on alert all the time. This is more effective than quizzes and tests. We're avoiding the anxiety of tests this way.

**Ahmad: They have mid-term and final exams.**

Dr. Fahad: Yes.

**Ahmad: That's an examination, right?**

Dr. Fahad: I insist that my students actually attend class regularly because there is a long assessment. If they miss that a number of times, it might be subtracted from the coursework mean mark, which is 20. The whole thing is 20 for coursework, 30 for the midterms, and 50 for the final. This is the college assessment policy.

**Ahmad: What do you think about these assessment tools? Are they effective?**

Dr. Fahad: For writing, it's really unfair to have 50 for the final. Effort should take quite a big portion of that because it's a portfolio. When we talk about writing, we talk about their portfolio, the whole work. It's all the hard work they've done throughout the semester.

It shouldn't go into their grades, actually. I suggest that should actually take 30 marks off the whole thing.

**Ahmad: To what extent do the assessment results or the students' grades reflect the students' actual performance?**

Dr. Fahad: Well, I'll tell you something which is really honest. Sometimes we have to teach students very little things in order for them to actually...

**Ahmad: To get high marks?**

Dr. Fahad: Not to get high marks, but at least to make them cope with the course. Do you know what I mean? Because if we try to treat them as a native speaker, it won't work at all. They will actually have a catastrophe in terms of success. We try to actually treat them gently, bearing in my mind that the objective is achieved. We do this as much as we possibly can.

**Ahmad: In general, do you think it does reflect?**

Dr. Fahad: No, it doesn't. It honestly doesn't. Like I told you, writing is a cumulative experience. You can't actually remedy what the years have ruined.

**Ahmad: Let's talk about your feedback. Do you give corrective or constructive feedback?**

Dr. Fahad: Both sometimes. Like I told you, we're partners.

As someone who doesn't do a teacher-centred approach, we try to be sort of a corrective advisor. When you instruct, it means that you give orders. But we still try, "Why don't we do it this way instead of doing it that way?" instead of saying, "No, you are wrong. This is a wrong answer. You should do this and you shouldn't do that," which might not be accepted at this level. It's a partnership.

**Ahmad: You don't say, "This is wrong," and stop at that.**

Dr. Fahad: No, we shouldn't say it's wrong or not. There is a better way of doing that. You know what I mean? We should say, "There is a better way of doing this. You are doing it okay, but if you had done it this way it would be more acceptable for the reader."

**Ahmad: Are you satisfied with your students' performance?**

Dr. Fahad: I'm not actually really satisfied with my students' performance because, like I told you, it's really hard work. My students don't seem to understand or realize that specializing in the English language is a difficult task. They have to work four times as hard as they are now.

I'll tell you something. Writing is un-teachable. Writing comes with practice, and with actual intensive reading and receiving good quality education right from the first steps. You can teach writing for students who are already qualified for writing. This is my point of view.

**Ahmad: Have your students' writing skills been improved?**

Dr. Fahad: Some of them, yes. It has improved.

**Ahmad: As you expected?**

Dr. Fahad: I noticed only recently when we had the end-of-term exam that they had followed the procedures that we had given throughout the semester in terms of punctuation and grammar. But bear in mind that we have been very gentle with them, because you can't treat students at this stage as those who have received lots of good quality education. They're still actually treated as beginners. "Language beginners," we say sometimes.

**Ahmad: Overall in your evaluation of the course, what were the positive or good points about this course?**

Dr. Fahad: The good point about this course is that it opens horizons for students to understand what writing is. Writing is at the pinnacle of language skills because it is a mirror of how and what type of education students have received.

The saying in English is, "Write to me, I'll tell you who you are." It reflects your background education, whether it's good or not.

It is actually a gateway for professionalism in terms of communication and quality of teaching. It reflects the seriousness of the learner because he's now at the pinnacle of receiving his or her skills.

**Ahmad: In your opinion, what was the negative and not so good about this course?**

Dr. Fahad: In terms of the course material, the course content, everything is okay. The negative is the quality of students we receive. The quality needs a sort of polishing. It needs to be more scrutinized and checked and rechecked before they are allowed in.

Writing should be more emphasized on proficiency tests. I'll tell you something which is really amazing. There are a number of students that are positively and clearly fluent in English, but when it comes to writing they don't know the alphabet. This is really a catastrophe.

You can't judge a learner just because he or she speaks fluent English. If you'd like to check his education, ask him to write something for you.

**Ahmad: You will be shocked.**

Dr. Fahad: You will be shocked, as you have already put it.

**Ahmad: What are your suggestions for making this course more effective and more useful, or at least better adjusted to students' needs? What are your suggestions?**

Dr. Fahad: We suggest biological grammar and a review of grammar course because we're talking about biological grammar, which involves sentence construction, word order, and writing meaningful, correct sentences.

**Ahmad: This is the grammar course?**

Dr. Fahad: Yes.

**Ahmad: Let's talk about this course. What do you think can be done for this course to be much more effective?**

Dr. Fahad: We start with the input first, in order to adjust. Now I'm telling you that the input is actually not that good.

We have to make measures more stringent. By the way, recently we have upgraded our proficiency test. It's more watertight, as they say. Hopefully that will filter the students properly.

I can tell you that if we receive good students, then we can say what's wrong with our course because there will be a challenge. Now there is no challenge. But like I told you, I really suggest that there should be a grammar course prior to basic writing.

**Ahmad: In general, do you think the basic language skills courses are enough to improve the students' level and to prepare them for to be complete?**

Dr. Fahad: You can't actually improve a student's level just by prescribing or suggesting solutions. Students have to be aware that they are fully responsible for themselves, they are on their own, and they are no longer actually receiving instructions. They are partners. They don't have to turn their backs on what they've already learned, but they have to start from now to improve themselves. Otherwise, they won't go to the end.

**Ahmad: Do you think these three courses are enough to prepare them?**

Dr. Fahad: No, I don't think so. They are not enough, but the rules and regulations might not allow for more.

**Ahmad: There's no space or time.**

Dr. Fahad: Yes. You are absolutely right.

**Ahmad: Do the teachers in charge of these courses have any professional development activities? Do they get the chance to update their knowledge?**

Dr. Fahad: Yes, of course. All our teachers are very professional. We have exchanged pieces of writing, discussions, and consultations about improving the courses. This team is actually professional enough to carry out these courses now and in the future successfully. Usually, they update themselves. They have the internet available, and books are around. Always when they go abroad, they bring books with them with these basic skills in mind.

**Ahmad: What support system is put in place for the teachers? Do you have training courses?**

Dr. Fahad: No, we don't have training courses. You have to bear in mind we are teachers teaching the discipline. Like the students who have to rely on themselves entirely, teachers have to rely on themselves and train themselves because now the world is a small village.

If you can get on the internet, you can access conferences and findings of research. It depends. Like a student, a teacher is actually responsible for updating himself or herself.

**Ahmad: The system doesn't have it?**

Dr. Fahad: No, it doesn't allow it. But now if it allows, the big question is who is going to train whom? Like I told you, it's not to instruct.

Teachers can attend conferences and seminars and carry out presentations and so on. This is part of teacher training. If they are going to just present a topic about basic skills, they have to send for the materials. They have to be very up to date, which means they have to update themselves in terms of courses and service training courses. If they are offered by instructors who are well-established and qualified, why not?

**Ahmad: Thank you very much. You've been very helpful.**

Dr. Fahad: Thank you. I hope that you actually carry out your thesis successfully. I hope to see you soon.

**Ahmad: Thank you very much.**

## Appendix (9)

### An Extract of a Coded Transcript

**Theme:** Assessment and Feedback

**Code:** AssessFeed

Code	Data Chunks
AssessFeed 1a	I interviewed the students. Also, when they do homework assignments, sometimes they write essays, each and every one of them. Only a portion of that is discussed. The next portion is discussed later on, so we keep them on alert all the time. This is more effective than quizzes and tests. They also have mid-term exam.
AssessFeed 1b	They [students] have to choose any two books. They should be books according to their choice. They have to write and be critical about the author, what did they like and what they didn't like about the characters. They have to submit it before the mid-term, and before the final too.
AssessFeed 2a	There were no quizzes, only midterm and final exams. The teacher said that we would have spot quizzes every week, but this did not happen.
AssessFeed 3a	I think that the teacher gives us constructive feedback as far as grammar and punctuation marks are concerned. We don't write; therefore, there is no feedback on our writing performance.

**Code 'AssessFeed':** describes student and teacher interviewees' views about the assessment and feedback practices in the English Department.

**AssessFeed 1:** describes the findings of the actual assessment and feedback practices.

**AssessFeed 1a:** describes the first extract in the transcript relating to the assessment and feedback practices.

**AssessFeed 1b:** describes the second extract in the transcript relating to the assessment practices.

**AssessFeed 2:** describes students' views about the assessment practices.

**AssessFeed 2a:** describes the first extract relating to views about the assessment practices.

**AssessFeed 3:** describes students' views about the feedback practices.

**AssessFeed 3a:** describes the first extract that relates to views about the feedback practices.

*(Continued on next page)*

**Theme:** Socio-Cultural Issues

**Code:** SocioCul

<b>Code</b>	<b>Data Chunks</b>
SocioCul 1a	Our voice is restricted in class, as there is no chance of discussing what is being taught. There is no space during the lecture time to express my opinion.
SocioCul 2a	What I notice is that students are unwilling to collaborate simply because they are not used to it. Unfortunately, we actually have to sometimes select only a few students who are really hard workers. The rest just sit and do nothing and receive nothing.
SocioCul 2b	If you try to make them collaborate and work as a team, it might not work. It might work for five or ten minutes and then everyone will work individually, which is not good. It slows down the process of teaching.
SocioCul 3a	This teacher follows her own style without caring much about our needs. When she says something, we can't argue with her: that's it. In the final speaking exam, she recorded our voices without our permission, and what is worse is that she asked another teacher to attend and evaluate our presentations.

**Code 'SocioCul':** describes the various socio-cultural themes emerged from the participants' responses.

**SocioCul 1:** describes the issue of ignoring the student voice.

**SocioCul 1a:** describes the first extract relating to students' views about the ignorance of their voice.

**SocioCul 2:** describes the issue of students' lack of collaboration in the classroom.

**SocioCul 2a:** describes the first extract relating to students' lack of collaboration in the classroom.

**SocioCul 2b:** describes the second extract relating to students' lack of collaboration in the classroom.

**SocioCul 3:** describes the issue of teachers' power relations in their classrooms.

**SocioCul 3a:** describes the first extract relating to students' views about the teachers' absolute power in the classroom.



## Appendix (10)

### Certificate of Ethical Research Approval

STUDENT HIGHER-LEVEL RESEARCH



School of Education and Lifelong Learning

### Certificate of ethical research approval

**STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS**

**You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level research (e.g. Masters, PhD, EdD level).**

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, then have it signed by your supervisor and by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guides.php> and view the School's statement in your handbooks.

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**READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER** (the form will expand to contain the text you enter).  
**DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

---

**Your name:** Ahmad Al-Nwaiem

**Degree/Programme of Study:** PhD in Education

**Project Supervisor(s):** Salah Troudi

**Your email address:** mr\_ahmedh@hotmail.com, aa303@ex.ac.uk,

**Tel:** 07790101673

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**Title of your project:**

Evaluation of the English Language Teacher Preparation Programme at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait.

**Brief description of your research project:**

The research aims to evaluate and explore the basic language skills courses component in the programme of the department of English at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait, and use the results as a basis for suggesting practical amendments and improvements. Four courses of the basic language skills component must be taken by the new students in the first year of enrolment in order to improve their language proficiency. These courses are Conversation (131), Reading (132), Mechanics of writing (133) and Advanced Writing (233). Evaluating these courses through a comprehensive study and discovering areas that need improvement may help finding solutions for the students' language problems.

---

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee  
October 2005

**Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):**

The participants include the student teachers at the programme and the instructors (staff members).

**Give details regarding the ethical issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (with special reference to any children or those with special needs)** a blank consent form can be downloaded from the SELL student access on-line documents:

All participants will be informed as fully as possible of the nature and purpose of the research, and their informed consent will be gained. This consent will clarify to the participants their right to withdraw and that their participation is voluntary. All the participants will be asked to return the questionnaires anonymously and they will be assured, both verbally and in writing, that all the information gathered will be treated confidentially.

**Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:**

The methods will be questionnaire, interview, documents analysis and diaries. Both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected. Qualitative data is collected from the open-ended questions in the questionnaires, interviews, diaries, and documents whereas quantitative data is collected from the closed items in the questionnaires.

The qualitative data will be analysed using cross-case analysis, by listing all raw data (all the individual responses) under each item, and then grouping the similar responses, identifying common themes, and counting frequencies. On the other hand, quantitative data will be analysed by using descriptive statistics, through presenting the frequency counts of the responses for each item in the questionnaire. For this analysis, SPSS Program will be used.

When analysing the data, I will make sure that no names or any sort of identification would be revealed in the study. Therefore, a pseudonym will be used to protect the anonymity of the institution and individuals.

**Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):**

All the data will be kept in a safe place with me and I will make sure that no one will have access to them.

**Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):**

The study should not have any exceptional factors or potential political issues.

---

***This form should now be printed out, signed by you below and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's **Research Support Office** for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.***

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Appendix ( 9) continued...

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given above and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed:..........date: 18<sup>th</sup> March 2009

*N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor*

This project has been approved for the period: April 2009 until: April 2010

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): .....date: 18/03/2009

*N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occurs a further form is completed.*

SELL unique approval reference:.....D.108/09/36.....

Signed:..........date: 18/03/2009  
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

This form is available from  
<http://www.education.ex.ac.uk/students/index.php> then click on On-line documents.

**Appendix (11)**

**Consent Form**

**Graduate School of Education**

**University of Exeter**

I have read and understood the research aims and purposes. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I may withdraw my participation at any time. I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me. All the information I provide will be confidential and for study purposes only. I am also aware that my participation in the study will be anonymous.

(Signature of participant) ..... (Date).....

(Printed name of participant) .....

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher. Contact phone number of researcher(s): .....

If you have any concerns about the research that you would like to discuss, please contact: Ahmad Al-Nwaiem E-mail: aa303@exeter.ac.uk

**Appendix (12)**

**A Picture of One of the Classrooms**



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