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Libyan EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Competence: Towards
Progress, Not Perfection

إمام أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية الليبيين بكفاءتهم التدريسية سعياً للتطوير، لا الكمال

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify Libyan EFL university teachers' perceptions of teaching competence and the qualities of competent teachers. A qualitative research was used to investigate these perceptions, and to explore which competencies are involved in the teaching practices. The results revealed that not all participants have clear perceptions of teaching competencies. Most of them reported misconceptions of these competencies as reflected in their lack of integration of the three pillars of knowledge, skills, and attitude. The results also indicated that there is no clear distinction between teaching competencies and that social competence received more attention than educational, learning, and technical competencies. College teachers are highly encouraged to develop their teaching competences and therefore it is suggested to offer focused training courses as an effective strategy to develop teaching competencies.

Key Words: Perceptions, Teaching competence, training courses.

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ملخص:

تهدف الدراسة للتعريف بمدى إدراك أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية للكفاءة التدريسية وطرح صفات الأستاذ الكفاء، ولقد تم استخدام بحث نوعي للتحقق من مدى معرفة واستنباط أي المعارف يتم تناولها في تمثيل العملية التعليمية. ولقد أظهرت الدراسة أنه ليس لكل المشاركين فيها مفهوماً واضحاً عن الكفاءة التدريسية، بل أن غالبيتهم أقرّوا بعدم ادراكهم لها، والتي بدورها انعكست في محدوديتهم لدمج ركائزها الثلاث المعرفة والمهارات والانطباعات. كما أفرزت الدراسة أيضاً بأنه لا وجود لخط فاصل يميز بين الكفايات التدريسية، وبينت أن الكفاءة الاجتماعية لاقت اهتماماً أوفر مقارنة بالكفايات العلمية والتقنية والتعليمية، لذا وجب تشجيع أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية الجامعيين لتنمية كفاءتهم التدريسية كونها مزيج من صنائع أيديهم والتي يتم تطويرها من خلالهم أو بتأثير بمن حولهم. وفي هذا الصدد فإن كل مشترك في الدراسة أجمعوا على اقتراح الدورات التدريبية المكثفة كونها أحد أنجع الطرق في تطوير الكفاءة التدريسية. الكلمات المفتاحية: التصورات، كفاءة التدريس، الدورات التدريبية.

Introduction

The current study examines Libyan EFL university teachers' perceptions of teaching competency. Despite the large number of staff members teaching in educational institutions, Libyan EFL teachers experience many difficulties Elabbar (2017), which prevent them to develop their competency level. However, disregarding the requisites is the source of these difficulties. As described by Hol and Aktas (2013); Paramanik & Barman, (2019) competence is visible, observed in class performance, and can be assessed. Yet, it has been noticed that some Libyan EFL teachers lack some of these teaching competencies. Therefore, introducing EFL teachers without any arrangements and guidelines such as preparation through teachers' in-service training sessions, lack of awareness of the role of formal support, and lack of systematic continuous training are some of the causes that form a gap between teachers' current competences and the efficient standard model in teaching practices at Libyan

Universities. Only a few studies have precisely dealt with teachers' competence and its relevance to teachers' performance in educational settings. Therefore, teachers' teaching competencies can be a subject of research to provide effective resolutions. Because not all teachers succeed in developing their teaching competency, a conceptual framework to enable those teachers to raise their competency level is needed, and further studies to address the drawbacks inherent in this profession in higher education are required. Little attention is paid to developing teachers' core competency which makes it an emerging topic of research interest. According to Mulder (2011; p14) "A lot of improvement is still needed in the practical implementation", developing EFL teachers' competencies would certainly improve their performance.

In this study, the light will be shed on how teaching competency is perceived by a group of Libyan EFL teachers at Sabratha University, on the importance of the association between teachers' competence and performance, and how to promote these teaching competencies.

This study also will highlight the role of competent teachers who can add a great contribution to accomplishing the learning process by rising students' results, the findings will help to improve teaching quality in higher education. It will provide important insights into teachers' perception of the characteristics possessed by competent teachers in Libyan classes. The results of this study would be important:

1. To contribute to the understanding of teaching competencies through enlightening the educational society on the value of competent teachers.
2. To find out how EFL teachers develop their current teaching competencies.
3. To promote the role of training and development programs to raise teachers' competency to come up with trained and highly qualified teachers.
4. To shed light on which teaching competency is considered of great importance and which is ranked low.

Research Questions

- 1-How do Libyan EFL university teachers perceive teaching competencies?
- 2-What strategies do Libyan EFL teachers use to develop their teaching competencies?

Literature Review

In the field of education, when it comes to understanding the word education, one of the main factors that arise at this point is teachers, who are the promoters of education quality. However, in any plan to reform the education territory and raise its quality, a teacher is the main factor in the success of any educational goal in the academic setting and in implementing any educational plan. The matter of consideration which made its way into higher education is 'competence', a concept that is probably as old as humankind Mulder (2014), and the basic element that greatly influence the educational process. Moreover, teachers have the power to influence the learning process positively or negatively and the progress of any society depends on the developments in the education sector particularly competent teachers who have to be prepared with sufficient capabilities to promote the learning process. The meaning of competence is mostly related to capabilities that get together with confidence, self-efficiency, and academic identity *ibid.* Selvi (2010; p174) states that "teachers need to have more competencies than they had before, by taking the international developments into consideration, the teacher competencies should be discussed and updated". In this regard, the term competence refers to teachers' ability to achieve a certain task appropriately, to meet the instructional requirements. Otherwise, it is considered incompetency with no satisfactory results achieved and without any accomplishment of the planned objectives, as a result, those teachers whose teaching competence was not recognized felt disrespected, anxious, and reported strong identity struggles in the workplace.

Nevertheless, the power of an education sector is mainly based upon the quality of teachers, because they are the true investment that societies should rely on. Teaching competency, the word which is increasingly used currently, becomes a fundamental aspect of teaching quality. However, the borderline between teachers' competency and teaching quality began to blur and many studies have been done on the rapport between teachers' competency and educational achievements (Westera, 2001; Cubukcu 2010; Kumar, 2013; Goodwin et al, 2014; Mulder 2014; Al- Issa, 2017; Gleasser, 2019; Celebi 2021).

Defining Perception

Many scholars define the term perception as the notion that is shaped in the human mind, related to one's ideas, deep understanding, traits, and previous experiences (Freeman, 1991; McDonald, 2012). Consequently, it is the result of changes that took place over time to reach a complete idea and reflect mental images about a particular issue and interpreted in real behaviors. There is no accurate interpretation of teachers' self-concept, however, teachers perceive competence differently as they have different conceptualizations in varied educational settings. Misconception, in turn, can influence teachers' performance.

Kennedy et al (1999) highlight the role of beliefs and attitudes in actions where all boundaries are removed. However, the shared knowledge and beliefs changed due to the experience and what teachers went through to come up with new perspectives that they had not had before about their teaching practices. "People's actions and beliefs are governed by their social behaviors and values involve a change in ideology" Markee (1997: p67).

Defining Competence

here is no doubt that teachers have been always considered conveyers of the content they teach. However, successful teachers are mainly those who prepare the content, deliver it, and assess their students' progress. Thus, they also can maximize their knowledge, and skills and enlarge their abilities to update their resources whenever it is needed.

Much has been written about 'competence', the concept which is as old as history, Mulder pointed out that competence is the ability to perform effectively where knowledge, skills, and attitudes are emerged (2011; p12). The concept of competence, is defined as capability, capacity, and the physical or mental power to do something. In general, it refers to the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are required for effective education in academic settings (Stoof et al. 2002; Tigelaar et al. 2004; Schneider, 2019). The three pillars of teaching competence are closely emerged and connected. Many experts in the field of ELT have defined and characterized competence in various ways Gupta (2007) defines competency as knowledge, skill, attitude, or behavior that enable a person to perform effectively at work. Similarly, Parimala et al (2014; p29) define competency as "an improved modern term applied to the way of doing things in the competency way".

A review of related literature shows that competency is composed of three sub-scales: knowledge about how to learn, attitudes towards learning, and the skills or capabilities of learning.

There are dissimilar definitions for the same concept in different contexts. Teaching competency is a combination of equal amounts of knowledge, skill, and attitude; however, some competencies may involve more knowledge than skill or attitude, while others are not. In this sense, teaching competency is the ability to meet complex demands and to perform a given role sufficiently in a particular context. Up to now, different writers drew out different competency divisions based on their various perceptions (Council of Europe, 2001; Huntly, 2003; Bibi, 2005; Ilanlou and Zand 2011; Schneider, 2019).

According to Mulder (2007), competency means possessing required or adequate abilities or qualities, being judicially qualified, passionate, having intellectual potency, and having the

availability to improve and function in a certain way. Many researchers claim that competence involves making decisions, innovative thinking, research, experimentation, judgments, and evaluation which are considered the key elements in this process (Burgess 2000; Pantic and Wubbels 2010; Zhu et al 2013). The concept of teachers' competencies is frequently discussed with three main themes: knowledge competencies, professional competencies, and personal competencies as noted by (Huntly, 2003; Bibi, 2005). The most obvious attribute of competence is Koster et al's illustration (2005) that a teacher's competency is divided into five categories: domain-specific knowledge, communication, organization, pedagogy, and attitude. Each is involved in effective performance. Nevertheless, in broad terms teaching competency refers to the role of the teacher in class in performing different teaching tasks and carrying out the educational plans. While teacher competence refers to professionalism and expertise.

Four Core Teaching Competencies

In this study, only core competencies will be discussed, a framework of conceptualizing core competencies related to performance to stress their importance in the teaching and learning process. The four main competencies are educational competency, learning competency, social competency, and technological competency Zhu et al (2013). The main findings from previous researches proposed that those four core competencies are speculated as core competencies. (Robison 2001; Lin 2009; Pantic and Wubbels 2010; Xu and Ye2014). Although teachers' competency is a key factor influencing innovative teaching performance, many teachers lack these core competencies Lin (2009). However, innovative teaching competencies can be established and should be developed to enhance the state of teachers in all educational settings Jin (2001).

Educational Competency

It refers to teachers' sufficient use of knowledge, preparing the content and delivering it, and using a unique style to convey the content of the subject effectively in the classroom. Teachers are required to guide the students to grasp the knowledge easily to achieve a variety of instructional objects. However, this reflects teachers' high attentiveness to the subject they teach by developing and applying a range of strategies to integrate effective literacy instruction. In this regard, it seems obvious that pedagogic competence is teachers' capability to organize the process of teaching and learning, understand students psychologically throughout the syllabus to enhance students' learning, and expand their knowledge to satisfy their needs and interests. Therefore, teachers practice different methods and materials, and set various aids and techniques to encourage and support students to comprehend the content clearly and effectively; subsequently, assess what they have learned to monitor and evaluate their progress by using a variety of assessment-data measuring goals. Teachers know different ways of analyzing students' understanding and provide formative reflection Ilanlou and Zand (2011).

Learning Competency

It states how teachers can be involved in innovating teaching to deal with different learners' needs, develop the learning materials by students' level, and solve teaching problems that emerged in the class. It also enables teachers to reflect critically upon their educational impact

and value system, taking professional development seriously. “To find new and enterprising solutions to educational issues and are inventive when developing educational programs. They provide learning experiences that engage student interest and enhance student learning” Kumer (2013). Competency evolve building more friendly and positive atmosphere. Thus, a favorable condition is created full of satisfaction where students feel rewarded, have a sense of ownership, can spontaneously discuss their problems, and where other teachers support them Schneider (2019).

Social Competency

According to Selvi (2010), Social competency refers to teachers interacting with students from different backgrounds besides the ability of teachers to communicate and cooperate with colleagues such as organizing workshops and seminars to increase resourcefulness in the workplace and build positive human relationships to promote the learning practices in collaborative working. This directs teachers to maintain a relaxed environment that conveys high expectations for all. Skillful teachers tolerate the different backgrounds of students; understand students’ learning difficulties, respect their values, and rights issues, being someone, they can trust. Moreover, teachers are required to have some abilities to work with others in that collaboration among teachers displayed a beneficial influence on students’ progress.

Technological Competency

Recent studies have stressed that teachers need to seek ways to enrich or support their teaching by use of specific technology either in content preparation or its delivery. Similarly, they need to be able to promote their teaching practices by using educational technology for example using online sources to search and extract information effectively (Koehler and Mishra, 2008; Hannon, 2008; Amara 2019). Not surprisingly, technology increases every day and becomes an integral part of the teaching process. One of the significant abilities that teachers need to acquire as a tool for teaching are soft skills to enhance students’ thinking and creativity, and knowhow to integrate information technology into learning and teaching practices. To create more opportunities for students to gain knowledge easily, teachers integrate technology as a tool to produce, manipulate, store, and communicate practically to transfer content, exemplify concepts.

“It is obvious that technology is the norm in most educational institutions” Amara (2019; p315) to achieve any course objectives, language teachers implement and practice a wide range of techniques and strategies of teaching. However, to have an effective teaching process a variety of teaching materials should be applicable where the existence of these technological competencies is essential to cope with today’s learners’ needs. Weinstein (2008) mention that the degree of achieving any objectives is based on teachers’ competency, which would be obvious in class performance.

Ilanlou and Zand (2011) classified competence into two types: General competencies which include: familiarity with development and learning psychology, awareness of the teaching-learning process, class management and teaching methods, research skills, and evaluating students’ academic achievement. Basically, specialized competencies include: content mastery, providing the content in proper order, organizing the content, mastery in employing

training tools in practice, keeping accurate records, and giving timely feedback to the students.

Linguistic Competence

Chomsky revolutionized the scientific community with the insights of transformational grammar which shaped the understanding of human languages (1957). However, 'competence' is first mentioned in Chomsky's linguistic theory as the capability (1965).

In foreign language context, competence was the goal of teacher education for decades (Chomsky, 1965; Gleasser, 2019), the term linguistic competence is associated with language acquisition. In this respect, "linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogenous speech- community" Chomsky (1965; p3). Though, competence is affected by many conditions in real-life situations, some people are equipped with sufficient amount of language knowledge, but when they try to proactive what they know, they fail because of many conditions such as memory limitations, distraction, the shift of attention and interests. The most obvious point is that grammar introduced in sentences by speakers of any language where these rules are called transformational rules correspond with the mental and psychological ability of language users. Therefore, the mechanism of this system enables the speakers to comprehend and produce language.

In broad terms, Communicative competence is firstly mentioned by Chomsky (1965), and later this notion developed by Hymes (1972). However, Hymes' point of view is that linguistic competence is a subset of communicative competence (1972), He added that Chomsky's theory lacks the contextual and cultural consideration of language usage in concrete situations. Communicative competence, unlike linguistic competence, is associated with performance which is heavily affected by social and cultural aspects in various context. Consequently, performance has been seen as a reflection of language competence, "It refers to the speakers' ability to use the language apparently in different linguistic, sociolinguistic and contextual settings" Saleh (2013; p108).

Gleasser (2019) indicates that competency is distinguished mainly by structure and level, where the latter is the main concern of this study. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), competency level is associated with how individuals achieve a required task and differ in their performance not just empirically, but by score-based. However, in terms of language' level, competence is categorized into six levels based on the language proficiency levels, ranging from the basic level A1 to the most advanced level C2. On the other hand, the CEFR drew out two major divisions based on competence structure: general competencies which include knowledge, skills, and ability to learn, besides communicative language competencies which are concerned with linguistic competencies, socio-linguistic competence, and pragmatic competencies.

Competency Development Strategies

Teaching as a mobile profession was an area of interest by many writers for years, that requires teachers to possess certain qualities to develop professionally as the "Success of educational plans in each country depends on the teachers armed with scientific competencies and professional skills" Ilanlou and Zand (2011; p1145).

The common European principles as reported by the Council of Europe issued in (2001) for the quality of teaching and development, drew out some major concerns that teachers must be essentially capable to deal professionally by subject and pedagogical knowledge within the context of lifelong learning, that profession which is interchanged to keep up with the modern innovation and updated researches throughout their teaching career. Some of these changes are required either for promotion or academic identity Lankveld et al (2017) highlight teachers' competence as a key indicator of their academic identity. Consequently, competency recognition could be reached through collaboration at the workplace as "the recognition of competence by others is important" Selvi (2010; p174), sharing ideas to learn through discussion groups, attending training courses that are collage-based, developing interpersonal skills, building a positive relationship to monitor personal growth, and to pursue doctoral studies as the highest self-perception is for the instructors who have a Ph.D. degree Hol and Aktas (2013), the more qualifications teachers have, the best educational results will be achieved.

However, the various stages of professional development of skills embrace three dimensions which are considered as the main strategies to develop competency Mulder (2014). The first dimension is teaching performance where competency is presented in actual teaching practices such as: performing knowledge adequately without copying it from other resources, as some teachers present their lectures based on literal structurally and meaningfully transferring without any addition, which is good evidence of adequacy weakness of practicality in teaching practice. On the contrary, competent teachers offer knowledge without being needy, support colleagues with a wide class familiarity experience at various levels, increase students' creativity, facilitate learning and provide formative feedback to enhance students' achievements.

The second dimension is research performance where teachers contribute and improve new ideas, conduct studies and publish researches. Nevertheless, Çelebi asserts that "The attitudes of the teachers towards scientific research are not at the expected level, the low level of attitudes and interest indicates that the competences related to scientific thinking processes cannot reach the expected level" (2021; p99). Likewise; both teaching and research play a crucial role in higher education to accomplish teachers' competency since research performance is an important component of academic performance for individuals. The third dimension is professional performance, where teachers create a positive learning/teaching environment, where innovative teaching is applicable Xu and Ye (2014). In this setting, teachers have more responsibilities in supporting their students by delivering high-quality instructions, accordingly, student outcomes are likely to be improved.

According to a report by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood and Youth Affairs in Melbourne issued in (2001), teachers are required to be supported by the environment at the workplace, and support from their colleagues, in addition to offering a variety of corporation at the workplace such as work-based training providers, stakeholders, professional development and technical assistance. As a result, those supported teachers will have a chance to reflect on their own and others. In an attempt to offer advisory and consultancy services explicitly ongoing professional development program was drawn upon in upgrading teachers' competency, where they can participate in a university program to

enhance their teaching skills. On the one hand, those teachers noticeably deal with several problems such as course syllabus arrangements, Elabbar (2017) claimed that heavy workload, lack of in-service training or pre-service training where Libyan teachers left to their understanding and personal decision to handle these issues with limited support. These issues have created dissimilarities among Libyan universities and even faculties. College policy is not helping the staff members in reaching a principally higher level of expertise, as a result, some teachers are required to prequalify to teach effectively.

Some valuable studies provide strong evidence that curriculum professional development programs may constitute a part of raising teachers' competency levels. Elabbar (2017; p1047) recognized that teachers should be involved in curriculum professional development "to equalize opportunities of human development" based on quality and assurance standards. Although the program of continuing education and development of staff members are arranged by universities, these programs cannot be available for all. On the other hand, some scholars maintain that teachers' attitude is considered as one of the barriers for professional development to overcome. It is noted that teachers' competence is likely to be a mix of knowledge, skills, and attitude. Moreover, there is no guarantee they are fully convinced of the value of these courses even though they undergo these training sessions. Researchers (Goodwin et al, 2014; Elabbar, 2017; Al- Issa, 2017; Amara, 2019) state that the starting point to handle these challenges, which arose in the educational context, lies mainly in the professional development opportunities that come up with potential resolutions and strategies towards supporting teachers to enrich their teaching practices.

There is no doubt that some members of teaching staff at Universities in Libya, who holds MAs in their fields, continued in there looking for ways to grow, sustain a well-trained, to expand their options for engaging in curriculum professional development University programs. However, those teachers are increasingly seeing the benefits of these developing programs because it reassures them that they will be more competent and able to master the knowledge and skills they need in the educational context. Competency improvement programs are gaining widespread acceptance and positive recognition throughout the higher education community on the national level and worldwide. At this point more and more these programs are seen as a potential solution to higher education raising concerns "Development of competence and professional skills are the major objectives of most of the teachers' educator programs" Parimala et al. (2014, p29). These programs are considered inevitably incomplete and accused of being aimless due to teachers' existing belief towards change and lack of continuity of such programs, other constraints are considered where the issues of need analysis should be approved before starting any new course or while it is in process. Indeed, curriculum professional development program is described an evolutionary effective implementation to promote teachers' competency.

Competent Teachers

The very quick change of the world demands teachers to have extra capabilities, these demands straight affect teachers who become responsible for operating the educational system successfully depending on their professional competency. However, "a professional competence when he/ she acts responsibly and effectively according to given standard of performance" Mulder (2014). Competent teachers can lead to the development of students'

progress positively, while less competent teachers can do exactly the opposite, they are responsible for poor students' performance, and lack the required knowledge and the needed skills to promote their students' progress as they need to handle this issue gradually. Thus, good teachers support and inspire their students, attribute their success and failure in various learning settings, and have a clear notion of the different capacities of their students.

There is a clear association between teachers' professional competence and students' performance, thus teachers' competency is essential to students' success (Goodwin et al, 2014; Al- Issa, 2017). Consequently, only competency can categorize teachers as excellent ones and ordinary ones McClelland (1998). A majority of such studies have shown that teachers' competency and high students' achievements are closely intertwined, those scholars have provided an enormous amount of valuable information about teachers' competency and its effect on learners' performance. Cubukcu, (2010) states that high teacher competency would be reflected in students' positive attitude towards schooling and self-development, however, professional teachers continually guarantee their students' academic achievement as reported by Ilanlou and Zand (2011).

Based on the previous views, the efficiency of any educational institution is directly tied up with competent teachers, the good users of knowledge, skills, and developers of the learning and teaching process. However, existing literature mainly described competency from a theoretical point of view, no competency area is considered more significant than another, all competencies are considered as a whole, and all competencies are given equal weightiness. Teachers are required to attain knowledge and skills in addition to mastering their teaching practices, according to Rahman et al (2005) teachers are regarded as excellent and competent teachers depending on the academic achievement of the students. The efficiency of the process of learning and education is based on the main components: competent teachers who undoubtedly play a crucial role, students, the educational atmosphere, the syllabi, and educational aids that affect the objectives and quality of the process, only without which it can neither start nor accomplish anything. Rahman, et al (2005) add that teachers play an important role in facilitating and distributing new knowledge, skills, and abilities that students need in their practical life. Accordingly, Ilanlou and Zand (2011) claim that competent teachers should be familiar with new learning and teaching methods, research skills, classroom management, and know how to evaluate the academic achievement of students.

Huntly (2003; p5) asserts that "competent teachers set rational goals and realistic means by which these may be achieved". Being a competent teacher means being enduring and flexible, working efficiently to promote students' development, and being able to make smart decisions that influence student learning outcomes being set out alongside respect to teaching skills and "pedagogical" knowledge. Likewise, language teachers are preferred to be so passionate to promote their careers.

Being a competent teacher means having a high degree of expertise, and being good enough to compete with others in the same domain. Mostly competency grows over time and experience, which is reflected in the reaction and interpretations of competent teachers to real situations in different contexts.

Research Methodology

This part discusses the methodology used. A qualitative research design for collecting and analyzing the data was used, it took place during the school year 2021-2022. A semi-structured interview was used for collecting the data from participants who were Libyan EFL teachers randomly selected from the English department at Sabratha University. Semi-structured interview questions were designed to explore teachers' perceptions of teaching competency at the level of the instructional contexts. The questions addressed the various

perspective on the relations between the teaching competency and its pedagogic practice. All interviewees were asked to answer the questions based on their experiences in their teaching practices, and sometimes more clarification was given to explain the interview questions to get a clear vision of their perceptions. Participants were interviewed individually; the total number of the population was twenty instructors. A sample of seven female teachers took part in this study, the participants were EFL teachers mainly MA or Ph.D. degree holders.

The interview questions were designed concerning the core teaching competencies (educational, learning, social, and technical competency) to pattern the average knowledge, skills, and attitude from participants' perspective. By answering these questions deep understanding of teaching competence will be shaped. The In-depth interview took 20-25 minutes each; it consisted of five open-ended questions allowing for flexibility. Participants were asked follow-up questions to clarify and elaborate their answers if needed. The first question was about how EFL teachers identify teaching competence. The second question focused on how EFL teachers develop their teaching competency. While the third question is about which teaching competence is of great importance to EFL teachers. The fourth was mainly about if there are any strategies and regulations to develop EFL teaching competence professionally, this question was to detect if those teachers conduct any studies, attend seminars, or training sessions. The final question focused on the characteristics and qualities possessed by competent teachers. The main purpose of the interview was to investigate how EFL teachers perceive their teaching competence, and to make detailed notes on how they interpret those competencies in classes. It is not the purpose of this study to evaluate teachers' competence but to determine their perception of competency. Interview questions have been validated by an EFL expert to examine their relevance to research questions. This was justified because we intended to find out how EFL teachers emerge their knowledge, skills, and attitude to form teaching competencies which later replicated in pedagogic practices. Data have been analyzed by thematic analysis through inductive approach. These procedures are too helpful in answering research questions set out in this study and to get an accurate result to draw conclusion about participants' views and experience.

Data Analysis

In this study, qualitative data were collected by which the researcher investigates how staff members of teaching perceive their teaching competencies. This methodology helped to reveal teachers' views and beliefs about their core competencies which would be reflected in class practices, and what strategies were used to develop these competencies. The participated teachers have two professional titles, they held different qualifications either MA or Ph.D. degrees. Two teachers were holders of a first degree, they have just 1-year teaching experience, while five participating teachers were more qualified with an experience which deeply described to range from eight to more than sixteen years. Participants varied in their training, two participants were trained in Libya; three participants received their training in different countries, and two of them did not undergo any formal ELT training. To get through understanding of teaching competence, the researcher starts the analysis of the gathered by transcribing the audiotape into a typed text for efficient data retrieval, thematic analysis was used to develop themes to get an accurate result to be correlated to the research questions and literature review, by identifying pre-determined categories.

Findings and Discussion

EFL teachers at Sabratha University were interviewed to check how they perceive their teaching competence, and what strategies they use to develop these competencies.

The results showed that when EFL teachers were asked to define competence, teachers' responses lack clear understanding of the concept 'competence' of its three pillars were (knowledge, skills, and attitude) integrated.

Teachers' answers were reflecting they have different views defining the concept of competency, they misperceive its concrete meaning, and the characteristics possessed by competent teachers.

Based on interviewees' answers, results indicate that only one teacher have a high level of understanding of the term competence, considering its three pillars (knowledge, skills, attitude). Interviewee's answer was very clear and informative.

Teacher 1 said that:

"Competence means cognitive knowledge, pedagogy, teaching strategies, materials, class management, lesson plans, class activities, evaluation, and assessment, motivating students in class by giving them a nice atmosphere to learn, and to use technology in the right way to make learning easier and to improve your way of teaching".

Surprisingly, the answers of three participated teachers did not provide any clear definition of the term which reflects their poor understanding of the meaning of teaching competencies which were clear in their comments.

Teacher 5 said that: *"I am not completely aware of its meaning"*.

Teacher 6 said that: *"I have no idea"*.

Teacher 4 said that: *"Competency starts earlier from being a student, each year it develops based on previous experience"*. The final comment by teacher 4 as a definition of competence was unacceptable and vague, the result is inconsistency with what has been previously reviewed in literature. On the other hand, results also indicate that there were three participants were rather close to the correct understanding of the concept 'competence'. One of the comments was by teacher 7 who define competence as: *"the ability to do something and teach any subjects"*, this is completely in agreement with Mulder's definition of competence as an ability to achieve a certain task if ability integrated with its main three components which previously mentioned, Gupta (2007) adds 'competence' is to perform effectively at work. From another point of perspectives, Mulder clarifies the meaning of incompetence as *"the inability to perform, or lack of ability"* (2011; p 6), research findings are also consistent with Lin (2009) where many teachers lack these core competencies as they stated in their comments. Nevertheless, this is inconsistency with Kennedy et al's findings that ability unaccompanied with an integration of skills, beliefs and attitudes is not adequate (1999). Markee emphasizes the role of one's attitude in individuals' actions, which require a change in ideology (1997).

The participants' perspectives propose continuous professional developments program as the most effective strategy to develop competence. Results show that interviewed teachers stress the importance of training courses and the countless benefits of joining these courses as a controlled outside form of competence development strategies which arranged by universities.

Teacher 1 said that:

"Unfortunately, not all teachers have the chance to develop their competence, I believe that teachers should work on their competence and develop it from inside the institute by any means such as attending training courses"

Another interviewee added that:

“Policy makers should arrange courses for all staff members”

Their answers were precise and clear about their real intentions to develop their competence by attending training sessions. This is mainly associated with Amara (2020) findings that university teachers need continued support in a new form of professional development that is college-based. It is also consistent with Elabbar (2017) findings that intensive courses, workshops were so valued to teachers, who stresses the importance of in-service teacher training and suggests ongoing professional development support that will help staff members to fulfill professionalism. This is also similar to Parimala et al’ s findings (2014) in that every teacher needs to update her/his teaching competence by any possible strategy, EFL teachers should carry on the responsibility to update their competency level due to the role these competencies play in their teaching practice.

Therefore, the content of professional training can enhance teachers’ competence and provide them with forum to particularly use this content Amara (2020). Educational staff experience a big challenge which implies intensive professional development which later associated with performance results Mulder (2011). It is noteworthy to say that educational staff consider professional development programs as a strategy to develop their competency level. However, Mulder’ s final conclusion of competence development, these competency-based regulations are desirable and fruitful and thus a blessing, if it used well (2011, p14).

From another perspective, it is also noteworthy to mention that only one interviewee was satisfied with her competency level. Teacher 1 said that: *“I am satisfied with the competence I have so far”*. While other teachers were not completely satisfied, they reveal their ideas in statements such as *“I have got competence which is a little bit higher than my performance, which I need to improve”*. Another interviewee added, *“I have good basic competence that I need to work on it”*. These findings are similar to a study by Weinstein (2008) and Lin (2009) where performance is not essentially a reflection of competency, few teachers claim that they are satisfied with their teaching competencies when performed in class.

It was interesting to note that the term ‘competence’ has another meaning as results showed for instance: Teacher 3 said that: *“Competency is reaching specific goals, and objectives of the subject you teach”*

Teacher 2 said that: *“Competency reflected in students’ results at the end of the year in that what you give as a teacher, comes back to you”*

Similar results obtained by Ilanlou and Zand (2011) who stated that few interviewees set clear course objectives, which they easily reach at the end of the academic year. Moreover, Weinstein asserted that course objects reflect teachers’ competence in class performance (2008).

Generally, based on what previously mentioned, results are in consistent with Kafyulilo et al. (2012) that some participated teachers have a clear perception of the concept ‘competence’, other interviewees were struggling to provide a clear description that reflects their understanding of ‘competency’, they were completely unaware of its meaning.

What really matters to mention is that only two teachers were satisfied with their competency level. Teacher 1 said that: *“I am satisfied with the competence I have so far”*. While four participant teachers were not completely satisfied, they express their ideas in statements such as *“I have got competence which is a little bit higher than my performance, which I need to improve”*. Another interviewee added, *“I have good basic competence that I need to work on it”*. These findings are consistent to Weinstein (2008) and Lin (2009), results showed that only few teachers were satisfied with their teaching competencies when performed in class, many teachers lack these core competencies.

Research findings are consistent with Lin (2009) findings where many teachers lack these core competencies, while others differ in their views to perceive their teaching competencies regarding the qualification they held. It is similar to a research study conducted by Aktas and Hol (2013) in Turkey, their results revealed that there is a meaningful difference between instructors' perceptions according to their academic level, those teachers who held a Ph.D. degree have a very high self-perception of their academic level compared to other participants.

In research area, respondents' answers indicate that only two interviewees publish research in the last four years, participants propose many difficulties in conducting and publishing research. However, results are in contrast with Burgess (2000), who remarks that competence comprise innovative thinking, making decisions, research and experiments. Similarly, Ilanlou and Zand (2011) claim that general competence includes research skills, one of the key components' teachers should master.

However, when teachers were asked about the qualities of competent teachers, all interviewed teachers agreed that there are certain qualities that competent teachers should have.

One teacher believed that: *"Being opened to others, having nice relationship with students and colleagues as well"*.

Two other teachers said, that the qualities of a competent teacher are based on their views of having the required knowledge and the way to transfer it appropriately. Teacher 1 claimed that: *"competent teachers can answer any question, they always have something to say"*.

The obtained results are consistent with Walker's view (2008) of the qualities of competent teachers as: expertise, flexibility, positive attitude, respecting others, communication, and accepting others.

Likewise, findings showed that educational competency and social competency are highly valuable than learning competence where creativity, innovative teaching, and developing materials according to learners' interests and solving problems emerged in class are ignored by six participants. However, teachers have high perception of social competency, compared to educational competency, learning and technical competence. Results were clearly stated in participants' comments such as: Teacher 4 said that: *"sometimes I put more weight on one competence than another"*

Still, it was significant that teachers express their views that their technical competencies are in good condition in searching for the unknown to them, but not in practice and usage. All teachers agree that there is no clear distinction between teaching competencies and they are all important. These views are clearly stated in their comments: One of them said: *"They are all at the same level; you cannot have one without the other"*. Teacher 3 stated that: *"It is like a cycle; you cannot go out of it"*. Another teacher said that: *"If I am not good at learning competency, I will not be good at educational competency which is the basic one"*. On the level of technical competency, they all use online resources and scholarly websites to search for unfamiliar information as mentioned in Koehler & Mishra, 2008; Hannon, 2008. Teacher 1 declares that: *"It is essential to deal with technology items, but knowledge is the heart of the educational process"*. Concerning social competency, all teachers declare that they have a good relationship with their students and colleagues as well, having a sense of collaboration within the workplace, as this is consistent with Selvi (2010).

Research findings reveal that:

- 1- Only one participated teacher has a clear perception of teaching competencies, whereas five participants are incapable to provide a good definition of teaching competence and are unaware of its meaning.
- 2- Six participants describe teaching competency disregarding the relationship of its three pillars knowledge, skills, and attitude.
- 3-Teachers' perception of their performance were limited, just one participated teacher was satisfied with her competency level.
- 4- All participants proposed training courses as the most effective strategy to develop teaching competency reflected in their serious intentions developing their core teaching competencies by joining these courses if they were available.
- 5- All participants stated the importance of technological devices, net connections, and private offices in the workplace to work on developing their teaching competencies as they should be.
- 6-Social competency was given more weight by all participants compared to other teaching competencies.

Conclusion

As high competencies are compulsory in today's world, teaching competencies possessed by EFL teachers are mainly crucial to obtain the needed requirements of staff members and to gain success in the educational context. It could be concluded that EFL teachers' perception of teaching competence was limited, they misperceive the integration of the three pillars of competency. Their understanding of the four core competencies (educational, learning, technical, and social) reveals that there is no explicit line that separates one competence due to its importance from others, more weight is given to social competency.

Stakeholders recommended formulating training programs to develop the teaching competencies of staff members at Sabratha University, continuous professional development training courses should be continuous, well planned, and include all university teachers to widen and enrich their teaching competencies. EFL Teachers are also highly recommended to raise their competence, and update their methods and teaching practices by joining continuing professional development programs. Yet, these programs are a chance to create a potential success in the workplace to fulfill professionalism.

In conclusion, the author strongly recommends that EFL teachers have to be familiarized with various strategies to develop their competence and to try hard to enrich their teaching abilities. In general, competence development strategies are crucial in the learning process in which these strategies are extremely important.

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