Research article

Learning to teach English as a foreign language in Lebanon

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ABSTRACT

The increase in pressure to teach English as a foreign language from an early age, and the privatization of education, are two issues discussed in education literature which are more advanced in Lebanon than in other Arab countries. This article reports on the first stage of investigation into English language teacher education in Lebanon. The research project begins by identifying who Lebanon's English teachers are, how they have been trained and how they perceive the usefulness of their training. The results of a survey of 715 teachers are discussed along with insights from four semi-structured interviews, three with teachers and one with an official from the Ministry of Education. The discussion highlights issues of concern such as, the low status of the profession, the female majority among teachers, as well as the poor perception many teachers have of the usefulness of most training, whether pre- or in-service. It is argued that this last point is related to the varied contexts produced by such a private and public mix in the educational system and the difficulty of making any training immediately relevant to a specific situation. It is recommended that English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) providers plan a reflective, practice-based approach, exploiting the knowledge of local expert teachers in order to develop critical reflection skills for teachers in training. Such an approach should make it possible for knowledge and practice to be integrated consciously by teachers themselves, in whichever situations they are employed.

Keywords: language teacher education, Lebanon, privatization, teacher perceptions, reflective teaching practices

INTRODUCTION

Lebanon experiences similar pressures of globalization to the rest of the Middle East, and shares concerns such as inequalities based on gender, class and geographical location (Akkari, 2004). The need to produce school graduates literate in English, competing demands on state resources, and pressure to allow a market to develop wherever possible, combine to produce a situation where education is increasingly being provided by private institutions. Masri (2009) discusses this phenomenon, evident in the increase in private universities in Lebanon from 19 in the 1990's (BouJaoude, 2000) to nearly 40 in the following decade (Lebanese Association for Educational Studies, n.d.). An increase in private education is visible elsewhere in the region, including Syria and Egypt (AKDN, 2007; World Bank, 2008).

Private schools and universities in the Middle East respond not only to a need to teach English as a foreign language, but also to a perceived need to educate *in* English. Where teachers' proficiency in English is poor, the learners suffer in other subjects (Association MADA, 2008). In Lebanon, many state-run schools provide more than half the instruction in English which is believed to be more advanced than elsewhere in the region. The experience of Lebanon's teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) may be of interest to instructors in other countries where lessons exclusively in the mother tongue may soon come to an end.

Lebanon's diverse school system was originally established by missionaries, (Bashour, 1997) and today the private sector caters for 65 percent of the country's school children (Lebanon's population is estimated at 4.2 million by the World Bank, 2011). Schooling has therefore been decentralized, although the curriculum is government-mandated (Zakharia, 2010). Many schools operate in French, but increasingly, English is the medium of instruction, while Arabic is restricted to a few humanities subjects. However, despite studying and being taught in English for up to twelve years at school, many students have to take remedial English language courses as a condition of entry to university (Nasser and Goff-Kfouri, 2008; Shaaban, 2005).

Learning to become an English language teacher in Lebanon is a matter of graduating from university and then, in some cases having to attend a variety of in-service English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) sessions. The latter are provided by the Lebanese Ministry of Education's Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), private foundations and universities, the Association of Teachers of English in Lebanon (ATEL), western publishing companies and international organizations such as the British Council and Amideast (Shaaban, 2005). While there are proposals for new legislation specifying postgraduate qualifications for teachers of secondary level pupils (G. Nahas, personal communication, 19 February, 2010), it will be difficult to plan in-service ELTE to fit a long-term strategic vision, given the role of so many organizations each with their own agenda. For example, as part of a recent global strategy, the British Council treats Lebanon as part of a region stretching from Morocco in the west, to Syria in the east (British Council, 2007). Long-term planning also poses a challenge for vocational and technical teacher training in Lebanon (European Training Foundation, 2003).

In the author's experience, both as a participant in and observer of in-service ELTE in Lebanon, providers often make decisions based on guesswork and predetermined ideas and materials, rather than extensive knowledge of the people who will receive training or feedback from training. This was true of, for example, a regional ELTE project by the British Council and local ministries, which was based on promoting three of its global websites and one developed originally for Egypt (British Council, 2008). Despite the professional commitment of these providers, such development projects would arguably be better if they started with an understanding of the contexts and experiences relevant to the career progression of teachers rather than utilizing pre-existing methods and materials. This paper therefore aims to contribute to such an understanding by reviewing and, to a certain extent, evaluating ELTE in Lebanon. It also suggests adopting an approach, based on exploiting the knowledge of expert teachers locally through reflective practice.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

ELTE has been discussed at length in many academic journals as it can be considered from countless perspectives such as, context, certification, pre- and in-service training content and methodology and teacher perceptions and preferences. This reflects the requirement of a more in-depth understanding of the teacher's world than that by Wallace (1991) who criticized language teacher training as simply learning a craft or acquiring received knowledge in order to apply science. As far as the terms

"training" and "education" are concerned, they will both be used throughout as it reflects their status in the literature.

The context in which Lebanese teachers learn to teach English is one in which similarly a large number of private schools compete for pupils with the public sector and with each other. Schools are English or French medium, with a few classes in Arabic. The change to trilingualism was sanctioned in 1997 by a Ministry of Education policy aimed at closing the sectarian—linguistic divide that saw Muslim—Arabic and English-speaking as opposed to Christian—Arabic and French-speaking (Joseph, 2004). Diab (2006) reports a survey in which there was 100 percent agreement on the importance of English for Lebanon. Further analysis from Zakharia (2010) adds that government policy has produced a micro-shift in students' attitudes towards Arabic, which is promoted in terms of identity, while English is seen to be of practical value.

Another feature of the context is the teaching material, in which teachers in state schools use national textbooks, in English or French for most subjects. In contrast Shaaban (2005) reports that private schools usually prefer imported texts, always in a foreign language, which they claim are more appropriate; a belief not always substantiated (Dankar, 2007).

The working environment in Lebanon is one in which English language teachers face many of the same problems and challenges as their colleagues elsewhere. They are generally underpaid, sometimes earning as little as US$330 a month for a full-time position (El-Basha, 2009). Consequently, many teachers in the public sector take extra part-time work in the private sector. Poor pay and working conditions have been identified as key factors in language teacher education (Shulz, 2000) which lead to alienation and isolation (Crookes, 1997).

Certification of English language teachers in Lebanon has moved on from the days when one could teach with just the baccalaureate certificate. Today's aspiring teachers are expected to have a minimum of Bachelor of Arts degree (BA) level education, sometimes supplemented by courses on teaching practice and theory, resulting in a four-year long teaching diploma (TD). Despite this, Shaaban (2005, p. 111) reports "chronic problems" including "inadequate preparation and minimal professional development", however in a recently announced initiative, minimal professional development was not seen as a problem. The non-profit organization Teach for Lebanon (2009) plans to send new graduates of whatever subject, on a six-week training course and then into rural schools. Shaaban also reports that Lebanon's English teachers, certified or not, often have low levels of language proficiency but are employed out of necessity. Proficiency in English is an important aspect of the context given the way teachers are affected by "native-speakerism", perceiving the native speaker teacher as a superior professional (Annous, in press). This may be exacerbated by the frequent involvement of British Council and US embassy-supplied trainers in Ministry of Education ELTE activities.

The next perspective from which to consider ELTE is content and methodology, which often reflects the apparent progression of developing teachers. Concern for survival in the new classroom environment is followed by a craft stage focusing on specific techniques and routines. Finally, although some teachers stop at the stage where their practices are sufficient to get them "through the day" (Hammerness et al., 2005, p. 379), others move on to interpret for themselves their classroom experiences and develop a philosophy of teaching as described by Sprague and Nyquist (1991), (as cited in Brandl, 2000). A logical conclusion of this is that training aims should reflect the developmental stage of the teachers being trained (Graves, 2009), an approach that would often require local knowledge and organization. Support by the government and schools which cater to different levels of personal development is a crucial element in successful in pre- and in-service training (Crookes, 1997; Mathew, 2006; Lamie, 2005; Yan, 2007). Mathew (2006) reports on research in India that recognizes that teacher's personal goals in development are crucial and that achievement of aims depends on the extent to which the school "and the larger educational system of which it is a part", support them (p. 37). This argument also appears in the recommendations to the European Commission (2002) where such support would take the form of accreditation of an all in-service training for language teachers. A similar desire for accreditation of in-service ELTE was reported from Lebanon, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia (Orr, 2008).

ELTE builds the knowledge base of language teachers which includes learning theory, pedagogical reasoning, and contextual knowledge, use of which is maximized via the deployment of meta-cognitive and reflective skills (e.g. Buitnik, 2009; Hammerness et al., 2005; Johnston and Goettsch, 2000). Crucially, teachers' previous experience as school students must also be made

available for study and reflection (Farrell, 2007), as Freeman (2002) and Kayes (2004) argue the importance of learning the discourse of reflection itself. Equally, if not more important, is the study of expert teachers as a source of knowledge (Berliner, 2001). A dissenting voice comes from Medgyes (1999) who defends the primacy of the teacher's language knowledge. A near-native command of English is "an indispensable, albeit insufficient tool." (p. 184) (See Kamhi-Stein (2009) for a review of researchers with similar views). Other areas of content include information communication technology (ICT) (Kelly and Grenfell, n.d., p. 18) and the relationship between the learners' first and second languages (Tedick and Walker, 1994; Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Mouhanna, 2009). The important emphasis on reflection has produced an increase in classroom-based action research in ELTE (Richards, 2008) and is arguably a consequence of the development of critical language teacher education. In the Middle East, for example, a concern for uncovering privilege and inequality or political agenda (Hawkins and Norton, 2009) can empower teachers in the periphery to exploit rather than accept ELTE derived from the English-speaking center. The intensity of interest in the reflective-based approach is due to the fact that it is not only a method of learning about teaching, but also part of the content. It is the teachers themselves who reflect on their practices and incorporate the reflection into the content of their professional development. Reflection must be done in a principled manner (Johnstone, 2007) and when done so, it allows for bottom-up processing of local understanding to filter and configure external top-down transmission of new ideas. The centrality of the teacher in the classroom, to any kind of change processes involving learners is also recognized in Graves' (2008) view of curriculum enactment. The increasing incorporation of reflection and meta-cognition into the language of teacher education is, however, not yet a universally recognized phenomenon. Ginsburg and Megahed (2008) review the discourse of educational reform in Egypt, and find that it focuses on teacher behaviors and development of pupil's critical thinking, but with no mention of teacher meta-cognition. In ELTE however, there is evidence that these concepts are becoming more common in Arabic speaking countries (Coombe and Barlow, 2007; Orr, in press).

Teachers' perceptions of their professional education give us yet another angle from which to consider ELTE. It is clear that for teachers to perceive training as useful, they have to feel their needs have been met (Bahous and Kfouri, 2007; Yan, 2007). It was expressed by Fullan, (1979), that given the diversity of contexts in which teachers work, it is difficult to provide relevant training and follow up without a grass roots needs analysis (as cited in Lamie, 2005). This is another factor behind the promotion of the reflective practice approach to teacher education, particularly the explicit reference to the knowledge base in order to self-evaluate and plan for change in a way that situates the learning in known, local classrooms (Egbert, 2006). Brandl (2000) points out that novice teachers reported feeling overwhelmed by theory not linked to personal experience and practice. Reflection as a skill needs to be taught so that teacher development can proceed beyond this point. Hatton and Smith (1995) for example, set out a hierarchy of reflection that teachers can develop through, leading to an understanding of teaching in the classroom, and in the wider institutional and social context.

Despite a vast amount of literature on language teacher education, Shulz (2000) was able to claim, "We are still discussing many of the issues that were discussed more than 80 years ago" (p. 516). In fact, according to Gunther (2006) educationalists can look back over a thousand years and agree with the recommendation by Abou Nasr al Farabi (870–950 C.E.) that instruction should ensure "that both teacher and student participate actively in the process … allow[ing] the instruction to be student-centered." (as cited in Ginsburg and Megahed, 2008, p. 94). This revisiting of old debates and without even raising the question of identity (Varghese et al., 2005), is recognition of the complexity of the language teacher's world. It is hoped that the developing conceptualization of reflection (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Kocoglu et al., 2008) will allow us to exploit that complexity.

METHODOLOGY

The first stage of the project asked the following questions:

1. Who are Lebanon's English Language teachers?
2. What kind of ELTE have teachers received?
3. How do teachers perceive the usefulness of training they have received?

These questions allow us to consider the data gathered in terms of the *context*, *certification* and teacher *perceptions of content and methodology* of ELTE. (The next stage of the project will

investigate the cognitions of expert teachers of English in a variety of contexts in Lebanon and how they have become "experts".)

A 37-item survey (Supplementary file: Appendix A) was developed based on experience of the collaboration between the British Council, CERD and ATEL, and discussions with a colleague teaching on a Masters of Arts in ELT and the head of English at CERD. The items relating to content of teacher training reflect the pre-prepared menu encountered.

The survey was piloted with 20 teachers, with revisions made to eliminate ambiguities. The final version contained items related to age, gender, experience, certification, content and methodology of teacher education sessions as well as teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of these sessions.

The survey was distributed to contacts by email and by CERD to all public schools for completion by their English language teachers. Of the surveys that were returned, 715 were found to be usable. Given the fact that many public sector teachers may also work in the private sector, it is impossible to know exactly how many English teachers there are. However, the head of English at CERD estimates there are between 900 and 950 teachers in the public sector, the president of ATEL estimating another 1400 in the private sector (S. Abou Hamad, personal communication, 12 June, 2009; R. Karam, personal communication, 15 June, 2009). Thus 715 represents nearly a third of English teachers in Lebanon, allowing for a high degree of confidence that the findings can be generalized.

Data was transferred to SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) so that descriptive statistics could be generated. Reliability checking for survey items where each item represents an independent concept or characteristic can be done by the test-retest method (De Vaus, 2002), although this is problematic. In an attempt to deal with this challenge, a pilot study was conducted, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated after the main survey to provide an indication of how the responses turned out. Alpha was calculated for items which were considered logically to have a positive relation (items 23 and 24, useful training on grammar and vocabulary), giving a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.855. No relation was assumed for items 15 and 25 (useful training on lesson planning and on using computers) and confirmed with a low alpha result of 0.370.

Only 48 respondents chose to provide answers to one or more of the three open-ended questions (items 14, 26 and 37), which in most cases, the information simply elaborated on an item already marked. For example, two responses to item 14 gave the name of the annual teachers conference attended which the respondents had already indicated was useful in item 13. No attempt was made to add the data to the statistics but it will be commented on in the next section where appropriate.

A second source of data was from four semi-structured interviews. A Ministry of Education official with previous teaching experience and knowledge of ELTE and three working teachers were asked to comment on the results of the questionnaires and how these compared with their own experiences. Four interviewees compared to 715 survey respondents is numerically unimportant, however it can be argued that their different backgrounds allowed to help interpret the qualitative data and in turn the survey results by providing something of the human story behind the numbers. To maintain the promised confidentiality of the survey, the three teachers were not asked if they had completed it, although it was likely that two of them had certainly received it but the third was not working at the time of distribution. The four interviewees had quite different profiles: two female and two male, with different ages, work environments, and amounts of experience. In the following sections, the interview data is indicated by (I/M) for the ministry of education official, and by (I/T1, I/T2 or I/T3) for the teachers.

RESULTS

The results from the survey are presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows information about who Lebanon's English language teachers are.

The survey provides more demographic information in the form of data about the qualifications attained by Lebanon's English language teachers, which is presented in Table 2.

Most of the survey dealt with the teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of training received. The percentages in the other tables represent the combined responses for *agree* and *strongly agree*. Table 3 shows the results for training in the form of Bachelor of Arts courses (based on 504 teachers with a relevant BA).

The results for training in the form of Master level courses (based on 97 teachers with a relevant Masters degree) are shown in Table 4.

One way of differentiating training is according to the venue. Teachers may attend sessions at school or the local CERD teacher training center. Occasionally, there are opportunities to attend training elsewhere. The data in Table 5 indicates how many teachers received useful training in the different venues.

Table 1. Lebanon's English language teachers by sex, age and years of experience.

Characteristic	%
Female	91
Male	9
Age: 20–25	11
Age: 26–30	30
Age: 31–40	34
Age: 41+	25
Experience: Less than 1 year	3
Experience: 1–3 years	9
Experience: 3–5 years	11
Experience: More than 5 years	77

Table 2. Lebanon's English language teachers by qualifications.

Qualification	%
Brevet	100
Baccalaureate	98
BA English language and literature	61
BA Education	9
BA other	9
MA ELT / TESOL	7
MA Education	6
MA other	4
Other (Teaching Diploma; Teaching Knowledge Test; etc)	20

Table 3. Percentages of teachers reporting having attended useful undergraduate training on core content.

Training	Useful (%)
Useful theory classes	53
Useful methodology classes	50
Practical activities	32
Useful theory classes + useful methodology	28
Useful methodology + practical activities	27
Useful theory classes + practical activities	24
Useful theory classes + useful methodology + practical activities	21

Table 4. Percentages of teachers reporting having attended useful graduate training on core content.

Training	Useful (%)
Classes on language learning theory	70
Classes on methodology	73
Classes on classroom activities	61

Table 5. Teachers reporting having benefitted from in-service training – by venue.

Venue	Useful (%)
At school	53
At the local government training center (Dar al mu3alimin)[1]	53
At an annual teachers conference	37
Other: charitable organizations, embassies and universities	15
Other: own experience; self-study	2

[1] 3 represents the Arabic letter ع [ayn].

Finally, the teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of different types of training is presented in Table 6.

Qualitative data from the four interviews was sorted into relevant categories. Interviewee comments were identified as referring to the female majority among teachers; pre-service ELTE; in-service ELTE; experiential/self-directed learning about teaching; the Teaching Diploma, and the low number of teachers with a relevant Masters degree. A category for miscellaneous comments was also included. The interview data is presented in (Supplementary file: Appendix B.).

DISCUSSION

1. Who are Lebanon's English language teachers?

Table 1 shows us that English teachers in Lebanon are overwhelmingly female (91%), generally (64%) between the ages of 26 and 40, most of whom have been teaching for more than 5 years (77%). The female nature of the workforce was also noted by Annous (in press). One of the male interviewees reported being the only male student in a class of 35 during his BA (I/T2). This is similar to the figure given by Masri (2009) for pre-school teachers in the region as a whole, but higher than the figure for primary and secondary. In Lebanon, this has to do with the double labor preformed by mothers, working both for an income and as principal caregivers to children. Being a teacher means a woman can be at home during the weekends and school holidays (I/M). The three teachers interviewed also suggested that men are generally not interested in teaching as the salary is poor, the work is low status and because teaching is a last resort. "Education is more of a female's role. Men are supposed to be a doctor, a lawyer, someone important" (I/T2). A teaching career seems unlikely to attract anyone who will be the main breadwinner of a household. The work is not valued highly and the women who do this work appear to be perceived in relation to their husbands (actual or future) and not as individual professionals in their own right.

Regarding the age of the teachers, it is notable that only 25% are over 40 years of age. Given that a teaching career could span forty or forty-five years between the ages of 20 and 65, one might expect to see around 50% of teachers over 40. Part of the reason has been due to the expansion of private education but it may also be that the pay and conditions are not attractive enough to keep some women in the profession once their children have left home. One interviewee (I/M) gives another reason:

> Private sector teachers tend to be young because school directors have more power and can send the older teachers away – especially in the case of teaching young children. But as teachers retire, directors have to replace them on a contract basis, and they would take only young ones. Young teachers are attractive for their IT skills and it is felt they are better with KGs.

Table 6. Teachers reporting having attended useful training – by type (compared with those not having received any training).

Type	Useful (%)	No training (%)
Lesson planning	77	9
Classroom management	68	13
Preparing tests	56	11
Theories of learning	60	16
Teaching speaking	60	16
Teaching listening	62	16
Teaching reading	72	11
Teaching writing	68	12
Teaching grammar	64	15
Teaching vocabulary	63	15
Using computers in class	23	42
Using the class text book	50	14
Trainer with Lebanese school experience	63	12
Training demonstrating practical activities for use in next class	67	10
Training clearly connecting theory to practice	52	12
Training requiring me to try out activities with the other teachers	48	18
Training requiring me to produce materials for class	64	12
Training requiring me to write an essay, report etc.	44	21
Training requiring me to read books, articles etc.	59	16
Training requiring me to work in a group with other teachers	65	12
Training requiring me/my group to make a presentation	65	14
Other	14	–

Presently, only a few existing public sector teachers have the right to a permanent teaching position. Upon retirement, this right is not transferred and younger teachers may fill these roles on temporary contracts. This new generation of teachers are more skilled in the areas of ICT and therefore in need of less training.

Finally, in terms of experience, most English language teachers in Lebanon are in the "mature category" (Annous, in press), which indicates they are experienced and no longer in need of the support that is required by novice teachers. The fact that the majority are under 40 and a long way from retirement, suggests that the teaching workforce is both experienced and ready for whatever challenges arise in the form of ELTE initiatives, such as the aforementioned proposal to standardize and increase qualification requirements. However, the context in which English language teachers develop professionally and implement the curriculum has shown to be demanding. Added to the difficulties are those associated with the social responsibility of women as carers and the uncertainty of employment conditions.

2. What kind of ELTE have teachers received?

Table 2 shows us that, today, 79% of English language teachers have at least a BA, which in the case of 70%, is in a field related to English and/or education. Almost 10% specifically mention having studied the four-year Teaching Diploma, although the figure is probably higher. There has been considerable variation in the TD depending on the university, with some providing a separate year of study (I/T1), potentially more useful, rather than mixing in extra courses to the BA program (I/T3). The fact that there are 9% of English teachers with a BA unrelated to English in any way, suggests insufficient teachers to meet the needs of the government's policy of providing schooling in English and that some teachers enter the profession for lack of opportunities in their preferred field.

It was found that 13% of English language teachers hold a Master of Arts degree (MA) related to English and/or education. This figure could be treated as low and explained by the fact that there is "no material incentive" (I/M), "People need money after they graduate" (I/T2) and "a family is more important" (I/T3). On the other hand, the figure can be seen as high for the same reason. With no reward for completing an MA, it is remarkable that even 13% have done so. However, "competition is increasing so more people will do an MA." (I/T2). While the public sector has no mechanism for rewarding an MA holder, in the private sector, an MA can mean a coordinator's position with consequently fewer hours in the classroom. It is also increasingly the case that teachers for the intensive English and college writing skills courses in private universities are required to have an MA. Some of the best qualified teachers are teaching English as a foreign language at tertiary level when they could be more usefully deployed at primary and secondary level in order to help reduce the need for remedial classes at university.

Less than four years after its introduction by the British Council, the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) has already been taken by 4% of teachers. This commercial product sold by the British Council on behalf of University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), endeavors to set a basic, global standard in ELTE. In a recent development, the trainers giving the workshops are Lebanese who have been trained by the British Council. The use of the TKT has been sanctioned by CERD which facilitates the delivery of workshops, although the test is, as yet, "unfortunately, not becoming part of a strategy" (I/M) for ELTE in Lebanon. The interviewee goes on to suggest that the TKT is valued for its association with the University of Cambridge, a case of brand recognition, and as preparation in case of examinations being announced for access to permanent posts in the public sector. This seems to imply that the TKT could crossover into the content of a government examination. Certification is therefore clearly taken seriously by the ministry of education, a sign of which has seen increasing numbers of teachers obtaining teaching diplomas. It remains to be seen however, if national certification will coexist or integrate with international products.

In addition to certification, there are the workshops and other sessions that make up in-service training. The National Trainer scheme run by CERD appears to be the most consistent approach, where trainers run a menu of workshops, usually based on those they have previously attended themselves. They meet the teachers and "tell them the possible workshops, it's like a needs analysis", then "the national trainers make the decisions regarding content and send them for approval" (I/M). ATEL workshops are also determined by the available trainers rather than teacher input. For teachers beyond the reach of these trainers, whether or not training is provided is a matter of where they work. It can be seen from Table 5 that 15% of respondents reported receiving useful

in-service training at schools belonging to charitable foundations, at some of the larger universities and from the British Council and US embassy. Other than the aforementioned training, there may be either "none at all" (I/T2) provided by employers or not much other than "workshops…too spaced out, with no follow up" (I/T1).

Finally, responding to an open question, a few teachers (2%) mentioned teacher learning based on experience and self-directed efforts, which was stressed by two of the three teachers interviewed:

> *I learned by experience, and doing research on the internet…I read a lot of articles. I read psychology…it's the most useful (I/T3). Teacher (I/T1) went on to say, The training I have had comes from eight years at (one center) and six at (another center).; Learning by teaching motivated students is a good idea for the start of a career; it gives you a kind of readiness to tackle or approach new people with a clear vision.*

Unfortunately, however, the opportunity to learn to teach students who are already motivated is not typical. Ironically, many of the assumptions of foreign trainers from the British Council for example, are based on their experiences with highly motivated individuals in private language centers.

The next section will consider the content and methodology of ELTE in Lebanon in terms of teacher perceptions of its usefulness.

3. How do teachers perceive the usefulness of training they have received?

One might expect from the hard reality of classroom practice that teachers are made critical of the immediate relevance of their pre-service education. However, Table 3 suggests there is, indeed, some cause for concern about the way undergraduate courses in theory, methodology and practical teaching activities are perceived. The problem of perceived relevance was specifically mentioned in one interview: "Methodology was the only teaching course, the courses in SLA, linguistics, phonology had no [relevance to becoming] a teacher" (I/T3). The only input this teacher found useful was on lesson planning. Another teacher reported, "It didn't really benefit me"; "[During] my BA there weren't really education or teaching courses"; "I haven't [learnt] anything to do with teaching" (I/T1). This teacher completed a BA in English Language and Literature, taught for some years, followed by taking the Teaching Diploma. The years of experience meant that the extra year at university "didn't add anything" (I/T1), although there is a positive comment about the course in testing. Finally, one of the interviewees described that when he started to teach, he felt that nothing useful had been learnt that was relevant, despite courses in which he learnt how to write lesson plans and approach the students. He reported:

> *When I first left university, I kept saying I haven't learnt anything, I haven't a clue; They tell you students are easy to manipulate, but when I came to class it was complete chaos, however, when he began to teach university students, he realized the way he had been taught was, in fact, useful. At the university where I teach, the students don't know how to write a paper [or carry out] research. Most of the teachers don't even know what a syllabus is, so I realized I did learn something. I'm glad I went to the university I did for the TD (I/T2).*

This teacher then completed a Masters in Education, his pre-service education thus being extensive. However, the teacher reports, "I'm putting into practice about 10% of the theoretical stuff I learnt" (I/T2).

A finding as low as 53% for useful theory is worrying if there is any expectation that teachers are able to reflect critically on their work. Whether teachers view the content as irrelevant (especially if English literature was the main focus) or the classes themselves as not memorable, this result is a cause for concern and indicates the absence of, or an inability to exploit this part of the knowledge base. Bahous and Kfouri (2007) also report Lebanese teachers' poor perception of the usefulness of theoretical input.

Teachers' responses to the items about learning useful methodology (50%) and practical activities (32%) are more what one might expect, although, as Table 3 shows, the ratings are even lower for combined items. Undergraduate classes at university are usually too large to allow for much practice, so it is a positive finding that there are university faculties trying to provide more than just theory. One way to give a practical focus is through the use of film. "There were a couple of movies of teaching in different countries on the history of education class, very useful" (I/T1), another method is to visit real

classes, "I had to observe a teacher in a school all through the year and make comments about the methods used etc., I observed for at least 40 hours" (I/T2). Finally, where teachers have done a separate year's study for the Teaching Diploma, there may be teaching practice. The same interviewee reports, "I also had to teach for 12 hours, using a method and writing about how effective it was" (I/T2).

One further point can be made about the usefulness of the BA programs. It may be that they are intended to develop future teachers' language skills emphasized by Medgyes (1999) rather than anything else. "I had to write two papers a week and do at least one presentation a month, so that was helpful because my English was so bad, I was taught in a French school so my English improved a lot" (I/T2). If, as mentioned above, teaching is not highly regarded, language knowledge might be being prioritized over teaching knowledge during this fundamental qualification for Lebanon's language teachers.

In contrast to BA programs, Masters level programs, as might be expected of courses specifically aimed at developing English language teacher knowledge, are perceived to be useful by a larger percentage of teachers. Table 4 shows however, that the practical application of theory is still a challenge.

With regard to in-service ELTE, government sponsored in-service training is conducted in official training centers and in individual schools. Additionally there is the annual ATEL conference and training provided by private organizations. Table 5 shows that only about half of the teachers attending government sponsored in-service training sessions report finding them useful. This needs to be looked at in terms of opportunities to attend, reconsideration of main content areas and the approach that is taken by the trainers responsible for the sessions. The ministry interviewee points to the diverse contexts in which teachers operate when she comments that teachers prefer training at their own schools because at training centers, "big groups coming together makes the relevance of the training less for more teachers" (I/M).

Regarding the content of in-service training, it can be seen from Table 6 that a maximum of 77% of teachers report having attended useful training on lesson planning with lower ratings for classroom management, learning theory, teaching the four skills, grammar and vocabulary. It would appear that from the data collected the key pedagogical areas are being dealt with, but that there are mixed opinions of in-service training. Useful training on teaching reading and writing was reported by 72% and 68% of respondents, while useful training on teaching speaking and listening was reported by only around 60%, which is unsurprising given that teachers have to work with large classes and speaking has low importance in assessment. Nor is it surprising to see listening training being rated so low, associated as it is with the use of technology. The fact however, that only 16% appear not to have attended such training suggests that it is not being appreciated.

Another low response (56%) was given for useful training on language testing. It is a positive finding that so many teachers have attended training (only 11% appear not to have done so), but one would have hoped for a better response. Language testing is often missing from training programs but all teachers in Lebanon can find themselves required to prepare formal tests in addition to carrying out some kind of informal assessment (Orr, in press). The ministry interviewee remarks:

> They need training… Teachers look for a text on the set themes, they write things badly, asking informative questions instead of argumentative, for example. They put grades just to make numbers, not really based on what you ask the student to produce and how much thinking they have to do (I/M).

Only one of the teachers interviewed mentioned having had training on assessment. His remarks were positive, "The testing and measurement course had a positive impact on me, I had a holistic approach and learned to be more scientific, but we discussed, we didn't prepare any tests" (I/T1). This teacher took the course after several years in the classroom which will have enabled him to connect theory to practice.

A low rating (23%) was given for ICT, predictable enough given the uneven distribution of ICT resources and the unreliability of the mains power supply in many areas of the country. This is a relatively new field (42% appear not to have attended such training) and the costs are still high, but ELTE is likely to incorporate more ICT before long and to catch up with other subjects where technology training is increasing (British Council, n.d.).

Regarding the approach taken during training sessions, results indicate that teachers prefer immediately relevant, active sessions, working in groups to prepare a presentation or some kind of materials for class. "Teachers just want activities because they don't want to work themselves," (I/M). In fact, one can understand teachers wanting to make life easier, as they are often working at two or more jobs (El-Basha, 2009) hence, one should be wary of criticizing them.

It is positive to see a solid rating (63%) for training delivered by a Lebanese trainer given the aforementioned influence of native-speakerism. Interviewees T2 and T3 mention positive experiences with local trainers, however, T1 only mentions a British Council trainer. The ministry interviewee reasons that the local trainers are fine because, "they have had training with the British Council and American Fellows. They had foreign trainers" (I/M).

Ironically, a native-speakerist attitude is also displayed when discussing the use of the textbook as the focus for an in-service training session. The ministry interviewee applauds UK practice where:

> You enter the class and don't see the textbook at all—the teachers give the students activities all the time—where are the books, you don't find any. This would shock our teachers, how come they don't have a book? (I/M).

In fact, a low response (50%) was given for useful training based on the teachers' textbooks. This is unfortunate given that the textbook is the teachers' main resource even though it is often undervalued (Richards, 1998). One interviewee complains, "The problem with the system is it is too general, just the surface of things, never, let's sit down and look at this chapter of the book in detail" (I/T1). Another teacher suggests simply possessing the textbook is seen as enough, "I didn't get any training on the book–even the way they give you the book, it's just, here's the book. You can start tomorrow" (I/T2). The ministry interviewee comments that state school teachers have had training on the textbook and that any further training sessions would be neither necessary nor popular. At the same time, a teacher "wouldn't put the textbook aside because there are inspectors" (I/M). The textbook is thus a key resource for busy teachers and for pupils preparing for exams, which the ministry interviewee reveals are based entirely on its content. Training linked to the textbook is an obvious need. The teachers interviewed seem to agree, both in the negative comments given above and in this positive one, "using the course book—American curriculum—very useful! I would say open and start reading but I was taught to start with the illustration" (I/T3). It may be that textbook-focused training needs to be more creative, looking at alternative ways to exploit it rather than explaining its content. This, itself, suggests a need for more theoretical discussion about how languages are learned and how they may usefully be assessed.

Another low response, (52%) was given for useful in-service training linking theory to practice. The ministry interviewee points out that theory is given a lot of attention in Lebanon:

> Our culture we tend to focus on the theoretical aspect. The Lebanese trainer would probably focus on the theory and some activities. To the disadvantage of…I mean compared to another trainer from the UK or the US, you would find them all the time, activities, activities, but we would tend to give a share to theory (I/M).

Given the predisposition to focus on theory, it seems unfortunate that in-service training does not seem to take full advantage of the opportunity to make the link to practical classroom application. The same problem was noted with pre-service theory classes at university. Reflective practice is dependent on having access to a theoretical knowledge base (among other types of knowledge) and Reid (1999) suggests that teachers do appreciate theory if they see its relevance. The problem here seems to be one of failing to situate the learning in actual classroom practice (Egbert, 2006). Reid's suggestion may be supported by another finding, which is the greater approval given for almost all aspects of in-service training by teachers without a BA. The ministry interviewee suggests non-BA holders feel threatened by their lack of a degree so are more motivated to learn. It could also be that by being older, and more experienced, these teachers are better able to relate new ideas to what they have learnt through practice.

CONCLUSION

This paper has surveyed ELTE in Lebanon. The picture is very varied. Pre-service education may serve primarily to improve language skills. The usefulness of the Teaching Diploma depends, in part, on whether or not the courses were taken all together at the end of the BA or periodically over the four

years. While the content of much teacher education, both pre- and in-service, appears to be relevant, there is a problem of making it useful to teachers, a similar concern to that reported by Bartels (2005), (as cited in Richards, 2008). The problem is exacerbated by the diversity of work situations created by the number of private institutions as well as the socio-economic differences from one part of the country to another. Dealing with this can start with a consideration of goals and methodology. There seems to be an approach to ELTE that separates methods training from theory, which encourages teachers to see their work as a craft, albeit, one of applying knowledge about language learning. The complexity of the contexts in which language teaching takes place requires one to view ELTE more as a matter of scaffolding for teachers in the process of growing transformatively (Kohonen, 2007); quantitatively in terms of the number and variety of their experiences and qualitatively in terms of their ability to act on the basis of critical reflection. This is a question of seeing the constitution of the teacher's knowledge base as a *process* in which declarative knowledge interacts with the features of specific contexts to become procedural knowledge. More than just insisting on extra teaching practice and observation which is analyzed in relation to the theoretical input, reflective thinking has to be made an objective in itself. This model has already been recommended in the context of ELTE in East Asia (Breen, 2006), which can be achieved by modeling the thinking processes involved in linking practice to theory (e.g. Tripp, 1993) and the consequent planning for future action. The work of Borg (2006) will be useful in learning how to develop teacher meta-cognition, i.e. thinking *about their thinking about their teaching*, the concept of which is especially important where teacher education is influenced by western organizations with relatively little knowledge of the reality of teachers' lives, as is the case in Lebanon. Moreover, ELTE can be improved and have greater face value if it understands that good practice exists locally, something which can be used to inform teacher educators. Teachers with reflective skills can help articulate this practice making it accessible to novices and continuing their own learning in the process.

   Lebanon, like other countries in the region, faces the challenge of producing thoughtful teachers, proficient in English and able to ensure that the new generations graduate with a high standard of English. It is reasonable to assume that English language teaching in the region will see increasing diversity of contexts and certification as governments bow to pressure and allow more of a market to develop in education. It remains to be seen what effect this will have on the challenge of enabling teachers to benefit from their ELTE.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE
Mike Orr has worked as a language teacher and language teacher educator for over 20 years, including positions with universities and the British Council, in Europe, South America, North Africa and the Middle East. He coordinated the MA in ELT at University of Balamand, Lebanon for 4 years before moving to Scotland in 2010.

APPENDIX. SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS
Supplementary materials associated with this article can be found, in the online version
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