BIRZEIT UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Graduate Studies

Teaching English at the Palestinian Private Kindergartens:

Objectives, Practices, and Challenges.

تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في رياض الأطفال الفلسطينية الخاصة: الأهداف،

والممارسات التعليمية التعلمية، والتحديات.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to myself and to all those who supported and helped

me during this challenging journey: family members, friends, and

colleagues.

Thank you all.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my deepest gratitude for my professor and supervisor, Dr. Jehad Alshwaikh, for his outstanding support academically and personally. Dr. Jehad had always shared with me his insightful remarks and valuable comments, without which this work would not have been possible. He was patient enough when I got sick; he was a great supporter when I was overwhelmed with the effort I had to put into this work. He listened to me when I needed to talk; he trusted me when I doubted myself; he encouraged me when I felt down. Dr. Jehad was ready to follow up with me via face to face meetings, emails, phone calls, and even WhatsApp texts. Dr. Jehad showed me that he was very indulged and interested in my thesis, which in turn affected me positively.

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Abstract

Due to the increasing demands for global communication in English, learning English has become a necessity to better access high-quality education and to increase future socioeconomic prospects. Therefore, teaching English at an early stage of preschools has become increasingly popular in many countries including Palestine. Although there are increasing numbers of children learning English in preschools worldwide and nationally, research on this issue is still scarce (Butler, 2013).

Therefore, the current descriptive study was designed to explore teaching English at the Palestinian kindergartens from a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective. In particular, it aimed to investigate why private kindergartens teach English (including their general goals and objectives), the primary teaching and learning practices at the English lessons, and the challenges associated with language instruction at kindergartens. The study utilized qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection through a descriptive design. Questionnaires were distributed to fifty-four private kindergartens. Then based on the results of the questionnaire, ten interviews were conducted with English kindergarten teachers during the second half of the academic year 2019-2020.

Data revealed that the main aim for teaching English at the Palestinian kindergartens is preparing kids to learn English in the first grade. It was also found that that the majority of intended learning outcomes that teachers set are related to academic matters, mainly linguistic aspects of the language rather than communicative ones, including learning the alphabet, numbers, vocabularies, and basic reading and writing skills.

Teachers' discussion of their teaching practices highlighted differences among two kinds of classes: teacher-centered classes and learner-centered ones. The primary two differences

between the two kinds were the level to which kids assume an active role in the learning process and the extent to which teachers emphasize social, cultural, and interactive skills in addition to the linguistic ones. Moreover, the results of the second research questions revealed seven main teaching practices which are (A) Developing English plans and preparing kids to learn the new language (B) Teaching early literacy skills: Alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and speaking (C) Utilizing different teaching strategies in the English classes (D) Using groups in the English classes: whole class-group, small groups, and individual work (E) Using the first language (Arabic) in the English classes (G) Dealing with individual differences (H) Assessing kids and correcting their mistakes.

Concerning the challenges that English teachers encounter when teaching at kindergartens, three kinds of challenges emerged. Firstly, teachers encounter challenges related to language and language teaching such as kids' low exposure to English before and after enrollment at kindergartens and the insufficient time dedicated to English teaching. Teachers also face challenges related to their Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), professional development, and expertise in teaching English for young learners. They complained about the lack of support, supervision, and training. Finally, teachers encountered challenges related to context, mainly the parents who do not take seriously learning English at kindergartens and who might not be cooperative enough with the teachers (in terms of follow-up with their kids). Also, the teachers complained about the lack of resources, including the curriculum, educational games, and ICT types of equipment.

In light of these results, recommendations for future research, policymaking, and teachers were provided. This study recommended conducting a similar study using observation as the main instrument for data collection as using observation enables for collecting authentic data

from the field and enables for noticing essential aspects of language learning such as communication, interaction, and active vs. passive roles, peer support, and internalization which were not easy to report through interviews and questionnaires. The study also recommended the government to invest in English kindergarten teachers by providing systematic and continuous support, training, and supervision. Finally, it recommended teachers to exploit kids' native language as the teachers in this study agreed that using Arabic is very supportive and helpful for the teachers and the kids.

الملخص باللغة العربية

اكتسب تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في مرحلةٍ مبكرةٍ أهميةً كبيرةً مؤخراً وذلك نظراً لانتشار اللغة الإنجليزية كوسيلة تواصل عالمية حيث بات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية ضرورةً للحصول على مستوى عالٍ من التعليم ولتحسين المستوى الاقتصادي والاجتماعي للأفراد. ولكن بالرغم من انتشار تعليم الإنجليزية في مراحل مبكرةٍ جداً مثل مرحلة رياض الأطفال عالمياً ومحلياً (فلسطين) إلا أن الدراسات حول هذه الظاهرة لا تزال قليلة. لذلك، صممت هذه الدراسة لاستكشاف بعض القضايا المتعلقة بتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في رياض الأطفال الفلسطينية الخاصة وذلك بالاستناد إلى أفكار فايجوتسكي الثقافية الاجتماعية.

هدفت هذه الدراسة الوصفية إلى استكشاف أسباب تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في رياض الأطفال بالنظر إلى أبرز الأهداف العامة والخاصة، وأبرز الممارسات التعليمية التعلمية في حصص اللغة الإنجليزية، وأهم التحديات التي تواجه معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في رياض الأطفال. لتحقيق هذه الأهداف، استخدمت طرق جمع بيانات كمية وكيفية، حيث تم أولا توزيع استبانات على أربعة وخمسين معلمة ثم لاحقا وبناء على نتائج هذه الاستبانات تم إجراء عشر مقابلات مع عشر معلمات يدرسن الإنجليزية في رياض الأطفال الفلسطينية الخاصة وذلك خلال النصف الثاني من العام الدراسي 2019-2020.

أظهرت النتائج أن الهدف الرئيسي من تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في رياض الأطفال هو تهيئة الطفل لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في الصف الأول. وتتم هذه التهيئة فعليا من ناحية أكاديمية حيث وجدت الدراسة أن الغالبية العظمى من الأهداف التي تعمل على تحقيقها معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية مرتبطة بقضايا أكاديمية ولغوية بحتة مثل تدريس الحروف والأرقام ومعاني الكلمات وقواعد القراءة أما التركيز على القضايا والأهداف التي تتعلق بتواصلية اللغة كان محدوداً جداً.

أظهرت ممارسات المعلمات خلال المقابلات وجود فروقات بين نوعين من الصفوف في رياض الأطفال: صفوف مرتكزة على المعلم وصفوف مرتكزة على الطالب. تتسم الصفوف التي ترتكز على الطالب بالدور الفاعل الذي يلعبه الطلاب داخل الصف وباهتمام المعلمات في تلك الصفوف بجوانب تفاعلية واجتماعية وثقافية على عكس الصفوف التي ترتكز على المعلم التي يكون الطفل بها متلقيا سلبيا ولا يسلط الضوء فيها على جوانب اجتماعية وتفاعلية. كما أظهرت نتائج السؤال الثاني حول ممارسات المعلمين وجود سبع ممارسات أساسية وهي (1) تطوير المعلمين لخطط لتعليم الإنجليزية وتهيئة الطلاب لتعلم اللغة الجديدة (2) تدريس مهارات لغوية أساسية وهي: معرفة الحروف الأبجدية، الوعي الصوتي، معاني الكلمات، وبعض المحادثات البسيطة (3) استخدام المعلمات أساليب تدريس مختلفة في حصص اللغة الإنجليزية مثل الأغاني

والألعاب والصور والمحسوسات وغيرها (4) استخدام المعلمات لنظام العمل بمجموعات حيث يتم أحيانا العمل مع الصف كمجموعة واحدة، ويتم استخدام المجموعات الصغيرة المتجانسة وغير المتجانسة وأخيراً يتم العمل بشكل فردي مع الأطفال في بعض الأحيان (5) استخدام المعلمات للغة الأم (العربية) في حصص اللغة الإنجليزية (6) تعامل المعلمات مع الفروقات الفردية بين الأطفال (7) تقييم المعلمات للأطفال في حصة اللغة الإنجليزية وتصحيح أخطائهم اللغوية.

أما فيما يتعلق بالتحديات، ظهرت ثلاث أنواع من التحديات التي تواجهها معلمات الإنجليزية في رياض الأطفال. أولا، تواجه المعلمات تحديات مرتبطة بطبيعة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وما يترتب على تدريسها في السياق الفلسطيني. فمثلا، ذكرت المعلمات أن تعرض الأطفال للغة محدودٌ جداً سواء قبل الروضة أو بعدها وأن الوقت المخصص لتعلم اللغة بشكل رسمي في الرياض محدودٌ أيضاً. ثانياً، اشتكت المعلمات من تحديات مرتبطة بمعرفتهم البيداغوجية لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية وغياب التأهيل الكافي والمتابعة المستمرة وأخيراً، تواجه المعلمات تحديات مرتبطة بالسياق الفلسطيني مثل عدم اهتمام أولياء الأمور بمرحلة رياض الأطفال وبأهمية تعليم اللغة في سن مبكرة مما ينتج عنه ضعف المتابعة والتعاون مع المعلمات. كما تذمرت المعلمات غياب المنهاج الموحد في مرحلة رياض الأطفال.

في ضوء هذه النتائج، تم الخروج بمجموعة من التوصيات الموجهة لصناع القرار، وللباحثين، وللمعلمات. أوصت الدراسة بضرورة إجراء دراسات أخرى مشابهة لكن باستخدام آليات جمع بيانات مختلفة أهمها المشاهدات حيث تتيح المشاهدات جمع بيانات أصيلة من السياق وتتيح ملاحظة جوانب تفاعلية كان من الصعب تحديدها من خلال الاستبانات والمقابلات. كما أوصت الدراسة بضرورة دعم وتأهيل معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية في رياض الأطفال حيث يعتبر تأهيلهم ومتابعتهم المستمرة حجر الأساس لدعم إدراج برامج اللغة الإنجليزية في رياض الأطفال. وأخيراً، أوصت الدراسة بالاستثمار باللغة الأم (العربية) وعدم إهمالها خاصة في مرحلة رياض الأطفال حيث أظهرت المعلمات أن استخدام اللغة الأم يدعم بشدة تعلم الأطفال للإنجليزية في هذه المرحلة.

<u>Chapter one: Research Problem</u>

1.1. Introduction

The early seven years in a child's life have a significant influence on her/his wellbeing, social behaviors as well as future attainment as a school student and as an adult both at the personal and the academic level (Tamader Al-Thani, Al-Muftah, Romanowski, Coughlin, & Abuelhassan, 2015). Whether children become responsible, active members of their society depend on a good degree in the amount of stimulation, guidance, support, education, and nurture they receive in their early years. According to the Palestinian National Strategy for Early Childhood Development and Intervention 2017-2022, "a positive start of life helps children to grow properly and brings benefits, not to the child only, but also to the family and society by reinforcing the human capital, increasing the productive capacity and reducing public expenditure on education, health, welfare, and crime prevention" (MOEHE, MOH& MOSD, 2017, P. 17).

The preschool stage, therefore, plays a pivotal role in developing kids' excitement and eagerness towards learning and ensures that a firm foundation is built for the subsequent age stages. The significant impact of preschool experience on the holistic development of children has been emphasized in many studies. For example, Barnett (2008) found that kindergarten experience has positive immediate and lasting effects on the cognitive and social behaviors of the children as well as on their school achievement later on. Morris & Perney (2003) found that the pre-reading skills that kids develop at kindergartens are significant predictors of later reading achievement at the first and the second grade. Increasing numbers of studies have also found that exposure to pre-literacy and language activities at kindergartens enhances the kids' phonological

awareness and ability to read and write in primary schools (California Department of Education, 2009).

It is worth mentioning that these substantial benefits are mostly connected with the remarkable development of language that takes place at kindergartens, whether a native or foreign language. Recently, with the widespread of English as a lingua Franca, the demands for global communication in English have increased. Thus, teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has occupied a central position and has become a necessity to better access high-quality education, to increase future socioeconomic prospects, and to facilitate communication in the globalization era (Shin, 2014). Therefore, teaching English early at preschools has become increasingly popular in many countries globally, including Palestine. Many kids worldwide are exposed to English at kindergartens, although English is a new and unfamiliar language to them and sometimes to their families (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

The decision to start English as a foreign language instruction at earlier stages is based on the assumption that children are better language learners since language learning in childhood occurs as part of a natural process that is almost lost by the time students reach high school (Vos, 2019; Sindik & Adžija, 2014; Butler, 2013). Accordingly, parents have become enthusiastically willing to start teaching their children English as early as possible; Brumen (2011) says: "parental pressure has helped foster the expansion or faster implementation of foreign language learning in kindergartens" (p.718). Although there are increasing numbers of children learning English at preschools worldwide and nationally, research on this issue is still scarce (Butler, 2013).

Therefore, this study was designed to explore English teaching at the Palestinian kindergartens. In particular, it investigates why English programs are offered at the private

kindergartens in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate, the nature of the English language teaching and learning practices, and the major challenges that accompany teaching English at kindergartens. Two main reasons arouse my interest and motivation to conduct the present study. The first is my personal experience as an English teacher at a kindergarten (see below). The second is the scarcity of national studies related to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in general and Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) in particular.

Next sections aim to shed light on the research problem, objectives, the research questions and the significance of this study.

1.2. Research Problem

According to the Statistical Yearbook for the scholastic Year 2018-2019, number of public KG2 classes in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate is 13 while the number of Private KG2 classes is 144. Number of kids enrolled in the private sector in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate is 10342 kids while only 285 are enrolled in the public sector (MOEHE, Statistical Year Book for the scholastic year 2018/2019, 2019). The majority of the kids who are enrolled in the private sector learn English as according to the Directorate of Ramallah and Al-Bireh, 63% of the private kindergartens teach English.

Although the majority of the kindergartens teach English in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) is not supervising teaching English at these kindergartens (MOEHE, MOH& MOSD, 2017). Moreover, research and data concerning English at these kindergartens are very scarce. In other words, policymaking and planning considering English teaching at the Palestinian Private kindergartens are

unavailable, making English language programs served to preschoolers wildly variable in design, operation as well as in quality.

On the one hand, there is no national curriculum for preschools in Palestine; only in 2017, the MOEHE published a General Framework of Preschool Curriculum. However, it did not tackle any issue related to English language teaching (MOEHE, The Guide to Kindergarten Teacher, 2017). Suheir Awwad, the director of the preschool sector of the General Education Department, said that the MOEHE considers teaching English in the private preschools as an additional activity so they do not control or supervise it.

The lack of an approved preschool curriculum compatible with the first-grade curriculum creates a gap during the transition from preschool to elementary education. Thus, there seems to be an increasing concern for the owners of kindergartens about developing a curriculum that is accountable to parents as a worthwhile one since all the kindergartens that teach English in Palestine are privately run, and their success is usually reflected by their popularity to parents.

On the other hand, kindergarten teachers who are supposed to develop and implement suitable, communicative, and culturally relevant English curricula may not have the necessary academic training or qualifications that enable them to do that (Monitoring and Evaluation Department, 2018). Some kindergarten teachers teach English even though they are not specialized in English and are not specifically trained to do so as according to the education statistical yearbook for the year 2028-2019, 13.7% of the kindergarten teachers in Ramallah and AL-Bireh Governorate have a "secondary lower" qualification and 19.7% have a lower diploma (MOEHE, The Education Statistical Yearbook, 2019).

Generally speaking, the professional role of the kindergarten teachers is not yet considered adequately in Palestine neither by society nor by the authorities; working at kindergartens is not considered as a prestigious job. Sbardella (2006) explains: "Here in Palestine, the kindergarten teachers are called "murabbiya," that means 'caregiver'; a term used for anyone who takes care of a child, without referring to any responsibility in the education and development of the child" (P. 53). Unfortunately, even in publications published by the MOEHE this term "Murabbiya" was frequently used to refer to kindergarten teachers.

Hence, kindergartens in Palestine may face challenges in creating a coherent and comprehensive vision of English teaching for young kids, making teaching English an overwhelmingly challenging task. When I started teaching at kindergartens_ although I have decent pedagogical and content knowledge, I found myself amid conflicting expectations and orientations at the social-cultural level (parents and society) and the professional level.

This study does not argue against language teaching at kindergartens, but instead, it aims to understand this trend and to diagnose the context of English language instruction at kindergartens. In the coming section, the objectives of this study and the research questions will be discussed.

1.3.   Objectives of the Study and the Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the context of English teaching at the Palestinian kindergartens by discussing specifically three main issues. The first is the reasons why private kindergartens teach English. This includes justifying why they offer English programs, looking at the general goals (aims) of teaching English, and finally looking at their specific objectives for the English classes.

Secondly, this study aims to explore teachers' main teaching/ learning practices. The study aims to analyze these practices in light of vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and in light of the results of the first question

Finally, this study aims to discuss the challenges that might be encountered when teaching English at kindergartens from the teachers' point of view.

To achieve these objectives, the following three main research questions were posed:

1) Why do private Palestinian kindergartens teach English?

2) What are the main English teaching and learning practices at the private Palestinian kindergartens?

3) What are the major challenges associated with English language instruction at kindergartens?

1.4. The significance of the study

While consideration of early childhood programs and issues pertaining to preschool experience and English instruction at this age level might not necessarily be new, examining such issues under Vygotsky's socio-cultural ideas is more contemporary worldwide. In Palestine, Early Childhood Development (ECD) has not been investigated thoroughly. However, recently the concern about ECD has been on the rise. For example, the MOEHE initiated in 2012-2013 a National Early Childhood Development Strategy according to which the government started the opening of some governmental kindergarten classes in some public schools located in marginalized areas (MOEHE, Evaluating the experience of the MOEHE: The opening of preschool classes in public schools, 2017). Also, in 2017 the MOEHE published the General

Framework of Preschool Curriculum that includes the skills and abilities a child is supposed to acquire at this stage, which is considered the first step for a more unified preschool experience (MOEHE, The Guide to Kindergarten Teacher, 2017) Thus, this study has the potential to contribute to the development of the existing trend at three different levels:

First, in our context, very few studies investigated issues related to ECD. For example, Abassi (2018) evaluated the performance of kindergarten teachers in Jerusalem in the light of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards; Hazboun (2013) investigated the managerial styles of the principles of kindergartens; Shaheen (2013) explored the effect of the training programs provided by the Early Childhood Resource Centre on the professional development of kindergarten teachers and principles; Ahmad (2007) proposed a model for evaluating the growth of kids in preschools; and Sbardella, (2006) investigated the history and reality of early childhood education sector in Gaza strip. Nevertheless, none of these studies considered any issue explicitly related to English language instruction or English teachers in kindergartens. I hope that the current study fills that gap.

Secondly, the results of this study might be helpful to educationalists and teachers at the institutional level since it sheds light on practices, challenges, and issues related to language learning and teaching in childhood, offering a national background to which teachers can refer while designing and implementing suitable and relevant English syllabuses.

Further, the current study may inform policymakers about the significance of including English language education in kindergartens as part of compulsory education. The MOEHE has been opening public kindergarten classes (KG2: five to six years old) since 2013 yet amongst the most frequently mentioned problems of those classes, according to parents, teachers, and supervisors, is their exclusion of English instruction form their daily or weekly programs

(MOEHE, Evaluating the experience of the MOEHE: The opening of preschool classes in public schools, 2017). According to the same study, 64.3% of the supervisors said that private schools surpassed the public ones in teaching English. Consequently, the findings of the current study might be useful for the Palestinian policymakers in their approach towards establishing a more constructive and comprehensive preschool experience in the public kindergartens that contributes to equal access to free English education for all Palestinian children regardless of their socioeconomic background. I hope that such access may facilitate their transition to formal education later on.

The coming chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study, which is Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. The theoretical framework is discussed in the literature chapter because of its relevance to the theoretical background about language learning and acquisition, which is also presented in the coming chapter.

<u>Chapter two: Theoretical Background and Literature Review</u>

2.1. Introduction.

According to the 51st convention on the rights of children by the United Nations, all children have the right to receive early childhood education regardless of the country they grow up in as nowadays education is one of the main factors that affect the quality of life later on (Tamader Al-Thani, Al-Muftah, Romanowski, Coughlin, & Abuelhassan, 2015). Thus, the concern about childhood education has been on the rise lately, and public and private investment in this sector have increased. Kindergartens, preschools, and nurseries are all terms used to refer to the places where very young learners (VYL), _usually ranging from 2 to 6 years old_ receive an education that is designed particularly around their developmental milestones and in line with them (Shin, 2014).

Enrollment in early childhood programs has many aims. For instance, Friedrich Froebel, _the father of the kindergarten_ system believed that early childhood education must focus on spirit and nature and must help young kids understand the relationship between the creator and the livings and the non-livings (Park & Yang, 2016). In Singapore, kindergartens aim to foster and support the holistic development of kids in order to prepare them for the life-long journey of learning and thus to help them become active and responsible members in their communities (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2013). In Canada, the concern of early childhood programs is on nurturing all the aspects of the development of the individual kid and on creating an inclusive environment regardless of kids' backgrounds (Regan, 2013). In Finland, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is central to the kid's path of learning and development. According to the website of the Finnish National Agency for Education, ECEC has two major aims: the first

is to fulfill the children's needs and to promote their wellbeing; the other is to educate and prepare them for school.

The current study tackles teaching English in the Palestinian kindergartens: the aims of teaching English, the teaching-learning practices, and the challenges associated with language teaching. These issues will be discussed in this study with reference to Vygotsky's socio-cultural insights. Also, investigating these issues cannot be thoroughly approached unless they are examined in light of the theories of English language learning and acquisition. Therefore, this chapter offers a narrative presentation of issues related to the research problem, starting from the theoretical framework of the study, then it presents a theoretical background for language learning for young learners in general. Then, it discusses recent and relevant literature related to the issues under investigation by looking at English programs around the world, the way these programs are operated, the main activities, and the challenges teachers face. Finally, this chapter sheds light on the situation of preschools in Palestine to help place this study in the context of early childhood programs in Palestine in general.

2.2.   Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory with its investigation of the complex interrelation of thought and language (Vygotsky, 1962). Recently, the Vygotskyan framework for learning and development has been used extensively to discuss issues and programs related to early childhood education as well as to teaching English for young learners (Shin, 2014; Brown, 2007; Edwards S., 2005; Edwards S., 2003; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). The main emphasis in this framework is placed on the crucial role played by semiotic mediation to facilitate learning in social, cultural, historical, and physical contexts.

Within this framework, the socially and culturally communicated nature of knowledge is emphasized (Edwards, 2005; Kaufman, 2004; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; L.S.Vygotsky, 1962). In this framework, learning –including second language acquisition- is seen as a semiotic process where participation in socially and internally mediated activities is essential (Vygotsky, 1962).

Vygotsky was interested in investigating "meaning" as an entity that results from the interconnectedness between the system of thinking and speaking (language). Researchers usually refer to the system of meaning as verbal thought (Mahn, 2013; Mahn, 2012; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). Investigating this system was at the center of Vygotsky's work, and it constitutes the foundation upon which other important concepts rise, such as mediation, the zone of proximal development (ZPD), scaffolding, and most importantly, language learning. In this section, I will review all of these theoretical insights that will serve the purpose of directing this study and interpreting its results later on.

2.2.1. *The social origins of thoughts.*

Ideas, beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge about communities and people develop historically over time and are transmitted to generations via communication and interaction (Edwards S. , 2005). That is why within Vygotsky's framework, learning is constructed, and cognitive development is initiated necessarily in socially and culturally embedded contexts and are accelerated via social interaction and communication.

Individuals in their development depend on the socially and culturally transmitted experiences of others. Initially, they receive these experiences via their interaction with their caregivers. In this sense, "knowledge acquisition" and the"development of intellectual capacity" are believed to be socially defined and contextualized rather than being individually defined or

"universalistic" (Edwards S. , 2005). Researchers usually refer to this as the"social sources of development" or the genetic law of development (Hedegaard, 2007; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

Another example of the social sources of development is language acquisition, which forms the basis for the communication that takes place between caregivers and children since the primary function of speech is communication (Vygotsky, 1962). Early experiments detected infants' reactions to human voices as early as the third week of their life, reflecting that the social function of speech is already apparent since the first year of infants' lives (Vygotsky, 1962). During the first two years, children know and use words supplied to them by their caregivers. After that, their developing curiosity and intellect put them in need for more than that; and this is where language and thinking start to meet to form a fundamental shift in the development of the child, particularly when the child discovers that everything has a name (Vygotsky, 1962).

Therefore, communication is not only established through linguistic symbols or words. Real communication needs meanings and generalizations; that is why Vygotsky looks at communication as an intellectual process of meaning-making and sharing meaning as well (Vygotsky, 1962). So at the outset, I will explain what Vygotsky means by meaning-making and how it is accomplished.

2.2.2. Meaning-making.

Vygotsky approaches the system of language (speaking) and the system of thinking as two separate but unified systems that intersect to make meanings. Vygotsky was particularly interested in investigating (meaning), and he refers to it in his writings as "Znachenie slova"

(Mahn, 2013). However, most of the researchers who quoted Vygotsky translated it to verbal thought (Mahn, 2013; 2012; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995).

"Verbal thought" does not refer to the meaning of words; instead, it refers to the language or words' use (Mahn, 2013). According to Vygotsky, meaning or verbal thought varies from the most fixed meaning, which is the lexical/dictionary meaning to the most fluid one, which is meaning in a social context. The latter refers to how individuals convey meanings in particular socio-cultural contexts (Mahn, 2012).

The origins of verbal thought can be traced back to the early cognitive/thinking processes that infants utilize through their attempts to interact and communicate with their caregivers in social contexts. These early communication attempts could only be accomplished by using signs, symbols, or tools that mediate the desired messages such as sounds, cries, and body movements (Mahn, 2013; 2012). It is worth mentioning that these early mediating tools are critical to acquiring language (as a more sophisticated tool) later on.

Considering the social context upon which infants initiate their elementary meaning-making processes, Vygotsky argues that meaning-making is socially constructed and emerges out of a need to interact with others and to debate for what makes meaning to the individual (Vygotsky, 1962). However, meaning-making is not limited to communication with others. Rather, it arises in dialogues either with others or with the self (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995).

For communication to succeed, words are not enough; interlocutors need generalized concepts (Vygotsky, 1962). Generalization is a fundamental feature of any word, as "all words generalize" (Vygotsky, 1962, P. 249). Generalization is the "mental act of abstracting from a

concrete object to develop a concept of the object in its manifold manifestations" (Mahn, 2012, P. 106).

The ability to generalize develops as language expands as a result of play and social interaction. This means that the system of meaning is not static. It is a dynamic system that changes and develops as a result of "qualitative transformation" that takes place in both the system of speaking and the system of thinking (Mahn, 2012). This kind of transformation is positively affected by the sociocultural contexts in which children grow and operate (Mahn, 2012). With the development of higher psychological processes and the development of concepts and generalizations, the meanings that children create change and expand.

Based on this, Vygotsky argues that children and adults have different thinking modes, and thus they tend to create and communicate different meanings for the same word or concept. For example, they might have the same concrete content of the word "dog" in their minds; however, the child thinks in the concrete complex "dog," and the adult thinks of the abstract concept "dog" (Vygotsky, 1962). The child and the adult understand each other with the pronunciation of the word "dog."

Within this framework, there is a strong relationship between social interaction and meaning-making as the latter could not be accomplished away from social interaction or social experiences. Still, to facilitate and achieve successful interaction, people need signs or tools. Vygotsky refers to the use of such tools for different purposes as mediation, which will be explored in the coming paragraphs.

2.2.3. Semiotic tools and mediation.

One of the most fundamental theoretical insights of this framework is that all human cognitive activities and mental functions such as memory, problem-solving, planning, intentional learning, and evaluation are always mediated by symbolic tools (Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky drew an analogy between the processes through which humans mediate and control their world via physical tools and the processes through which humans mediate their thinking and higher forms of development through symbolic tools (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). Such tools include works of art, diagrams, maps, algebraic symbols, mnemonic techniques, pictures, audio-video materials, and, most importantly, language (Aimin, 2013).

In this sense, a distinction should be made between two kinds of semiotic or mediating tools: the physical tools and the symbolic tools. The physical tools are used to control the external physical and social world; thus, they are outwardly directed, whereas symbolic or psychological tools are inwardly directed and are used to facilitate, support, and organize the internal mental functioning of the individual (Vygotsky, 1962).

The employment of such tools during human social and mental activities is called semiotic mediation. It is key to all aspects of knowledge construction and human understanding of the world (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Mediation is defined as "the introduction of an auxiliary device into an activity that then links humans to the world of objects or the world of mental behavior" (Lantolf, 199, P. 418).

Individuals do not invent psychological tools in isolation. Instead, they create them under specific cultural and historical conditions. The creation of these tools is affected by the particular practices of the communities, and thus they are culturally and socially bound, which makes them

not static (Turuk, 2008). These tools are the product of sociocultural evolution. They are subject to change due to the modifications that occur as they pass from one generation to another (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). So, when children are presented with tasks, they engage in them using tools.

Adults, parents, or caregivers play a significant role in instructing children on how to utilize these tools, especially language. That is why language learning –including second language learning (L2)- is considered as a semiotic process in which engaging in socially mediated activities is essential. Later on, the language the children acquire through mediation becomes a tool for mediating their relationship with others and for mediating their internal mental functioning as well.

Thus, it is noticeable that language plays a dual role in the cognitive development of children. Primarily, language has a communicative function as it serves to mediate the child's relationships with others. This early function of speech is called communicative or social speech (Vygotsky, 1962). Later on, another function of speech emerges from the primary one; it is the egocentric speech (Vygotsky, 1962). This speech mediates or regulates our relationship with ourselves. Later on, egocentric speech transforms into inner speech (Vygotsky, 1962). When children reach this stage, they can perform all forms of high mental functions by themselves. This transformation takes place through what is referred to in this framework as internalization processes.

2.2.4. *Internalization*.

Internalization transforms what was once external assistance into a resource that individuals have access to internally (Aimin, 2013). Further, internalization recognizes and

connects the social environment and individual mental activities for knowledge construction (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Internalization, thus, plays a significant role in the lifelong process of constructing knowledge, whether in childhood or even in adulthood.

Knowledge construction starts as a social activity as children acquire knowledge and assumptions about the world through their contact with the people and the environment around them. Vygotsky refers to this as the "inter-psychological" plane (Vygotsky, 1962). Later on, this knowledge is internalized by individuals by adding their personal experiences and understanding. This is referred to as the "intra-psychological plane" (Vygotsky, 1962). According to Vygotsky, every psychological function appears twice, first between people on their inter-psychological plane and then within people on their intra-psychological plane (Vygotsky, 1962).

It is worth mentioning that this transformation is not a mere copy. When individuals internalize what they have acquired socially, they add their sense, attitudes, experiences, and previous schemata, making it new, personal, and different (Turuk, 2008). This internalization process takes place consistently as long as individuals are engaged in social and cultural practices, whether in informal settings (daily life activities) or formal settings (e.g., schools).

Accordingly, it could be said that children develop their understanding of the world only through internalization (Mahn, 2013). So, the child's words might correspond with the adult's in object relatedness but not in meaning since meaning differs across people depending on how they internalize language creating a different sense of each word. Children create "an individual" meaning of the word in their inner speech that is different from social speech (Mahn, 2013). For example, the word 'mother' evokes a different and personal sense in every individual even

though there is a sociocultural meaning of the word approved by most people and denotes both a biological and cultural relationship (Mahn, 2012).

To conclude, children's development is characterized by their ability to internalize meanings. Internalization could never be accomplished away from social interaction. Therefore, Vygotsky places fundamental importance on the role played by people such as parents, adults, or caregivers in the development of the child. This role is referred to as scaffolding; it will be next explored in addition to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is a prospective way to view and discuss development and learning according to this framework.

2.2.5. *The zone of proximal development and scaffolding.*

At the outset, let us make it clear that Vygotsky approaches learning and development as two related yet not identical concepts. He was critical towards theories such as Piaget's theory that viewed development as a precondition of learning and not the result of it (Vygotsky, 1962). One of the most fundamental principles that this framework builds upon is that human development takes place in socially and culturally shaped contexts within which all forms of cognitive functions are initiated before they become internalized (Vygotsky, 1962). Based on this, Vygotsky argues that when beginning any activity, learners need social support, and they depend on others who might be more matured or experienced. Gradually, learners assume more control over their learning, and with the development of their inner speech, they become more capable of self-regulating their cognitive activities independently of others (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). Accordingly, learning and development are seen to be facilitated through social interaction; development begins as a consequence of the dialogic interactions between children and representatives of their culture, such as parents, older siblings, or teachers (Lantolf, 1994).

Vygotsky commented on this issue:

> *Learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate*
>
> *only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with*
>
> *his peers. Learning is not development; however, properly organized learning results in*
>
> *mental development and sets in motion a variety of development processes that would be*
>
> *impossible apart from learning. (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996,*
>
> *P. 198)*

To explain how this occurs, Vygotsky developed two essential notions: scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). To best understand these two notions, a historical overview is needed.

Vygotsky had been critical towards the mental tests (IQ tests) that were highly used to assess and reflect learners' achievement and innate intelligence (VEER, 2007). Vygotsky was not satisfied with the fact that the existing assessment instruments at his time exclusively assessed the learners in the aspects that are already developed and established as a result of school instruction (Turuk, 2008). Vygotsky believed that children learn little from performing activities or tasks either too below their intellectual level or too high (VEER, 2007).

Accordingly, Vygotsky felt the need to change the way tasks are developed, performed, and assessed, taking into consideration the intellectual level of the learners (VEER, 2007). To determine the intellectual level of learners, Vygotsky suggested testing the learners twice: first, when learners accomplish independently tasks that are simple to them and then when they perform more challenging tasks that are slightly above their level with the assistance of a more capable partner or an adult (Vygotsky, 1962). This procedure yields indications about the

intellectual level of the learners and their underlying potentials since interacting and benefiting from adults' assistance could not be achieved unless what adults are providing is within the learner's reach (VEER, 2007; Langford, 2005).

This distance between what the learners can accomplish independently and what they can accomplish with the help of others is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). This distance reflects the actual level of development as determined by independent solving of the tasks and the potential level of development as determined by task solving under adults' or partners' guidance. According to VEER (2007):

The zone of proximal development refers to functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturing, functions that mature tomorrow, that now are still in their embryonic form; functions that cannot be called the fruits of development, but the buds of development, the flowers of development, i.e., that which are just maturing. (VEER, 2007, p. 81)

Hence, social interaction plays a significant role in mediating and directing learners to development. So, development could be seen as a result of mediating processes through which parents, teachers, or older siblings help the learners assume gradual control over their learning by pushing the limits gradually and by offering the appropriate amount of scaffolding (guidance and assistance) (Lantolf, 1994). Of course, this collaborative mediated mental activity could not be accomplished without mediating tools, particularly language (Vygotsky, 1962).

Discussion about ZPD could also be related to the previous discussion about internalization, as many researchers explained the whole process as an internalization process. Turuk (2008) defines ZPD as the area where the transformation from the inter-psychological plane to the intra-psychological plane takes place, and this is precisely where learning happens

(Vygotsky, 1962). Therefore, learning is considered to be "distributed, interactive, contextual, and the result of the learners' participation in community practice." (Turuk, 2008).

Viewed in this way, the concept of ZPD has some defining characteristics that are worth considering in the context of the current study. The first and the most relevant one is its consideration of the social-individual dimension (Langford, 2005). This can be seen in the assumption that what learners are capable of accomplishing with cooperation today will be able to accomplish tomorrow independently. Cooperative cognitive behavior, thus, precedes and directs individual cognitive behaviors.

The second distinguished aspect of the ZPD is related to the leading role played by instruction in the mental development of individuals (VEER, 2007). Vygotsky believes that instruction should not follow the results of the mental tests. Instead, it should be geared towards the ZPD of each student, noting that this ZPD changes consistently due to time and instruction (VEER, 2007). Learners develop and learn as they move from one ZPD to another. To explain, when learners are first presented with new, stimulating, and challenging tasks, they will need scaffolding. However, even the most challenging tasks would become routine after the students receive enough guidance and opportunities for practice. When this happens, the limits should be pushed again towards the next ZPD by exposing them to new, different, and more challenging tasks (VEER, 2007).

So apparently, Vygotsky believes that teaching is critical for the development of the learners, and otherwise, they would develop more slowly (Langford, 2005). This link between development and teaching is presented as the fundamental thesis of Vygotsky's new approach to education and, in particular, the learning of non-spontaneous taught concepts (Vygotsky, 1962).

Therefore, discussing the formation of spontaneous and non-spontaneous concepts becomes necessary now.

2.2.6. Concept formation: Spontaneous vs. non-spontaneous concepts.

Analyzing concept formation is essential for understanding the link between the learning that occurs before children are enrolled in formal education and the learning that takes place after that. According to this framework, learning that takes place before formal education is characterized by the development of everyday concepts through collaboration and interaction with others. The meaningful words that children acquire before school age are considered to be the first generalized concepts they develop; primitive kinds of concepts (Hedegaard, 2007; Vygotsky, 1962). This indicates that social and collective practices constitute the foundation for children's concept formation.

As the child's intellectual level develops at school age, a higher level of generalization and thus concepts develop, which Vygotsky refers to as scientific or non-spontaneous concepts. The development of such concepts is conditioned by school instruction and is associated with engagement in systematic, planned processes (Hedegaard, 2007; Vygotsky, 1962).

According to Vygotsky (1962), concept formation is more than a mere association between verbal symbols and objects. Concept formation is an act of generalization and the result of a complex cognitive process that could never be achieved without the use of words.

So, spontaneous concepts are connected to everyday activities and experiences through which children acquire concepts without explicit instruction and intended consciousness (Vygotsky, 1962). These concepts are connected to the family and the community, and they are

the result of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962). Thus, spontaneous concepts are acquired early in childhood long before scientific concepts start to develop.

Scientific concepts, on the other hand, are explicitly and systematically introduced to the children at schools mainly to cover an area of knowledge. Hedegaard (2007) defines scientific concepts as "conscious orientation to instruction based on linguistic communication within the different subjects in schools" (p. 249). This means that scientific concepts are related to academic matters, are introduced to the students in a coherent way, and are related to other concepts within a system of knowledge (Hedegaard, 2007). The interconnectedness between the concepts in different subjects in a system implies that children will attend to these concepts consciously and intentionally, which is the main difference between scientific concepts and spontaneous ones. Vygotsky says: "what distinguishes the spontaneous concepts from the scientific concepts is the absence of a system" (Vygotsky, 1962, P. 217).

Despite the apparent differences between the two kinds of concepts, they are both parts of the process of concept formation. So, they influence and build on each other, and they also share similar characteristics, which could be seen in the examination of the way concepts start to be formed in childhood.

In childhood, children tend to interact, socialize, and imitate older siblings or parents. This imitation is the first form of spontaneous concept formation (Hedegaard, 2007). The domination of social experiences over anything else in childhood makes spontaneous concepts very dominant at that age level. The result of this socialization is "societal" or "collective knowledge" that gradually transforms into "personal conceptual competencies" (Vygotsky, 1962). By the time children are enrolled in formal education, children are introduced to new

different practices that are less "social" in their nature. When this happens, scientific concepts dominate, and they start to expand, build on, and enrich the spontaneous concepts that have been developed earlier (Hedegaard, 2007). This major transformation could be attributed mainly to the development of cognitive functions by the time children enter formal education. To quote Vygotsky:

> "*The development of scientific concepts begins in the domain of conscious awareness and volition. It grows downwards into the domain of the concrete, into the domain of personal experience. In contrast, the development of spontaneous concepts begins in the domain of concrete and empirical. It moves toward the higher characteristics of concepts toward conscious awareness and volition. The link between these two lines of development reflects their true nature. This is the link of the zone of proximal and actual development.*" (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 220)

Understanding the process of concept formation –particularly scientific concepts- helps in devising successful instructional methods that help children learn different subjects since instruction is an essential step in the development of concepts in every subject at schools. One of these subjects is foreign/second languages. Vygotsky (1962) drew an analogy between learning a second or foreign language and developing scientific concepts as learning a new language – unlike learning the native one – requires a certain degree of conscious awareness and instruction. Therefore, according to Vygotsky, understanding where children are in their concept development can help in understanding their processes of acquiring a new language:

The child learns a foreign language in school differently than he learns his native language. He does not begin learning his native language with the study of the alphabets, with

reading and writing, with the conscious and intentional construction of phrases, with the definitions of words, or with the study of grammar. Generally, however, this is all characteristic of the child's first steps in learning a foreign language. The child learns his native language without conscious awareness or intentions; he learns a foreign language with conscious awareness and intention." (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p 9)

In the following paragraphs, language learning in general and foreign language learning specifically will be explained.

2.2.7. Language learning: First and foreign languages.

According to the Vygotskyan framework, communication is the essence of language learning, and communication entails interlocutors trying to create, negotiate, and share meanings and thoughts in social and cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1962). As mentioned earlier, "meaning" is the system created by the unification of thinking and speaking and is mediated by symbolic means, mainly language. This emphasizes the critical role played by language in the facilitation of communication, meaning-making processes, and the development of human cognitive activities in general.

From this perspective, children's early language learning is embedded within social events and arises from collaborative processes of meaning-making in a specific cultural and historical contexts (Aimin, 2013). language is considered to be the primary tool that humans utilize to enhance their connection and understanding of the world, of the people, and of themselves as well (Vygotsky, 1962).

Viewed in this way, researchers who explained language learning within Vygotsky's framework define language acquisition as a process through which external speech, which arises

from social and external dialogues with others, is gradually internalized and combined with thoughts by means of communicative activities (Aimin, 2013). Lantolf & Pavlenko (1995) expressed a similar interpretation by saying that "language acquisition device is not located in the head of the individuals but is situated in the dialogic interaction that arises between individuals engaged in goal-directed activities" (P. 110). Considering this, language differs across communicative contexts and plays a distinctive role in forming different identities for each (Rublik, 2017).

Therefore, language cannot be separated from the settings in which it is used. Thus the development of linguistic knowledge, whether it is semantic, syntactic, phonetical, and pragmatic, cannot be achieved unless children are engaged in "language-mediated daily activities" in their homes and community (Kanagy, 1999).

Vygotsky (1962) identifies three levels or stages for language development. The first is the social speech children use to control the behavior of others and to express simple thoughts and feelings such as crying, shouting, or laughter. The social speech represents the first primitive attempts of humans to interact with others. The second is the egocentric or private speech, which serves as a bridge between the first and the third stage. In the egocentric speech, children talk to themselves and think out loud to guide their behaviors. The third stage is the inner speech used by older children and adults to direct all the cognitive activities.

Note that the previously mentioned stages are exclusive for speech development in particular. On the other hand, writing is more consciously demanding and challenging because it is different from speaking _presented, particularly by inner speech_ (Vygotsky, 1962). Inner speech is addressed to oneself where the listener and the speaker are identical, which allows for

maximum abbreviations of verbs, names, or specifications, and it can also be predictive (VEER, 2007). On the other hand, writing requires more specifications as the writer and the recipient do not share the same physical environment and thus are not aware of all the specifications or the abbreviations that the writer might use. Moreover, learning to write requires the students to be aware of the fact that the sound system has transformed into a system of symbols, and those symbols might not necessarily correspond with the sounds (Vygotsky, 1962). So, when children first learn their language, they learn how to speak the language long before they learn how to write it.

Having said that, it is clear that children acquire their first language as part of their spontaneous development process before they are introduced to a new foreign one. So the researchers influenced by Vygotsky's ideas started to examine the process through which children learn a new language with having an already developed system of meanings in their first language (Aimin, 2013; Mahn, 2013). The researchers were interested in studying how learners create a new language and meaning system with limited exposure to the new language. Before examining their interpretations, it is worth mentioning that Vygotsky did not write explicitly or intensively on second language acquisition per se. Instead, he provided a foundation for explaining the function of language learning in general, and the great role language plays in enhancing communication, mediation, concept formation, and human cognition in general (Mahn, 2013).

Thus, second language learning is defined in the same way Vygotsky defines learning as a semiotic process that demands participation in socially mediated activities (Turuk, 2008). Second language learning is a collaborative achievement that is less likely to be achieved if the learners work unassisted and unmediated (Turuk, 2008). From this sociocultural stance, Lantolf

& Pavlenko (1995) explain that acquiring a second language entails more than simple mastery of the linguistic properties of the language. Interpreting second or foreign language learning should consider the extent to which learning the new language can enhance individuals' understanding and ability to employ their linguistic repertoire for interpersonal and intrapersonal functions.

Moreover, Rublik (2017) explains that understanding second language acquisition requires differentiation between learning the language naturally and spontaneously in a full-immersion context and learning it in artificial settings arbitrarily and deliberately, such as in classrooms, since the two contexts involve different developmental lines. Therefore, language acquisition within this framework is approached in the same way developing spontaneous and scientific concepts are approached.

Learning a second language in classrooms requires conscious and deliberate attention and instruction and depends on a certain level of development in the first language (Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky (1962) explains that scientific concepts (such as second language) grow from the domain of conscious awareness and volition downward into the domain of concrete then into the domain of personal experience. However, learning spontaneous concepts such as (the native language) develops in the opposite direction; that is why in foreign language learning, the higher forms develop before the spontaneous fluent speech.

Usually, learners build their scientific concepts on top of the spontaneous concepts, and they relate them together. That is why when learning a new language, children transfer their first language meaning systems and linguistic knowledge, which are already in their command and employ them in their learning of the new language (Rublik, 2017). Therefore, recognizing that learners of the second language have already developed a system of meaning in their native

language is an initial but critical step when interpreting how learners learn a new language and when creating and designing contexts for second language learning (Mahn, 2013).

To sum up, communication and socialization play a fundamental role in children's language learning, as language learning is facilitated when students interact and communicate with people and environments around them. When children are taught a new language, it is vital to consider their social, cultural, and educational environments and the dynamics between what they have been taught outside the schools unconsciously and what they will be taught in schools consciously (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

Moreover, schools should create rich interactive and communicative experiences and activities that allow students to construct knowledge and meaning systems effectively. School activities should motivate students to communicate meanings using the second language and should encourage them to be active in their learning by promote communicative kinds of tasks (Rublik, 2017). Teachers should avoid teaching the language via drills, memorization, and incomprehensible interpretation of word meanings away from authentic communicative contexts. In other words, language classes should be student-centered and should turn into learning communities to promote the negotiation of meanings and the development of language skills. In the coming section, language classes will be discussed more thoroughly in light of theories of language learning and acquisition.

2.3. Theoretical background for language learning and acquisition for young learners.

The decision to start ESL/EFL instruction at earlier ages appears to be in part based on the classic argument that there is a biologically determined point for language acquisition occurs around puberty, beyond which people become incapable of acquiring languages proficiently and successfully; this argument is referred to in the literature as Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) (Shin, 2014 Butler, 2013; Brown, 2007)**.** Pros of this assumption considered the role of accent as a significant component of success since it is found that kids are superior to adults in developing a native-like accent (Brown, 2007)

However, recent studies and empirical research concerning this relationship between learning languages and age found that introducing second/foreign languages to very young learners does not necessarily provide an advantage over a later start (Shin, 2014). Such studies have considered that "the acquisition of the communicative and functional purposes of language is in most circumstances, far more important than a perfect native accent" (Brown, 2007, p. 63).

Several factors other than age have been reported to influence the effectiveness of language learning experiences such as the amount and kind of exposure (including goals, time, and intensity), individual learner factors (including aptitude, motivation, gender, and socioeconomic background), and other factors related to the context (including teacher qualifications, resource availability, community support, and the local language environment) (Butler, 2013; Paradis, 2007).

Moreover, it is worth noting that there is a difference between the expectation of an early start in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) situations, considering the critical distinction between learning and acquisition. In ESL settings,

kids are expected to use the language in a natural setting daily, which helps them develop a native-like proficiency very quickly. However, children in EFL settings _like the Palestinian context_ are exposed to a limited amount of language, a few hours weekly, and without the opportunity to practice it outside the classrooms. Because of this limited kind of exposure, EFL learners are not likely to achieve high levels of proficiency in English even if they start learning it from childhood (Shin, 2014). In other words, applying the critical period hypothesis (CPH) to foreign-language learning is not appropriate since foreign language education often does not provide the learners with an opportunity to fully utilize such biological/ natural mechanisms.

Regardless if we are talking about ESL or EFL setting, early childhood programs should utilize approaches for language learning that is developmentally appropriate (Shin, 2014). Developmentally appropriate approaches for Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL) have their roots in Piaget's (1970) work. Piaget emphasized that children are active learners, and they learn to make sense of the world by building up concepts through interacting with their physical environment and making connections between already existing knowledge and the new one. Besides, developmentally appropriate approaches emphasize Vygotsky's argument that children learn through play and social interaction via symbolic tools, mainly language, and that adults and peers scaffold kids, facilitate and aid their learning process (Vygotsky, 1969).

A direct implication of these conceptual underpinnings is the designing of language classes that allow young learners to construct meanings and make discoveries through stimulating, meaningful, purposeful, playful, joyful, and communicative activities instead of learning the language explicitly through focusing on isolated items or structures. The purpose behind providing these kinds of activities is to promote the kids' ability to use the language in daily purposeful situations, such as communicating their needs and thought to their caregivers

(Singapore Ministry of Education, 2013). Thus, learning a new language is highly connected with being in an interactive, language-rich, and non-threatening learning environment that allows kids to benefit from adults' interaction and extend their skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In such contexts, teachers might use role-playing, singing, rhyming, storytelling, and other activities which will be explored in detail in the third section of this chapter.

Moreover, participating in groups is essential to how kids' learning is constructed. The more children are engaged in group interactions, whether with the teacher or with their peers, the more likely they are to hear new words and use them in their talk (Shin, 2014). In these learning environments, the attention to the early literacy practices shall be great as they are central to the short and long-term outcomes for the English learners (Kohnert, Yim, Nett, Kan, & Duran, 2005). Early literacy practices might include the knowledge of letters, basic handwriting skills, writing directionality, and basic phonological awareness, and these practices work well when they are purposeful and engaging (California Department of Education, 2009).

When young kids are exposed to language practices at kindergartens or preschools, their reaction towards them might vary, making their language develops throughout certain stages and at different rates. Some researchers have investigated these stages of language development for young learners, and the nature of the language they develop and one of the most common and prevailing results was that kids go through four stages when they develop their second or foreign language. These stages are: using their first language, silent period, using headlines and learned phrases, and finally producing more complex structures and vocabulary (Adžija, 2014; Singapore Ministry of Education, 2013; California Department of Education, 2009).

The first language is the first source of assistance when learning a new language since when kids are enrolled in preschools, usually they have no or little exposure to the new language, which means they learn it from scratch at a time when their first language is almost developed. The fact that young learners depend on their first language when learning a new one has encouraged many researchers to conduct studies about the relationship between the first language and the second one and the influence they have on each other such as (Culatta, Reese, & Setzer, 2015; Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Hancock, 2009; Barnett, 2008; Kohnert, Yim, Nett, Kan, & Duran, 2005; Paradis, 2007). All of these studies agree that the first language is a source of assistance rather than an impediment. Language teachers should invest, value, and capitalize on the students' first languages and cultures when learning a new language rather than restricting and limiting first language use in second language classes. Kohnert, Yim, Nett, Kan, & Duran (2005) found that young kids who have not developed cognitive skills in their first language before learning a second language are at greater risk for academic delays than their peers who have had opportunities to develop and use their first language.

A plethora of research has reported many benefits for children's receiving systematic foreign language instruction at kindergartens, and those benefits include not only linguistic development but also metalinguistic, cognitive, social, and interpersonal (Shin, 2014). For example, Göncz & Kodžopeljić (2010) investigated through an experimental design the effect of early bilingual experience on the kids' metalinguistic awareness and found that children with bilingual preschool experience had higher metalinguistic awareness as well as more advanced psychological functions such as concentration, synthesis, and abstraction. Furthermore, it has been found that children who learn a second language at an early age have more active brain spheres (Klimova, 2013). Positive attitudes and enhanced motivation towards learning languages

have also been reported continuously as significant advantages of introducing early foreign-language education (Li, 2004). Finally, studies show that children who receive early language education at kindergartens or preschools have the potential to develop and maintain native-like pronunciation, high oral proficiency, and comprehension skills (Brumen, 2011; Brown, 2007).

Given those accepted advantages of early second or foreign language instruction and considering the spread of English as an international language, ministries of education in the countries where English is not commonly spoken are consistently lowering the age of compulsory English education. Earlier compulsory English instruction means more time spent learning the language, thus increasing the learners' mastery of English by the time they are adults and in the workforce (Shin, 2014). Responding to this trend, many researchers have begun to conduct studies aiming to explore the different contexts and issues pertaining to EFL instruction for young learners at kindergartens, and some of these issues will be explored next.

2.4. English instruction at kindergartens

In the previous sections, some of the theoretical insights and arguments concerning teaching English as a foreign language for young learners were discussed. This section aims to explore how these ideas are put into practice by reviewing some studies about English classes at kindergartens.

In the class, many factors affect teaching the language. Lo'pez & Me'ndez (2004) mention seven of these factors: past experiences, educational experiences, colleagues/administrators, changes in teaching situations, materials, politics, and students. These factors impact the way teachers teach English in different contexts and the models they adopt in teaching the language.

Many researchers were interested in investigating these contexts and models. For example, Li (2004) investigated the culture of English teaching in Hong Kong kindergartens and described the complexity of the interaction between the native and the Western culture. Similarly, Klimova (2013) explored the context of EFL teaching in the Czech Republic kindergartens. Adriany (2017) investigated early childhood education in Indonesia and the integration of English in kindergartens from a socio-political perspective. According to interviews conducted with kindergarten teachers, teaching English at an early age has been the result of "Franchising" international kindergartens, a phenomenon which Adriany (2017) refers to as the "McDonaldization of education." From the political perspective that the researcher adopts, this phenomenon "sustains and perpetuates colonialization.

Other researchers focused more on identifying and interpreting the nature of English instruction at preschools and describing the optimal environment and activities for learning EFL or ESL. Among the prevailing results reported by such studies are that language learning environments at preschools should be natural, stress-free, fun, rich, supportive, stimulating, purposeful, engaging, meaningful, student-centered, and most importantly, developmentally appropriate and culturally as well (Chu, 2014; Shin, 2014; Sindik & Adžija, 2014; Klimova, 2013; Moon & Reifel, 2008; Li, 2004; Lo'pez & Me'ndez, 2004).

For example, English teaching in the Czech Republic follows the "Helen Doron" program, which considers that learning English should be as natural as acquiring the native language (Klimova, 2013). Within this program, kids are divided according to their age and are mostly exposed to action-based activities and drama techniques through which they learn themes in English, such as family members, greetings, colors, etc. (Klimova, 2013). TEYL in Spain is also directed by the belief of the natural acquisition of the foreign language, not to mention that

Spain and Belgium are the two European countries making the most effort to start teaching foreign languages at the age of three (Brumen, 2011). This tendency requires designing language activities that are authentic in the first place and meaningful to very young learners (Lo'pez & Me'ndez, 2004). Therefore, teachers of English in Spain depend highly on the use of games as a medium of instruction. Lo'pez & Me'ndez (2004) state:

> *Games are not only a playful addition to the class, but they also provide an opportunity to use and assimilate real use of the language while the mind is focused on participating in the game as well as being a very effective opportunity for indirect learning*. (Lo'pez & (P. 170)

The use of games along with other playful fun and engaging activities such as rhymes, songs, role play, and storybooks in teaching English for young learners have also been reported in other studies. For example, Brumen (2011) investigated the perception of and motivation for foreign language learning at preschools in Slovenia and found that when involved in playful, engaging activities (running, singing, acting, talking), young learners had intrinsic motivation for learning the new languages otherwise they found learning languages inconvenient and irrelevant. According to Brumen (2011), "playfulness should dominate in every kind of educational activity"(P. 718).

Similarly, Mokhtar, Mayuasti, & Ikhsan (2017) found that using songs at a kindergarten in Indonesia helps kids learn new vocabularies, especially if the songs are followed up with activities that promote students' talk and allow them to see flashcards and pictures. Moon & Reifel (2008) explored teacher's understanding of the role of play in literacy learning at a kindergarten in the U.S. Through observations and interviews, Moon& Reifel (2008) found that

play has an essential role in children's literacy learning and development. The teachers who participated in the study used concrete, manipulative, fun, hands-on, and creative activities and games, and they believed that these playful activities mediate literacy learning.

Lori & AL-Ansari (2001) also examined many variables pertaining to English language learning for young learners in Saudi Arabia and found that young learners were motivated to learn the language since they had maids at their homes who spoke English and their motivation was positively correlated with listening to English stories told by those maids.

Hakkarainen (2008) agrees with Brumen (2011) and with Lori & AL-Ansari (2001) that the motivation created by engaging, fun activities is essential to learn a foreign language for young learners, but Hakkarainen (2008) believes that the interaction created through such activities is the source for such a motivation. Adopting Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Hakkarainen (2008) investigates the nature and level of involvement, motivation, and learning in kids participating in a paly-based project in a kindergarten in Finland. The researcher builds on Vygotsky's ideas of ZPD and internalization to analyze the role of play and narratives in kid's involvement and language learning. The researcher used daily interactions between the teacher and the kids and between peers themselves as the main unit of analysis and focused his observations on children's use of cultural tools and on their ability to initiate communication while engaged in play-based learning. Among the significant results of the study were the high rates of personal engagement and involvement shown on behalf of the kids throughout the five months of the project, which in turn enhanced kid's repertoire of vocabularies.

Adžija (2014) argues that learning is much easier if it is stress-free and fun, as in that case, the "emotional brain," which stores memories, is activated. According to Adžija (2014),

80% of the problems that kids encounter while learning are stress-related. In her longitudinal study, Clarke (1999) aimed to identify, describe and interpret the nature of the English language that four Vietnamese four-years-old kids were able to develop over one year of learning in a bilingual preschool in Australia. The study focused on observing the language output of the four kids during their interaction with others. The results show that the four kids were able to comprehend and produce different patterns of language output and at different rates, and the reason for these differences was the level of scaffolding and the way teachers responded and interacted with each one of them. This emphasizes the importance of creating safe, welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environments for learning the language for young learners.

Nevertheless, real contexts do not necessarily reflect this ideally supposed environments. At many kindergarten classes around the world, there is an extensive use of "school-like" activities driven by the concern about preparing the kids for the primary school (Hakkarainen, 2008). For instance, English classes in Hong Kong were found to be highly controlled and structured with focusing on learning outcomes rather than learning processes and on task completion rather than full emotional and mental engagement (Li, 2004). Similar results were reported in Cambodia, where the teacher-centered approach is mainly used in the English classes at kindergartens (Masnan & Ngajib, 2016). In Indonesia, kindergarten English teachers also complained that their academic load is overwhelming (Adriany, 2017).

Other challenges related to language teaching for young learners are reported in different studies. For example, Masnan & Ngajib (2016) found that English kindergarten teachers in Cambodia face two kinds of challenges: The first comes from the teachers themselves, such as their low proficiency in English, their limited professional preparation, and their inability to plan effective lessons. The second comes from the unsupportive environment, including the limited

contexts in which students could use the language outside the kindergartens, parents' inability to speak English, and lack of resources too. Further, the researchers observed several instances of communication breakdowns in the English classes, which were the result of disengaging activities and peers' mockery when some kids try to communicate with the teachers in English Masnan & Ngajib (2016).

Li (2004), in his investigation of Hong Kong kindergartens, agreed with Masnan & Ngajib (2016) that limited subject knowledge and academic background is a major challenge but also reported another one, which is parents' expectations that sometimes do not correspond with the professional attitudes of the teachers. In addition to teachers' lack of professional preparation, Savic (2016) reported the inadequacy of many preschool English curricula; some curricula are guided by the market while others are not related to the education policies.

In Canada kindergartens, teachers encounter enormous challenges related to their students' first language. Sometimes, an English kindergarten teacher might have five or six students, each speaking a different language that the teacher herself/himself does not speak (Hancock, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Similarly, Kohnert, Yim, Nett, Kan, & Duran (2005) agree that teaching English to young learners in the United States is more challenging when the families speak languages other than or in addition to English. In the united states, teachers also complain about the differences in the varieties and forms of English that kids may encounter in their daily life while learning English, which might negatively affect their language learning in kindergartens (California Department of Education, 2009).

From this perspective, the need for more academically qualified and professionally competent teachers has dramatically increased, and more importance has been placed on the academic preparation and training of specialized English preschool teachers in colleges and universities (Alqassem, Dashash, & Asma, 2016; Chu, 2014). That is why many researchers started investigating teacher's competence, qualifications, experiences, and attitudes towards ECE in general or TEYL in particular. For example, Tamader Al-Thani, Al-Muftah, Romanowski, Coughlin, & Abuelhassan (2015) described teachers' perspectives and experiences with the implementation of early childhood education policies and practices in Qatar. Happo, Ma¨a¨tta, & Uusiautti (2013) discussed the expertise of early childhood teachers in Finland and discussed ways to improve their expertise. Chu (2014) investigated the changes in English teachers' beliefs before and after teaching in kindergartens.

Creating successful and rich early language learning experiences depends on a good degree in the teacher's ability to understand how children learn and develop their early literacy skills (California Department of Education, 2009). Teachers are supposed to build on this knowledge base when designing learning activities so that to maximize the possibility of learning the language efficiently. However, English kindergarten teachers at many kindergartens around the world are either homeroom teachers who received little training on how to teach English as an EFL, or elementary/secondary English teachers who have limited knowledge on how to deal effectively with VYLs (Shin, 2014; Inbar-Lourie, 2010).

This professional gap minimizes the teacher's ability to adjust their teaching techniques to kindergarten English classes (Brumen, 2011). Therefore, a reconsideration of and investment in teacher's competence are considered to be initial steps towards increasing the effectiveness of early English language learning in many non-speaking English countries such as Saudi Arabia,

Cambodia, Indonesia, and Finland (Adriany, 2017; Alqassem, Dashash, & Asma, 2016; Masnan & Ngajib, 2016; Happo, Ma¨a¨tta, & Uusiautti, 2013).

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter presented the Vygotskean theoretical framework that underpins this study by highlighting the most relevant theoretical insights that are used to analyze and interpret the results of the study. The chapter also presented a theoretical background for language learning and acquisition, which helped in understanding the context of language teaching and learning at early ages. Finally, some relevant studies that tackled issues related to language instruction at kindergartens were reviewed. The literature reviewed showed that teaching English at kindergartens is a new trend and accompanied with many challenges. Few studies in the Arab world concerning teaching English at kindergarten were found. Moreover, literature concerning teaching English at kindergartens in Palestine is missing. That is why the current study aims to fill this gap. In the coming chapter, the methodology of the study is described in detail.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The overall aim of this study was to investigate the context of English language instruction at the private Palestinian kindergartens located in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate. This study specifically aimed to explore the reasons why private kindergartens offer English programs to preschoolers, the nature of the activities provided, and the challenges that English kindergarten teachers encounter. Thus, the current study was conducted to answer three main questions which are: (1) Why do private Palestinian kindergartens teach English? (2) What are the main teaching-learning practices at the Palestinian kindergartens? (3) What are the significant challenges associated with English language instruction at these kindergartens? This chapter describes the research design and the approach adopted, and it justifies these choices. It also provides an in-depth description of the context and participants and discusses data collection instruments as well as data analysis procedures. Finally, actions taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the results are stated.

3.2. Approach and design

This study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods through a descriptive exploratory design. Using the qualitative and quantitative approach allows for a full understanding of the research problem by taking advantage of each approach's characteristics. Survey questionnaires were used to collect the quantitative data that enabled me to describe the overall context and the general tendencies related to the issues under investigation, especially that literature about English teaching at the Palestinian kindergartens is missing. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews were then utilized to collect qualitative data to develop a

detailed understanding of the research problem and to get deep insights and meanings towards the research questions (Creswell, 2012). The fourth section of this chapter (Instruments of the study) provides detailed explanations of the two data collection instruments.

3.3.   Context and participants

When the MOEHE first assumed responsibility for education in 1994 upon the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), it aimed to ensure education for all Palestinians and to improve the quality of the education received at all levels (MOEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan, 2008). However, the MOEHE then did not assume direct responsibility for early childhood education, and the private sector only operated it until 2012. In 2012-2013, the MOEHE initiated the National Strategy for Early childhood Development and intervention 2017-2022. According to this Strategy, responsibility for the planning, implementation, and monitoring of early childhood development and intervention programs rests on three government ministries which are the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE), the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) (MOEHE, MOH& MOSD, 2017).

Responding to this Strategy, the government started opening some public kindergarten classes (KG2) in some public schools located in marginalized areas. In 2012-2013, only four KG2 classes were opened in which 122 kids were enrolled. According to the Education Statistical Yearbook for Scholastic Year 2018/2019, the number of public KG2 classes increased to 270, with a total number of 5092 kids enrolled. The number of public KG2 classes in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate is 13, with 285 kids enrolled. On the other hand, the number of private kindergartens that offer a two-year preschool experience (KG1 and KG2) is 1783, with

around 143161 kids enrolled. One hundred forty-four of these private kindergartens are in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate, with 10342 kids registered.

As one could notice, the enrollment rates in the public classes are considerably incomparable with the enrollment rates in the private ones as it only constitutes 3% of the general enrollment rate in both sectors, which is 62% in the academic year 2018-2019. These numbers indicate that there are still many Palestinian kids who do not attend kindergartens at all and that kids from low-income families have the least access to preschool education since they cannot afford the fees of the private ones. It is worth mentioning that until the time when this study was carried out, preschool education was not compulsory.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, on average, there are 22 kids placed in each classroom ranging in age from 3.8 (KG1) to 5.8 (KG2). The number of kids per teacher in kindergartens is 19. In Ramallah and AL-Bireh Governorate, there are 801 teachers, 13.7% of them have a "secondary lower" qualification, 19.7% have a lower diploma, 65.1% have a BA, and 1.6% have MA (MOEHE, The Education Statistical Yearbook, 2019).

The MOEHE has not yet developed a unified, integrated, and comprehensive kindergarten curriculum that describes all the direct and indirect pedagogical and educational experiences that help achieve this stage's goals (MOEHE, Evaluating the experience of the MOEHE: The opening of preschool classes in public schools, 2017). The MOEHE just recommends that kindergartens provide activities on these areas: Logical mathematics, verbal/linguistic concepts, naturalistic concepts, interpersonal concepts, musical-rhythmic concepts as well as drama (MOEHE, MOH & MOSD, 2017).

The linguistic activities that the MOEHE directly supervises and recommends at kindergartens in both sectors are exclusive to the mother language in Palestine, which is Arabic. The head of the preschool sector in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate Suhair Awwad told me through a personal communication that foreign language teaching -basically English- at some private kindergartens is carried out as an additional activity and is not being coordinated by MOEHE. Data about teaching English at the Palestinian kindergartens, whether private or public, are missing.

To get names of the KGs that teach English in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate, I contacted kindergarten supervisors and visited them in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Directorate in the first semester of the academic year 2019-2020. According to the people I met there, there were no established databases regarding English language teaching and learning. So, I had to meet two supervisors and went through the names of KGs, and they told me the names of those that teach English according to their knowledge. We found that of the 157 KGs located in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate (both private and public), 108 private kindergartens teach English. It should be noted that this number (108) is not reliable since the supervisors themselves were not sure about some kindergartens.

Therefore, the population of the current study encompassed all the private kindergartens that teach English in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate, which are around 108. The study was carried on a convenient sample of 54 private kindergartens. I tried to reach out the entire population, yet many kindergartens' directors refused to participate. 54 kindergartens accepted to participate in the study. I visited kindergartens from different localities: Ramallah, Al-Bireh, Beituniya, Beitin, Surda, Abu Qash, Al Jalazun camp, Jifna,   Ber Zeit, Kobar, Turmus'ayya,

Bani Zeid, Saffa, Beit Liqya and At Tira. Before visiting them, I contacted their directors and got approval for their participation in the study.

The questionnaires were addressed to the teachers who teach English in the chosen kindergartens, regardless of their specialization. Fifty-four teachers answered the questionnaire by themselves and in few cases their directors helped them. Before distributing the questionnaires, I did not know much about the context of teaching English or English teachers in Ramallah and Al-Bireh since national studies and official publications on this issue are missing.

In the following paragraph, I will give a brief description of the context and of the teachers **based on the result of the qualitative section of the questionnaire**, which was dedicated to getting "**general background information about teaching English and teacher's specialization**." I suppose that this would help in placing the results of the study in a broader and more comprehensive context.

English was taught at the private kindergartens mostly as a foreign language course in which children aged between (4 -6) (KG1/KG2) learn English three to five times a week with an average of 5.3 hours weekly. Only 30% of the KGs provided English programs for kids under the age of four (3-4 years) "Bara'em (براعم)" Some kindergartens, 37%, offered English through content-based instruction; English, in this case, was used as a medium of instruction to teach other subjects such as math and science. Of the sample, 27.7% adopted international curricula for teaching the language. Thirty-eight of the sample used books to teach English; among the books used are: Hooked in Phonics, Wonder Phonics Book, My Friend, English Chicks, and My family. It is worth noting that, according to MOEHE, using books is not allowed at KGs.

English was mostly taught by an English teacher who has a specialization in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) or in English language literature and translation (61% of the sample). The majority of the teachers hold a BA degree (46 teachers) while three teachers have MA degree, three teachers have a diploma, and only one teacher has a high school certificate. The teachers had an average of seven-year experience ranging between a minimum of one year and a maximum of twenty-eight years. Usually, there were no assistants in the class to help the English teachers; only 29% percent had assistants with them. Figure 3.1 summarizes the properties of the English teachers (the sample).
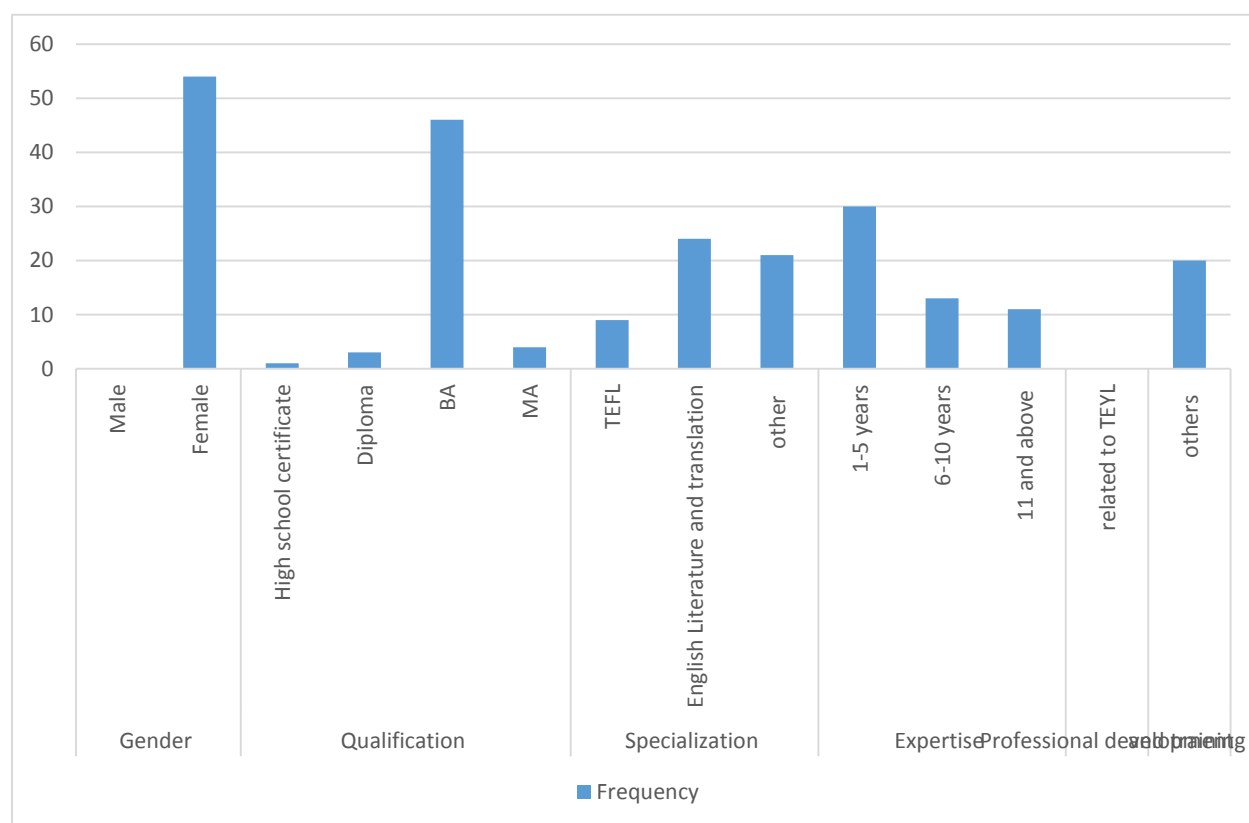
Figure 3.1. The properties of the teachers' sample (who completed the questionnaire).

Based on the results of the questionnaires, ten teachers were intentionally chosen for semi-structured interviews using "purposeful qualitative sampling" (Creswell, 2012). This kind

of sampling enabled me to select teachers who could help develop a detailed understanding of the context of English instruction at kindergartens by sharing their experiences regarding the issue under investigation (Creswell, 2012). The teachers were chosen based on the results of the second section of the questionnaire, "challenges section." The reason why the average responses of this section were the criterion is that no apparent differences were found in the average answers of the third section, which was about the teaching and the learning practices. The first section, on the other hand, was not considered in the selection criteria since it tackled issues related to policies, which is more relevant to the directors of the KGs, not the teachers. The average responses of the selected teachers concerning the challenges section ranged between (1.38= disagree) and (4.62= strongly agree). The first group of the teachers agreed with most of the challenges mentioned in the questionnaire, while the second group disagreed that they face most of the challenges mentioned.

Having interviewed the ten teachers, some aspects of their practices revealed similarities and differences among them. These differences were mainly related to the roles kids assume in the English classes (active vs. passive role) and to teachers' emphasis on the communicative aspects of the language. When the four teachers, who did not find teaching English challenging, discussed their practices via the interviews, they represented learner-centered classrooms in which kids played active roles and teachers emphasized communication a lot. The other six teachers, who faced more challenges, represented teacher-centered classrooms as the discussion of their practices revealed kids playing a less active role and the emphasis in the class is on language structures. More about the differences between the learner-centered classes and teacher-centered classes will be provided in the fourth and fifth chapters. Table 3.1 below

presents the properties of the qualitative sample that was selected for the interviews. Table 3.2

summarizes the aspects of the teacher centered group and the learner centered one.

Table 3.1

The Properties of the Interviewee Teachers

Name of the teacher	Qualification	Specialization	Years of expertise	Average response on challenges section	Approach adopted
T1	BA	Social work	2	4.15	Teacher-centered
T2	BA	English literature & teaching diploma	5	3.8	Teacher-centered
T3	BA	Psychology	7	3.76	Teacher-centered
T4	BA	TEFL	10	4.1	Teacher-centered
T5	MA	TEFL	5	3.69	Teacher-centered
T6	BA	English literature	4	4.62	Teacher-centered
T7	BA	Modern languages	28	2.26	Learner-centered
T8	MA	English literature	4	3.08	Learner-centered
T9	BA	English literature & Diploma in education	4	2.69	Learner-centered
T10	BA	English literature	10	1.38	Learner-centered

Table 3.2

Aspects of the Teacher Centered Group and the Learner Centered Group

Aspect	Teacher centered Group	Number of teachers out of six	Learner centered group	Number of teachers out of four
Teachers' attitudes towards language skills	Preference of reading, writing and listening.	6	Preference of comprehension, speaking, listening.	4
Roles of the kids	Passive roles. Indicators: (focusing on drills, memorization of language items, using grammar translation method)	5 * (T5 didn't mention examples of this aspect).	Active role of kids. Indicators: (encouraging kids to discover knowledge; guess meanings, use what they learn in context; kids' initiation of conversations; interacting with the teacher, the kids, and with classroom objects; morning circle).	4
Groups	Using small groups and whole class activities	6	Using small groups, whole class activities, and individual work to observe each kid closely and take each kid's characteristics into consideration	4
Communication	Limited. Indicators: (limited interactive tasks and games; groups are used for non-interactive activities; speaking and	6	Relatively higher. Indicators: (morning circle, initiation of talks on behalf of kids, teachers speak English and encourage kids to use English to talk about things; kids	4

	conversation through drills.		develop vocabs gradually as they try to speak up; interactive kinds of games are used).	
Individual differences	Focus on low achievers; focus on the academic aspects. Indicators: (intensifying instruction for low achievers; don't consider high achievers' needs; limited consideration of social, emotional and cultural aspects.	5 *T5 didn't mention examples of this aspects.	Focus on all kids from all aspects: academic, emotional and social. Indicators: (working individually with kids, differentiation of education and designing plans based on kids' needs; taking into consideration the kids' social background; considering kids' learning styles	4
Assessment and evaluation	Focus on Academic aspects, Indicators: (giving monthly or weekly assessments; using pencil-paper tests; giving marks; giving dictation; reciting conversations).	6	Academic and social aspects of development. Indicators: (using observation as a primary tool for evaluation; observing kids through the individual time and while interacting in class; considering initiating talks and not being shy an important aspect of development; considering life skills in evaluation; using portfolios).	4

3.4. Instruments of the study

Two instruments were used to collect the data needed to answer the research questions: (1) survey questionnaires and (2) semi-structured interviews. Table 3.3 shows the relationship between the research questions and the instrument used to answer it. It was supposed to conduct classroom observations so to get more authentic information about the process of teaching-learning English in kindergartens in various settings. However, in the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020 (during data collection phase), the emergency state was imposed in Palestine, and all the educational institutions were closed from March to June (The end of the academic year) because of the Covide-19 pandemic that affected people in Palestine and worldwide. I thought that observation would have been the best instrument to answer the second question about teaching-learning practices. Although I could not observe English classes, I tried to utilize the interviews in a way that enabled me to get specific information about the teaching activities and daily practices. Below is a detailed presentation of the two instruments used.

Table 3.3

Relationship between the Research Question and the instrument used

The Research Question	The Instrument
Why do Palestinian private kindergartens teach English?	Questionnaire
What are the main teaching-learning practices at the Palestinian kindergartens?	Questionnaire and interview
What are the challenges associated with language instruction at kindergartens?	Questionnaire and interview

3.4.1. **Survey** *questionnaires***.**

"The questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher, and often being comparatively straightforward to analyze" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, P 317).

Planning and designing the questionnaire required extensive time and effort that lasted for a month and a half following the eight steps of creating a survey questionnaire presented in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007). The use of questionnaires as an instrument enabled me to statistically describe issues related to teaching English in the Palestinian kindergartens, particularly policies, practices, and challenges. These data also helped me to carry out comparisons between the different kindergartens and thus to choose participants from different kindergartens _reflecting different teaching experiences_ for the qualitative part of the study.

Generating the items of the questionnaire (main topics and constructs) was mainly done by referring to Vygotsky's theoretical framework, the research questions, and the literature. The questionnaire was a "structured one," which means that it contained the range of possible responses that teachers would choose from, enabling the generation of frequencies of response amenable to statistical treatment and analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

The questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first was concerned with general background information about the kindergarten system (e.g., number of English instruction hours per week and the books used) and about the English teacher (e.g., qualifications, specializations, and years of expertise). In the second part, more specific aspects were addressed with a sum of forty-seven items distributed through three subsections: (1) the "aims of teaching English and the curricula adopted or used" with eight items, (2) "the challenges encountered by teachers" with

thirteen items (3) "the teaching-learning activities in the English class" with twenty-four items. See **Appendix 1.** The committee member, Dr. Maher Hashweh, suggested adding one open-ended question after the challenges subsection and the practices subsection to allow the teachers to add extra remarks, activities, or challenges.

Two rating scales were used: (1) Likert agreement scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, (2)Likert frequency scale ranging from never to always. The agreement scale was used with the first and the second subsections: reasons of English instruction and challenges, while the frequency scale was used with the third subsection about the practices.

Two sensitive issues were addressed in the questionnaire: using books and evaluating the kids since the MOEHE puts limitations on evaluating the kids via pencil-paper tests and also prohibits the use of books with preschoolers. However, to deeply understand the context of English teaching in kindergartens and to be able to describe it, asking about books and evaluation was necessary. "To defuse the threat, items about these matters were located within a discussion of other less sensitive matters to suggest that this issue might not be too important" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, P. 333).

A "covering letter" was written in which the purpose and title of the study were presented along with my contact information. In the letter, I also shared gratitude and appreciation for teachers' cooperation. Finally, it assured confidentiality. The questionnaire was written in Arabic to facilitate its completion by the teachers regardless of their specialization or qualification. As mentioned before, not all English teachers in kindergartens have a high level of proficiency in the language, and I did not want to get confusing results due to language miss-understanding.

3.4.2. *Semi-structured interviews.*

Open-ended questions were asked to allow the teachers to discuss their viewpoints and to best voice their opinions regarding the research problem deeply and away from any constrains (Creswell, 2012). Data collected via the questionnaire reflected general aspects regarding teaching English at the Palestinian KGs. However, the interviews allowed for a more detailed investigation of these aspects, which in turn helped me find uniqueness as well as similarities in the shared experiences.

For example, in the questionnaire, I asked about using songs in the English class; most of the teachers answered that they always use songs, although they differ considerably in the way they employ these songs. Investigating the different uses and objectives of using songs was guided by the interview questions. It is worth mentioning that interviews aimed to find more profound data related to the practices and the challenges, while policies and objectives were not meant to be explored via interviews since the discussion related to them is more relevant to the directors and supervisors rather than the teachers. Nevertheless, some themes related to English teaching objectives emerged from teachers' discussion of some interview questions.

The interview consisted of nineteen questions that were developed with reference to the questionnaire, the literature, and the theoretical framework. The interview questions covered six sub-themes which are: (1) challenges related to English instruction in KGs, (2) taking kid's needs, characteristics, and previous experiences into consideration, (3) the active role of the kids in the learning process, (4) activities and teaching strategies, (5) enhancing communicative language teaching and interaction, (6) assessment. See appendix (2). See Appendix 2.

According to Creswell (2012), the interview questions could be categorized into **background/demographic** questions (e.g., How long have you been teaching?); **descriptive**

questions (e.g., could you describe your daily routine in your English class); **experience questions** (e.g., How has your teaching changed since you have started teaching Englis for preschoolers?); **opinion questions** (e.g., To what extent do you consider developing speaking and listening skills more important than reading and writing?); **behavior questions** (e.g., How do you describe your role and relationship with the kids in the class?); and finally **process questions** (e.g., How do you observe your kids' development in English?).

3.5. Procedures of the study

This study took place over nine months during the academic year of 2019-2020. In this section, I will discuss the various serial and integrated procedures that were undergone to achieve the purposes of the study. The study was carried out in three primary phases, and they will be discussed in detail next.

1. During the first phase _November, 2019 to January 2020_ literature about teaching and learning English for young learners was reviewed along with countries' experiences in teaching foreign languages (specifically English) at kindergartens. Referring to this literature and the theoretical framework of the current study, the questionnaire was planned for, designed, refined, and piloted. During this stage, I visited the main office of the MOEHE and Ramallah and Al-Bireh Directorate several times to get the needed approval letters to conduct the study. Also, I got facilitation letters to be presented to the directors of the kindergartens to facilitate data collection. Finally, I got the information needed to contact the kindergartens that teach English; I had their phone numbers along with their location and information about the numbers of students and teachers in each one. The MOEHE did not did not have any convenient way of distributing the questionnaires to a maximum number of kindergartens. They said the only way they

could help is to let me leave the questionnaire in the postal boxes of each KG -which are located in the Directorate-. However, it was not guaranteed that questionnaires would be noticed since, according to many directors whom I contacted personally, the directors rarely check these postal boxes as usually nothing important is found on them except for advertisements. So, I decided to contact and visit as many kindergartens as possible. Visiting KGs to collect data was done during the second phase, which I will discuss next.

2. The second stage _ February to May_ was the data collection stage. The questionnaires were administrated in two ways: self-administration and telephone. Only four participants filled the questionnaire via telephone, and this was done upon their request. At the same time, it was more convenient for me since those kindergartens were located in remote villages. I need at least a one-hour drive to reach these villages, but the teachers at these kindergartens leave early at twelve p.m. Due to my work, I could not make it before twelve. The other fifty questionnaires were self-administrated by the teachers, mostly in my presence. The fact that I had to visit kindergartens and to be present during completion time put pressure on me and was exhausting since I had to attend at an agreed time and in an agreed place, which required me to drive for hours sometimes and to get out of my work several days. In a few cases, the teachers preferred to complete the questionnaire in my absence and thus asked me to come the next day or in a few hours. My presence was helpful as it enabled any "queries or uncertainties to be addressed immediately" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, P 344). I was able to clarify any ambiguities and make sure that they did not miss any item and that they paid

attention to the rating scale used. The time needed for completing the questionnaire was ten to fifteen minutes.

Out of 108 teachers who teach English at kindergartens in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate, 54 teachers agreed to participate and complete the questionnaire. I used to call the directors of the kindergartens and to tell them about the research purpose and ask them if they voluntarily agree to participate. If they consent, we would agree on a suitable time and day for both of us.

Distributing the questionnaires was done by the end of February. In the mid of March, kindergarten, schools and universities were closed due to the lock down that was imposed because of Covid-19 pandemic. For that reason, observing English classes was not possible. Therefore, I had instead to plan, design, refine, and pilot interview questions addressed to the teachers. I contacted some of the teachers who participated in completing the questionnaires; ten agreed to do so while some refused to join .

Administrating interviews was carried out in May, and doing so at that particular context and time was a challenging endeavor. Most of the teachers were engaged in distant and online education with their students. This kind of teaching was not easy neither for the teacher nor for the kids; all the parties were in continuous tension. Teachers used to spend so many hours developing English classes with limited resources at their hands and then spend hours following up with the parents and the kids, usually using WhatsApp or Facebook groups. So teachers were already overwhelmed with the situation, and many found it demanding and stressful to manage to find more time for a one-hour interview.

The interviews were exclusively conducted via phone calls and only one interview via a video call and this was basically because mutual face to face meeting was not allowed at that time as quarantine was imposed in Palestine because of Covid-19. As a result of the limited direct contact with telephone interviews, I had to give extreme attention to the way the conversation was going on with the teachers by using icebreakers and by being flexible to encourage them to talk freely (Creswell, 2012). I did not want to make the teachers feel daunted by the questions so as not to affect the results, especially that I was looking for detailed information that makes up for authentic classroom observations as much as possible.

The teachers were given a choice to speak in Arabic or English since I wanted the teachers to express themselves freely without the constraints of the language. Only one teacher preferred to talk in English; the other nine used Arabic to answer the interview questions. The interviews lasted 40 minutes on average.

Probes, which are "sub-questions under each question," were used to clarify the questions and obtain additional data as well as to have the teachers expand on ideas (Creswell, 2012, P 222). For example, when I asked them, "Based on what do you choose what concepts or subjects to teach in your class?" sometimes the teachers just answered: "based on the weekly plan." So, I added a **clarifying probe** such as, "could you tell me about developing this plan?". **Elaborating probes** were also employed sometimes. For example, when I asked the teachers about the relationship between kids' performance in the Arabic class and the English class, one teacher just said: "mmm not much." So I asked her to elaborate by saying, "What does "not much mean"? "could you explain more"?

"Motivational probes" were also utilized to encourage the flow of the ideas by the teachers such as "ya I understand" "mm yes yes" "Ah." Also, **"reflective probes"** were sometimes used, and they imply rephrasing the participants' answers and redirecting them to make sure of the point they are trying to make (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). For example, one of the teachers was explaining her daily morning routine by giving examples of the activities that she does with her kids. I reflected on that by saying: "So I understood that you start your English class every day by interactive and communicative kind of activities." The teacher said: "Yes, exactly. I interact with them to refresh them up".

A recording program audiotaped the interviews in my phone after asking the permission of the interviewee to do that; then, the audio files were kept in a secure place to ensure confidentiality. The process of conducting interviews lasted for one month.

3. The third phase was dedicated to analyzing the data and writing the final thesis, which lasted for three months, _June to Aguste_. This phase will be discussed in detail in the next section, which is about data analysis procedures.

3.6. Data analysis

3.6.1. Analyzing the questionnaire data

A survey questionnaire was used to collect quantitative descriptive data concerning teaching English in Ramallah and Al-Bireh private kindergartens. Descriptive statistics describe and present data in terms of summary frequencies and mean averages and aim to simply report what has been found without making any inferences or predictions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Analyzing quantitative data using descriptive analysis helped summarize the overall

trends and tendencies and provided an understanding of the differences and the similarities among the scores.

The first step in this descriptive analysis was "scoring data." "Scoring data implies assigning a numeric scale (or value) to each response category for each question on the instruments used to collect data" (Creswell, 2012, P. 176). For example, 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = undecided, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree. Based on these assigned numbers, the teacher who checks "disagree" would receive a score of 2. Also, values were given for "categorial scales" in the first part of the questionnaire "background information." For instance, "what class level do you teach English? ☐Baram (3-4 years) ☐KG1 (4-5 years) ☐KG2 (5-6 years)." I assigned numbers such as 1 for Baram, 2 for KG1, and 3 for KG2.

To facilitate the scoring procedure, I gave a code to each question (variable). Table 3.2 presents examples of the codes created for the first part of the questionnaire.

Table 3.4
Names of the variables: definitions of the variables, and the number assigned to each response option.

Code	Description	Numbers assigned
KGsc	is the kindergarten part of a school	Yes=1 No=0
O.Sub	Teaching other subjects in English	Yes=1 No= 0
Book	Using books in the English class	Yes=1 No= 0
Qualif	Teacher's qualification	High school=1 Diploma= 2 BA= 3 MA= 4

I also coded the items in the second part of the questionnaire. For example (item 1 to 8) were coded (PC1 to PC8= Policies); items 9 to 21 were coded (Ch9 to Ch21= Challenges); items 21 to 47 were coded (TL21 to TL 47= teaching-learning activities). Then SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was chosen to complete the analysis process; the reason why I chose it is that it is an affordable program that my supervisor and I are familiar with. Concerning the two open-ended questions, teachers have not filled them, and so nothing was analyzed other than the responses of the questionnaire items.

3.6.2. Analyzing the semi-structured interviews

The data collected via interviews were analyzed and interpreted in an inductive manner using thematic analysis procedures, as discussed in Creswell (2012); Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007); and Braun & Clark (2006). The analysis took place in one month. According to Braun & Clark (2006), thematic analysis (TA) is a popular method of systematic qualitative data analysis through which a researcher identifies, organizes, and interprets patterns or themes across a dataset. Such analysis aims to provide insights into collective and shared experiences and to note commonalities and uniqueness across them in an inductive way, starting from the particular data collected to the larger picture or themes (data-driven analysis) or, as Creswell (2012) describes, "bottom-up approach to analysis." The patterns found (and which are classified as themes) are crucial to the study questions as they represent and describe meanings that help in answering them (Braun & Clark, 2006). The reason why the thematic analysis was used is because of its accessibility and flexibility, especially for a researcher new to qualitative research such me.

Before starting the analysis, audiotaped interviews were organized in a computer file chronologically, and then I transcribed them _converted the audiotaped files into text data

(Creswell, 2012). The transcription involved converting all the participants' words, pauses, and laughs. Since interviews were carried out via phone calls, I was not able to detect visual and non-verbal features. Later on, the hand analysis of the transcribed data started following the six-phase model presented by Braun & Clark (2006).

1. The first step was **familiarizing myself with the data.** The aim was to "immerse" myself in the data to get a "preliminary understanding" and a "general sense" by reading them several times in an active, analytical, and critical way. I started "making general notes" to highlight issues or items that might be of interest, importance, or relevance to the research questions. Creswell (2012) describes this step as "**preliminary exploratory analysis.**"

2. The second step was **generating initial codes**. I started identifying interesting "text segments," placing them in brackets and assigning a word or a phrase that describes them. The labels used to describe the features of text segments are called codes (Creswell, 2012). Braun & Clark (2006) defines codes as "the building blocks of analysis." In this step, so many codes were generated. Different codes were given different colors. Some of the codes highlighted in this stage mirrored participants' language and concepts such as "Doing daily revision," others were invoked by the theoretical framework of the current study such as "peer support" and "scaffolding." (Braun & Clark, 2006). As I re-read the textual data, I sometimes incorporated new material into existing codes, and I re-coded some of the previously coded data. For instance, the code "Flexibility of weekly plan" was incorporated with "developing weekly plans."

3. The third step was **searching for themes.** I started examining the codes more closely, looking for redundancy or overlap, aiming to reduce and cluster the codes by generating initial categories or "themes." Braun & Clark (2006) stated that a theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (P. 82). The relationship between different codes was examined using a thematic map. Some of the codes did not fit in the generated themes (e.g., changes in teacher's beliefs over the years/ kid's academic development/ kid's social development), so such codes were put together for further revision under the title 'miscellaneous.' Finally, initial consideration of the relationship between the themes was carried out to see how they will be used coherently to "tell a story" and answer the research questions.

4. The fourth step was **reviewing potential themes**. I reviewed all the codes clustered under initial themes. All themes were considered with their relation to the entire data set and the research questions. Some modifications and adjustments were made. For instance, the theme "teacher's relationship with kids" was combined with the subtheme "communicative language teaching" under the central theme "teaching components of the language." Also, the theme "English plans" was combined with "Preparing the kids for learning the language for about month," and they were renamed as "Planning and preparing kids for language learning."

5. The fifth step was **defining and naming themes**. Themes' purposes and main details were highlighted. The themes were also looked at and interpreted from a broader perspective guided by Vygotsky's theoretical framework. I also identified the extracts I

want to provide for each theme and subtheme to support them. Finally, the themes were named and presented in a theme map (Figure 3.2).

6. The last step was **producing the report**. The themes were organized, reported, and discussed meaningfully combined with the results of the questionnaire. In the fourth chapter, "results and findings," these themes will be addressed thoroughly.
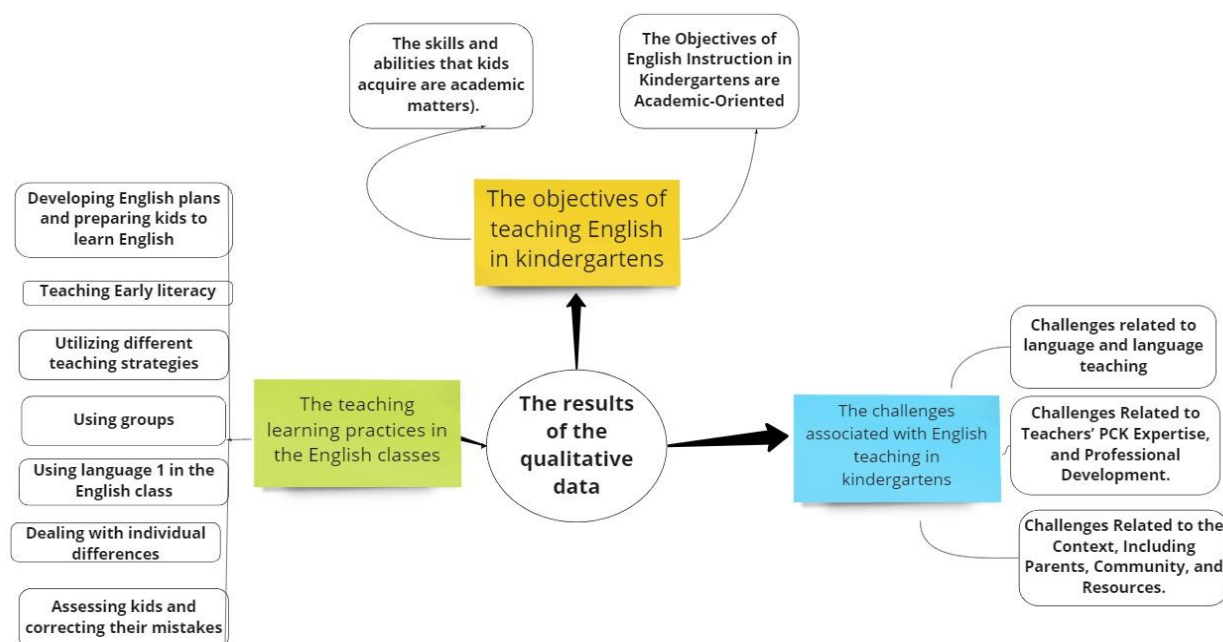
Figure 3.2. A thematic map summarizes the main themes that emerged from the

qualitative data

3.7. Trustworthiness, Validity, and Reliability

To guarantee the validity of the questionnaire, it was validated by seven specialists: one is a Ph.D. student in New Zealand, and the other six are instructors at Birzeit University at the Faculty of Education. Upon the specialists' validation, I adjusted many items either by adding more explanation or by deleting unnecessary or ambiguous words. For example, ages (in years) were added to the names of classes that learn English since naming differs across kindergartens.

They also suggested using two Likert scales: a frequency scale for the third section (Never to always) and an agreement scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) for the first and second sections. Furthermore, I modified the language in some items to ensure their readability for the target audience. For example, fewer academic concepts were used, such as ZPD; instead, explanations for such concepts were provided.

A pilot survey was conducted with three English kindergarten teachers working in Jerusalem to assure the quality of the questionnaire and to check the time needed to fill it out. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was calculated using the Cronbach-Alpha equation by SPSS, and it was (0.88) for the third subsection and (0.82) for the second subsection which are high ratios that confirm the stability of the instrument and its accuracy (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

For the interviews, the questions were sent to the three committee members to check the "face validity" of the questions _whether they measure what they claim to measure_ (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) and their comments were taken into consideration. As for the reliability of telephone interviews, Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007) argues that they have high reliability "as the interviewee might disclose information that may not be so readily forthcoming in a face-to-face, more intimate situation." (p. 153)

According to Creswell (2012), the credibility of the qualitative data could be determined by different strategies such as member checking. So, I sent the findings to three participants to determine if they find the findings accurate and realistic and they agreed with the findings I sent.

3.8.   Ethical consideration

Throughout the study, I abided by BZU ethical considerations. First of all, I got an approval from the Research Ethics Committee in BZU for my proposal entitled "Teaching English in the Palestinian kindergartens: Objectives, practices and challenges" for its consistency with the standards in force at Birzeit University. The participants in the current study voluntarily agreed to cooperate with me either in interviews or questionnaires. They had the right to withdraw at any stage; actually, two teachers apologized and did not want to be interviewed after completing the questionnaire. The participants received a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity, and their names were not mentioned at all.

3.9.   Conclusion

This chapter presented the methodology of the study in detail. First, the context of the study was discussed; then the participants were described showing the characteristics of the teachers who participated in filling the questionnaire and those who participated in the interviews. Procedures of conducting the study and data analysis were also discussed thoroughly. Next chapter presents the results of the study.

<u>Chapter Four: Results</u>

4.1. Introduction

Given the variety of English programs offered to preschoolers at the Palestinian private kindergartens, it is significant to examine these programs closely. The previous three chapters focused on the research problem and the theoretical framework, relevant literature, and the methodology utilized for this study. The purpose of this chapter is to report and present the main findings generated out of the questionnaires and interviews to answer the three research questions, which are:

1. Why do the Palestinian private kindergartens teach English?

2. What are the main teaching and learning practices at the Palestinian kindergartens?

3. What are the major challenges associated with English language instruction at kindergartens?

The findings are divided into three sections, each of which answers a research question, respectively. The three sections are presented below in detail subsequently.

4.2. The reasons and the aims of teaching English at the Palestinian kindergartens

This part presents the results of the first subsection of the questionnaire (eight items) concerning the reasons and the aims of teaching English at kindergartens. It was not intended to investigate this question via interviews; yet, the analysis of the interview questions generated one theme that would also contribute to answering the first question. Table 4.1 summarizes the means and standard deviations for the reasons of offering English programs at kindergartens and the overall aims of English instruction. The first column presents the number of the item as presented in the questionnaire, and they are sorted in descending order.

Table 4.1
Reasons and aims of teaching English at the Palestinian kindergartens

Questionnaire Item Number	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
7.	We teach English to prepare kids for the English curricula at the first grade.	4.55	0.5
6.	We teach English since it is a lingua Franca.	4.35	0.7
8.	We teach English since learning the language at an early age leads to higher proficiency.	4.35	0.8
3.	The main aim of teaching English at our kindergarten is enhancing communication and interaction	4.18	0.9
4.	We teach English to enable the kids to use it naturally in their daily life.	3.96	1
1.	The kindergarten follows an English curriculum developed by its administration and teachers.	3.96	0.9
2.	The main aim of teaching English at our kindergarten is teaching reading and writing.	3.51	1
5.	We teach English because of the competition among private kindergartens in Ramallah and Al-Bireh.	2.27	0.9

Table 4.1 shows the means and standard deviations for the reasons and the aims of

teaching English at kindergartens. As the table shows, the highest mean (M=4.55) was for the

item No.7 that teaching English at kindergartens mainly aims to prepare kids for learning English

in the first grade. The teachers strongly agreed with that. In the "background information"

section of the questionnaire, teachers were asked whether English curricula in the first-grade

repeat what has been studied in kindergartens. They could answer by (Yes, No, I am not sure).

Thirty-nine percent of the teachers agreed that first-grade repeats kindergartens' curricula, 27.5%

disagreed, while 33.3% said they are not sure about it. The second highest mean was for items

No. 6 and No. 8 that justifies why kindergartens offer English programs. The majority of the

teachers with a mean of (M=) 4.35 agreed that English is taught at kindergartens because it is an

international language (Lingua Franca), and because learning English at an early age results in

higher proficiency in the language.

The second aim for teaching English according to teachers was enhancing

communication and interaction, item No. 3 with a mean of (M=) 4.18. The third aim (item No. 4)

with a mean of (M=) 3.96 was that kindergartens teach English "to enable kids to use it naturally

in their daily life." The least two agreed-upon items were No. 2 and No. 5. Teachers were

undecided that the aim of teaching English is teaching writing and reading with a mean of (No.2,

M= 3.51). Teachers disagree that teaching English is driven by competition among private

kindergartens (item No. 5) with a mean of (M=) 2.27.

This question was not intended to be answered via interviews. Yet, when teachers were

discussing their programs, they emphasized that their main aim for teaching English at

kindergartens is to prepare kids to learn English later on in schools. Their discussion revealed

that they prepare kids to learn English basically by working on academic-oriented objectives.

This theme: "the objectives of English instruction at kindergartens are academic-oriented" will

be explained next showing how and where this affirms and contradicts the results of the

quantitative data.

A. The Objectives of English Instruction at Kindergartens are Academic-Oriented.
When interviewed, the teachers mentioned various objectives (or intended learning outcomes)

that they aim to achieve throughout the preschool experience (specifically KG2). The majority of

these objectives are academic ones providing the kids with basic foundational skills in language

and literacy that prepare them to adjust to the school system very quickly. This goes in line with

the result of item No.7, which achieved the highest mean that kindergartens teach English to

prepare kids for the first grade. Emphasizing the academic objectives was common among all the interviewees _whether adopting a teacher-centered or learner-centered approach _.

The most repeatedly mentioned objective was teaching kids the letters, sounds of the letters, and words that start with the letter sound. T5 (teacher-centered approach) said:

For me, by the end of the year, kids have to know the letters; they should be able to recognize the upper and lower case forms, recognize the sounds, and write letters as well. Also, they need to know at least two words for each letter sound.

T8 (learner-centered) agreed by saying: "*let's say that it's enough for me if they end up knowing all the letters and words for each letter sound with perfect pronunciation. I guess that's perfect for me.*"

Teaching vocabularies was also a significant objective for all the teachers. Some of these vocabularies are related to the letters, as mentioned above; others are introduced within broader concepts such as colors, body parts, family members, toys, transportation, and animals. For example, T3 (teacher-centered) said:

kindergartners must learn many vocabs. The more they learn at this stage, the better. In the first grade, kids will repeat all the letters, and they will learn to write them. Thus, emphasis should not be placed on what they write but on learning more words.

Teaching writing at kindergartens is not a primary objective to work on, which goes in line with the result of item No.2 with a mean of (M=)3.5. However, generally, teachers adopting teacher-centered classes showed interest in writing more than teachers in the learner-centered classrooms. For example, T7 (learner-centered) mentioned that she does not spend much time on writing activities. She explained:

Look, we don't emphasize writing much. The director of the KG told me not to focus on writing and to invest my time in teaching correct pronunciation and accent to enable them to speak and interact. In the first grade, kids will learn from books; they have to read and write obligatorily. So why to do that in KG as long as they don't have books and curricula.

On the other hand, T2 (teacher-centered) thought that writing and reading are important somehow since parents want to see tangible and quick results. Writing _unlike speaking_ could be developed and noticed by parents easily.

Items No.3 and No.4, which were about focusing on interaction and communication as well as a natural use of the language in daily life, achieved high means: 4.18 and 3.96, respectively. However, mentioning them as objectives was exclusive to teachers adopting the learner-centered approach. For instance, T9 said:

For English, they have to know the letter sounds, but I need to work more on their personalities to be able to use the things we learn. As I told you, some kids like to be on the side, and they don't want to speak English at the beginning of the year. So, I accomplish great results with them.

She also added: "*it's important for them to learn how to speak and to learn how to interact with things more than holding the pencils and writing some stuff, you know.*" T10 expressed a similar idea by saying:

Kindergartens should prepare kids for the school but from a social, emotional and psychological perspective. I play the letters song every day, so I am sure that by the end of the year they will know all of them. That's why I invest my time by working on their

personalities and behaviors and acceptance of the English language. I cannot take it that

a kid comes to my class to copy letters seventeen times!.

 She added: *"listening and speaking are far more important than writing; writing is important,*

but it comes by time. So, what's important to me is to create independent kids. Tomorrow at

school, there will be no flattering or petting."

Considering that the objectives that teachers aim to achieve are related mostly to

academic matters, the outcomes of English instruction at preschools are expected to be aligned

with those academic objectives. Teachers mentioned increased ability to recognize letters,

associate letters with the sounds they make, memorize meanings, read words (mainly CVC[1]

words), less practice time, better (copying) writing skills, and a good repertoire of words. They

also mentioned development in kids' ability to make short conversations using memorized

phrases and sentences such as "I'm fine, thank you," "My name is." T2 said: "*by the end of the*

year, kids are capable of conducting short conversations such as what's your name? How old

are you? Where are you from? But I can say what develops the most is their copying (writing)

and reading abilities and their repertoire of words". T4 said: "*at the end of the year, they could*

read a short story that contains CVC words and some sight words."

Teachers adopting a learner-centered approach reported other outcomes (in addition to

the academic ones) related to social and emotional aspects. T8 explained:

I had a timid kid who rarely interacted with us, and I used to spend much time with him

to do any activity. Throughout the year, he started bursting; he became able to recognize

the letters very easily, needed less scaffolding, and what shocked me the most is that he

started to interact with me in English. If I talk to him, he responds, and he even initiated

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[1] CVC words are three letter words that follow a consonant/vowel/consonant pattern. They are considered the simplest words to decode by blending the three sounds together such as bed, bag, mad, etc.

conversations. For instance, once he came to me, looked at my T-shirt and said: "oh, this is green, this is blue, this is red." It was nice how his personality changed; kisses, hugs, and things like that.

To sum up, this section sheds light on the rationale behind offering English programs at the private kindergartens by discussing the reasons why English programs are offered and the main aims and objectives associated with teaching English at kindergartens. The results show that the primary aim of teaching English is preparing kids to learn English in the first grade. Although enhancing communicative competence and interaction was reported as an aim for teaching English in the questionnaire, mentioning it in the interviews was limited to the learner-centered classes. Generally, there was a great emphasis on the academic aspects and on linguistic content. The outcomes of teaching English are academic-oriented, and the skills and knowledge kids are supposed to acquire are related to linguistic aspects, including recognizing Alphabet, vocabulary learning, essential reading and writing skills, simple conversations, and phonological awareness (letters' sounds and beginning sounds).

4.3. The Teaching-Learning Practices in the English Lessons at Kindergartens

This part aims to answer the second research question, which is about the teaching-learning practices in the English classes. The results of the third subsection of the questionnaire (25 items) will be presented along with the results of the interviews. Table 4.2 summarizes the means and standard deviations for questionnaire items.

Table 4.2
Teaching-Learning Practices in the English Classes in Kindergartens

Number	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
TL.35	I use visual and auditory teaching aids in the English lesson; e.g., flashcards, realia, TV	4.78	0.42
TL.34	I teach kids concepts such as seasons, colors, body parts, and shapes.	4.76	0.62
TL.36	I use body movements and facial expressions to facilitate learning certain things.	4.71	0.50
TL.47	I focus on correcting mistakes that impede communication;	4.67	0.65
TL.30	e.g., different word meaning (a kid say an orange instead of an apple)	4.55	0.76
	I play a supportive role in the class		
TL.28	I teach kids how to communicate with others in English, e.g., introducing themselves.	4.49	0.88
TL.37	I use different teaching strategies, such as songs, stories, role play, handcrafts, and drama.	4.49	0.70
TL.39	I use resources such as the Internet to get activities and ideas	4.43	0.73
TL.29	I use groups in the English lessons	4.43	0.78
TL.46	I consistently correct kids' mistakes (pronunciation or writing)	4.37	1.13
TL.31	I communicate with my kids a lot	4.31	0.93
TL.45	I evaluate kids through the activities that we do in the class	4.31	0.68
TL.24	I start teaching English through social interaction such as: speaking with students in English	4.29	0.94
TL.27	I teach kids how to use English to express basic needs such as: going to the bathroom and drinking water.	4.25	1.13
TL.32	My kids memorize meanings of words by heart (English to Arabic)	4.22	1.10
TL.40	I modify ready-made activities to meet the needs of my kids	4.18	0.95
TL.33	I train kids how to use words in authentic real-life contexts; e.g., apologizing, going to the supermarket	4.18	1.14
TL.38	I take my kids' characteristics and previous knowledge into consideration when preparing the lessons	4.10	0.98
TL.26	I encourage my kids to speak in English, and I listen to them	4.06	1.08

TL.41	I design activities with different levels to see what my kids can do alone and what they can do with help	4.04	0.87
TL.23	I start with teaching the letters	3.90	1.43
TL.25	I speak English with my kids	3.80	1.10
TL.44	The class is like a learning community where kids help each other in the learning process	3.73	1.02
TL.43	Kids ask about new words and concepts other than those included in the plan	3.67	1.01
TL. 42	Kids have free play time during English lessons	3.63	1.04

Table 4.2 summarizes the results of the third subsection of the questionnaire aiming to answer the second research question. The results were presented in descending order to highlight the most used practices and the least ones. As the table shows, the items generally achieved high means ranging from 4.78 (very often) to 3.63 (sometimes).

As the table shows, using different teaching aids such as flashcards and realia[2] was a common practice among the sampled kindergartens with the highest mean of (4.78: very often). In the interviews, the teachers emphasized the importance of using such aids (especially flashcards and relaia). The uses of such aids was discussed by teachers in the interview and they are presented next in theme: (C: Teachers utilize different teaching strategies in the English class).

Teaching word meanings under branches of concepts such as seasons and colors, and so one achieved also a high mean of (4.76: very often). As mentioned in the previous section (aims and objectives of teaching English), the teachers in the interviews emphasized learning vocabulary either with letters or within concepts and they considered teaching vocabulary one of their most important objectives. In theme (B: Teaching early literacy skills: Alphabet knowledge,

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[2] In education, realia (/riˈeɪˌliˌə/ pron. ree-ay-lee-ah) are objects from real life used in classroom instruction by educators to improve students' understanding of other cultures and real-life situations.

phonological awareness, vocabulary and speaking), teachers discuss in detail their vocabulary teaching practices.

Further, the teachers said they teach kids how to communicate with others in English through simple conversations such as introducing the self (item 28, M= 4.49). Through interviews, the teachers also mentioned teaching simple and straightforward conversations. However, according to the teacher-centered group, teaching these conversations is more of a mechanic routine activity in which kids come to memorize some phrases. The learner-centered group, on the other hand, focused more on developing kids' ability to communicate naturally and spontaneously using the daily activities. The qualitative data regarding speaking activities will be discussed in detail in theme (B: Teaching early literacy skills: Alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary and speaking).

The mean for item No.31 about the teacher's continuous communication with her kids achieved a mean of 4.31. Similarly, they said they listen to the kids and encourage them to speak in English (No.26, M=4.06). The qualitative data does not entirely support these two results as in general the majority of the interviewed teacher said that they use Arabic a lot with the kids. Details about teachers' communication with kids and the nature of this communication are presented in themes (B: Teaching early literacy skills: Alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary and speaking) and (E: Using the first language in the English classes).

Using groups was also a common practice with a mean of 4.43, and teachers asserted that they take into consideration kids' existing knowledge and characteristics when preparing their lessons (M=.4.10). Exploring teachers' practices via interviews emphasized that using groups was a very common practice. see theme (D: Using groups in the English lessons).

Teachers' answers to item No 24 that they start teaching the language through social communication achieved a mean of 4.29. In contrast, their answers to item No 23 that they start teaching the language through letters achieved a relatively low mean (M= 3.90: sometimes). All of the interviewed teachers explained that they spend the first three to six weeks preparing kids to learn English through songs, games, and simple conversations. They said they never start the year by teaching the letters, which emphasizes the results of the questionnaire. Preparing kids to learn English is discussed in theme A: Developing English plans and preparing kids to learn the new language.

Teachers stated that their kids memorize word meanings by heart (English to Arabic) with a mean of 4.22. Nevertheless, the mean average of their answers to item no No.33, which is about training kids how to use words in a context, was 4.18. Teachers' responses to these two items (No. 32 and No.33) may be contradicting. The interviews revealed more details about teaching vocabulary. Teaching words' meanings within contexts was limited to the learner-centered group. Some of the teachers adopting the teacher-centered approach said they do not ask kids to memorize the Arabic translation; they said they use flashcards and ask kids to say the word referring to the flashcard or the picture in English. Other teachers from the same group mentioned letting kids memorize English-Arabic translation of the words. These practices and other relevant ones are presented in theme (B: Teaching early literacy skills: Alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary and speaking).

Lower means were found for these items; No.25 which is about speaking English with the kids with a mean of 3. 80; No.44 that the class is a learning community (M=3.37); No 43 that kids ask about new words or concepts with a mean of 3.67; No.42 that kids have free playtime in the English lesson with the lowest mean of 3.63. Concerning the first result (No. 25), the

interview data approves that using English in the English lessons all the time was not a common practice in both of the groups; teachers mentioned using Arabic a lot and they justified and explained that in detail in theme E: Using the first language in the English lessons. The other items (No.43, No.42, and No.52) reflect the active role that kids could assume in the class either in the academic planned activities or in other unplanned ones. The qualitative data revealed significant differences in kids' roles in the class among teachers adopting the teacher-centered approach and teachers adopting the learner-centered approach. The practices discussed by the four teachers who were adopting the learner-centered approach revealed that their kids assume active roles (they discover meanings, have opinions, engage in different daily life activities, try to communicate in English). On the other hand, the other six teachers did not mention such practices. These differences are highlighted within each theme of the qualitative data that will be presented next.

To connect the results of the questionnaire with the results of the qualitative data in a more detailed and systematic way, I will present the results of the interviews through themes because these themes give a more detailed explanation of the practices presented above. The teaching-learning practices that emerged from the interviews are (A) Developing English plans and preparing kids to learn the new language (B) Teaching early literacy skills: Alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and speaking (C) Teachers utilize different teaching strategies in the English classes (D) Using groups in the English classes: whole class-group, small groups, and individual work (E) Using the first language in the English classes (F) Dealing with individual differences (G) Assessing kids and correcting their mistakes.

A. Developing English Plans and Preparing Kids to Learn the New Language.

English teachers develop yearly, monthly, or/and weekly plans. These plans are either developed by the teacher herself or with the help of other teachers. In a few cases, the plans are already developed by the administration. Teachers' choices of the topics are affected by the curriculum used _if they are adopting a specific one_, the plans the other teacher develops for the other subjects[3], and kids' needs, characteristics, and pace of development (mainly mentioned by teachers adopting a learner-centered approach). For example, T5 (teacher-centered approach) said:

> *I develop the plan in accordance with my kids' development, but I take into consideration what they learn in the Arabic and math classes with their teacher. For instance, I never teach them a concept, a word, or a skill that they haven't yet learned in Arabic. At the beginning of the year, the Arabic teacher teaches them how to trace lines, so I do that. I never start with teaching letters unless they have stared learning Arabic letters.*

> T2 further explained: "*look, it simply depends on what they learn in the other classes, and what they learn in the other classes depends to a good degree on the "General Framework of Preschool Curriculum" or the "The Guide to Kindergarten Teacher" published by the MOEHE*. T7 (Learner-centered approach) stated:

> *You know, those are kids, you should go along what they need. Sometimes I come to the class, they have questions, or they want to share with me something or talk about certain things that they had seen; that's ok. We do that, but generally speaking, we have a plan that we try to adhere to.*

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[3] Usually the kids stay with a single teacher who plans and teaches all subjects except for English

All the teachers agreed that the plans are very flexible, and they modify them based on many factors such as social, cultural, or political events, students' absences for specific reasons, and the extent to which kids are responding to instruction. T2 said:

> *If there are certain cultural or political events, we modify the plans in accordance with*
> *them; e.g., we teach them about our flag, its colors, and we introduce simple*
> *conversations such as what's your nationality? Where are you from.*

  T9 added:" *even though I have a curriculum. Yet, I act to it. For example, I might need to add to it if I feel that the kids are grasping or taking*."

At the beginning of the year, all the teachers spend time ranging from three to six weeks to prepare kids to learn the new language. During this time, kids are exposed mainly to English songs and games so that they get used to English away from direct instruction. This corresponds with the result of item No. 24 according to which the teachers said they start teaching English through social interactive activities with a mean of 4.29. T6 explained:

> *English is a new language, so you have first to expose them to it through listening to*
> *songs, and you have to help them get used to it. In the beginning, kids don't know what*
> *English is, so I talk with them about languages and tell them that we learn English to talk*
> *to people who speak English. I tell them that it's different from Arabic.*

When the real instruction begins, teachers said they revise whatever they teach daily because kids tend to forget English quickly since it is a foreign language that exposure to it outside the class is minimal. They also said that revising kids help them memorize, and it also refreshes them up. T9 explained:

First, in the morning, we set in a circle in the garden; we talk about all the things we

learned in the week, and there are other things that we start with like we sing days of the

week song and other songs just to refresh them up and start the day in a beautiful way.

T7 agreed and added: "*I have to repeat and revise things. As much as you repeat for them, the*

more they will grasp the idea or the point I'm teaching, especially since English is a foreign

language that they rarely encounter outside my class."

B. Teaching Early Literacy Skills: Alphabet Knowledge, Phonological Awareness, Vocabulary, and Speaking.

Teachers mainly focus on teaching letters; they teach letters' sounds, names, upper and lower case forms, and the alphabetical order. Besides, teachers focus on making sound-letter associations such as "Book" starts with B. Teachers dedicate one week for each letter. They use letter cards and flashcards to teach the letters; they also depend heavily on phonics and letters' songs; they use stories as well to tell the story of the letter. T9 explains:

We start in general with a song for somebody called Jack Hartman. He is exciting; I like

how he spells the letters and how he is interacting. Then I show them pictures and

flashcards for the letter. Then mostly, I have objects; If I don't have all the objects, at

least I have half of them.

T8 said:

I start with a simple story for the letter I'm teaching. I have puppets, and through them, I

introduce the letter by saying once upon a time, there was the letter A. I try to include the

words that I want them to learn. When I finish, I show them small posters for the letter; I

teach them how we write it, I ask them to write it in the air and then on the board to focus

on writing between lines.

Kindergarten English teachers also emphasize learning vocabularies; some are learned with letters; others are introduced thematically (animals, food, transportation, etc) which corresponds with the result of item 34 that achieved a high mean of 4.76.

Even though teaching vocabulary was common to all teachers, their approach to teaching them was different. Teachers adopting the teacher-centered approach focus on "memorization" of the words and their Arabic translation. T3 said:

Kids can memorize a lot of words and their meanings at this stage. The more they memorize, the better. I even did that with my son; he memorized more than 50 words when he was just two years and a half. I also give kids sentences to memorize along with their Arabic translation such as my dad goes to the mosque, أبي يذهب إلى المسجد because in conversations, kids need sentences, not isolated words.

T4 (teacher-centered) also has an interesting opinion concerning the relationship between teaching vocabulary and reading. She said: "*kids must learn to read words because reading enables them to understand the meaning. And meanings are fixed and are the same whatsoever. The dog remains a dog; the fox remains a fox. So, If they don't read, they won't be able to understand meanings.*"

On the other hand, teachers adopting the learner-centered approach focus on providing kids with rich language input that enables them to learn words and construct meanings away from drill and memorization. They emphasize words' use in a context. T7 said: "*When I teach them vocabs related to food, I show them my lunch box; then we start practicing. I let them describe their lunch boxes.*" She also stated that her class is stimulating to kids; they could see containers and toys with labels on them. She says: "*This is how they learn; they look around, see*

many things that could talk about, they would say: Oh, these are four kites, this is a red toy."

T10 Said:

> *Every day, they learn a new word. I gradually add words to their repertoire through interactions. If they say: teacher, please أنا بدي مي I would add: oh you want water. The next day, they would come and say: Please, I want water. They discover and guess meanings by themselves.*

Finally, English teachers teach basic speaking skills that enable the kids to interact in English. The first approach to teaching speaking is training kids to speak in complete sentences of four or more words through predictable classroom routines such as the morning routine when the teachers ask about the day, the month, the weather, and the everyday conversations such as greetings, asking to go to the bathroom or introducing the self. This corresponds with the result of item No. 28 with a mean of 4.49 that teachers teach kids how to communicate with others using simple conversations such as introducing oneself. And it corresponds with the result of item No. 27 with a mean of 4.25 that teachers teach kids how to communicate basic needs. Generally, kids do not initiate such conversations; instead, they wait for their teacher to ask. T5 (teacher-centered) explained:

> *Even though we repeat these conversations daily, they still can't use them smoothly; they know how to answer when they are asked. If they hear the same conversation in natural speech, they get confused. I think speaking is a difficult skill for this age.*

Therefore, kids memorize these short sentences as they daily repeat them, and they come to anticipate the kind of language they need for each activity. T3 said:" *they know that I ask them daily about the weather and their feelings; if I forget, they remind me. Once I forgot to ask them about the weather, they told me: teacher, today is windy.*"

The second approach is teaching kids to conduct straightforward, unplanned, and spontaneous conversations with the teacher or their peers. This approach was noticed in the learner-centered classes where the kids are encouraged to speak in English through authentic situations that take place in the class. For example, the teachers ask kids daily about the things they did in the previous day and encourage them to share their opinions or feelings regarding certain things. In this approach, teachers said that kids' ability to chat with others increases with time as they take advantage of kids' attempts to communicate in English by adding new words gradually with each attempt. T10 said that if a kid comes to tell her something in Arabic, she pretends that she does not understand. Kids then feel obliged to use English and whatever communication strategies at their disposal. She says:

> *If they don't know the word, they sometimes ask another teacher or they use gestures and body movements. Once, a kid came to tell me that his classmate Ahmad fell down. He told me: Ahmad, he this (pointing that he was standing on something high), then, this (pointing that he fell down). I love it when they do that. I didn't correct them; I just said: Oh, he fell!.*

Correcting mistakes and evaluating kids will be discussed thoroughly later on in section (H) which is about assessing kids and correcting their mistakes.

Teachers in the learner-centered classes agreed that the rapport between them and their kids contributes to developing kids' speaking skills and communicative competence. When kids love their teacher, they tend to imitate her and use the language she shows interest in. T10 said: "*they speak English because they love me, and they want me to be happy.*" T9 said: "*If the teacher is so sweet and kind, they will try to speak in English. At first, it will be hard for them. At the end of the year, it gonna be fine.*" T7 added:

We use English in the English and math class. Sometimes if they see me during other

lessons, they speak English to me because they love me. They would say: I miss you. I tell

them: I miss you too. Kids are intelligent; they know Miss T7 speaks English, so they try

to speak English with me. I never shut them down.

Considering the rapport between kindergarteners and their teachers, all the interviewed teachers talked about a secured and supportive relationship between them and their kids which goes in line with the result of item No. 30\ M= 4.55 that the teachers play a supportive role in the class. described their relationship with kids as a "mother-like" one. T1, for example, said: "*I am not a teacher; I am like their mother.*" T7 also stated

I love kids; they sometimes call me Mum! Sorry but if the kids don't feel secure with me,

then I no longer can be their teacher. The parents sometimes ask me to talk with their

kids about some issues because kids listen to me more than them.

Teachers love the kids and always try to be kind to them. Yet, investing this rapport in teaching specific language skills such as speaking was more common in the learner-centered classes. T5 (teacher-centered approach) said: "I*'m very approachable and friendly; they love me; they kiss and hug me. I never shout or hit kids. I chat with them about non-academic matters but usually in Arabic.*" On the other hand, T.9 (learner-centered approach) said:

In the morning, we set in a circle or U shape in the garden. We set on the ground on a

carpet that unites us. We talk about different things; they might share something, and

sometimes I initiate talks. The way we sit, makes them feel I am next to them, I am not

bigger than them. They are tiny, and I am really big to them so when we sit like this, they

feel more focused and safe, and thus they feel encouraged to speak up and learn.

C. Teachers Utilize Different Teaching Strategies in the English Classes.

Teachers mentioned using many teaching strategies and teaching aids that in their English lessons such as songs, flashcards and realia, body movements, worksheets, stories, and role play. According to the questionnaire, the item that achieved the highest mean was item No. 35 with a mean of 4.78 that teachers use visual and auditory teaching aids in the English lessons. Item No. 36 also achieved a high mean of 4.71 that teachers use body movements and facial expressions to facilitate learning the language. Using teaching strategies such as songs, stories, and drama achieved 4.49.

According to the interviews, the two most used strategies among all the teachers were songs and flashcards and realia. Songs are used to teach the letters and their sounds and to teach some concepts or vocabularies. According to them, songs make learning new vocabulary effortless to kids, help kids with different learning styles (auditory, visual, and kinesthetic) to be engaged, and to concentrate. Besides, songs are an excellent opportunity to be exposed to native English in a fun and playful way. T8 explained:

> *The number one strategy for me is songs. It's not easy to keep young kids concentrated for more than ten minutes. When I play a song, their concentration becomes higher as they want to listen to the song and notice the movements and sometimes dance with it.*

T9 also said:

> *Singing is important. Look, If I wanna approach a kid and talk to him, I sometimes sing the thing, rhyme it or use some tone like up and down. This enables me to catch him, show him, and illustrate what I want much better than just saying it as it is.*

T7 said that she uses songs to teach vocabularies such as the "at the toy shop," "seasons songs," and "days of the week song," and she explained:

I create a fun time for them. I sing and dance with them; we make facial expressions and body movements that help them remember the songs and understand them. English is a foreign language, how would they learn it if you don't do that! When I teach the body parts song: touch your arm, turn your body around, with every sentence we do a movement; kids end up learning the meanings indirectly. When I teach "at the toy shop" song, I bring similar toys with exact colors like the song, which helps kids learn vocabs very quickly.

Secondly, teachers use realia, flashcards, handcrafts, and playing dough. The primary aim of using these as aids is to help kids connect meanings with things or letters with words. In this way, kids less probably forget what they learn in addition to the fun value that such aids add to the learning process. T1 said:

I love to use real and concrete objects as well as pictures because kids never forget what they see and interact with. For instance, If I want them to remember the letter and a word related to this letter sound, I sometimes draw the letter (e.g., A) on their hands and draw an apple on the other hand.

T9 said: "let's say 80% of the times, I have a small whiteboard, I keep it next to me If I wanna draw something, in case I don't have an object or a flashcard."

Teachers also mentioned games as a teaching strategy in English lessons. Two kinds of games were mentioned. The first is used mainly by teachers adopting a teacher-centered approach; such games are simple oral or motor ones through which minimal level of interaction or language production takes place. T3 gave an example: "*we play a game, I write letters on disposable cups, and kids have to match the capital letter cup to the small letter cup.*" Other teachers gave examples of total physical response activities. For example, T5 said:" *yes, we play*

together. For instance, we play: stand up, sit down, open the door, shut the door, touch your arm, touch your mouth, and so on. I feel it helps them learn vocabulary in a fun way".

Teachers adopting a learner-centered approach mentioned other kinds of games; educational games such as Lego with letters to form words or educational puzzles with certain concepts to deliver (T10 mentioned that). Also, they play games that need a high level of language comprehension and production. For example, T9 said that she asks a kid to get outside the class; the rest of the classmates are in, and they hide an object. Then they let the kid in, and they start giving him hints about where the object might be. Such kind of collective activities motivates kids to interact with each other and use the language.

Finally, teachers stated that they use stories and role play but not as much as the other strategies mentioned earlier. T8 said: "*I love using stories; it makes them happy and focused. It's an interactive method since they always have many questions to ask during story time and after it as well.*" Concerning role play, some teachers (T2, T4, T5, T10) mentioned the "little teacher" activity in which the teacher acts as a student, and a kid acts like a teacher. T10 said:

> *Sometimes, we exchange roles. I am a student, and one of them is the teacher. I like this activity because I can evaluate my practices; I see how they imitate me and how they perceive my role. It's a reflective practice for me. I also evaluate their language.*

D. Using Groups in the English Classes: Whole Class group, Small Groups, and Individual Work.

English teachers use whole-class grouping and group work each for different purposes. Whole class activities are used to introduce the topic (whether a letter, a number, etc.) and when there are activities that all kids need to participate in at the same time, such as listening or watching songs and playing sports. According to the teachers, when kids participate together in

an activity, their confidence becomes higher, and they participate without feeling that they are under pressure. T2 said: "*look when we are working as a whole class, you can't easily notice the individual mistakes. So, kids –especially low achievers- participate with confidence; I see them singing and trying to answer questions loudly with other kids*." Also, if a kid asks a question or shows incomprehension of something, the teacher repeats for the entire class in case other kids are facing the same problem, but they feel shy to speak about it. T8 said: "*If a kid asks a question, I take advantage and explain for the entire class. There might be other kids who have the same problem but don't want to say that*."

Groups, on the other hand, are used with coloring, drawing, writing, worksheets, playing games, and handicraft activities. The primary aim of using groups in these activities is to facilitate teachers' management of the class and of time, especially with the absence of teachers' assistants in the majority of kindergartens (according to the questionnaire, 70.6% said they do not have an assistant). T6 (teacher-centered) said: "*I introduce the topic for the whole class; then I use groups for the following-up activities, such as when writing or coloring the letter. By this, I could give attention to each group as observing them all would be impossible alone*." T7 (learner-centered) said:

> *It depends on the activity. For example, songs are introduced to the whole class. Suppose that I want them to play a game or to do an activity, then I will use groups. Let's say numbers; I give each group a number to work on; then, I ask each group to present their number and explain their activity. I do the same with letters.*

Teachers mentioned other benefits of groups such as minimizing behavioral problems, especially bullying, encouraging sharing and collaboration, and giving kids an active role as they assist their peers. Concerning the distribution of kids in groups, teachers agreed that it depends

on the purpose of the activity. Sometimes, they use homogeneous groups in which kids are grouped by their ability; other times, they use heterogeneous groups in which kids with different learning levels are working together. T6 said:

> *It depends on the nature of the activity. For example, If they are writing something, I distribute them into two homogeneous groups. The first includes kids who can write independently; I show them what they need to do and leave. I stay with the other group (low-performance) so that I can help them directly.*

T3 said:

> *If we work in groups, I always try to mix students, high performance with low performance and confident kids with less confident ones. I tell them to help each other; I say Sami help Basil. I believe that this minimizes bullying among them because they are working together, and instead of mocking the less fortunate kids, they help them.*

T.4 said that mixed-ability groups are very productive. Kids imitate each other, and competition among the different groups arises, which motivates kids to work faster and help the group members so that their group wins.

Though, some teachers (T2 and T8) said that preschoolers do not understand the concept of cooperation and sharing, which makes using groups fruitless. T2 noticed: "*Sometimes when I tell a kid to help another one with a puzzle, for example, he solves it alone instead of working as a pair.*"

Finally, teachers adopting a learner-centered approach said they need to work individually with kids at least once or twice a week. Working individually with kids enables them to observe their development closely and see what each kid needs. T10 said:

During the week, we learn in groups distributed in different corners: the story corner, the

writing corner, the play space and so on. Groups are great, and they teach them how to

cooperate. Yet, I need to work individually with them at least twice a week. I need to

assess their comprehension and see if they need further explanation.

E. Using the First Language (L1) in the English Classes.

Generally, all the teachers said that they use Arabic in the English lessons but with

different levels ranging from excessive to minimal use. Teachers' responses to item No. 25

showed that teachers were almost undecided regarding speaking English with the kids; item 25

achieved 3.8.

Teachers use Arabic for different reasons. Firstly, they use it to give instructions and

orders as they find giving orders in Arabic a lot easier and time-saving. T2 said:

If I wanna give new information or orders, I translate to Arabic. It's just easier. Kids

immediately and effortlessly catch it. I could use English, but then I will need real objects

or pictures, or I will need to explain the idea several times and in different ways, which is

more demanding than simply using Arabic.

Besides, using Arabic enhances the relationship between the teacher and her kids. Some

teachers also mentioned that kids' engagement in Arabic is considerably higher than in English.

T1 who teaches kids all the subjects including English said that her kids show more enthusiasm

and engagement in the Arabic classes than in the English ones.

Finally, using Arabic supports English learning as kids could transfer their first language

skills to English, such as their print and phonological awareness. T9 said:

At the beginning of the year, 90% of the kids are non-English speakers, and they don't

know me. So, I speak English but then translate. I try to help them to get to know me. So

it's easier for me and easier for them to connect. Using Arabic also makes them feel more

comfortable and engaged.

The most commonly used form of L1 is translation. Sometimes, teachers directly and immediately translate words; T3 stated: *"I usually translate immediately as this helps them learn faster. For example, I tell them apple* تفاحة *Sometimes I tell them the word in Arabic, and they say the English meaning."* In other cases, teachers first use gestures, pictures or give hints before directly translating to Arabic. T7 explained:

In Kg1, I translate everything to Arabic, but when kids move to Kg2, I don't. This is because most of the kids are already familiar with my routine. If I have new students, I tell them to pay attention to my movements and gestures. For instance, (sit down), I hold him and show him to sit down. Sometimes, kids help each other by translating. They would say بتقولك اقعد*.*

T2 said that although she knows that giving hints or showing pictures is better than direct translation, she does not always do that because it is time consuming. She said: "it's just easier and faster for kids to learn it when I use Arabic)" The teachers said that using L1 lessens with time, especially in the daily routine activities. T4 said: *"If I am using real objects, I just tell them it's a banana. They can see it, so why to translate. I also don't translate things that we do every day, like open the book and look at the board.* T2 also said: "when kids are used to the class routine, I use more English especially when I say: prepare your pencils, sit down, open your book, look at the board".

In general, teachers agreed that they find a relationship between kids' performance in Arabic and their performance in English; T.5 said: *"yes, of course, there is a relationship; I ask their Arabic teacher about their performance and most of the time we could see a clear*

similarity." That is why they develop their English plans with reference to the Arabic one, as I mentioned earlier. However, teachers opined on the impact of using Arabic extensively in the English classes. Some teachers believe that using Arabic, although it has advantages, impedes kids' development in English; T8 said:

> *Using Arabic defiantly impedes language development; I use Arabic fifty percent of the class. However, I feel I should use it less than that, but sometimes I need to speak in Arabic, especially when I see like question marks going out of their heads (laughing).*

Others said that using Arabic, at this age level, helps kids in their learning of English and does not affect it negatively at all. T7 said:

> *No No, Arabic supports English learning. For me, I use it purposefully; it is a great source to invest in when teaching young learners a new language. I am totally against using only English. Kids are learning English as a foreign language, not as a first language!*

F. Dealing with Individual Differences.

All the teachers assured that at kindergartens, there are always considerable differences among kindergartners. They attributed these differences to the age factor (the few months make a difference in younger ages), the different learning styles of each kid, and to their socio-cultural background. The teachers emphasized the importance of dealing with individual differences carefully which corresponds with the result of item No. 38 with a mean of 4.10 that teachers take kids' characteristics and previous knowledge into consideration when teaching English. Nevertheless, teachers showed different approaches to dealing with individual differences.

In the teacher-centered classes, teachers focus on kids with low ability levels (low achievers), and they rarely considered differences related to other aspects such as personality and

learning styles, or to dealing with high achievers. Thus, academic intensification was the primary method they used to consider individual differences. For example, teachers mentioned giving low achievers extra help, extra homework, and extra worksheets. They also mentioned dedicating extra time to re-explain things to them individually and minimizing their expectations of them. T4 said:

> *I give them worksheets in the class like their classmates, but then I give them extra work to do in aid notebooks. Also, in the morning, I allocate around an hour to sit with them either in groups or individually. We revise all the letters. Then, at the end of the school day, I sit with them another time to make sure they still remember what we revised in the morning. This is how I make sure that they are going to be fine by the end of the year.*

T2 mentioned almost the same procedure:

> *I give them an extra lesson that lasts around 20 minutes, I simplify the things they need to know. For instance, if their classmates have to read CVC words, it is enough for them to recognize letters. Also, they are assigned extra homework daily. As for the excellent students, I am sorry to tell you that, but they never get something special or extra.*

In the learner-centered classes, teachers considered individual differences in terms of academic ability, learning styles, personality, and other factors related to their families. T9 said:

> *There is no student who is the same, I have 20 students; five are hyperactive, five are low a little bit. You have to consider this. Each student has his own method of learning: some students learn through songs, some through writing, some need to get extra sheets home, some need me to be next to them and cuddle them and stuff like that.*

Therefore, in learner-centered classes, intensifying teaching was not the only way of dealing with different kids. T10 said:

If you have 25 kids, then you need 25 personalities! You need 25 methods of teaching and tones of voice. You will have sensitive kids, stubborn kids, kids with health issues, or kids coming from broken families. You need to change your personality as well as your teaching to meet the need of each." She added: "First I work with the whole class, then we have corners, so I work with every four kids in one corner. This enables me to give each group the kind of instruction and attention it needs.

T7 also said:

Well, it's not only about their academic performance. If I know that some kids are very athletic, I distribute them among the groups during physical activities to make sure that each group has an equal chance for winning. I don't want any kid to feel he is less than others in any aspect.

T8 also shared another example:

It happened to me two years ago. I had a calm student who didn't communicate or talk. I started working on his personality and tried to give him more confidence. You need to know when to use the rough or the easy way.

Finally, using groups to differentiate between kids and deal with individual differences was a common strategy across the two approaches. Teachers place kids who need additional help in heterogeneous groups in which they receive extra scaffolding from their peers. Teachers might also place them in homogeneous groups in which they will be asked to perform different tasks that are suitable to their needs and levels. T6 said: "*I place kids who need help in groups; they learn from their classmates.*" T5 stated: "*I always try to find an alternative for kids who have trouble working at the mean level of the class. I place them in groups and choose different activities for them.*"

G. Assessing Kids and Correcting their Mistakes.

Although in the questionnaire, the teachers agreed with a mean of 4.31 that they evaluate kids through classroom activities (item No. 45), some of the practices teachers shared in the interviews showed that this was not always the case. In the teacher-centered classes, teachers depended heavily on worksheets and the weekly or monthly assessments to evaluate the learning of their kids in English. T1 said: "*I assess them monthly on all the letters and vocabularies that we have learned through the month. Sometimes, If I see that they are not mastering them, I postpone the assessment and give them another chance.*" This kind of assessment focuses on memorization and reading-writing skills rather than comprehension or the use of language in conversations. T3 said:

> *According to the plan, every week, kids need to learn a letter and memorize four or five sentences. Some kids memorize only two, that's fine. What matters is that they memorize something. When I give the parents the weekly plan, they tell me that they start teaching their kids the sentences even before we start in the class to make sure that their kids have enough time to memorize what is required from them and so to get a good evaluation.*
> (emphasis added)

T4 said:

> *I design tests like those assigned to the first and second graders –laughing-. Every month, there is an exam in four letters. I also assign dictations, and I ask them to recite the conversations that we learned. I give them marks so that parents see tangible results.*

On the other hand, teachers adopting a learner-centered approach depend on observing kids during classroom activities and games. Besides, they use portfolios (that might include worksheets, pictures, and videos sometimes) to observe kids' development over time. In this

case, teachers' focus is not only on the academic aspect but rather in other aspects related mainly to communication and interaction. T9 said:

> *First, we have portfolios for each kid. This helps you see kids' development. For example, once I have a shy kid who never interacted with us, by the middle of the first semester, this kid started to be more active and used things in the class. This is an aspect of development, in my opinion. Also, I take into account their interaction in the class during activities, plus the books and the worksheets.*

T10 said: *"Sometimes, I videotape the kids, and I let them watch their videos after like four or five months. It's crazy –laughing-. When they see themselves, they feel happy and proud. They could see how much they have changed". T8 said: "well, I have a game. I group them into two groups, and I ask each group to tell me words for different letters. While they are playing, I could see who is interacting and contributing and who is not."*

Almost all the teachers agreed that they are obliged to correct students' mistakes and errors since what kids are learning at this age will stick forever which goes in line with the result of item No. 46 with a mean of 4.37 that teachers consistently correct kids' mistakes. T5 said: *"I feel obliged to correct all the mistakes, but I correct them gently so that not to shut them down."* Al the teachers agreed with T5 that what matters is how to correct mistakes. They agreed that they never treat kids' errors directly or in the form of interruptions. They mentioned other error correction methods. For example, the first praise kids for their attempts, and then gently and indirectly, model the correction by repeating the correct utterance. Teachers might do that immediately after the kid finishes what he/she wants to say or they might decide to treat it later, depending on the personality of the kid. T9 explained:

I wait till they finish their utterance and just repeat the word. I don't like to tell: oops, this is wrong. You should always be loving to little kids. I'd say excellent then fix the problem. If he's a shy kid, you have to be careful. I'd wait a long time let's say 10 minutes; then I'll start reviewing with them what they said in the class and just fix it.

To sum up, this section presented the main practices in the English classes at kindergartens as reported by teachers in the questionnaire and the interviews. The main practices that were discussed via questionnaire items and more thoroughly via the interviews are (1) planning for the English lessons based on the Arabic plans; (2) using teaching strategies such as songs, flashcards and realia, body movements, worksheets, stories, and role play; (3) using whole class activities to introduce the subject and group work for follow up activities that are generally not communicative in nature (e.g., coloring, writing, worksheets); (4) teachers' use of L1 to facilitate learning and to create rapport with kids; (5) taking into consideration individual differences: from an academic perspective (focusing on low achievers) in the teacher-centered classes and from a social, cognitive and emotional perspective in the learner-centered classes; (6) assessing kids through monthly and weekly assessment (tests, dictation, reciting) in the teacher-centered classes and observation and portfolios in the learner-centered classes. The challenges related to English language teaching will be presented next.

4.4. The Challenges associated with English teaching at kindergartens

This part aims to answer the third research question, which is about the challenges that teachers encounter when teaching English at kindergartners. First, the results of the second subsection of the questionnaire (13 items) will be presented, then the results of the interviews. Table 4.3

summarizes the means and standard deviations for the challenges that teachers encounter when teaching English at kindergartens.

Table 4.3
Challenges that Teachers Encounter when Teaching English at Kindergartens

Number	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
19	Parents have limited knowledge of the language	3.49	1.13
18	Limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom	3.39	1.32
14	Lack of a unified preschool English curriculum	2.90	1.41
15	Insufficient enriching materials that are relevant to the Palestinian culture	2.80	1.26
21	The conflict between parents' expectations and my objectives and practices	2.53	1.12
17	The complexity of the language for the young learners	2.49	1.12
9	Teacher's lack of proficiency	2.41	1.16
13	Insufficient teaching materials and educational games	2.39	1.25
16	Lack of time devoted to language teaching weekly	2.37	1.16
20	Parents' indifference to the importance of the English language	2.27	1.21
12	I find it challenging to conduct unplanned conversations	2.12	1.21
11	I have limited knowledge of methods for teaching English for young learners	2.02	1
10	Lack of knowledge in children's literature	1.92	0.77

As the table shows, the items were sorted in descending order to shed light on the highest means even though the means for this subsection were generally low (ranging from strongly disagree to undecided). Item No. 19 achieved "relatively" the highest mean 3.49 that parents' limited knowledge of the language is a challenge. The second highest mean was for item No. 18 with a mean of 3.39, and it was about the limited exposure to the language outside the classrooms.

Unexpectedly, teachers disagreed with the rest of the challenges mentioned (from item 14 to 10, according to the table above). Therefore, teachers were asked about the challenges they encounter via the interviews. Through interviews, the teachers were more open and they had the opportunity to discuss some of the challenges they encounter freely. Three kinds of challenges emerged, and they will be discussed thoroughly next.

A. Teachers Face Challenges Related to Language and Language Teaching

Teachers agreed that low exposure to the language before kids' enrollment in KG is a significant challenge. Prior to the preschool stage, kids rarely practice or interact in English. This point was also agreed upon in the questionnaires. Teachers described the kids at the beginning of the academic year by descriptions such as "T6: they come without any prior knowledge of the language," "T2: at the beginning of the year, kids come raw, minimal knowledge that doesn't exceed few English songs learned from YouTube," "T3: they come to the class as preterm," "T5: " they come to me with zero exposure to English; some even have never heard of English, and they don't know what English is." T8 also complained by saying:

kids play games on mobiles, but in Arabic, the kids watch movies and series in Arabic; they listen to Arabic songs. I guess if parents work to integrate English even in the simplest way, it will make a difference. Even if they don't understand, at least they come to kindergartens already exposed to the language and comfortable to listen to it.

This obstacle contributes to the rise of other problems, such as lack of students' engagement and acceptance of the language. That is why _as mentioned earlier_ teachers spend from three to six weeks at the beginning of the year preparing kids to the language. T3 explains:

Kids come to the class as preterm infants; that's why during the first month, I don't teach letters; I only expose them to some songs and few phrases. When we are in the second half

of October, kids become ready to learn English, and they are comfortable with me, with

the classroom and with the language.

Concerning teaching English, teachers complained that the time allocated for English teaching is not enough, especially for teachers who also teach in a school affiliated by the same administration. T8 _who also teaches third, and fourth-grade_ said that her major obstacle is time, "*If I have enough time, kids' development will be more apparent or let's say more rapid.*" She also attributed kids' inability to develop speaking skills to the insufficient time she spends with them: "*When I see them three to four hours weekly, it's not enough to develop their communication skills.*" T2 said that she cancels many activities and avoids those that need discovery and interaction because of the time issue. It is worth mentioning that according to the questionnaire, teachers teach English, on average of five point three hours weekly. Finally, some teachers said that the English system is different from the Arabic one; the letters and the writing directionality; that is why English teaches should be patient and should proceed step by step.

B. **Challenges Related to Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), Expertise, and Professional Development.**

Even though teachers disagreed in the questionnaires that they face challenges related to their PCK and expertize, the majority of interviewees mentioned these as challenges in the interviews. They admitted that teaching English for young learners is challenging for them. T1, who has a major in social work, said that her proficiency in English is low; she particularly finds teaching speaking or listening very difficult. She said: "*I focus on reading and writing since they are easier to me; I cannot teach conversations! If my specialization was English, I would do things differently. I would teach them more words, also create more engaging teaching aids.*"

T8, whose specialization is English, said that when she started teaching at a kindergarten, she did not have a theoretical or practical background for teaching English to very young learners such as KG1 and KG2. She explains:

Even though I have a major in English literature, I don't know anything about teaching very young learners. Right now, I am a Master's student in the educational administration program, yet it didn't benefit me practically; I learn excellent theories, but they are not in the core of my practical life.

T5, who is also a Master's student in the TEFL program, said that she lacks knowledge and experience in dealing with very young learners: "*Look; usually the challenges that I face are not related to language aspects but rather to the characteristics of the young learners.*" Obviously, dealing with young learners is sensitive and not easy at all. Teachers mentioned that sometimes they have "aggressive, trouble makers, and hyperactive kids." Teachers, thus, need to know how to deal with them in the class. T10 said that when teaching young kids, their modes matter, their felling of hunger of thirst might change the entire plan. She said:

After all, you're dealing with kids who should be in a supportive and safe place. Sometimes, you have a kid whose parents have hit him in the morning, or who is sleepy or hungry. This affects the entire atmosphere of the class, and you just have to deal with it immediately before trying to teach them anything. They are sensitive! I sometimes just cancel the class to deal with a case like this.

Overcoming these obstacles is subject to experience. All the teachers said that when they started working, they were not familiar with teaching methods and resources needed to teach preschoolers English. With time and experience, they gain more knowledge and thus become

more comfortable when preparing and implementing English lessons. T4 _who has been teaching for more than ten years_ said:

> *Of course, there is a great difference in the way I used to teach English and the way I am teaching now. When I was accepted to the job, the administration didn't have any plans or a curriculum. I didn't know what or how to teach those kids, so I only taught them letters in a very traditional way. Then, I started asking my sister, who has experience in teaching at kindergartens; she helped me, and year after year, I gained more expertise and started to create my own methods and teaching aids. You have to know that the administration wants you to achieve great results, yet they are not concerned about your professional development or training, so you have to work on yourself by yourself.*

Other teachers also agreed that kindergartens' directors do not play a supportive role in the field of developing teachers, especially English teachers. T5 said that when she started teaching, "she was left alone." She complained about the lack of community support by saying: "*They even didn't tell me anything about the students or their characteristics. I had to figure these things out by myself; I asked about their social status; I asked about kids with special needs.*" She expressed her shock that teachers do not share their experience in this field while sharing experience and creating a systematic community of teachers as learners are essential in this case since the MOEHE does not supervise or train kindergarten English teachers. T8 agreed: "*I had no experience; no one told me what to do; I had to create my own way of teaching!*"

C. Teachers Face Challenges Related to the Context, Including Parents, Community, and Resources.

Teachers mentioned many examples of communication breakdowns and conflicting expectations between them as English teachers and parents. In the questionnaire, teachers

mentioned parents' limited knowledge of English as a challenge. T4 and T2 said that "parents are uncooperative"; they rely on them as teachers and do not teach or revise kids at home, justifying this by their lack of knowledge of the language. T9 mentioned the same problem: "*Many parents can't speak English, so only me as a teacher working on language or conversation isn't enough.*" In some instances, teachers find that lack of parents' involvement is beneficial. For example, T9 and T5, who are native speakers, agree that they rarely hear wrong pronunciation from kids since kids only hear things from them as teachers, not their parents. T5 said: "*because I'm a native-like speaker, I find it advantageous that kids only hear English from me. They never catch the wrong pronunciation. Anyway, every teacher must pronounce words correctly, even if she isn't a native speaker.*"

Other teachers said that parents sometimes set unrealistic expectations, which is exhausting to the teacher and the kids. T10 said: "*OMG, some parents expect that in one week their kids will be speaking English; they feel afraid, but then when they see the gradual development and the way I deal with their kids, they feel less anxious and become more cooperative.*"

T1, a homeroom teacher who also teaches English, said that some parents find teaching Arabic way more important than English. Therefore, they ask her to concentrate on Arabic, not English. When she assigns English homework or an assessment, they do not take it seriously. The negative role played by parents is not exclusive to teaching English. Sometimes parents underestimate the significance of the preschool stage in general, which in turn impacts English teaching negatively. T5 said: "*Look, parents are not concerned whether their kids learn Arabic or English. They see us as babysitters, that's what matters to them. They are unaware of the long term benefits of learning a language at an early stage.*" T2 said:

Once, I was talking to a mom about her kid's performance in the class, I was encouraging her to work with him, but she said that she was not interested because he's stupid and will eventually leave education. Imagine a mom was calling her five-year kid stupid!

T10 works from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. She said, "*I stay with the kids more than they stay with their moms! Both of the parents work, kids stay with me, I teach, I feed, I do everything to them. It's stressful and disappointing when parents can't find time to be involved.*" T9 and T7 said that the majority of the behavioral problems and the lack of discipline are connected to parents' absence. T9 gave an example:

I had a problem with a kid whose father is abroad; his mom is by herself. No grandma, No grandpa. So he had a problem; he used to be very aggressive with kids because he is bored and didn't have the parent-kid community thing.

Regarding the community, teachers mentioned that it does not provide kids with a rich environment for their development, especially in English. T5 said: "*Unfortunately, poverty and the passive social-cultural context in which kids are raised affect their development negatively.*" T 4 also agreed:

Look, it might be a bit too negative to say this, but the locality where I'm teaching right now makes things even harder. I used to teach in a different place where parents are more educated, and the social context is more supportive; I used to achieve greater results.

The challenge is greater when the teacher has kids from different socio-cultural backgrounds. T10 explained:" *the challenges I face the first month are the most difficult. The*

problem is that you have twenty kids coming from twenty different environments. It takes me about two months to try to place them all in one similar context."

T2 and T7 shared another problem, which is the effect of the community of kindergartens on teachers' attitudes and practices. T2 said that her focus on reading and writing does not reflect her own beliefs regarding language learning. However, she feels obliged to do so since the majority of the private kindergartens in Ramallah do that; she says, "it's a trend." If she does not follow the trend, parents will object; they will trivialize her achievements. T7 complained that some kindergartens in Ramallah teach English as a first language. She finds it inappropriate and disappointing to see little kids speaking English better than Arabic. Yet, she says:" *Sometimes, I need to do that so not to go against the stream!"*

Finally, some teachers pointed to the shortage of resources that could be utilized to enhance students' learning. T4 said that she has to sing and rhyme most of the songs because she rarely finds an available laptop or speakers to play the songs. T2 said that resources and teaching aids that are interactive are costly, and their unavailability makes enhancing communicative skills not easy at all. T1 stated that it takes her a lot to create teaching aids suitable to her kids' level; she wished if such aids were already available. T3 made a comparison between the resources available where she works and those in another prestigious school in Ramallah. She says: "*I wish I have a projector, LCD, or an ICT room for the English activities.*" T6 mentioned the lack of a preschool English curriculum. T8 said that the lack of resources affects the education of students and the performance of the teachers. She gave an example: "*once, my speakers broke down, I could not find another one quickly. It was a disaster! I felt so confused and disorganized."*

To sum up, the results of the interviews and the questionnaires show that teachers encounter challenges related to language and language teaching, such as the low exposure to English before and after enrollment in kindergartens and the insufficient time dedicated to English teaching. In the interviews, teachers mentioned challenges related to their PCK, training, and expertise in teaching English for young learners even though the results of the questionnaires did not show that. The interviewed teachers also said that they do not receive support and are not prepared, supervised, or trained to teach English in kindergartens. Finally, teachers encounter challenges related to context, mainly the parents who do not take teaching English seriously at kindergartens and who might not be cooperative enough. In the next chapter, the results of the study will be related to each other, and they will be interpreted and discussed in light of the theoretical framework of the study and relevant literature.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the results of the three research questions were presented. First, the reasons and aims for teaching English were discussed showing the relationship between the quantitative and the qualitative data. The results showed that the main aim for teaching English is preparing kids to learn English at the first grade and mainly from an academic perspective. Secondly, the main teaching and learning practices were presented. The qualitative data went in line with the quantitative data. However, the qualitative data gave more details in case of seven practices. Finally, the challenges of teaching English were presented mainly by reference to the qualitative data since in the questionnaire the teachers disagreed with most of the challenges. The qualitative data showed that there are three kinds of challenges: related to English and English teaching; related to teachers' PCK; related to context and community.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This study aimed to investigate issues pertaining to teaching English at the Palestinian kindergartens via qualitative and quantitative methods. In the previous chapter, the results of the study were presented in three main sections: (1) The reasons and the aims of teaching English at the Palestinian kindergartens, (2) The teaching-learning practices, (3) The challenges related to English instruction in kindergartens. In this chapter, I will discuss these results in light of the Vygotskian framework that was adopted in this study. Then, I will discuss the limitations of the study to help readers see and interpret the results within the context in which the study was planned for and conducted. Finally, recommendations for future research and policies will be provided.

5.2. Reasons and aims of teaching English at the Palestinian kindergartens

The results of the questionnaire, as well as the interviews, showed that teaching English in kindergartens is driven by reasons related to academic issues. The most prominent one was preparing kids to learn English in the first-grade. Throughout the interviews, teachers confirmed that they do that by targeting primarily Alphabet knowledge. All teachers said they feel obliged to graduate kids competent in the English letters, their sounds, vocabularies, and basic writing and reading skills. This implies that kids who register for the first grade are usually expected to be already able to read and write in English. This might be true in the case of the private schools that adopt English curricula other than the Palestinian one because the Palestinian English Language Curriculum published by the General Administration of Curricula (2015) declares that first graders are not expected to be already "alphabetized." According to the general objectives

of teaching English in the Lower Primary Stage (Grades 1-4), kids will acquire linguistic

abilities related to morpheme-grapheme skills and conventions of reading and writing (such as

coping skills, basic print conventions, and left-to-right writing and reading orientation)

throughout this stage (Grades 1-4), not before it (General Administration of Curricula, 2015).

Moreover, enhancing communicative ability is the goal of foreign language instruction

today in Palestine (General Administration of Curricula, 2015). Within this approach

(communicative competence approach), the emphasis is placed on "on what the learner can do

with language rather than what the learner knows about the language" (P16). The communicative

competence approach has its' roots in the Vygotskian framework, according to which the essence

of language learning is to be able to communicate meanings and thoughts (Vygotsky, 1962).

Thus, within this approach, preparing kids to learn English at the Palestinian schools should

preferably be done by allowing learners to interact in English and use it through real-life social

situations instead of focusing on mere linguistic knowledge.

In the questionnaire, teachers agreed that one of their aims of teaching English is enhancing

communicative competence, yet the discussion of their teaching practices and the aspects of

language that they emphasize the most in the interviews shows that enhancing communicative

competence was not a primary concern. As the qualitative results showed, even though teachers

taught kids simple conversations to use in certain authentic situations, yet this was done mainly

through drilling and reciting of conversations in daily routines that provided a chance for

producing the language mechanically. Such fixed routines did not provide opportunities for

spontaneous language use, and teachers rarely create enough communicative tasks to allow

creative language use and social interaction among kids. Also, data did not reveal increasing

autonomy in initiating conversations because kids are accustomed to responding to teachers'

interactions rather than initiating new ones.

Incorporating in creative, spontaneous, and novel interactive situations was exclusive to the

learner-centered classes, and in most cases, it remained at the word-level and constitutes of noun

phrases and chunked language. Clarke (1999) reported a similar finding as he found through a

longitudinal study that the language output of four 4-year old kids learning English is

characterized by the use of single words and the relience on chunked langugae. More creative

language use was subjected to the amount of interaction and scaffolding these kids were exposed

to and received.

To sum up, data showed that emphasizing aspects of linguistic knowledge was a primary

aim in the teacher and learner-centered classes to prepare kids to learn English in the first grade.

In the learner-centered classes, enhancing communicative competence and working on issues

related to social, emotional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal aspects were more visible. Yet, kids

were still exposed to language activities that enabled them, for example, to recognize letters, read

CVC words and sight words, spell many words, write first names, count to fifty, and write to ten.

All of these outcomes are not necessary to prepare kids for the first grade if we consider the

objectives of teaching English in the primary stage (1-4 grade) in Palestine. Therefore, it could

be said that the private kindergartens either do not follow the requirements of the Palestinian

English curriculum or prepare kids to learn English only in the private schools that teach

international/foreign textbooks without consideration that public schools in Palestine and many

of the private ones adopt the Palestinian English curriculum.

English teachers should take advantage of the two-year preschool experience by creating feelings of enjoyment and personal appreciation of the English language instead of teaching linguistic skills that will be learned again in the primary stage. They are also encouraged to consider the preschool stage as a chance to create opportunities for kids to use the language and initiate verbal communication in meaningful, relevant, and intellectually challenging situations.

Preparing kids for the first grade by building essential social and communicative skills is considered an important objective for the preschool stage in many countries around the world. For example, in Singapore preparing kids for the next stages of learning does not mean that kids shall be exposed to a simplified primary school curriculum to accelerate learning; instead, it indicates that kids are to be provided with the necessary skills and concepts that enable them to proceed through the next stages (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2013). Hakkarainen (2008) states that school readiness is a major aim of kindergartens in Finland, although preparing kids to school does not come through posing academic pressure on them but rather through developing language, maintaining social interaction, play, and imagination. Preparing kids to "school atmosphere" through the self-learning curriculum approach is also a significant aim for early childhood education in Saudi Arabia (Alqassem, Dashash, & Asma, 2016). According to Masnan & Ngajib (2016), kindergartens are not meant to focus on academic content per se; instead, they must highlight and work on the different learning styles of the kids and on exposing them to a language-rich environment in order to help them direct their learning by themselves later on.

If kids find themselves already competent in the language aspects that are expected to be learned in the first grade, they might feel less motivated and challenged, and thus they might not show significant progress (VEER, 2007). This is especially true for the kids who will be enrolled in public schools or in private ones that teach the "English for Palestine" textbook. In this case,

and considering Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD, those kids might lose interest in learning English because the regular instruction in the first grade will not push their limits by creating new ZPDs for them (VEER, 2007). According to Vygotsky, learning takes place when a learner moves from one ZPD to another one. Opportunities for kids to learn English in the first grade will be minimized if they are not exposed to new materials and tasks; to new ZPDs. Therefore, one can argue that over-preparation of the kids for the first grade and too much concentration on isolated linguistic skills could deprive kids of engaging in and benefiting from the language learning process later on. Besides, over-preparation might contribute to creating achievement gaps as kids who have been fortunate enough to have a preschool experience will be significantly better than their classmates who have not enrolled in kindergartens or who have been enrolled in public or private kindergartens that do not teach English.

In the next section, the teaching-learning practices will be discussed in light of the objectives mentioned above and the Vygotskian framework with "communication" as one of the main foundations for interpreting the classroom practices.

5.3. The teaching-learning practices in the English lessons at kindergartens

In this section, five of the practices that were presented earlier in the fourth chapter will be discussed thoroughly in relation to the Vygotskyean framework. These practices are communication and the active participation of the kids in the class, using mediating tools, using groups, dealing with individual differences, assessment, and using the mother language in the English classes.

According to Vygotsky (1962), children's early language learning arises from processes of meaning-making in collaborative activities with others. Meaning-making processes go beyond recognizing the meaning of the individual word; meaning-making implies constructing meanings

based on background knowledge that is formulated socially in the first place then internally. From this perspective, language learning is embedded within social and interactive events in specific cultural and social contexts. Therefore, when the classroom objectives and practices are built around linguistic competence rather than communicative acts -as in the case of the Palestinian kindergartens- language learning might be compromised.

Communication is one of the foundations of this framework and the primary objective of the Palestinian English Curriculum. The language learning process, thus, is seen as a functional process that occurs through meaningful use and interaction. However, the analysis of the practices reported by teachers shows that communicative activities do not constitute a significant part of the daily practices of the majority of English teachers. Moreover, the practices generally revealed a minimal emphasis on language use.

The quantitative data reflected a general and a positive view of the English teaching-learning practices among teachers from different kindergartens; yet, they did not highlight specifications of the way these practices are planned for and implemented in each kindergarten. The qualitative data did that which allowed for finding differences among some kindergartens. The type of differences found was explicitly related to the emphasis on the communicative approach and the active role assumed by English learners in some classes, unlike others. Thus, English classes were classified into two main categories; the first includes the teacher-centered classes, while the second includes the learner-centered classes.

Exploration of teachers' attitudes and practices indicated that teachers adopting the learner-centered approach believe that communication and comprehension of English are more important than reading or writing, which are emphasized by teachers adopting the teacher-centered approach. Moreover, in the learner-centered classes, language learning was viewed as

an active process through which learners assume active roles and have motivated attitudes for language learning. Indicators of kids' involvement in the learning process included encouraging kids to construct and guess meanings and to learn through discovery instead of being passive learners. Besides, in these classes, kids are encouraged to use what they learn through rich classroom environments; teachers also create comfortable environment in which kids are not inhibited from speaking up which facilitates their initiation of interactions and talks. T7 explained that she organizes the class in ways that make books, toys, and other educational materials physically accessible to the kids, and this is how they become active and try to talk about what amuses them to their teachers or parents. According to the Vygotskian framework, when learners are involved in the learning process, they become motivated by the desire to learn what makes them active and involved members of their community (Langford, 2005).

It is worth noting that even though teachers in the learner-centered classes pay attention to communication and try to involve learners in the learning process, they still give enormous attention to the linguistic aspects, as mentioned earlier, but with emphasis on the active participation of kids in these literacy activities.

On the other hand, the practices discussed by teachers in the teacher-centered classes reveal more concentration on drills and memorization, which contributed to creating passive learners who are comfortable with parrot-like learning and who are not encouraged to use English in communicative events. In the teacher-centered classes, the teachers are the main authority figures, and their primary role is to pass knowledge to kids. The teachers believed that as much as kids drill, the more knowledge they would gain, and the more vocabs they will learn. However, there is a difference between drilling and repeating lists of vocabulary items and between repeated encounters with the language. The latter implies that kids have a chance to hear

and use language constructs several times with time lapses in between; they have the chance to organize their meanings and think about the way words were used in different contexts. Repeated encounters with the language result in an understanding of the "meaning" as described by Vygotsky rather than merely rote learning. Rote learning takes place when kids recite English words and Arabic translations blindly such as what happens in some of the teacher-centered classes (Langford, 2005).

The daily routine of the English lesson, as discussed by teachers, is almost the same in both kinds of classes. Teachers start with a simulated literacy activity to engage all learners at the same time; they, for example, revise letters with kids and sing together many of the familiar songs. Then teachers guide students' participation in literacy activities, and they give them direct coaching using mediating tools such as songs, playing dough, videos, posters, or flashcards. In the third step, kids start working either individually or in groups to perform external activities with occasional and purposeful coaching on behalf of the teachers. For example, kids might be asked to write or draw the letter on a worksheet; or they could play a game or solve a puzzle. After that, kids are expected to proceed independently unaided to help them become self-directed learners. These steps reflect a Vygotskian model for early childhood acquisition of literacy concepts, as presented in Kaufman (2004).

When teachers from both approaches discussed their daily routines, they mentioned using tools and underscored the significant role these tools play in aiding and facilitating kids' learning. For instance, they mentioned flashcards, songs, handcrafts, playing dough, realia, educational play materials, and stories. According to Vygotsky, these artifacts are referred to as "mediating tools," and they facilitate all humans' cognitive and mental functions, including memory, problem-solving, planning, and intentional learning. Teachers reported examples that

prove this as they mentioned that using realia and flashcards help kids associate words to objects and thus help them memorize and remember meanings; using songs and stories help them concentrate and learn new vocabulary.

According to Vygotsky, using these tools is a culturally and socially sensitive endeavor as people create and use these tools within a particular context. That is why these tools are not static and are subject to change. That is why T10 mentioned that she tries to modify the mediating tools according to the specifications of the context and the students. For instance, she said that she used to use a newspaper flashcard when teaching the letter (N); yet, she has not been using it for four years now since kids are not familiar with newspapers as most parents nowadays are dealing with online newspapers.

Among the common practices that teachers talked about, as the daily routine described above shows, is the use of groups. As the results of the questionnaires show, the majority of teachers use groups. The interviews data revealed the reasons why teachers may use groups. First, they mentioned that groups help them manage the class. Secondly, groups create a positive atmosphere and friendly relationships among classmates. Finally, groups create a chance for peer support and thus help kids learn from each other. Concerning the first purpose, it makes sense that with the absence of teacher assistants in the majority of kindergartens, teachers find grouping kids and working with one group at a time much more manageable than working with the whole class and much time-saving than working individually with each kid. As for the enhanced relationships, the literature emphasizes the importance of students' feelings, often referred to as "affect" in the language learning process. According to the affective filter hypothesis, kids' learning of the language is optimized when they feel relaxed, positive, supported, and unthreatened (Brown, 2007). That is why when kids sit in groups and feel bonds

with each other, the affective filter is lowered, resulting in an increased willingness for learning (Brown, 2007).

We have to be a little bit more critical to the third purpose, which is kids' helping each other or, according to Vygotsky, kids' scaffolding of each other in groups. Before discussing that, it is essential to keep in mind that English classroom activities are academic-oriented. Generally, the kind of activities that teachers referred to when talking about groups was related to the Alphabets and numbers, and they were not communicative in nature. For instance, teachers mentioned coloring, drawing, writing, doing a worksheet, or playing with the dough in groups. Teachers' descriptions of the groups and the tasks performed within reveal that groups are rarely used to perform a joint activity where all the learners have to participate and contribute to performing one shared task. Instead, their description implies a group of students _generally five_ sitting at one shared table, each performing an individual task; the task is similar to all kids in the class. For example, learners are distributed into five groups, with a shared color box; every learner in the group is expected to hand in a coloring sheet by the end of the activity.

This kind of group work activities requires a minimal level of interaction among students in the same group, and kids' helping of each other could not be easily noticed unless we are talking about an early finisher who completes a task for another late student, which was honestly declared by some teachers. T4 said groups compete to be the winner group; she does not have to wait long until all kids finish their tasks as the group members would help late kids finish theirs. The irony is that teachers are generally talking about a group achievement but with individual tasks. In such cases, one could argue that using groups in the English class does not result in transforming the class into a learning community where high achievers communicate with other

kids or contribute to the emergent understanding of all the members despite their differences in abilities or knowledge (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

In the learner-centered classes, teachers pointed to examples for using groups to play games or solve puzzles. In these cases, the group members assist each other in performing one group task. For example, T8 said she gives each group a letter to work on; the group members decide the words that start with the letter sound, cut suitable pictures, and then past them where required. Different groups work on different letters, and thus each group becomes responsible for presenting their work to the other groups. During group time, kids might talk to each other and make decisions; thus, some kids might learn from their peers who might be more capable of them even without noticing.

Referring to Vygotsky's notion of ZPD, participation in social and communicative practices play a pivotal role in leaning and development within the individual's ZPD since learning is presented with the distance between what learners can do with the help of others (including adults, teachers, and more capable peers) and what they can perform independently. Kids learn if they are first exposed to tasks that require help from others and then gradually become able to perform these tasks individually without help. In such cases (learner-centered classes), using groups in the language classes is of great importance as language learning becomes a collaborative achievement and not an individual's solo effort (Turuk, 2008).

This discussion about using groups in the English classes gives rise to two important issues (results) to be discussed in relation to Vygotsky's notion of ZPD. The first is dealing with individual differences and the characteristics of each kid; the second is assessing and evaluating kids in the English class. The overarching principle that guides discussing these two issues is that according to Vygotsky, teaching needs to be delivered in the ZPD for every child. Teachers

should thus know how to push the limits for each kid depending on his/her ZPD so that to best benefit from instruction (Turuk, 2008).

According to the results of the questionnaires, teachers said that they very often consider kids' characteristics when teaching and that they very often modify the activities to meet kids' needs. In the qualitative part of the study, it was found that teachers are actually very flexible regarding their plans and their expectations of each kid. However, the fact that academic objectives guide their instruction makes teachers very concerned about the academic performance of the kids, especially the low achievers. Teachers, therefore, discussed thoroughly the way they approach and take into consideration the needs of these kids (Low achievers) and mainly from an academic perspective.

In the teacher-centered classes, the teachers emphasized the importance of intensifying instruction for them and giving them extra time, extra worksheets, and extra help. This kind of direct coaching and scaffolding will be useful If teachers deliver instruction that is within these kids' ZPDs with activities that are a little bit above their level. Teachers also mentioned placing these kids into mixed-ability groups so that they learn from their peers. Vygotsky states: "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when a child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, P. 198). Cohen & Lotan (2014) emphasize that group work increases and deepens kids' opportunities to learn content and develop language and thus has the potential to build equitable classrooms. They further stated that "even kindergarten children have been shown to learn very abstract concepts when placed in a group with peers who already understand the idea" (Cohen & Lotan, 2014, P.11).

However, it is worth mentioning that benefiting from peer assistance during group work is connected with the kind and amount of group interactions and talking that takes place among peers during the tasks (Cohen & Lotan, 2014). Thus, taking into consideration the nature of group activities in the teacher-centered classes, which was discussed earlier, I do not think that mixed ability groups are useful for low achievers. In the teacher-centered classes, group interactions are very minimal since kids are placed in groups to conduct tasks that are not communicative in nature. In such a case, kids do not participate and act as members of a learning community that contributes to the understanding of other members.

In my opinion, in such cases, it is better to have homogeneous groups in regard to intellectual abilities. Homogeneous grouping allows for placing kids with aligned zones of proximal development (ZPDs), which helps the teachers in providing suitable instruction and coaching that they could not provide through the whole-class time (Langford, 2005). Otherwise, kids would not receive appropriate scaffolding either during whole class time or during group work keeping in mind again that groups in the teacher-centered classes serve activities that are not communicative in nature.

So far, the discussion was about considering the needs of the low achievers even though consideration of kids' ZPDs is not limited to this case. High achievers also need an appropriate kind of instruction that is above the average level so that they are regularly challenged and pushed towards new ZPDs. However, teachers in the teacher-centered classes did not consider this case. To interpret this, we need to get back to the objectives of teaching English in kindergartens. Teachers aim to achieve specific outcomes to prepare kids for the first grade. As long as kids achieve them, teachers do not feel the need to work on other objectives or on other

aspects to meet the need of those kids. According to teachers, what is offered to high achievers is only the opportunity to scaffold other kids during activities time.

On the other hand, teachers in the learner-centered classes highlighted the importance of working individually with kids after group work at least twice a week. Private/individual tutoring helps kids regardless of their levels, whether they are high or low achievers. It also provides an opportunity for teachers to examine kids' ZPDs closely as they could observe what kids can or cannot perform without help and thus provide them with activities that are a little bit challenging for them. This individual observation helps teachers examine a process described by Vygotsky called internalization.

Internalization takes place when learners start to assume responsibility for their learning, and it is reflected by their ability to work independently without the need of others (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). When kids are placed in groups, they are expected to benefit from the kind of social activities. When kids internalize knowledge, they make this kind of external-social assistance a source to which they can refer to internally.

The only way to examine whether a kid has internalized something is to see If s/he has profited from the assistance that was provided to him/her once through solving problems independently. This examination reflects a method of assessment, according to Vygotsky. This interprets why the teachers adopting the learner-centered approach said that working individually with kids is critical because it enables them to assess kids indirectly and thus to provide assistance and instruction based on that indirect assessment. From this perspective, discussing assessment objectives and techniques become necessary.

In the case of learner-centered classes, assessing kids takes place indirectly mainly through observing kids during class activities (group and individual work). Observation allows teachers

to find out how internalization takes place as the teacher examins the process of solving the problem and not only the final product. Besides, teachers take advantage of assessment to inform and modify their practices in accordance with them, taking into consideration the social, emotional, and intellectual characteristics of the kids. That is why T9 and T10 emphasized the importance of knowing the learning style of each kid to provide activities compatible with it. This assessment can best be described as a formative assessment as teachers' focus is mainly directed towards students' learning with ongoing feedback. The teachers adopting this approach never mentioned the use of tests, exams, or grades. Instead, they mentioned portfolios, classroom activities, and worksheets.

Unlike the learner-centered approach, teachers in the teacher-centered approach mentioned that they conduct a monthly assessment that takes the form of tests, dictations, and reciting. Apparently, the focus of these tests is on final products rather than the process of learning or language use. This kind of summative assessment with the use of traditional evaluation techniques is undoubtedly not age-appropriate. Teachers' main aim was to detect development in specific areas related to linguistic aspects and then report that to parents. For example, T1 said that sometimes she gives kids a second chance to re-perform the test again in a few days if she feels that they are not competent enough. Instead of giving students more scaffolding or less challenging tasks that are within their ZPDs, the teacher asks them to repeat the test. This means that kids go home and start "studying" to get good evaluations and marks. In this case, the assessment does not aid kids' learning and does not inform the teacher's practices. This point shall be elaborated and discussed from a different perspective later on in the challenges section.

The final result to discuss in this section is the relationship between the first language and English, as discussed by the Palestinian kindergarten English teachers. All teachers _ecxcept for

one_ embraced Language 1 use (Arabic) in the English classes. Indicators of this embracement were detected in many aspects. For example, when teachers discussed their planning of English lessons and their preparation for kids to learn English, Arabic lessons and plans were the foundation for that practice. Also, they agreed that there is a relationship between kids' performance in Arabic lessons and their performance in the English ones. Using Arabic in the English classes ranges from using Arabic as a medium of instruction (Grammar translation method) such as in the case of T1 to total rejection of L1 use such as the case of T10 (direct method). The rest of the teachers showed moderate use of Arabic for specific purposes.

Teachers employ Arabic for several functions such as creating a rapport with the kids, facilitating learning, and saving time when introducing something unfamiliar, something new, instructions, or orders. Similar uses were reported in Inbar-Lourie (2010), who explored EFL teachers' use of kids' first language in Hebrew and Arabic medium schools. They categorized the uses in three categories: instructional (facilitate comprehension and explaining new words and concepts), managerial (giving instructions and for discipline purposes), and affective (encouraging and comforting kids).

Recently, there has been renewed interest in investing in the first language as a meaningful component in the foreign language classes as opposed to the "monolingual exclusivity" _exlusive or nearly exclusive target language use_ that was called for before (Inbar-Lourie, 2010). Many researchers have considered L1 a legitimized tool for second/foreign language teaching and viewed it as an asset rather than an impediment. For example, it was found that Finnish immigrant students who were enrolled in Swedish schools at ten years old and already knew their native language learned Swedish much better than their younger siblings whose first language was not yet fully developed (Rublik, 2017). Hancock (2009) conducted an

experimental study to examine the effect of exposure to age-appropriate books in the native language on the pre-literacy skill development of language minority kindergartners. The study found that kids who were exposed to books written in their first language scored significantly higher on a pre-literacy skills test than their classmates who were exposed only to English books.

In a nutshell, recent literature shows that systematic and continued support of the first language, especially in the preschool stage, does not negatively impact the attainment/learning of the foreign/second language (Rublik, 2017; Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Hancock, 2009; Kohnert, Yim, Nett, Kan, & Duran, 2005; Lantolf, sociocultural theory and second language learning: Introduction to the special issue, 1994). The Vygotskian framework provides two arguments in favor of using L1 when learning another language.

First of all, the first language develops as a result of social interaction with caregivers (Parents), and it continues to be the primary tool for communication with the family. Therefore, failure to develop and maintain this tool at an early age (childhood) causes reduced contact with the family and loss or denial of cultural identity, which affects the social and emotional well-being of the kid. According to Kohnert, Yim, Nett, Kan, & Duran (2005) the risk of losing the first language combined with all the social-emotional and cultural aspects is high with very young learners since in this age level their language is very vulnerable to an incomplete acquisition or "backsliding" if not well and systematically supported.

The second argument is related to the acknowledgment of existing knowledge in scaffolding and co-constructing the new one; in this case, it is the activation of L1 in the learning of L2. According to Vygotsky, when kids are acquiring a foreign language, they are already in command of a system of meaning in their native language. This system is transferred to the

sphere of the new language, that is why teachers should capitalize and appreciate the first language and whatever concepts kids bring to the class instead of denying them.

Vygotsky's notion of daily and scientific concepts provides a framework for interpreting this relationship between Arabic as L1 and English as a second/foreign language. Foreign language learning, according to Vygotsky, is a process of forming scientific concepts while first language acquisition is an excellent example of daily concepts. Scientific concepts need explicit, systematic, and conscious teaching-learning contexts, such as learning a foreign language in school settings. The most important argument to highlight in this context is that scientific concepts grow and build on the daily concepts that kids have already developed _as part of their already existing kwnoledge_ (Langford, 2005). Within this framework, understanding and acknowledging where children are in their concept formation helps in understanding the process of learning a foreign/second language.

Therefore, taking into consideration what kids bring to the class from daily concepts (mainly L1) is considered the initial step for learning English. On the one hand, teachers agreed to this and emphasized that they never teach concepts in English unless kids are familiar with in Arabic and that they refer to the Arabic plans when developing English plans. On the other hand, teachers complained that kids at the beginning of the year come as "babies" with no previous knowledge about English; they considered that kids come with a "tabula rasa." They used terms such as "zero-knowledge," "preterm," and "with nothing" to describe kids. This is critical since it reflects that teachers deny the years kids spend picking up and learning things before enrollment in kindergartens. The teachers considered what they "learn" consciously in kindergartens in Arabic but neglected or did invest in the skills and concepts that they come with from their social and cultural contexts. The concept of "tabula rasa" also reflects teachers'

perception that kids' minds shall be filled with knowledge on behalf of the teachers with kids not participating in constructing this knowledge.

The nature of some of the practices discussed in this chapter creates several challenges. In the results chapter, challenges were classified into three categories: challenges related to language and language teaching, challenges related to teachers' proficiency and pedagogical knowledge, and challenges related to the context, including the community, the parents, and the resources. These challenges will be discussed next, taking into consideration the role the objectives of teaching English and the nature of the practices used played in creating such challenges.

5.4.   The Challenges Associated with English Instruction at Kindergartens.

The quantitative data showed that teaching English in kindergartens at not a challenging task. The average responses for the items asked were low, ranging from (undecided) to (strongly disagree). The lowest means were for items Ch12, Ch11, Ch10, which were about challenges related to teachers' knowledge of the language and of the English teaching methods (Refer to **Table 4.3:** Challenges that teachers encounter when teaching English at kindergartens). This means that teachers find themselves qualified enough, well prepared, and competent to teach English in kindergartens.

However, when interviewed, the teachers more open and they offered details about the challenges they encounter. Moreover, they were reflective and discussed the issue of lack of teachers' training, preparation, and follow up.

According to the results, the administration and the MOEHE are unsupportive when it comes to English kindergartens' professional development and training since teaching English is not systematically and directly supervised by the MOEHE. Even though the majority of teachers

are specialized in the English language, they said that they lack the pedagogical knowledge that aids them in the class when dealing with very young kids. According to the questionnaire, thirty-seven percent of the teachers reported receiving training courses and workshops in the field of early childhood education, yet none of the teachers mentioned receiving training that is explicitly related to teaching English in kindergartens. English teachers need to be well prepared and supported; otherwise, they would not be able to overcome the hurdles they face during their careers (Nassar, 2019).

Lack of English teachers' competency is a challenge that has been reported in other studies conducted about teaching young learners a foreign language such as Masnan & Ngajib (2016), who reported that the English teaching staff in kindergartens in Cambodia lack pedagogical knowledge and have limited training experience. Masnan & Ngajib (2016) asserted that more qualified English teachers should be hired after being exposed to professional development opportunities. They further stated that a reconsideration of teachers' competencies should be the first step in any educational reform concerning the early childhood education sector.

According to the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development and Intervention published by the MOEHE in 2017, kindergarten teachers' low academic qualification is stated as a challenge faced by the kindergarten sector. The same issue has been reported in other studies conducted in Palestine, such as (MOEHE, Evaluating the experience of the MOEHE: The opening of preschool classes in public schools, 2017) and Sbardella (2006). Nevertheless, discussing teachers' qualifications in these studies is not specific to English teachers but rather to kindergarten teachers in general. Therefore, this study might add to them that it specifically approached English teachers' qualifications.

Although it was not intended to investigate the sources of English kindergarten teachers' professional development, teachers talked about this issue in the interviews, which allows me to discuss that it in this context since such information might help in creating more systematic and planned support for the teachers. The teachers considered their colleagues (other English teachers) as their first source of development. All of the teachers said that when they started teaching, they found themselves overwhelmed with the particularities of the kindergarten context, including the characteristics of the kids, the resources available, and the lack of a curriculum.

To overcome these obstacles, they said they used to ask other English teachers who have more expertise in teaching English in kindergartens. It was surprising that only one teacher said that she reads and looks for academic sources such as articles or books that might help her. Teachers referred to their colleagues only at the beginning of their careers. They said that with time, they gained expertise, and things became more accessible and routine like; this is why they do not feel the need to ask or upgrade their knowledge and skills continuously.

What matters in this context is the fact that creating a community of kindergarten English teacher might be very effective. Through this community, teachers act as learners and researchers as they share problems and issues; then, the whole community contributes and provides ideas and solutions for them. Also, teachers could share useful resources to use or to refer to and ideas for teaching aids or educational games.

Nassar (2019) conducted an exploratory study of professional development programs offered for the in-service English language teachers in public schools in Palestine. In her study, Nassar (2019) identified ten features that are key to creating successful professional development programs for English teachers. Some of these features are similar to the ideas kindergarten

English teachers provided in this study. For example, she found that it is essential to provide teachers with a mix of deep content and pedagogy; T8 said that even though she has a profound theoretical background for teaching English, she lacks the pedagogical and practical side. T5 said that she feels confident to debate if someone comes to criticize a particular practice of her because she reads articles and studies about teaching English for young learners. This implies that having this deep mix of both content and pedagogy is also crucial for the English kindergarten teacher, not only school teachers. Moreover, Nassar (2019) also emphasized the importance of creating a community of learners through which teachers actively develop their skills and promote growth in their learning.

The other kind of challenges discussed by teachers was related to the English language and English teaching. The most critical point to discuss is that teachers considered the lack of exposure to the language before kids' enrollment in KG is a significant challenge. They also attributed some of the achievement and involvement issues to this low exposure. Let us start with Aimin (2013) definition of second/foreign language acquisition from a sociocultural perspective as a process of acquiring or learning a new language other than the native one with only limited exposure to the language.

In fact, it is very expected that kids' exposure to English would be limited before preschools as English is a foreign language to them. As Shin (2014) explains, there are differences between the expectations of teaching English in EFL settings and ESL settings. In EFL settings like ours, the exposure to English is limited, and thus learners are not likely to achieve high levels of proficiency in English even if they start learning the language from childhood (Shin, 2014). Teachers considered that lack of exposure impedes or delays the process

of learning the Alphabets as teachers wait for four to seven weeks before they start what they considered "real teaching."

This issue shall not be interpreted apart from the objectives of teaching English in kindergartens. If the teachers aimed to develop communication and interaction skills, they would not be so concerned about time; teaching time would be devoted to communicative activities and playtime without any pressures. However, this is not the case in the Palestinian kindergartens, where teachers' primary aim in both kinds of classes is teaching alphabets. Teachers feel rushed to complete a syllabus within a limited time frame, on average (5.3) hours weekly.

However, talking about low exposure to English in general and its effects on learning the language is legitimate. After all, it is true that in Palestine, kids are only exposed to English at schools, which limits the opportunities of language use in communicative situations outside the class. What was critically discussed above is expecting students to possess a certain level of knowledge of the language before the preschool stage as a requirement for facilitating the achievement of the academic objectives. The limited opportunities to use the language outside the English classes is a common problem among the non-English speaking countries, and it is continuously reported by teachers in many studies (e.g. Masnan & Ngajib, 2016; Savic, 2016; Li, 2004).

Teachers' complain about lack of exposure to English in kids' daily life is related to parents' roles and teachers' expectations of them which are part of the challenges related to the context including community and parents. Actually, the teachers mentioned that parents do not speak English with the kids, do not expose them to English via the TV or YouTube channels, and most importantly, they do not "revise," "follow up," or "teach" kids at home. Revising, following up, and teaching for tests or homework are all inappropriate terms considering the

context of early childhood education where young kids ranging from the age of three to six are expected to be learning fundamental skills of social life and simple literacy concepts. Kids are supposed to be playing not "studying," and it is worth mentioning that according to the MOEHE, homework assignments and tests are not allowed throughout the kindergarten stage and the primary stage as well.

Although I did not ask about assigning homework and tests because I thought it would be a sensitive issue, the teachers themselves talked about this and yet complained that parents do not take that seriously. This implies again that the objectives of teaching English determine and impact the way teachers teach (their practices) and the way they look at parents' and community's roles.

Teachers' perception of the role of parents was, unfortunately, limited to academic issues such as asking them to follow up with kids. I wish if the teachers involved parents with communicative activities or used parents to empower kids by bringing together the school and home. It is worth noting that whatever parents bring to the class _no matter how simple it is_ constitutes a part of the daily concepts that teachers should build on when teaching a foreign language.

The positive development of each child requires maintaining close ties to the child's family and community, including their values and first language. Therefore, schools should capitalize on the richness of the families and should not limit their role to academic aspects. Kids at this young age would feel secure if their sense of belonging to their families, culture, and first language is enhanced (Supporting English language learners in Kindergarten, 2007). Moreover, enhancing the meaningful partnership between the English kindergarten teacher and the family is

considered a key principle in language teaching (Preschool English learners: principles and practices to promote language, literacy, and learning, 2009).

Some teachers also mentioned that parents underestimate the importance of language teaching and do not take the significance of the preschool experience seriously, which matches the results found by Sbardell (2006) about the underestimated role of the kindergarten teacher by the government, society, and parents in Gaza Strip in Palestine. In the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development and Intervention, it is explicitly stated that as long as this sector is not being considered as a compulsory stage, the Palestinian families will still have low awareness of the importance of preschool education.

Finally, according to the questionnaire, teaching English was not driven by competition among the private kindergartens with the lowest mean of (2.27- disagree). However, some teachers discussed this as one of the obstacles related to context and community and they said that competition is a problem that makes them behave in ways that might not correspond to their points of view. For example, T2 and T6 said that they believe in the importance of communication and listening-speaking skills; yet, they focus on reading and writing just to please parents who compare their kids' achievements with others enrolled in different kindergartens. T2 said:

> *I personally believe that listening and speaking are very important; speaking is yet more critical at an early age. However, my practices don't enhance that, and the objectives I work on are not related to what I believe. In the end, I am controlled by the administration who wants to compete in the market and by parents who want to see quick and tangible results; reading and writing skills are noticed quickly by parents!.*

To sum up, teachers mentioned many factors that influence the way they teach. Some of these influences come from teachers themselves (their competencies); others come from the context. The latter includes parents' roles and expectations, the limited exposure to English outside the class, the availability of resources, the market (the private kindergartens' sector), the social changes (they mentioned the working mothers and parents absence for a long time), and most importantly the objectives of teaching English as set by the teachers and the leading administrations.

According to Fullan (2000), these forces are often viewed with concern and approached with caution even though some of them can be allies or positive influences. Some teachers pointed out to this in the interviews. For instance, T2 said that when parents are approached in a friendly convincing way, they have a very positive impact on their kids and their learning of the language. T3 also agreed and said that when parents cooperate, they become a great source of support.

Recommendations for stakeholders (teachers, administrators, private kindergarten owners, researchers, and policymakers) will be presented next in light of the results and their discussion. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight first the limitations of the study so that to place the results and the recommendations in their real context.

5.5. Limitations of the study and some reflections.

This study was conducted during the 2019-2020 academic year. The participants in the quantitative part of the study were fifty-four Palestinian preschool English teachers, while ten of them participated in the qualitative part. The teachers were female; according to the MOEHE, all the kindergarten teachers are females; that is why I referred to teachers exclusively by feminine pronouns. The primary purpose of the study is to investigate teaching English in the private

kindergartens in Ramallah and Al-Bireh in terms of the primary objectives of teaching English, the nature of the practices, and the kinds of challenges teachers face.

The results found were collected via questionnaires and interviews. Therefore, both kinds of data were presented from the viewpoints of the teaches. That limited the opportunity of reporting authentic data from the field itself (the classroom). Collecting such data would have been possible through observations that were intended to be used. However, the unexpected closures because of the widespread of Covid-19 that took place from March 2020 and continued until this moment of writing prevented me from visiting classrooms for observations. The observation would have made it possible to discuss the communicative and interactive practices of the teachers and the students more thoroughly. Also, I would have been able to observe group use and group interactions more closely. The roles of the teachers and the students would have also been examined from another "external" perspective. This is not to say that the data teacher reported are questionable or not reliable but rather to understand that the data analyzed reflected only "what the teachers said."

However, since I visited most of the kindergarteners during the first phase of data collection when I was distributing questionnaires in February, I was able to relate some of "what I saw in the class" or "heard" with what the teachers were telling me in the interviews. Moreover, the fact that I myself is a kindergarten teacher helped me pose questions that are related to the classroom atmosphere and understand what the teachers were referring to.

Classrooms' visits enabled me to manage the interviews and ask further questions, depending on my "minimal" observation of the context. For example, when I visited T7, I saw the classroom, the way the teaching aids were placed, the height of the board, and the containers that have labels in Arabic and English. Therefore, when the teacher was giving me examples of

how kids are active and how they interact with their surroundings and try to produce simple

sentences such as "oh look, these are four toys," I could relate since I saw how everything was

accessible to them. On the other hand, T3 was discussing the importance of teaching the kids

words and sentences to enable them to communicate; the way she was talking about this in the

interview makes the listener think that she focuses a lot on communication. However, when I

visited this teacher during the first phase of data collection, I saw the board crowded with more

than many words and sentences with Arabic translations. The teacher was lecturing the kids and

used merely traditional/rote teaching techniques. Then, she started telling them to recite the

words and the sentences they memorized. I cannot judge from one visit. That is why when I

asked her the interview questions, I asked more about the kids' role in the class and about their

use of the words and sentences she teaches.

The limited-time that I spent in some of the classes enabled me to observe and ask about

essential aspects that the teachers did not talk about. This proves the importance of conducting

other studies with observation as the primary method of data collection.

I would also like to reflect on the procedures of distributing questionnaires and the extent

to which teachers or administrators were willing to participate. First, there is no convenient way

to distribute as many questionnaires as possible via the MOEHE or the Directorate of Ramallah

and Al-Bireh. Systematic and organized data about the kindergartens that teach English or about

English teachers are also missing. These problems delayed me as I had to plan for many

meetings with officials and supervisors in the MOEHE and the Directorate to get the data I need.

Since the MOEHE does not supervise English teaching in the private kindergartens, many

kindergartens refused to participate, fearing that their participation would cause conflicts with

the supervisors. Those who participated were also very cautious regarding the data they had to

provide because they did not want to be questioned. For example, I asked about the curriculum used and the books if they are using any. Many told me that they actually use books, but they would answer by "NO" because they did not want to be questioned since the MOEHE does not allow book use in kindergartens.

Overcoming these problems is possible only if the MOEHE plays a more active role concerning teaching English, which is a trend that has been sparking lately, and we cannot ignore it anymore. Many of the teachers told me that it is the first time a researcher comes to investigate English teaching in their kindergartens. This indicates that even the MOEHE is not piloting or conducting any studies at least to have a database to which they or researchers could refer to.

Finally, some of the teachers told me when they were filling the questionnaires that they really enjoyed it because it made them reflect on their practices or think about them. This implies that teachers need to be supported and they need to feel that what they do is important and worth investigation. Based on this, recommendations for policymakers and future research are presented next.

5.6.   Recommendations

The are several recommendations that emerge out of this study; they are classified into three categories: (1) recommendations for policymakers including officials in the MOEHE, owners of the kindergartens, and administrators, (2) recommendations for English teachers (3) recommendations for future researchers.

Recommendations for policymaking

1. As part of MOEHE's heading towards a more constructive, comprehensive, and unified vision of early childhood, this study recommends the MOEHE to design a Palestinian English curriculum for kindergartens. The teachers in this study complained about the

lack of a curriculum and considered it as a challenge. Moreover, the study found that the primary aim of the English programs at kindergartens is preparing kids to learn English at the first grade. Therefore, creating a kindergarten English curriculum that is compatible with the English curriculum of the primary stage, especially the first grade would help teachers in creating relevant English activities.

2. If the government plan to introduce English into the preschool curriculum, the first step is investing in teachers. Kindergarten English teachers should be systematically and continuously supported, trained, supervised, and followed-up. The teachers, according to this study, complained about their limited experience in teaching English for young learners and about the lack of professional development opportunities. To overcome these problems and to ensure positive outcomes that help in taking advantage of English teaching at kindergartens, the government should be responsible for the professional development of English teachers at kindergartens by providing courses in the field of early childhood education and teaching English for young learners.

Recommendations for future research

1. This study utilized quantitative and qualitative methods. However, it recommends to conduct a similar study using observation as the main instrument for data collection. As I mentioned earlier in the limitations of the study, using observation enables for collecting authentic data from the field and enables for noticing essential aspects of language learning such as communication, interaction, and active vs. passive roles, peer support, and internalization.

2. This study contributes to the literature about teaching English in the Palestinian kindergartens by providing background knowledge of the context and fundamental

insights regarding issues related to the topic under investigation. This study recommends that future researchers conduct relevant studies that continue what this study has started. Some suggestions are provided below:

➢ Researchers could examine the development of kids' language throughout the preschool experience. This study highlighted some aspects of development such as kids' developing ability to recognize letters and sounds and their ability to conduct straightforward conversations. However, this issue is better to be investigated thoroughly in a qualitative study.

➢ Investigation of teachers' PCK and the extent to which they are able, prepared, and trained to teach young learners is essential because many of the challenges that teachers discussed in the current study stem from their lack of training.

➢ Homework and testing are sensitive and controversial issues at this age level, yet many teachers in this study reported them as part of their classroom practices. Thus, examining these issues and investigating the nature of tests and homework is recommended. Such investigation would contribute to understanding how teachers and parents approach this stage and perceive its role in kids' development, e.g., whether it is all about "studying" or about developing other relevant aspects of development.

➢ This study found that the native language is used in the English classes for different purposes and teachers considered Arabic as an important element in the English classes. Therefore, this study recommends examining the native language use in the kindergarten English classes more thoroughly. It also recommends investigating the effect of this use on kids' language development

since the teachers in this study had different opinions regarding the effect of native language use.

Recommendations related to teachers

1. The teachers in this study agreed that they seek help from their colleagues or from English teachers who have more experience in the field. Thus, teachers are encouraged to create communities of learners where teachers could share their expertise in the field of teaching English for young learners. These collaborative communities are an excellent method for gathering individual efforts and socially shared experiences as an initial step for offering professional development opportunities that compensate for the lack of governmental opportunities as reported by teachers.

2. Teachers in this study agreed that they find using the native language very supportive and helpful for the teachers and for the kids. Therefore, teachers should exploit in kids' native language, which is part of their existing knowledge because kids' first language supports foreign language learning rather than hinder it.

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Appendices

Appendix One

A. Questionnaire for the teachers

التاريخ: ....

حضرة الزميلة (معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية) في الروضة

تحية طيبة وبعد،

تم تطوير هذا الاستبيان من أجل جمع بيانات من رياض الأطفال الخاصة في محافظة رام الله والبيرة بهدف القيام بدراسة استكشافية حول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضات الخاصة.

أرجو من حضرتكم الإجابة عن البنود الواردة في هذا الاستبيان حيث ستساعدني إجاباتكم في الحصول على معلومات تتعلق بطبيعة تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية وتعلمها في الروضات، علماً أن هذا الاستبيان يحتاج إلى 12 دقيقة للإجابة عليه. وأتعهد أن إجاباتكم ستبقى سرية وستستخدم فقط لأغراض هذا البحث.

مع الشكر الجزيل،

فداء نعيم عبد الرحمن

برنامج الدراسات العليا، ماجستير تربية/ تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية – جامعة بيرزيت

للتواصل: 0597842964

الجزء الأول: معلومات عامة عن تعليم وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في روضتكم وعن مؤهلات معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية

اسم الروضة: ــــــــــــــــ   هاتف الروضة ــــــــــــــــــــ

- هل يتم تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضة: ☐ نعم   ☐ لا
- هل تعتبر الروضة جزء من مدرسة؟ ☐ نعم ☐ لا
- ما الصفوف التي تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية:
  ☐ براعم (3-4 سنوات)   ☐ بستان (4-5 سنوات)   ☐ تمهيدي (5-6 سنوات)
- ما هي عدد الساعات المخصصة لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية أسبوعيا: ــــــــــــــــ
- هل يتم تدريس مواد باللغة الإنجليزية مثلا (math/ science)؟ ☐ نعم   ☐ لا
- هل تتبع الروضة منهاجا دوليا لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية: ☐ نعم ☐ لا
- هل يوجد كتاب لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضة : ☐ نعم ☐ لا
- ما هو اسم الكتاب: ــــــــــــــــ
- هل يعتبر منهاج الصف الأول إعادة لما يتم تعلمه في الروضات؟ ☐ نعم   ☐ لا   ☐ لا أعرف

معلومات مهنية عن معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضة

- التحصيل الأكاديمي لمعلمة اللغة الإنجليزية:
  ☐ الثانوية العامة.
  ☐ دبلوم متوسط.
  ☐ بكالوريوس.
  ☐ ماجستير.

- التخصص: ــــــــــــــــ
- التأهيل التربوي إن وجد ــــــــــــــــ
- دورات أو برامج تتعلق بالطفولة المبكرة إن وجد: ــــــــــــــــــــــــ /
  ــــــــــــــــ/ ــــــــــــــــــــــــ
- أعلى صف قمت بتدريسه: ــــــــــــــــ
- عدد سنوات الخبرة الإجمالي في تدريس رياض الأطفال تحديدا : ــــــــــــ
- هل يوجد مساعدات تدريس مع المعلمة في الصف؟ ☐ نعم   ☐ لا
- هل توجد ساحات وقاعات يتم استخدامها للعب والتفاعل والأنشطة بشكل عام: ☐ نعم   ☐ لا

الجزء الثاني: يتكون هذا الجزء من ثلاثة محاور خاصة بتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية وتعلمها في الروضات الفلسطينية. يتعلق المحور الأول بسياسيات تعليم اللغة في الروضة **(أهداف تعليم اللغة)** والمناهج التعليمية، أما المحور الثاني فيختص بأبرز تحديات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضات. أما المحور الأخير فيتعلق بالممارسات التعليمية والتعلمية للغة الإنجليزية في الروضات. أرجو وضع اشارة تبين درجة اتفاقك مع البند.

	درجة الاتفاق				المجال/الفقرة	الرقم
أوافق بشدة	أوافق	محايد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة		
**المجال الأول: السياسات والمناهج**					
					تتبع الروضة منهاج لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية خاص بها تم تطويره من قبل الإدارة والمعلمات.	1.
					الهدف الأساسي من تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضة تعليم القراءة والكتابة.	2.
					الهدف الأساسي من تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضة تطوير مهارة التواصل والتفاعل الاجتماعي.	3.
					الهدف من تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية هو تمكين الطلاب من استخدامها بشكل طبيعي خلال حياتهم اليومية.	4.
					يتم تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضة بسبب التنافس الشديد بين الروضات.	5.
					يتم تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كونها لغة عالمية.	6.
					يتم تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضة من أجل تهيئة الطلاب وتأسيسهم لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في الصف الأول.	7.
					يتم تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضة لأن تعلم اللغة بعمر صغير يؤدي إلى تعلمها بكفاءة أكبر.	8.
	المجال الثاني: التحديات المرافقة لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضات					
					ضعف قدرتي على التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية.	9.
					عدم إلمامي بأدب الأطفال.	10.
					محدودية معرفتي بأساليب تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية للأطفال.	11.
					أجد صعوبة في إجراء محادثات أو الانخراط في تفاعلات غير مخطط لها باللغة الإنجليزية.	12.
					نقص الموارد والمصادر الإثرائية والألعاب التعليمية الممكن استخدامها في حصص اللغة الإنجليزية.	13.
					عدم وجود منهاج موحد لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الروضات.	14.
					عدم توفر المواد الإثرائية اللازمة والموائمة لمجتمعنا الفلسطيني.	15.
					قلة الوقت المخصص لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية أسبوعيا في الروضة.	16.

الرقم	المجال/الفقرة	درجة الاتفاق				
		لا أوافق بشدة	لا أوافق	محايد	أوافق	أوافق بشدة
17.	صعوبة اللغة الإنجليزية على الطلاب.					
18.	محدودية فرص الطلاب لممارسة اللغة الإنجليزية خارج الصف.					
19.	ضعف معرفة الأهل في اللغة الإنجليزية.					
20.	عدم اكتراث الأهل لأهمية اللغة الإنجليزية.					
21.	وجود تعارض بين أهدافي وأساليبي وتوقعات الأهل.					
22.	**الرجاء كتابة أي تحديات أخرى تواجهينها لم يتم ذكرها في الاستبيان إن وجدت**					

المجال الثالث: الممارسات التعليمية التعلمية في حصص اللغة الإنجليزية

الرقم	المجال/ الفقرة	درجة الاتفاق				
		مطلقا	نادرا	أحيانا	غالبا	دائما
23.	أبدأ بتعليم الطلاب الحروف والأرقام					
24.	أبدأ بتعليم اللغة من خلال التفاعل الاجتماعي مثل المحادثات والحوارات مع الطلبة					
25.	أتحدث مع طلابي باللغة الإنجليزية وليس العربية.					
26.	أشجع طلابي على التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية وأستمع لهم.					
27.	أعلم الطلاب كيفية استخدام اللغة للتعبير عن حاجاتهم الأساسية ومشاعرهم (مثل الذهاب إلى الحمام/ التعبير عن الجوع والعطش).					
28.	أعلم الطلاب كيفية استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية للتواصل الاجتماعي مع الآخرين (مثل التعريف بالنفس: اسم وعمر وجنسية ومكان السكن).					
29.	أستخدم أنشطة جماعية في الصف.					
30.	ألعب دورا داعما للطلاب.					
31.	أتحاور مع الطلبة باستمرار.					
32.	يحفظ الطلاب معاني الكلمات (الكلمة وترجمتها بالعربية) عن ظهر قلب.					
33.	أدرب الطلاب على استخدام معاني الكلمات من خلال أنشطة هادفة تعكس مواقف حياتية حقيقية (مثلا الاعتذار/ او الذهاب للسوبر ماركت).					

	المجال/ الفقرة	مطلقا	نادرا	أحيانا	غالبا	دائما
				درجة الاتفاق		
34.	أعلم الطلاب في حصص اللغة الإنجليزية مفاهيم حياتية وعلمية مختلفة باللغة الإنجليزية: مثل الألوان/ الأشكال/ الفصول/ أعضاء الجسم/حساب...الخ.					
35.	أستخدم وسائل ملموسة وسمعية وبصرية في حصص اللغة الإنجليزية (بطاقات، صور، مجسمات، أشكال وأشياء حقيقية، فيديوهات، شرائط تسجيل).					
36.	أستخدم حركات الجسم والإيماءات وتعابير الوجه لإيصال رسائل معينة أو لربط ما يتعلمه الطلاب بحركات معينة.					
37.	أستخدم في حصة اللغة الإنجليزية أساليب تعليمية مختلفة كتقمص الأدوار والأغاني والدراما والقصص والألعاب التعليمية والحركية والأشغال اليدوية.					
38.	آخذ بعين الاعتبار خبرات طلابي السابقة وتجاربهم الحياتية عندما أخطط للحصة أو أصمم الأنشطة.					
39.	ألجأ لمصادر خارجية كالانترنت للحصول على أنشطة ومواد متعلقة باللغة الإنجليزية.					
40.	أقوم بتعديل الأنشطة لتتناسب مع خبرات طلابي في السياق الفلسطيني.					
41.	أصمم أنشطة بمستويات مختلفة لاسكتشاف ما يمكن للطلاب إنجازه بشكل مستقل عما يمكن إنجازه بمساعدتي وبمساعدة زملائهم.					
42.	يقضي الأطفال جزءا كبيرا من حصة اللغة الإنجليزية في اللعب الحر والاستكشاف والتواصل.					
43.	يسأل الأطفال عن معاني كلمات ومفاهيم جديدة غير المدرجة في الخطة أو المنهاج.					
44.	يعتبر الصف مجتمع تعلم يساند فيه الطلاب الأكثر معرفة أو خبرة الطلاب الأقل خبرة.					
45.	أقيّم الطلبة من خلال أنشطة صفية تتم في سياق الحصة تعكس ما تعلمه الطلاب.					
46.	أصحح باستمرار أخطاء الأطفال اللغوية (مثلا لفظ الكلمات، طريقة الكتابة).					
47.	أركز على تصحيح الأخطاء التي تعيق التواصل وتحول دون إيصال المطلوب (مثلا أصحح الطفل اذا قال عن التفاحة برتقال لأن الرسالة المقصودة مختلفة).					
48.	الرجاء إدراج أي أنشطة أخرى لم يتم التطرق إليها في هذا الجزء وتعتقدين أنها مهمة أو ترغبين بالحديث عنها:					

انتهى شكرا لكم على وقتكم

B. Semi-structured interview questions

These questions were asked via phone calls. I started by introducing myself and by stating briefly the objectives of the study and the reasons why this interview is conducted. Then, I made sure that the time was convenient, and the interview was ready to start.

1. Could you describe the daily routine in your English class?

2. What are the most two strategies or activities that you use in your class? And why?

3. What are the most two used strategies in your class? Why? Are they central to your class?

4. Based on what do you choose the concepts or subjects to teach in your class?

5. If you are to choose one objective to work on all the year with your kids, what would it be?

6. To what extent do you consider developing speaking and listening skills more important than reading and writing? Could you explain why?

7. When and why do you use Arabic in the English class; in what contexts or situations? Do you think using Arabic impede kid's English language development?

8. Do you think that there is a relationship between kids' performance in their Arabic classes and their performance in your English class? How do you consider the influence of Arabic on the development of your kids' language?

9. How do you describe your role and relationship with the kids in the class?

10. When do you decide to do a whole-class activity and when to do a group work activity? What does influence your decision?

11. When and why do you decide to do a group-work activity? Could you describe to me how the class is during group work?

12. Could you describe kids' language development throughout the year? I mean, how they start and the gradual development that you notice. What are the most obvious aspects that change?

13. How do you observe your kids' development in English?

14. If a kid interacts with you in English, how do you deal with her/his mistakes? How often do you correct errors or mistakes that take place during communication?

15. Are there significant differences between the students in your class (whether in their abilities, backgrounds, or interests)? How do you deal with such differences?

16. How long have you been teaching? How has your teaching changed if so? And why?

17. What are the factors that affect your teaching positively and negatively?

18. Due to the emergency state, are you teaching online these days? If yes, what are the challenges that you face? How are they different from the ones you use to encounter in your regular classes?

19. If you encounter challenges, how do you manage to overcome them? Could you give me an example, please?