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TEACHING-LEARNING CHALLENGES FACING STUDENTS OF ENGLISH IN THE PREPARATORY YEAR AT THE TAIF UNIVERSITY, KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

ABSTRACT: *The present study aimed to investigate the teaching-learning challenges students face in the Preparatory Year Program (PYP) at Taif University from instructors' and students' perspectives. The first two questions were concerned with the instructors' and students' extent of agreement on the challenges students face while learning English in the preparatory year at Taif University from students' and instructors' points of view. The third question tried to answer whether there were any statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) between instructors' and students' responses due to the five domains of teaching-learning challenges. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data related to the first two questions, and Independent t-test was used to answer the third question. The findings of the first question showed that the fifth and the first domains include most of the teaching-learning challenges facing Taif University students in the Preparatory Year Program from the instructors' point of view. The results of the second question indicated that with the exception of the third domain, all the other domains represent teaching-learning challenges facing students from their own points of view. In addition, the results of the first two questions showed an agreement between instructors and students in terms of ranking the fifth and the first domains as having most of the teaching-learning challenges facing students. As for the third question, the findings showed that there were statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) between instructors' and students' views due to the five domains of the teaching-learning challenges. These findings could be due to the fact that instructors and students are two heterogeneous groups having different mentalities, belonging to different age groups, and educational and cultural backgrounds.*

KEY WORDS: *Instructors' perceptions, students' perceptions, teaching-learning challenges, Taif University students, learning EFL, and preparatory year.*

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is capable of making a significant contribution to the development of individuals, and the first academic year can be highly formative in that experience (Bovill, Bulley & Morss, 2011). The negative consequences affect individuals, universities, and societies (Bryson & Hand, 2007; and Tinto, 2006-2007). Strong links have been suggested between a student's early experiences and subsequent progression and success (Flores Juarez, 2005; and Yorke & Longden, 2007 and 2008).

Research may have revealed a variety of teaching-learning challenges that might be

similar in a way or another to the challenges proposed, but in a different context. These challenges might be faced by PYP (Preparatory Year Program) students learning English as a foreign language at Taif University in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in their first year of the university study program. And it is worthwhile to state the fact that the academic year 2012 is the first year the PYP is applied at Taif University.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the teaching-learning challenges students face in the Preparatory Year Program (PYP) at Taif University from instructors' and students' perspectives.

Learners of English as a foreign language encounter number of teaching-learning challenges. These challenges might include factors related to learners' lack of educational and language background knowledge and academic English skills, instructors' teaching and linguistic competencies and pedagogical methods, the course syllabus and learning materials used to provide learners with content in terms of culture and linguistic difficulty, and the physical learning environment where the teaching-learning process is carried. Other factors might include learners' age, anxiety as an obstacle for learning and available resources.

C.P. Cassanave & P. Hubbard (1992) reported that ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students need to be competent in academic language skills in order to cope with academic demands at North American schools (cited in Huang, Cunningham & Finn, 1992). They added that students have challenges in all academic language skills. They have difficulty in understanding academic lectures. They find it challenging to participate in classroom discussions and make oral presentations, and they have challenges in academic reading and writing.

D. Moje & D. O'Brien (2000) stated that it is interesting to note that background knowledge of the content can make comprehension easier. Students can comprehend passages better if they reflect their cultural traditions. So, lack of knowledge of culture makes comprehension of texts more difficult.

G. Braine (2002) mentioned that ESOL students have considerable challenges in their academic studies at North American schools, and one of the challenges is their inadequate English proficiency.

B. Ambe (2009) stated that many factors make learning in English challenging for English language learners at the college level. These factors include: (1) the student's level of English language proficiency and prior educational experience; (2) the amount of background knowledge in related areas; (3) experience in the first language; and (4) the learners' age.

B. Elizabeth Ambe (2011) pointed out

in another study that for English language learners at the university level to be successful in their academic endeavors, they need to be proficient in the target language. To be proficient and successful involve overcoming a number of challenges such as the learners' age, the learning environment, lack of background knowledge, and the fact that proficiency in the target language takes several years.

There are many lecturers from Western universities who report difficulties in teaching international Asian students. These difficulties were summarized by J.B. Biggs, as follows:

They rote learn and lack critical thinking skills;
They are passive, they won't talk in class;
They appear to focus excessively on the method of assessment;
They don't understand what plagiarism means;
They stick together [...] won't mix with locals;
They do not easily adjust to local conditions;
They tend to look on lecturers as close to gods;
Progressive Western teaching methods won't work with Asian (Biggs, 2003:125-131).

E. Almanza, de Schonewise & Janette K. Klingner (2012) pointed out that English language learners are the fastest growing segment of the student population. An understanding of the diversity these students bring to contexts of disciplinary learning is critical to determining how best to teach them. At the secondary level, English language learners are required to learn content and build English language proficiency simultaneously. Teachers who work with them should be knowledgeable about: (1) linguistic issues and the second language process; (2) cultural issues and cultural-responsive pedagogy; (3) assessment considerations; and (4) instruction that support language and literacy development in the content areas.

To conclude, the researchers believe that experts into the teaching-learning challenges classified challenges into: *academic language skills* (Cassanave & Hubbard, 1992; Braine, 2002; and Ambe, 2011); *background knowledge* (Moje & O'Brien, 2000; Ambe, 2009; and Ambe, 2011); *students level of English language proficiency, prior educational experience, learning environment, and learners age* (Ambe 2009; and Ambe, 2011); *lack of critical thinking skills, students being passive, and the focus on the method*

of assessment (Biggs, 2003).

However, the present study has classified the teaching-learning challenges into domains that are inclusive to the challenges revealed by the experts; and under each domain, there are a number of detailed items that specify the teaching-learning challenges under investigation. This paper tries to investigate the teaching-learning challenges facing students in the preparatory year at Taif University from the students' and the instructors' points of view. The results are of significance for policy makers and instructors of English.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DEFINITION OF TERMS, AND SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As education specialists working in the field of teaching English as a foreign language, it can be clearly observed that learners of English in general, and Taif University students in specific, encounter a number of teaching-learning challenges while learning English. These challenges might include factors related to learners' lack of educational and language background knowledge. In addition, instructors' teaching and linguistic competencies and pedagogical methods might play a role in causing a learning challenge. Another source of difficulty might be the course syllabus and learning materials used to provide learners with content in terms of culture and linguistic difficulty.

Moreover, the physical learning environment, where the teaching-learning process is carried out, might cause a challenge for learners. Other factors might include learners' age, anxiety as an obstacle for learning, and available resources. This research paper aims to investigate the teaching-learning challenges related to the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) course, teaching-learning process, students and teachers, assessment, and the physical learning environment.

The present study attempted to answer the following questions: (1) What are the teaching-learning challenges facing Taif University students at the preparatory year from instructors' perspectives?; (2) What are the teaching-learning challenges facing Taif

University students at the preparatory year from their own perspectives?; and (3) Are there any statistically significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ between the instructors' and students' views due to the domains of the teaching-learning challenges.

The following terms will have the associated meanings whenever they appear in the present study.

First, Teaching-Learning Challenges: Problems and difficulties that face EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners while learning English in the preparatory year program. These difficulties include structure and organization of the EFL course, teaching-learning process, students and teachers, assessment, and the physical learning environment.

Second, Preparatory Year Program: A one-year study program for the high school graduates, where they study fundamental courses that prepare them to specialize in the following year. They are streamed into Humanities, Sciences, and Health Education students.

The results of this study should be of importance and significance to: (1) University personnel, including decision and policy makers, to emphasize, highlight, and follow up all the domains of the teaching-learning challenges in their policies. It is of importance to enhance the implementation of the domains that rank higher and build on those that rank lower from students' and instructors' perspectives; (2) EFL instructors of English to consider the items ranked low throughout their teaching plans; (3) EFL instructors to form a common understanding of what contributes most to their students' effective learning; and (4) Curriculum and course evaluation and adaptation committee to consider the items ranked low in the domain of structure and organization of the EFL course.

The following points could be considered as limitations to the generalization of the findings of the present study. *First*, the present study was limited to the five domains of the teaching-learning challenges developed for the purpose of implementing the present study, namely organization and structure of the EFL course, teaching and learning, students and

teachers, assessment, and physical learning environment. *Second*, the present paper was limited to male EFL students' and instructors' views in the Preparatory Year program in the academic year 2012-2013.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

J. Huang, J. Cunningham & A. Finn (2002) carried out a study to find out what specific language skills are perceived to be most problematic to their ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students' academic learning. Results showed that students experience considerable challenges in English academic listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Specifically, understanding classroom tasks, giving oral presentations and being able to communicate a problem, comprehending the main ideas as well as the details of texts were identified as most challenging for the students in academic listening, speaking, reading, and writing respectively.

G. Ellen Batt (2008:39-43) carried out a study which sought to learn directly from the Idaho state's English language learners' educators what they perceived as the greatest challenges and needs for improvement of English Language Learning (ELL) education. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized in the research project. The participants for this study were purposefully selected to attain a maximum, all-inclusive sample of the rural state's educators with a primary role in ELL education. The study sample consisted of a total of 161 participants.

Teachers perceived that not all educators who work with ELLs in their schools were qualified to work with linguistic minority students. In response to the question whether all staff members in their school who serve ELLs are highly qualified for their positions, thirty-nine percent of the respondents indicated "no" and 55 percent of the respondents indicated "yes". Six percent did not respond to the question (Batt, 2008).

One of the open-ended questions on the survey asked: "*What are the three greatest challenges you face in educating ELLs?*". Twenty percent of the respondents indicated that the lack of colleagues' knowledge and skills

in educating ELLs was one of their three greatest challenges. Many teachers indicated that their colleagues lacked an understanding of diversity or multicultural education. ELL specialists' pointed out that extra duties in addition to their instructional roles constrain teachers' effectiveness and create much pressure and personal stress. Eighteen percent of the respondents specified that allocated time in the workday to accomplish the workload demanded of them was one of their greatest challenges. The teacher respondents identified priorities for professional development to compensate for knowledge and skills not obtained during the teacher certification process. The ELL practitioners also recommended restructuring solutions to improve ELL education (Batt, 2008).

In order of priority ranking, they proposed for their school to: hire more ESL (English as a Second Language) or Bilingual Education certified teachers (75 percent); create an ESL consulting teacher position (52 percent); hire more bilingual education assistants (45 percent); create a Sheltered English academy (44 percent); provide effective professional development (41 percent); group students by the same language proficiency levels (30 percent); change the ESL curriculum (20 percent); and use a different education model (14 percent).

B. Uckun & Jessica Buchanan (2008) conducted a comparative study to examine the education culture in two Turkish universities involving native teachers, English speaking foreign teachers, and their Turkish students in an attempt to understand the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges faced by both students and teachers. Four versions of the questionnaire were administered to 15 teachers and 228 students. All four versions focused on classroom management and examination procedures, pedagogy, and other affective factors.

The authors aimed to investigate students' and teachers' mutual beliefs, perceptions, and expectations of each other within the educational context and whether any differences could be accounted for by cultural differences between the two parties. This study was designed by both a Turkish academic

and a native English speaking instructor, a collaboration which serves to temper cultural biases inherent to any culturally based inquiry. The researchers found out that cultural diversity between students and teachers may be a source of “miscommunication” that compromises the learning/teaching environment. In such cases, students may be accused of poor performance or teachers may be blamed for inadequate methodology. The researchers hoped to maximize the effectiveness of cross-cultural classrooms as well as to suggest directions for further research (Uckun & Buchanan, 2008).

B. Ambe (2009) explored the processes by which a foreign-born English language learner with limited English proficiency acquired literacy skills for university work, and examined the strategies that the student used to comprehend course content. Data revealed that the English language learner encountered difficulties in the following domains: receptive and expressive aspects of the English language; written assignments; comprehension; and the teaching, learning, and assessment models of the host country.

The student employed strategies such as asking questions, seeking academic peer coaching, and using multiple media to succeed. Implications and recommendations were made for both instructors to adopt instructional approaches that would enable adult English language learners to attain higher levels of language proficiency and academic success (Ambe, 2009).

Srichanyachon (2010) investigated goal setting for learning English language of Bangkok University students. A set of questionnaires for the assessment of goal settings and problems of learning English was administered to 370 second-year students. The study revealed that the goal setting was at a moderate level. There were statistically significant differences found in the students' opinions for goal setting at .05 level as classified by gender, faculty, and English learning experience, but no statistically significant differences in terms of educational background.

Moreover, there was a positive relationship between English background knowledge and

goal setting at .05 level. There was a negative relationship between English background knowledge and problems of learning English at .05 level. In addition, there was a negative relationship between goal setting and problems of learning English at .05 level (Srichanyachon, 2010).

C.T. Nguyen (2011) conducted a study to explore the challenges students from selected South East Asian countries (Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia) face while studying English in Australia before entering into Australian university courses. The study was conducted at one of the largest language institutions in Melbourne, and the results collected draw on the English learning experiences of nine students (three Vietnamese, three Thailand, and three Indonesian) and two language teachers. Semi-structured interviews were adopted as the primary data collection method, and this allowed the major problems that these students experience while studying English for university entry to be identified. He found out that these students must contend not only with different styles of teaching and learning, but also with the challenge of adapting to a new culture (Nguyen, 2011).

As for their English learning experiences in the countries of origin, C.T. Nguyen (2011) found out that all students acknowledged that English lectures in their countries focused a lot on grammar, and other skills were not adequately taught. They reported that from primary school to high school, or even at university, teachers often taught them grammar and vocabulary which was taken from textbooks. They all recognized that, at that time, they were learning English theoretically and not pragmatically. Others skills like speaking, pronunciation, listening, or writing were also taught but not efficiently, as asserted by participants.

With regard to student-teacher interaction, all Vietnamese, Thailand, and Indonesian students stated that there was a distance between teachers and students, both inside and outside classroom. In classrooms, teachers worked mostly by themselves, and students listened and wrote in silence without interrupting teachers' work (Nguyen, 2011).

With regard to the challenges of learning

English in Australia, C.T. Nguyen (2011) stated that the common problems of Vietnamese, Thailand, and Indonesian students are pronunciation, speaking, and plagiarism in writing. Both teachers stated that these cohorts of students have problems when they pronounce English words, especially with consonant classes and word ending like s, sh, t, d, x, g, or j.

All of the respondents admitted that the rule of plagiarism in writing in their countries is not as strict as it is in English. In the first few weeks in language classes in Australia, those students felt puzzled with how to quote and paraphrase and also how to avoid plagiarism in academic writing (Nguyen, 2011).

The researcher found out that the reasons leading to the difficulties in learning English include: (1) *Different linguistic structures*: All teachers and students agreed that there were no strict rules for pronunciation in Thailand, Vietnamese, and Indonesian languages; and (2) *Difficulties in adapting with new culture, language, and learning styles*: Southeast Asian students still kept their traditional characteristics when studying overseas, and this was not easy to be changed overnight (Nguyen, 2011).

H. Yi-Chang (2011) conducted a study to investigate self-perceived anxiety levels of Taiwanese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) university students speaking English under different contextual conditions, including in class and outside of class, presenting individually and in groups, and learning English in formal and informal situations. A total of 191 students completed two survey questionnaires for the data collection.

The results demonstrated that students had a higher level of self-reported anxiety speaking English in the classroom than outside of classroom. And students making oral presentations individually tended to have a higher level of self-reported anxiety than students making presentations in groups. Besides, students learning English in formal situations tended to have a higher level of self-reported anxiety than students learning in informal situations. This study provided a framework that would help language educators and learners acquire a better understanding of the effect of different contextual conditions on

Taiwanese EFL university students' language learning anxiety in a language classroom (Yi-Chang, 2011).

To sum up, the challenges discussed above represent a number of teaching-learning challenges revealed by literature. These have been categorized by experts into: *prior knowledge and skills* (Batt, 2008); *academic language skills* (Huang, Cunningham & Finn, 2002); *understanding of multicultural education and extra duties* (Batt, 2008); *classroom management, assessment procedures, pedagogy, and cultural differences* (Uckun & Buchanan, 2008); *limited English proficiency* (Ambe, 2009); *goal setting* (Srichanyachon, 2010); *styles of teaching and learning, adapting to a new culture* (Nguyen, 2011); and *anxiety levels* (Yi-Chang, 2011).

However, the context in which these challenges have been experienced is different. The present study has investigated the challenges that Taif University students face in the Preparatory Year Program, which has been implemented at the university for the first time since the beginning of the academic year 2012. Moreover, the challenges under investigation have been divided into domains that reflect a wide variety of teaching-learning challenges that are expected to be encountered by students in the Preparatory Year Program at Taif University in the academic year 2012 after implementing the first year of this program.

Identification of these challenges would help policy makers and instructors to identify the reasons behind the difficulties and, thus, put forward solutions. The domains under investigation include structure and organization of the EFL course, students and teachers, teaching and learning, assessment, and the physical learning environment.

METHOD

This section of the research discusses the method followed to gather and analyze data. It includes population and sample of the study, instrument, validity and reliability of the instrument, procedures of the study, and the statistical analysis method.

Population and Sample. The population of the study comprised all male Taif University EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students and instructors in the Preparatory Year

Program. The total number of students was 3,700 and the total number of instructors was 55. A convenient sampling technique was used to recruit the participants of this study. A sample of 326 male students was selected, which is about 10% of the population, and 55 instructors which is the whole population.

Instrument of the Study. The researcher developed two questionnaires of 60 items each. I have been adapted from two projects by M. Holmquist *et al.* (2002) and N. Entwistle, Velda McCune & Jenny Hounsell (2002) to investigate the teaching-learning challenges facing Taif University students in the Preparatory Year Program at Taif University from students' and instructors' perspectives (see Appendix A).

Likert scale of four degrees (strongly agree = 1, agree = 2, don't agree = 3, strongly disagree = 4) was used to determine the extent of students' and instructors' level of agreement on the teaching-learning challenges. The four degrees of the scale have been entered as numbers for the purpose of analysis, so numbers 3 and 4 represent challenges. This means that a mean of 2 or more indicates a teaching-learning challenge. The items have been positively directed; they have been formed to represent the positive aspect of a statement.

Validity of the Instrument. The questionnaires are valid since the items have been derived from two teaching-learning projects developed by a group of experts, namely M. Holmquist *et al.* (2002) and N. Entwistle, Velda McCune & Jenny Hounsell (2002). However, the questionnaires were also given to 10 EFL (English as a Foreign Language) specialists who were asked to determine whether or not the questionnaires items were clear and relevant to the domain. The jury of judges suggested that since the items are general and applicable to all teachers, they should be modified in such a way that they are more specific to address EFL Jordanian teachers.

Reliability of the Instrument. In order to guarantee the questionnaires reliability, it was distributed to a sample of 25 students and 10 instructors other than the subjects of the study in order to ask for their responses. It was distributed again two weeks later, so that the

researcher counts its reliability. The results were calculated and analyzed.

The correlation coefficient (Pearson) between the previous and post responses for the students' questionnaire was 0.85 and 0.87 for the instructors' questionnaire, which is considered acceptable for the study. The Cronbach alpha reliabilities for the two versions of the questionnaire were .88 for the students' questionnaire and .90 for the instructors' questionnaire.

Procedures of the Study. After getting the approval of the university to distribute the questionnaires on the participants of the study in the Preparatory Year Program at Taif University, the researcher identified the population and the sample of the study and carried out the process of questionnaires validity and reliability.

Then, I asked a number of colleagues to distribute 425 questionnaires on the students, and received 375 questionnaires, so the response rate is 88%. The researcher excluded 39 questionnaires where many items were missing. Meanwhile, the researcher distributed 55 questionnaires on the instructors and received them all. Finally, the researcher analyzed the results and drew conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the study.

Statistical Analysis. In order to answer the first and the second questions related to the teaching-learning challenges facing Taif University students from their own perspectives and from the instructors' perspectives, descriptive statistics were used. To answer the third question concerning whether or not there were any statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) between students and instructors due to the domains of the teaching-learning challenges, Independent t-test was used.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This part shows the findings of the present study in terms of the three questions highlighted in the study.

With regard to the first question related to the teaching-learning challenges facing Taif University students in the Preparatory Year Program from their instructors' point of view, the table 1 shows the means and standard

Table 1:

Means and Standard Deviation of the Instructors' Responses to the Five Domains from Their Points of View

Domain	Means	Std. Deviation
The First Domain: Organization and Structure of the EFL Course	2.19	.37
The Second Domain: Teaching and Learning English	1.90	.30
The Third Domain: Students and Teachers	1.51	.33
The Fourth Domain: Assessment and Other Set Work	1.99	.33
The Fifth Domain: Physical Learning Environment	2.78	.53

Table 2:

Percentages of the Instructors' Responses to the Five Domains

Number	Domain	Agree	Don't Agree
1	Organization and Structure of the EFL Course	25.45	75.55
2	Teaching and Learning English	61.82	38.18
3	Students and Teachers	94.55	5.45
4	Assessment and Other Set Work	56.36	43.64
5	Physical Learning Environment	10.91	89.09

Table 3:

Means and Standard Deviation of the Students' Responses to the Five Domains from their Points of View

Domain	Means	Std. Deviation
The First Domain: Organization and Structure of the EFL Course	2.26	.47
The Second Domain: Teaching and Learning English	2.14	.48
The Third Domain: Students and Teachers	1.88	.51
The Fourth Domain: Assessment and Other Set Work	2.13	.49
The Fifth Domain: Physical Learning Environment	2.56	.72

deviation of the instructors' responses to the five domains included in the questionnaire distributed to them.

The table 1 indicates that the fifth and the first domains include most of the teaching-learning challenges facing Taif University students in the Preparatory Year Program from the instructors' point of view.

The table 2 gives more details on the percentages of the instructors' responses to the five domains of the teaching-learning challenges facing students.

It is clear from the table 2 that instructors don't agree mostly with the fifth and the first domains, which represents a teaching-learning challenge for the students.

With regard to the second question related to the teaching-learning challenges facing Taif University students in the Preparatory Year Program from their own points of view, the table 3 shows the means and standard

deviation of the instructors' responses to the five domains included in the questionnaire distributed to them.

The table 3 indicates that with the exception of the third domain, all the other domains represent teaching-learning challenges facing students from their own points of view. In addition, tables 1 and 4 indicate that there is an agreement between the instructors and students in terms of ranking the fifth and the first domains as having most of the teaching-learning challenges facing students. They also agree that the third domain include the least challenges facing students from the instructors' as well as the students' points of view.

The table 4 gives more details on the percentages of the students' responses to the five domains of the teaching-learning challenges from their own points of view.

It is clear from the table 4 that the fifth and the first domains received the highest

Table 4:
Percentages of the Students Responses to the Five Domains

Number	Standards	Agree	Don't Agree
1	Organization and Structure of the EFL Course	31.29	68.71
2	Teaching and Learning English	42.33	57.67
3	Students and Teachers	60.43	39.57
4	Assessment and Other Set Work	45.09	54.91
5	Physical Learning Environment	23.00	77.00

Table 5:
Means and Standard Deviation of the Instructors' and students' Responses to the Items from Their Points of View

Domain No.	Item No.	Means for Instructors	Item No.	Means for Students
1	2	2.56	11	2.78
	5	2.52	9	2.73
	10	2.36	14	2.41
	7	1.96	8	1.98
	1	1.92	7	1.96
	3	1.83	1	1.91
2	16	2.58	17	2.67
	27	2.30	19	2.23
	15	2.29	27	2.23
	22	1.61	24	2.00
	24	1.52	22	2.00
	23	1.52	26	1.96
3	31	2.03	34	2.81
	32	1.89	38	1.95
	30	1.60	36	1.92
	33	1.34	37	1.75
	40	1.29	29	1.69
	29	1.27	28	1.67
4	41	2.81	41	2.88
	46	2.18	44	2.21
	43	2.18	43	2.19
	48	1.72	50	1.92
	49	1.69	48	1.91
	50	1.49	45	1.82
5	59	3.45	59	2.99
	55	3.32	55	2.86
	52	3.10	60	2.65
	58	2.52	51	2.42
	56	2.29	57	2.38
	54	2.05	54	2.35

percentages in terms of students' disagreement, which represents a teaching-learning challenge facing them from their own point of view.

The table 5 displays the items that represent most of the teaching-learning challenges facing the students from their instructors' as well as students' points of view.

The table 5 displays the first three highest

and the least three means of the instructors' and students responses to the items of the teaching-learning challenges facing students, and that all the items that got a mean of 2 or more represent a teaching-learning challenge for students. It is evident that all the items included in the fifth domain related to the physical learning environment include represent a teaching-

Table 6:
Means and Standard Deviation of the Instructors' and Students' Responses to the Five Domains of the Teaching-Learning Challenges

Domain	Means for Instructors	Mean for Students	t. Value	Df	Sig.
1. Organization and Structure of the EFL Course	2.19	2.26	-.949	379	.343
2. Teaching and Learning English	1.90	2.14	-3.626	379	.00
3. Students and Teachers	1.51	1.88	-5.238	379	.00
4. Assessment and Other Set Work	1.99	2.13	-2.164	379	.031
5. Physical Learning Environment	2.78	2.56	1.134	379	.073
Total Average	2.07	2.19	-2.22	379	.02

learning challenge for students from instructors' as well as students' views.

In addition, it is clear from the fifth domain that there is an agreement between the instructors and students in terms of ranking items number 59 and 55 as having most of the teaching-learning challenges facing students. They also agree that item number 54 represents the least challenge in the fifth domain of the challenges facing students from the instructors' as well as the students' points of view.

To answer the third question related to whether or not there were any statistically significant differences between the instructors' and the students' views due to the domains of the teaching-learning challenges, the table 6 shows means and standard deviation of the instructors' and students' responses to the five domains of the challenges.

It is clear from the table 6 that there were statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between instructors' and students views of the teaching-learning challenges facing students in the Preparatory Year Program at Taif University due to the five domains of the teaching-learning challenges.

However, there were no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between instructors' and students views in the first and fifth domains, which comes in agreement with previous results indicating a consensus of instructors and students on ranking these domains as having most of the teaching-learning challenges for students.

DISCUSSIONS

As for the first question related to the teaching-learning challenges facing students

from the instructors' points of view, it is clear that the fifth and the first domains represent most of the teaching-learning challenges. The fifth domain related to the physical learning environment got the highest rank of challenges as all the items represent a challenge for students.

The instructors seem to reflect a realistic situation since the physical learning environment is inappropriate enough. According to them, the most salient challenges include classrooms which are neither equipped for the disabled nor with effective teaching aids. In addition, the seating arrangements are inflexible for pair work and group work.

In addition, the first domain concerning the organization and structure of the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) course got the second rank in terms of the challenges facing students from the instructors' point of view. The textbooks have been adopted for the preparatory year students regardless a careful assessment analysis of their academic or language needs.

The most salient concerns include issues related to the facts that most of the instructors believe that students are not given a good deal of choice over how they go about learning in the course. Many instructors added that the course doesn't sharpen their analytical skills and does not help students to develop their ability to plan for their own work. All in all, students don't feel relaxed to do well in the course.

With regard to the second question about the teaching-learning challenges facing students from their own point of view, it was clear that with the exception of the second domain, all the other domains represent a

challenge for students. They ranked the fifth and the first domains as having most of the challenges. This comes in agreement with the instructors' views in these two domains in general, which may support the point that the domains of physical learning environment and the organization and structure of the EFL course should be revisited.

As for the third question which showed that there were no statistically significant differences between instructors and students due to the five domains of the teaching-learning challenges, it can be stated that although there was a consensus between instructors and students on the fifth and the first domains, the results indicated that there were major differences between the instructors' and students' views.

Firstly, instructors indicated that there were only two domains that showed teaching-learning challenges for students, namely: (1) the physical learning environment; and (2) the organization and structure of the course. Meanwhile, students indicated that with the exception of the third domain about students and teachers, all the other domains represent a challenge for them.

Besides, it can be claimed that instructors and students are two heterogeneous groups having different mentalities, belonging to different age groups and educational and cultural backgrounds. Instructors are mature enough to consider and evaluate issues scientifically and objectively; they have got the experience required to judge the items of the domains according to scientific standards. This might help explain why they only found two domains of challenges faced by students.

Meanwhile, students might not have the knowledge and experience to judge the items according to internationally recognized standards used by their instructors. Besides, they are in their first year of this academic environment at university in which they have not adapted themselves enough to it. This might help explain the results indicating that they consider most of the domains as challenges for them.

To sum up, the previous studies share this study in that they all discuss one or more of a teaching-learning challenge that face students

at university level. For example, some studies discussed challenges related to academic language skills needed by students at university (Cassanave & Hubbard, 1992; Braine, 2002; Huang, Cunningham & Finn, 2002; Batt, 2008; and Nguyen, 2011).

Others discussed challenges of background knowledge (Moje & O'Brien, 2000; Ambe, 2009; and Ambe, 2011). Another study was about the difficulties of learning environment (Ambe, 2011). Other studies were conducted to investigate challenges related to cultural issues (Uckun & Buchanan, 2008; and Almanza, Schonewise & Klingner, 2012).

In addition, a study found out that students have difficulties in critical thinking, being passive, not being able to mix, and ineffectiveness of progressive teaching methods (Biggs, 2003). Some of the challenges discussed above were included in the present study such as the learning environment (Ambe, 2011).

CONCLUSION

However, the present study was carried out to investigate a more comprehensive set of teaching-learning challenges students face in their first year of studying at university. It tried to investigate challenges related to the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) course, teaching learning process, student and teachers, assessment, and the physical learning environment in which all the teaching-learning process is implemented.

Based on the results of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

First, policy makers as well as instructors should pay more attention to preparing a suitable physical learning environment that enable students to maximize their opportunities of learning English in the Preparatory Year Program at Taif University.

Second, the curriculum committee should consider all the items of the questionnaire while reviewing and revising the course as both instructors and students agreed that the course being used represent a challenge for students.

Third, other studies should be conducted to investigate the teaching-learning challenges facing female students in the Preparatory Year Program at Taif University.

Fourth, professional development workshops for instructors on the domains that reflected teaching-learning challenges facing students from their own of view, namely organization and structure of the EFL course, teaching and learning English, assessment, and physical learning environment.

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Appendice A:

Dear, students/instructors.

The researcher intends to conduct a study to investigate the instructors' and students' perceptions of teaching-learning challenges facing students in learning EFL in the Preparatory Year at Taif University.

To conduct this study, the researcher will distribute a questionnaire to identify your present level of the teaching-learning challenges you face while learning English in the Preparatory Year at Taif University.

You are kindly requested to read the items and indicate the degree of your agreement on the challenges you face.

Please note that your contribution will be dealt with professionally and for research purposes only.

Thanks for your highly appreciated cooperation.

The researcher

Please, put (√) in the box that corresponds to your point of view when learning English.

No.	Domain	Degree			
	The First Domain: Organization and Structure of the EFL Course	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	It is clear to me what I am supposed to learn in this course.				
2	I am given a good deal of choice over how I go about learning in this course.				
3	The course units are well organized and run smoothly.				
4	The course helps me to develop my problem-solving skills.				
5	The course sharpens my analytical skills.				
6	The course helps me to develop my ability to work as a team-member.				
7	The course improves my skills in written communication.				
8	I am generally given enough time to understand the topics I have to learn.				
9	I feel relaxed to do well in this course.				
10	The course helps me to develop my ability to plan my own work.				
11	The course is easy to cover, which makes it possible to comprehend thoroughly.				
12	The course strengthens my ability to discuss with others in a reasonable way.				
13	The course encourages me to relate what I learn to issues in the wider world.				
14	Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course.				
The Second Domain: Teaching and Learning English					
15	The different types of teaching (lectures, tutorials, labs, etc.) support each other well.				
16	I always have a positive role in lectures.				
17	The lectures are mostly an innovation of the course content.				
18	The lectures are effective and clear.				
19	I am encouraged to look for links between the course units.				
20	The handouts and other materials I am given help me to understand the course units.				
21	The teaching encourages me to rethink my understanding of the aspects of the course.				

Domain	Degree			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
23	I am prompted to think about how well I am learning and how I may improve.			
24	I am not just given information; the teacher explains how knowledge is developed in this course.			
25	The teaching helps me to think about the evidence underpinning different views.			
26	The teacher helps me to see how I am supposed to think and reach conclusions in this course.			
27	I find most of what I learn really interesting.			
The Third Domain: Students and Teachers				
28	The teacher tries to share his enthusiasm about the course with us.			
29	The teacher is patient in explaining the topics which seem difficult to grasp.			
30	My views are valued in this course.			
31	We support each other and try to give help when it is needed.			
32	Talking with other students help me to develop my understanding.			
33	The teacher motivates me to do my best in the course.			
34	The teacher seems more interested in testing what I have understood than what I have memorized.			
35	The teacher makes a real effort to understand difficulties I may be having in my work.			
36	The teacher normally gives me helpful feedback on how I am going.			
37	The teacher is very good at explaining the topics.			
38	The teacher encourages me to try my own ideas.			
39	The teacher lectures the content in a clear way.			
40	The teacher makes a real effort to have me actively taking part in lectures.			
The Fourth Domain: Assessment and Other Set Work				
41	There are too many examination tasks on complex facts.			
42	In the examinations, I am expected not only to show what I have learnt, but also to apply my knowledge practically.			
43	The examinations help me to understand the content better.			
44	It is clear to me what is expected in the assessed work for this course.			
45	I have to really understand the topics to get good marks in this course.			
46	To do well in this course, I have to think critically about the topics.			
47	The teacher encourages me to think about how best to tackle the set work.			
48	The feedback given on my work helps me to improve my ways of learning and studying.			
49	The feedback given on my set work helps to clarify things I have not fully understood.			
50	The teacher gives me the support I need to help me complete the set work for this course.			
The Fifth Domain: Physical Learning Environment				
51	The number of seats is adequate in relation to classroom display.			

Domain	Degree			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
53	The number of students suites pair and group work.			
54	Lighting is enough for effective learning.			
55	Classroom is equipped with effective teaching aids.			
56	Ventilation is appropriate for effective learning.			
57	Classroom space and size are adequate for the number of students.			
58	Space of display is enough for effective learning.			
59	Classroom is equipped for the disabled.			
60	Classroom is clean enough for effective learning.			



Main Campus of Taif University
(Source: www.google.com, 13/12/2013)

The first two questions were concerned with the instructors' and students' extent of agreement on the challenges students face while learning English in the preparatory year at Taif University from students' and instructors' points of view. These findings could be due to the fact that instructors and students are two heterogeneous groups having different mentalities, belonging to different age groups and educational and cultural backgrounds.