

*PhD in Sustainable Development and International Cooperation*

**Challenges to Sustainable Knowledge Transfer  
in cross-cultural Teacher Education.  
A case study of Early Childhood Care and Education  
Teacher Trainees in Egypt**

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**To Fiend and Mikachan**



*Bowling in the classroom*

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## **Abstract**

*The policy of transferring international educational knowledge across cultural and geographical borders has become a common practice for the international community, especially after the 1990 Education for All (EFA) agreement. Egypt is complying with this policy by relying on teacher education to transfer international knowledge to more traditional sectors, in an attempt to bridge the quality gap in its national (Early Childhood) education system. However, according to many scholars, knowledge transfer is not a straightforward process, as educational settings and knowledge are autopoietic, value-laden and idiosyncratic. At the same time, constructivist and reflective models of teacher education, which claim to foster sustainable knowledge transfer, are becoming increasingly popular. ‘Sustainable transfer’ is defined here as the process by which international knowledge is successfully accommodated within local educational settings. This study investigates the circumstances which may hinder or facilitate the transfer of international knowledge to local developing realities within the framework of constructivist and reflective teacher education, in order to understand the sustainability of this international policy.*

“The time has come for teacher educators to pause and reconsider their vocation”

– Ben-Peretz (2001:56)

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

AS6-1434	Audio of training Session 6, mins. 14:34
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CDA	Community Development Authority
CIDA	Cultural Industries Development Agency
CO	Classroom Observation
D1-1	Author's journal n° 1 p. 1
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EFA	Education for All
Fd-1	Falak diary p. 1
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
Gd-1	Ghadir diary p. 1
Hd-1	Hafa diary p. 1
Hev0100	Hafa exam video mins. 01:00
Hov	Hafa observation video
ICT	Information and Communications technology
Id-1	Iba diary p. 1
I/p	Interview Prof. University of Cairo 12/08/08
I/s	Interview Mr Saqr 10/12/09
I/t	Interview teacher trainees 02/11/09
I/x	Interview taxi driver 15/01/09
I/z	Interview English teacher
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LE	Lesson Evaluation
LE	Livre égyptienne (Egyptian Pound)
LP	Lesson Plan

MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
Nd-1	Nasim diary p.1
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSCE	North South Consultant Exchange
PARE	<i>Programa para Abatir el Rezago Educativo</i>
PBUH	Peace Be Upon Him
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
RQ	Research Question
TP	Teaching Practice
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nation Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WTO	World Trade Organization



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## Introduction

We are currently experiencing an unprecedented exchange of goods, ideas, values, and practices on a global scale, due to an intensification of communication and the advancement in technology. For example, as of 2011, there were 500 million active Facebook users, while in 2010 just under 800 million passengers travelled by air within the European Union alone (Eurostat 2011). Evidently, travel, trade and communication across borders are not new phenomena; human migration, international commerce and the exchange of ideas have all occurred throughout history (Tilly 2004). Nevertheless, the scale and, most importantly, the speed with which such processes are occurring today are unprecedented.

According to many commentators (such as the new-Institutionalists - Steiner-Khamsi 2004), this rapid exchange of goods and values is leading to the spontaneous, bottom-up creation of a transnational cultural environment – a global synthesis of multiple realities, a common ground of principles and ideas. To foster this process, the international community is encouraging the cross-cultural trading of ideas and practices concerning economics, science, politics, finance, and education. Regarding the latter, the ultimate aim of the international community is to create a high quality global education environment, which would contribute to poverty reduction and worldwide development (Steiner-Khamsi 2004). This is the rationale of the policy of ‘borrowing and lending’ education knowledge across geographical and cultural borders, which the international community has been promoting since the 1990 Education for All conference. The ‘universal’ principles, practices, and criteria concerning quality education set out in the EFA’s six goals have led to the development of international guidelines and consultancy concerning, among other things, curriculum development, text books and teacher education (see for example Schulle and Dembele 2007 and Easterly 1994).

However, critics have argued that the transnational environment produced by increased communications and improved technologies is not synonymous with a globally-shared cultural model. Instead, it is asserted that this transnational environment is characterised by the top-down extension of an existing model, which originates in a specific part of the world – namely, the Global North. The rationale for this claim is that cultures are not necessarily merging into a globally-shared model, because educational settings and knowledge are autopoietic, value-laden and idiosyncratic (Stephens 2007; Steiner-Khamsi 2004; Luhmann 1986; Parker 1997). This is not to suggest that education systems, beliefs and practices do not change; on the contrary, they are continuously recreated and rearranged by individuals as theories and practices are questioned, tested, and adapted in ever-changing realities (Sen in UNDP 2004:14).

This is a crucial reason that major shifts in values and radical social changes have occurred throughout history in almost every society (Sen in UNDP 2004:14). Moreover, individuals are not simply passive bearers of ideology and structures, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures through processes of struggle, contestation, and alteration. By reproducing these structures, individuals and groups do not surrender to the status quo, but

are rather active organizers of themselves in relation to their past, present and future (Starrett 1998). Luhmann's idea of the self-referentiality (or 'autopoiesis') of social systems should be understood in this light. This does not imply the mechanical, identical replication of the same element and/or event; every system needs to produce new elements continuously to ensure its survival (Luhmann 1986). The tendency for new elements to be produced according to existing patterns and criteria, however, constitutes one of the obstacles to attempts to allow different cultures to converge into a common global model (Steiner-Khamsi 2004). In turn, this problematizes the policy of borrowing and lending international educational knowledge in local settings, as changes in educational systems require some degree of compatibility and continuity between new and existing cultures.

Egypt has committed to achieve the EFA goals by 2015, and so is making numerous policy efforts to bridge the quality gap in its national education system. In particular, teachers and teacher education have been invested with the task of transferring international principles and practices to the more traditional sectors of its education system (MOE 2007b). A case study of the top-down model of teacher education discussed in the Chapter 2, however, suggests that this model is unsustainable in terms of transferring international knowledge, as new knowledge has rarely been accommodated within local traditional settings. Instead, constructivist and reflective models are becoming increasingly popular on the grounds that they may lead to sustainable transfer by helping the trainees investigate their own beliefs and practices in consideration of new knowledge (Stuart et al. 2009). In this sense, they would contribute to the creation of 'glocal' – globally-informed local – educational knowledge. Cases such as the Escuela Nueva in Colombia or PARE in Mexico are often held up as examples to support this claim (Tatto 1997).

To evaluate the efficiency and sustainability of this international approach, the author investigates the circumstances which may hinder or facilitate the accommodation (that is, the sustainable transfer) of international knowledge to local developing settings in Egypt, within the framework of constructivist / reflective teacher education. A key assumption is that, if it can be demonstrated that compatibility and congruence between international knowledge, individual beneficiaries and the wider socio-cultural context are required for knowledge accommodation to take place, then international knowledge cannot be considered universal or value-free, nor the micro-meso-macro- cultural context is only the background for the implementation of education beliefs and practices.

This would not only problematize the process of cross-cultural transfer of international knowledge, but also models of teacher education which involve such a transfer. This, in turn, has important implications for the sustainability and efficiency of the policy of borrowing and lending international knowledge for developing education worldwide.

### *Synopsis of the study*

**Chapter 1** begins by presenting a brief outline of the mainstream discourses of international development, and how they have progressed from paying very little attention to the field of education, to education becoming a key priority of the international aid agenda. Three

rationales underlying the international community's growing interest in education are described. The first is 'human capital' theory, developed within the 1980s neo-liberal economic framework, which views education as an instrument to provide the skills and knowledge needed to increase individuals' productivity and eventually support their (and their country's) access to the global free market. The second is the 'human rights-based' approach, which stems from the criticism in the 1990s of structural adjustment policies and stresses the need for the international community to intervene in non-economic areas to encourage development. This approach views education as a human right to which every citizen is entitled. The third rationale is that of 'international socialization', which views education as the instrument to spread the values and criteria embraced by the countries which had prevailed in the Cold War. These rationales are understood as central to the growing attention paid by the international community to education, which culminated in the 1990 and 2000 EFA conferences for the improvement of education worldwide.

The chapter continues by illustrating the work of the two EFA conferences, especially with regard to ECCE. While a number of benefits of investing in ECCE were recognized (such as offsetting social inequalities, supporting future learning, and contributing to poverty reduction), the conferences stressed the importance of fostering the quality of ECCE for countries to be able to enjoy such benefits. The definition of 'quality' agreed at the conferences entailed a holistic understanding of ECCE as an institution which cared for the health, cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development of the child. At the same time, this definition combined international efforts of developing ECCE into the implementation (in national and local educational settings worldwide) of a number of educational values concerning learning, teaching, knowledge, and the image of teachers and learners. In this sense, quality education became synonymous with active learning, teaching as facilitating, and the shared building of knowledge. As the teachers were identified as the main implementing agents of these values, teacher education was seen as crucially responsible in the transfer of international principles and practices for the development of quality ECCE.

At the end of the chapter, the policy of transferring international educational knowledge to local settings through teacher education is examined in more detail. This begins by examining key assumptions underlying the policy, including the notions that universally-valid educational knowledge and quality criteria exist, and that these can be transferred across cultural and geographical borders. The culturalist and post-modernist critiques of these assumptions are then considered. The culturalist critique problematizes knowledge transfer by arguing that educational practices are located within intricate, situated, autopoietic, and idiosyncratic cultural systems, and that the specific social context is also part of the learning experience. Meanwhile, the post-modernist critique questions the international community's claim of the universality of knowledge by situating the international policy of knowledge transfer within the modernist and neo-liberal paradigms. This presents these policies as an attempt to socialize situated (rather than universal) educational principles and practices, and as a chance for national governments to pursue 'externalization', that is, paying lip service to international agreements while maintaining the status quo (Steiner-Khamsi 2004; Sayed 2006).

**Chapter 2** uses the culturalist and post-modernist theoretical frameworks to read the history of education and education policy in Egypt, thus introducing the main argument and the macro-context of the study. From this analysis, it becomes apparent that education is not a neutral, technical and value-free institution, and that education policy in Egypt has always reflected the concerns and values of international and national powers, from the Arab conquest of the country in the seventh century to the Mubarak regime in the 1980s. Notably, education has served and portrayed different and at times competing interests and principles throughout the centuries. On the one hand, education has been recognized as a modernizing agent, and so employed to introduce various competing principles and practices from the Global North to Egypt. Education has therefore been variously seen as a means to fulfil human rights, to build a competent and skilled workforce under a human capital framework, to join the free-market global economy under a neo-liberal framework, and to secularize the population and the State. On the other hand, however, education has also been seen as an opportunity to reinforce the values and principles of the ruling power, to generate consensus, reaffirm the legitimacy and sovereignty of successive governments, control the population, select the management of the future (e.g. through the introduction of a binding exam-based system), and to ensure the reproduction of the status quo.

One of the consequences of this dualistic, ambiguous approach to education policy is that education has failed to modernize the whole country, and that only a small part of the population has been secularized. Most importantly, religion has never been eradicated from the national education system, in spite of numerous attempts of ruling powers from Ali in the nineteenth century to Nasser in the 1950s, and from Sadat in the 1970s to Mubarak in the 1980s onwards. One consequence of this was that two national education systems emerged, which began during Ali's rule and developed over the years. While one system served the interests of the rich, secular minority, the other addressed the poorer, religious majority of the Egyptian population. This distinction was reproduced in all stages of the national education system, including Early Childhood Care and Education (nursery and kindergarten) when it was officially introduced by Mubarak in the late 1980s. ECCE, like the other education sectors, was developed to fulfil two main objectives. The first was to improve the future learning of the pupils and to care for their holistic development, reflecting both the challenges posed by the process of globalization and the commitment of the government to international treaties and agreements like EFA. The second was to ensure the socialization of the population in line with the values of the government, and so the survival of the regime and the maintenance of the status quo.

The existence of two sectors (or tiers) in the national ECCE system, described by international scholars and confirmed by quantitative and qualitative data, was finally recognized by the Ministry of Education in 2007. A commitment was made to bridge this quality gap by transferring 'modern' (read international) educational principles and practices from one system to the other, a process already supported by the work of international agencies and NGOs since the opening of the ECCE to the private sector in 1994. The responsibility for facilitating the process of knowledge transfer between the two tiers of

education in the national ECCE system was given to the teachers and, consequently, to teacher education.

According to the MOE, teacher education should produce ‘modern’ teachers, which in turn would help to shift the educational paradigm from tradition to modernity across the country. However, the teacher education system in Egypt is a problematic sector. Firstly, it is highly centralized and controlled top-down by the MOE, which inhibits teachers’ ability to fulfil their role as agents of change. Secondly, it bears many traditional features, such as paternalism and authoritarianism, which contrast with the modern values which should be promoted in and by future teachers. Thirdly, the teacher education system is charged with workers who suffer from low economic and social status, which inevitably affects teachers’ motivation as implementers of change. Fourthly, it mainly employs a training methodology (the ‘applied science’ model) which, while promoting ‘modern’ approaches, still relies on behaviourist principles and one-way knowledge transmission. This has had limited results in implementing change towards the ‘modernity’ to which the MOE aspires.

This discussion is followed with a case study of the ‘applied science’ model of teacher education. This case study suggests that top-down models of teacher education fail to consider the autopoiesis of educational processes, the link between knowledge and context, and the emotional and situated nature of education. Ultimately, this leads to either the rejection or passive assimilation of international knowledge, which in turn prevents the paradigm shift advocated by the international community and the Ministry of Education.

However, research in education has claimed that other models of teacher education may facilitate the process of accommodating international knowledge in local settings, that is, sustainable knowledge transfer. Accordingly, the author designed and implemented a course using an original training methodology, which borrows from constructivist, cognitivist, and reflective theories. This training course constitutes the fieldwork phase of this study.

**Chapter 3** illustrates the overall aim of the study, which is to assess the sustainability/efficiency of the policy of cross-cultural international knowledge transfer. The policy relies on the following assumptions: education is mainly a technical pursuit; internationally-agreed educational values and practices are universal; and educational systems worldwide are converging into a global model. Sustainable transfer is defined here as the process by which new knowledge is actively accommodated by the local beneficiaries within existing educational settings, rather than being rejected or assimilated uncritically (Volet 1999).

The research aim is pursued by investigating the circumstances which hinder or facilitate the accommodation of international knowledge within the framework of constructivist and reflective teacher education. In the training course developed for this study, knowledge was transferred by helping trainees to recognize and address the misconceptions, false assumptions and drawbacks implicit in their own teaching methodology and performance, for which international criteria and practices were introduced. This is still a form of transfer, as it

implies that new knowledge is implemented in local settings where networks of educational practices are already in place.

To understand the circumstances hindering or facilitating knowledge accommodation, the study looks at the dynamics between local knowledge, foreign knowledge, and the wider socio-cultural context. For example, how do local and foreign knowledge interplay? How do local trainees read foreign practices? Does existing knowledge influence the trainees' understanding of foreign knowledge and, if so, does this happen according to recurrent patterns? Under what circumstances does this interplay lead to accommodation or rejection? Additionally, considering that teachers do not practice in a vacuum, but are situated in a specific (though ever changing) socio-cultural context, how does the context fit into the interaction between foreign and local knowledge? To what extent and how is the accommodation process affected by broader contexts of history, traditions, norms, values, politics and economics, which surround teacher trainees? And does this context do more than simply 'surround' the teachers?

Sustainable knowledge transfer involves accommodating new knowledge within local educational practices, the broader socio-cultural context, and the physical environment. However, this may not be simply a matter of fitting new techniques and strategies into existing settings. According to culturalist and post-modernist scholars, educational practices are not independent from the values and principles of individual teachers and their context (Pajares 1997, Nespor 1987, Tatto 1997 and 1998, Volet 1999). This bond between principles and classroom performance develops through the domain of pedagogical content knowledge.

Among the knowledge domains which affect teachers' performance in the classroom, pedagogical content knowledge is the most directly influential upon teachers' actions (Shulman 1986a and 1987). This domain is created as the teacher selects from the other domains of knowledge which s/he considers to be most appropriate to specific settings. This selection of knowledge is made according to the teacher's perception of the elements situated in the specific situation, which may include pupils, content matter, and physical environment. Additionally, teachers develop perceptions according to their own values, principles and personality traits (Charon 1989; Fenstermacher 1986). Understanding the interplay of knowledge, then, requires an understanding of the interplay of educational beliefs.

It is this interplay of beliefs which does (or does not) produce the conditions for sustainable knowledge transfer to occur. When new knowledge is introduced, this is interpreted and selected according to the existing beliefs of the teacher trainees, who need to make it useful and practical before it can be implemented (that is, turn it into pedagogical content knowledge). If new knowledge is not considered useful in the light of the teacher's beliefs and its practical implementation, then it may be rejected or assimilated, but not accommodated.

The analysis of beliefs underlying classroom practices is challenged by the nature of beliefs themselves, and by the problematic relationship between practices and beliefs. Beliefs are

emotional (thus private and unconscious), taken-for-granted (affected by internalization and misrecognition), related to practices according to constantly changing patterns (which depend on specific contextual circumstances), clustered in infinite combinations, and subjective and personal (because they are developed through the idiosyncratic life experiences of individuals). The complexity of exploring the interplay or dynamics between beliefs is therefore problematic, whether by inferring beliefs from teachers' own accounts (e.g. via questionnaires) or their classroom practices (e.g. via lesson observations).

However, not all beliefs are private or specific to individual trainees; many are developed and shared with friends, family and colleagues, as well as the broader socio-cultural context. Additionally, there are beliefs which are durable and recurrent, in the sense that they underlie similar combinations of educational practices which teachers implement habitually in the classroom. These shared, recurrent and durable dispositions form the 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977). The habitus is the system of the schemes of perception, thought, and action (dispositions) developed by individuals in response to and in accordance with the socio-cultural context. This makes the individual subject a participant in the objective social reality by sharing beliefs and values (doxa), which eventually inform the individual's actions. In this study, the notion of habitus supports the investigation of beliefs by helping the author to identify and select those which are recurrent and durable among individual trainees and their peers, and those which are shared with the local and wider socio-cultural context (that is, the doxa). It also means that beliefs which are exclusive to individual trainees' subjectivity can be excluded. In this sense, considering the habitus broadens the scope of the investigation of the knowledge transfer process to include the wider context. The question, then, is as follows: to what extent and how does the doxa hinder or facilitate the accommodation of international knowledge?

The chapter concludes by identifying and naming the dynamics of the knowledge transfer process investigated, and explaining how this is done. The first dynamic (Research Question 1) concerns the interplay between international knowledge and individual teacher trainees. More specifically, it is investigated whether and how existing knowledge is reproduced in the implementation of new knowledge. The question entails three sub-questions. The first sub-question breaks down the existing network of practices to identify individual English language teaching practices shared by the trainees. The second sub-question rebuilds the network around one of the selected practices and investigates the cluster of beliefs underlying this network. The third sub-question describes the trainees' implementation of new knowledge, and traces the existing beliefs and practices which recur in this implementation. Answering these questions aims to illustrate whether knowledge transfer is technical and value-free, or a cultural, value-laden enterprise.

The second dynamic (Research Question 2) concerns the interplay of international knowledge, individual trainees, and the broader socio-cultural and historical context. More specifically, it investigates the extent to which the durable and recurrent 'dispositions' which hindered or facilitated the accommodation of international knowledge (RQ 1) are shared with the macro-, meso- and micro- Egyptian socio-cultural context. Answering this question aims



to show whether knowledge transfer is an individual activity, or a social pursuit which reaches beyond the team of trainees to include the broader cultural environment.

**Chapter 4** discusses the fieldwork. It includes a description of the community and the town where the kindergarten is located, focusing on the statistics concerning the inhabitants (population, literacy rates), the economic and labour market conditions, infrastructure, socio-cultural and religious factors, power relations (politics), and public resources available for education. It then describes the kindergarten building, classrooms, furniture, teaching aids, pupils and parents. Finally, it presents the trainees' background, academic qualifications, the local competitiveness of the teaching profession, and the working conditions.

The chapter also illustrates and explains the model of teacher education employed for investigating the knowledge transfer process, which was an alternative to the training methodology most commonly employed in Egypt. This original model builds on the principles of cognitivist (Piaget), socio-constructivist (Vygotsky), and reflective (Schon) learning, and aims to allow trainees to understand, adjust and refine their own educational beliefs and practices in light of international theories and practices. The first principle considered is that learning occurs by combining experience and reflection ('praxis', in Freire 1972). Consequently, the course is designed to provide opportunities for the trainees to implement new knowledge in their own classroom, and to analyse their experience in the light of various educational theories.

The second principle considered is that learning requires a degree of compatibility between new and existing knowledge. This is due to the fact that the process of learning new content is guided by learners' existing knowledge, personal experience and 'common sense', which may include misconceptions and false assumptions. Accordingly, the model provides opportunities to help trainees to develop awareness of their own knowledge and 'common sense' assumptions, to explore and recognize misconceptions, and to help the teacher educator to acquire an in-depth understanding of the local educational culture. This goes into much greater depth than the usual forms of initial assessment of trainees' educational needs.

The third principle underlying the course is that learning is a natural and spontaneous process, where the learner is an active and responsible subject in the production of new knowledge. This assumption undermines models of teacher education which rely on the top-down implementation of new knowledge, or on the process of eliciting the 'correct' answers from trainees, as this 'correctness' is still decided by the educator. Instead, the course attempts to build new knowledge in partnership with the learners by adopting a learner-centred stance and by encouraging a process of learning by discovery. This implies that new knowledge is not presented as a block of content, but in the form of suggestions derived from statements, behaviour, and incongruent cases presented by or inferred from the trainees, which are then developed through activities and discussion. For this to happen, the author attempts to share his power with the learners and to refrain from the authoritarian assumption that he is the 'expert' – however, this was realised with mixed results.

The fourth principle is that learning is a social experience. This means that the learning process is influenced by the immediate as well as the broader socio-cultural context. In this study, these contexts include the school management, the team of fellow trainees, trainees' families, previous educational experiences, and trainees' status within the community. The author therefore investigates the local educational culture as well as: relationships among trainees; relationships between trainees and management; the family and social status of the trainees; trainees' schooling experience, and the employment of this knowledge in the process of training.

The fifth and final principle considers that teaching is jeopardized by daily routinized actions, which obscure a deeper understanding of events and so hinder the potential for the trainees to find alternatives. Accordingly, the author creates opportunities for specific events in semi-structured settings (training sessions, lesson planning, and observed teaching practice), and then provides the trainees with feedback about their behaviour in response to these events. This is done to encourage trainees question their initial understandings (through self/peer evaluations and the author's feedback), which subsequently allows them to construct and implement their new understanding of these events (through training sessions and teaching practice). Finally, the implementation of these new descriptions is tested (final assessment).

The course is planned and developed according to four phases. These phases should not be considered as steps rigidly confined to the training sessions, as the objectives pursued and the tasks included in each phase overlap between the individual sessions. Nevertheless, the broad features of each phase are outlined below in the interest of clarity.

#### ***Phase 1: Sessions 1 to 5***

This phase aimed to understand the local educational culture and to develop the trainees' awareness of their own beliefs and practices. Sessions 1 and 2 were used to gather an initial understanding of trainees' educational culture, and to stimulate their self-awareness of this culture. This occurred by investigating the trainees' pedagogical content knowledge with regard to English language teaching. PCK was chosen as indicative of actual classroom performance, especially in comparison to theoretical knowledge domains such as the knowledge of subject content or general pedagogical theories.

Assessment of PCK was carried out through paper tests and written analysis of test results. The test investigated the trainees' ability to identify topic-related challenges (i.e. from the pupils' perspective), and to devise suitable pedagogical solutions (i.e. from the teacher's perspective). Although this strategy failed to produce immediate information concerning the trainees' pedagogical content knowledge, insights into local educational culture were still identified by the ethnographic investigation of test results and their analyses. This included the author's research journals, the trainees' diaries, informal classroom observations, group interviews with the trainees, an interview with the chairperson of the local Community Development Authority and with the kindergarten manager, and informal conversations with

other stakeholders. The investigation revealed important features of the trainees' educational culture, including an emphasis on outcomes rather than procedures, oral rather than written communication, theoretical rather than practical knowledge domains, teachers rather than pupils' perspectives, and the centralized nature of the kindergarten management.

Session 3 continued the investigation of the trainees' educational culture through short-answer personal statements and trainees' autobiographies. The former provided relevant information on educational beliefs concerning discipline and corporal punishment, interference of religious practices in local education, images of the teacher, the nature of teaching, expectations from the training course, the nature of learning, gender and education, and trainees' perceptions of the learners. The autobiographies produced information concerning the trainees' beliefs relating to their self-image as teachers, which research has demonstrated to be strongly influential upon classroom performance.

Sessions 4 and 5 were employed to help the trainees (and the author) build tools for the investigation of existing educational beliefs and practices and the trainees' self-awareness. During Session 4, a lesson plan model was built using participatory training techniques. The model included: the lesson objective, strategies for topic presentation and explanation, connections between the topic and pupils' real life experience, challenges implicit in the teaching and learning of the chosen topic and feasible and relevant solutions, techniques for multi-level teaching, and homework assignment. Session 5 aimed to produce a form for trainees to evaluate themselves and their peers, in the interests of simplifying and structuring the otherwise complex task of classroom observation and lesson evaluation. The agreed model covered the topics identified in the lesson plan model.

### ***Phase 2: Sessions 6 to 10***

This phase challenged aspects of the local culture, and introduced international educational principles and practices. More specifically, it presented the trainees with international principles and practices (borrowed from the communicative approach to English language teaching), while challenging the existing educational beliefs and practices inferred from the previous training sessions.

Two local beliefs were recognized as commonly accepted but problematic. Firstly, the idea that learning is synonymous with memorizing content (that is, imprinting information in the pupils' minds) led to practices based on the repetition of the same content in different forms (e.g. oral rote learning and patterning). As a response, the author suggested that the trainees could engage the pupils by letting them transform the content which they were already familiar with, and communicate with one another and with the trainee by using this content.

The second belief challenged during this phase was the idea that words represent combinations of individual letters, which need to be memorized before whole words can be learned. In response to this, the author proposed that pupils could be engaged with visual

representations of knowledge (e.g. flashcards, drawings) before individual letters and other written representations of knowledge were introduced.

### ***Phase 3 (Sessions 7 to 9)***

Kolb's experiential learning model was implemented during this phase. This consisted of allowing the trainees to teach in their own classroom (semi-structured settings), and encouraging them to reflect upon their performance and to develop informed ideas about teaching and learning. Reflection was initially fostered by giving feedback on the lesson which the trainees had prepared and delivered as a homework assignment, with the aim of implementing the suggested beliefs and practices of communicative English language teaching.

Feedback was given collectively to each trainee by using video-recorded lessons and hand-outs with individual comments. However, the trainees' reaction was strongly critical of the feedback received. According to the trainees, the communicative approach was inconsistent with the local network of beliefs and practices, and most of the local job opportunities did not require the pupils to acquire a high level of literacy.

Session 8 was structured to respond to this negative reaction, and attempted to motivate the trainees to implement the suggested practices again. In order to achieve this, trainees were given the chance to evaluate their teaching performance according to their own criteria, which aimed to create the conditions for them to eventually understand their implicit misconceptions. The trainees were therefore asked to evaluate their teaching performance by establishing short-term targets to be achieved according to their own teaching methodology. During Session 9, the trainees received quantitative feedback as a group, which showed that their targets had not been achieved. Consequently, they agreed to implement the suggested communicative practices for a second time.

### ***Phase 4 (Sessions 10 and 11)***

This phase assessed the trainees' planning, delivery and evaluation of lessons, and their identification of overall academic targets for the pupils. The aim of this last phase was to conclude Kolb's experiential learning cycle (teaching practice-reflection, feedback on practice-development of informed knowledge, new practice-summative feedback) by giving the trainees an opportunity to implement the educational knowledge developed and refined throughout the course, and to receive summative feedback from the trainer.

During Session 10, the four tasks of the assessment are illustrated. During Session 11, the trainees handed in their lesson plans and syllabi, delivered the final lesson, and completed the self-evaluation of their classroom performance. From a research point of view, the overall aim of the assessment was to understand whether and how the trainees had accommodated the new knowledge suggested by the author within their existing network of beliefs and

practices. In other words, the aim was to assess the extent to which trainees had developed internationally-informed personal educational knowledge.

**Chapter 5** answers the two research questions of the study. The first question (RQ 1), which aims to understand the extent to which and how existing practices and beliefs were reproduced in the trainees' understanding and implementation of international knowledge, is arranged into three sub-questions.

The first sub-question (RQ 1.1) identifies the locally-shared, durable and recurrent practices which were actually employed in the classroom by the trainees to teach English. The analysis is organized to reflect the challenges of inferring educational practices, which are implicit in traditional methods of data collection. These include the fact that practices appear as intertwined and overlapping in the classroom, which in turn restricts the potential of lesson observation, as this cannot detect practices separately. Observations are also affected by the presence of the researcher, which inevitably influences teachers' performance, thus altering their usual choice and implementation of practices. The process of understanding recurrent practices via interviews is also limited by teachers' procedures of gathering knowledge needed for teaching performance (pedagogical content knowledge), as this requires the visualization of specific real-life situations. Consequently, identifying recurrent practices would require the teacher to be able to recognize the same practice which recurs in different situations. Moreover, practices explained in theory by a teacher are not necessarily indicative of the actual implementation in the classroom. Finally, some practices may belong exclusively to an individual trainee, or they may be implemented only at specific times or in specific circumstances. Not all teaching practices can therefore be said to be indicative of the local educational culture.

To understand and isolate the recurrent, actual, durable, and locally-shared (rather than the occasional, theoretical, temporary and individual) educational practices of the trainees, data were collected by employing a combination of methods. These included two sets of lesson plans, self-peer lesson evaluations, and classroom observations, along with other ethnographic research tools. The data concern two trainees in particular, although information from the other trainees is also discussed to strengthen the validity of the inferred practices. The process of inductive data analysis involves four stages. Firstly, the data are gathered according to the areas of lesson planning, such as the objectives established for the lesson and the strategies for presenting the topic. Next, recurrent practices are recognized within each area and isolated. Subsequently, the isolated practices are refined by identifying indicative statements, which are assessed for internal validity, and enriched by quoting specific examples where the selected practice could be observed. Finally, the inferred practices are cross-checked with the data gathered from the other trainees.

From the practices identified, five were selected to be shared with the group of trainees, on the basis of recurring in more than one source, and / or for being repeatedly observed in the classroom. The first practice involves an emphasis on teaching individual letters, which was inherent in the practices of patterning the letter with its spelling sound, and breaking down

the letterform into its fundamental parts. The second consists of patterning letters and words according to the letter's spelling sound and the word initial's speech sound. The third practice is repeating content to enable the pupils memorize it by employing different forms, including oral rote learning, imitating the teacher's handwriting, and other games and exercises. The fourth consists of selecting individual pupils for one-to-one tutoring during whole-class teaching. The fifth practice involves choosing activities which guarantee discipline and silence (as opposed to pupils' active interaction) during the lesson.

The second sub-question (RQ 1.2) maps one possible cluster of beliefs underlying the network of classroom practices built around one of the practices isolated in RQ 1.1. The analysis is organized in consideration of the challenges implicit in the process of investigating beliefs, which prevent them from being 'extracted' from the trainees by employing quantitative research methods such as questionnaires. These challenges include the emotional and unconscious nature of beliefs, and the fact that they are often taken-for-granted and viewed as unproblematic. Unlike other approaches to social research, the analysis also avoids accepting beliefs inferred from educational practices without assessing their validity. This on the basis that there is no fixed and univocal patterning of beliefs and practice which is independent from the specific contextual circumstances, that some beliefs are held by trainees but not implemented in the classroom, and that beliefs can be inconsistent with each another.

Owing to certain features of the fieldwork, in-depth interviews with trainees were not possible. Therefore, a combination of lesson plans, lesson evaluations, classroom observations and ethnographic research methods was employed to infer patterns of beliefs and practices and to assess their validity, which was judged according to four criteria. Firstly, the patterns of beliefs and practices inferred from the selected trainee had to be shared with the other trainees. Secondly, coherence between the inferred beliefs, practices stated in writing, and the implementation of the practices in the classroom was required. Thirdly, when incoherence occurred, this had to happen repeatedly, and in the same form. Fourthly, the patterns of beliefs and practices identified had to recur in more than one circumstance and source.

The analysis occurs by choosing a practice which is shared between the trainees (see RQ 1.1), mapping the network of practices related to the chosen one, and finally identifying one possible cluster of beliefs underlying this network. As the number of beliefs is potentially infinite, the study focuses on the categories of beliefs identified (in the literature and according to post-fieldwork reflections) as the most influential on trainees' classroom performance. These include epistemological beliefs, the trainee's identity, and subject-specific features. With regard to the nature of learning, for example, it was understood that the trainee viewed learning as the process of memorizing information, which in turn lay beneath the assumption that teaching consisted of imprinting content into the minds of pupils. This in turn implied a belief that pupils lacked previous cognitive structures or knowledge. This view of learning as passive and mechanical absorption of content was connected by the widely employed practice of content repetition with the notion that learning is an individual

activity; repetition becomes necessary under the assumption that learning involves the memorization of information, and this in turn suggests that pupils were perceived as individual learners.

For learning to occur through repetition, the content had to be broken down into single content units ('sequential learning'), which could only be combined into whole content ('watch model') once the pupils had demonstrated sufficient acquaintance with those single units. The need to acquire knowledge proficiently through repetition also meant that the teacher had to maintain discipline and silence throughout the lesson, in spite of the demanding, continuous exposure of pupils to single content units. This controlling attitude was also extended to content, which was viewed as fixed and unchangeable, resulting in an emphasis upon written representations of knowledge.

The third sub-question (RQ 1.3) investigates the reproduction of the existing network of trainees' beliefs and practices, as evident in their reading and implementation of the knowledge suggested by the author. Before presenting and analysing the data, this section explains how such knowledge was presented to the trainees. This began by selecting two sets of recurrent beliefs and practices shared by the trainees, which entailed misconceptions and contradictions according to communicative teaching criteria, and for which the trainees had already identified a number of drawbacks. This selection was motivated by the assumption that it would simplify the process of challenging and refining the existing educational culture. The first set concerned memorization and repetition, while the second set involved 'sequential learning' and 'watch model' learning.

The author and trainees identified several misconceptions and drawbacks, including the possibility that pupils would easily forget single content units when they were presented as items unrelated to one another, and because of the challenge to distinguish between similar letterforms. Additionally, spelling and speech sounds often do not correspond in English due to its non-phonetic nature, which implies that the same letter may produce more than one sound depending on the letters which it is combined with in specific words. Another issue concerned the fact that early childhood learning is facilitated by the visual and emotional association of content and real life items, and that written representations of knowledge are introduced at a later stage. Finally, it was highlighted that the existing educational practices were extremely time and energy consuming for the trainees and the pupils. This had two main consequences. Firstly, the 'watch model' (combining single content units into whole content) could not be implemented, leaving this task to the pupils' unguided intuition. Secondly, the practice of one-to-one tutoring was required to compensate for the inefficiency of whole-class teaching, which in turn neglected many pupils and prevented the creation of a learning community.

The presentation of new knowledge to the trainees occurred by illustrating a lesson organized in three stages, which stemmed from principles and practices of communicative and participatory teaching, and in particular, visual and group learning. During the first stage (whole-class teaching), the trainees were advised to introduce realia and/or pictures of

objects, and the selected objects had to be connected to the content. This connection could be visual (e.g. the letter 'A' and a door) and/or aural (e.g. the letter 'd' and the word 'dog'). After this, the trainee would allow the pupils to interact with and transform the objects, and subsequently connect the objects to one another, for example through the practice of storytelling. Finally, the trainee would write the words for objects on the blackboard, thus leaving the written representation of knowledge to the end of the first stage.

The second stage (group work activities) implied the arrangement of pupils into groups to use rather than repeat the content. Using the content meant that the pupils were able to transform and employ it to communicate with each other. One suggestion involved the pupils combining flashcards which pictured individual letters to form whole words, and to create a story which each group would then present to their peers using the flashcards picturing objects. The last stage of the lesson addressed the homework structure and assignment. Trainees were encouraged to plan homework by following-up on the activities employed during the previous stages, and to present the homework to the pupils as a whole-class activity (rather than individually). This aimed to save time and energy, and to increase pupils' active participation in their learning. Suggestions included drawing objects and associating them to a written word, and copying all the letters horizontally on the exercise book which composed a complete word (not just the individual letters).

The analysis employs data from Hafa's performance in the four tasks of the final assignment. It is organized by presenting the new practices implemented by the trainee according to five categories. These are the lesson and overall objectives established by the trainee; the presentation and explanation of the content; the strategies for whole-class teaching; the activities for one-to-one tutoring (including teaching aids); and the organization of the homework (layout) and methodology for its assignment. The practices implemented by the trainee, which were inferred for each category, are then compared to the suggestions made by the author in the training sessions. These suggestions concerned visual learning, contextualized content learning, pupils' active engagement with the content, pupils' participation in the lesson, content transformation, communication through the content, collective/group learning, and pupils' agency and empowerment. From the comparison of the two sets of practices (how they were suggested and how they were implemented), cases of disagreement are selected and investigated. This investigation reveals the role of the existing beliefs and practices (inferred from RQs 1.1 and 1.2) in hindering or facilitating the accommodation of the knowledge proposed by the author, and identified a number of recurrent influential dispositions.

The second question (RQ 2) investigates the extent to which these recurrent dispositions are also rooted in the local and broader Egyptian socio-cultural context. This aims to demonstrate that knowledge transfer is not an individual but a social pursuit, and that sustainable knowledge transfer is affected by the wider socio-cultural context. The recurrent dispositions explored in detail include one-to-one tutoring, teachers' controlling attitudes towards pupils, and the cluster which included emphasis on written knowledge, repetition, memorization, and the proficient learning of content units. The sources used to investigate the connection



between these beliefs and practices and the socio-cultural context include newspaper articles, government documents, interviews with key informants, classroom observations, and reviews of novels.

## **Chapter 1. International education: mainstream discourses and critiques**

### **1.1 Mainstream discourses in International Education**

Since the 1944 Bretton Woods agreement, which saw the foundation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the rationales, policies, objectives and methodologies of the most influential international agencies for aid and development ('international community' henceforth) have undergone many changes. In the 1950s and 1960s, development was synonymous with modernization and economic growth, following a model inaugurated by the Marshall Plan (Allen and Thomas 2000). This involved the provision of loans, expertise, and infrastructure from more economically developed countries, such as the USA, to those which needed to be re-built following World War II, including the UK, Italy and France.

Although a new approach emerged in the 1970s, calling for the provision of basic goods and services (including education) beside infrastructure, economic growth topped the international agenda of development assistance again in the 1980s, with the aim of broadening the markets through structural adjustment policies (Sayed 2006:45). A key condition for development (and for receiving aid) was that developing countries 'adjusted' their national economies to match international standards, particularly in the field of economy and finance (e.g. inflation rates). Within this economic framework for development, education also began to acquire an important role as means of providing the skills and knowledge needed to increase the productivity of individuals, which in turn would enable a country to develop. This conceptual model for education policies, which was pioneered in the 1960s by a group of economists from the University of Chicago, is commonly referred to as human capital theory (Robeyns 2006).

In the 1990s, international criticism for the limited outcomes of the structural adjustment policy in terms of social and economic development in many developing countries encouraged the rise of a new concept of aid for development (Allen and Thomas 2000). The international community (particularly UN agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF) argued that economic growth would not occur without intervention in other areas such as governance, gender, literacy, and human rights. New conceptual models for education policies were therefore developed, including the 'human rights-based' approach. This approach viewed education to be beneficial not merely in terms of immediate economic return, but also as instrument for improving non-economic areas such as parenthood, political participation, social cohesion and awareness and actualization of human rights (Robeyns 2006; UNESCO-UNICEF 2007).

According to other scholars, however, this international emphasis on education was also driven by the need to establish a new, post-Cold War world order, in which a new shared set of norms and principles was required (Sayed 2006:9). Led by the countries which had prevailed in the Cold War (such as the USA), the international community again proposed neo-liberal principles such as individual entrepreneurship and critical thinking as instruments

to promote the international integration of the markets, the expansion of trade, and the free flow of capitals (Allen and Thomas 2000). To gain worldwide legitimacy, however, such principles needed to be internationally shared and accepted. In this sense, education (especially basic education) became the tool for establishing a favourable environment for an active market-oriented economy, by providing citizens with the values, skills and knowledge necessary for becoming effective market actors. By helping to internalize international norms and implement them in the daily local institutional practices, and by breaking down the barriers to cultural harmonization and free flow of capitals and labour, education would then help the developing countries join in the process of globalization of goods, information, and capitals (Sayed 2006:13). This process is commonly referred to as ‘international socialization’ (ibid. p. 2).

Following these economic, moral and social, and political concerns, by the beginning of the 1990s education had become paramount in the international agenda for development, and a top priority for many governments. This emphasis led to the organization of global initiatives such as ‘Education for All’ (EFA), which established common goals for the improvement of Education and educational systems world-wide, and the ‘Millennium Development Goals’ (MDG).

### **1.1.1 Does an ‘international community’ exist?**

It may be useful at this stage to give a definition of ‘international community’, which in this study refers to the international and national organizations and agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and some major NGOs (e.g. Save the Children) working in the field of education and development. While this is not a homogenous entity which acts as one body, there are several common features which make such agencies part of a community, and which situate it within a specific discourse.

One such feature is the fact that organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO exist as subsidiaries of the United Nations, and therefore must comply with international agreements like the UN Declarations of Human and Child rights (Steiner-Khamsi 2004:169). Another is that these agencies cannot be dissociated from a Western ideological frame of reference (Sayed 2006:12). It is not a coincidence, for example, that most of the agencies’ headquarters are located either in Europe or United States, and that they use Western symbols (e.g. the Parthenon) and European languages as means of communication.

An anecdote from the 2008 UNESCO Conference in Paris, concerning the preparation of guidelines to promote the image of the ‘other’ in European and Arab-Islamic textbooks, contains a revealing example of the potentially non-representative nature of UN subsidiaries. During the conference, a representative of the League of Arab States requested that the booklet of guidelines included a foreword from the director of the League of Arab States as well as that of the UNESCO director-general. This request suggests that UNESCO is not necessarily viewed by all as a neutral, universal organisation for education, science and

culture all over the world, but rather as an organisation whose culturally and politically situated nature in fact excludes some identities.

Nevertheless, in spite of the many differences among and within the agencies which form the international community, these agencies devised conjunctively and agreed on common goals and practices for development, such as those identified by the EFA initiative (Steiner-Khamsi 2004:183).

For the specific purposes of this study, the expression ‘international community’ is meant to signify the multilateral, bilateral, governmental and non-governmental agencies for development which embraced and currently work for the implementation of the principles, goals and guidelines agreed at the EFA conference of Jomtien (1990), and re-stated 10 years later in Dakar (2000). Jomtien is particularly indicative as an international common effort as, for the first time in the history of international co-operation, 142 countries and several major international agencies (the five convening agencies of the initiative were UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, and the World Bank) agreed on a number of educational targets and resolutions to be pursued conjunctively on a global level. Targets included increasing the enrolment rate in schools, limiting the drop-out rate, and improving the overall quality of education systems worldwide. The rationale underlying these targets is that education is both a human right to be guaranteed and a way out of poverty to be pursued.

It is important to underline that the international community is does not only exist materially, as body of policies and guidelines, but it is also highly symbolic, and as such it is often invoked by employing expressions like ‘international standards’ (Steiner-Khamsi 2004:203). While such expressions may entail a sincere interest in the achievement of international targets, it can also be used rhetorically to legitimize national policies and reproduce domestic patterns of social exclusion, social immobility, injustice, and so forth. However, this attitude, which Steiner-Khamsi calls ‘externalization’, does not deny the material or symbolic existence of an international community, but rather problematizes the relationship between this community and national governments, and so the efficiency of establishing and pursuing common international standards and guidelines as strategy for development (ibid. p.69).

## **1.2 The EFA ‘global’ approach to ECCE: ‘universal’ educational principles and practices**

The international community which met in 1990 at Jomtien for the first EFA conference recognized education as an indispensable instrument for the development of every society in the world (UNESCO 2000:12). Consequently, it established six educational goals to be pursued and achieved collectively by the year 2000 by all the undersigning bodies. The fact that the deadline was not met made it necessary to organize a second EFA conference in 2000 (Dakar), which postponed the goals’ deadline to the year 2015.

This study is mainly concerned with the first goal, which aims at ‘expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and

disadvantaged children’, and with the sixth goal, which aims at ‘improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills’.

With regard to the first goal, it should be said that unlike other global initiatives like the MDGs, which only recognize primary education as priority for development, the EFA initiative explicitly mention pre-primary education on the basis that this contributes to the achievement of all the other educational and developmental goals. Several specific benefits of ECCE are identified in by EFA, including offsetting disadvantage and inequality, improving children’s well-being, laying the foundations for later learning, and supporting working parents (especially mothers). More generally, it is asserted that ECCE contributes to poverty reduction by improving people’s economic returns (UNESCO 2005:3).

The second EFA conference (Dakar 2000) understood that guaranteeing access to pre-primary education would not be sufficient to the attainment of the other goals. Consequently, it stressed the fact that efforts should also be made to improve the quality of education. In the view of the EFA community, quality ECCE had to go beyond simply supplying ‘schooling’ to children. Instead, ‘quality education’ was about supporting children’s survival, growth, development and learning through health, nutrition, hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development (ibid.).

The values promoted by the international community at the EFA conferences included important definitions of learning, teaching, the role of the teacher and learner and the nature of knowledge. Teachers, for example, should understand that learners build their own knowledge, by combining personal and ‘external’ elements. Consequently, teachers should acknowledge pupils’ prior knowledge, as well as the influences of parents, national and cultural identities and values (UNESCO 2004:30). The knowledge which is taught in the classroom should be relevant to the context and to children’s everyday life, by providing skills which contribute to economic growth. This implies a focus on the practical application of what is learned, and an empowering teaching methodology which emphasises critical thinking and problem-solving approaches. Knowledge should not be simply transmitted to pupils, who “need to engage with and co-construct knowledge in order to experience deep and meaningful learning” (Schweisfurth 2011). For this reason, the knowledge which is taught should be uncertain, shifting and negotiable, rather than fixed and unchangeable.

Active learning and pupils’ participation in lessons are also two popular concepts within international education, on the basis that they develop pupils’ full cognitive, emotional and creative potential (UNESCO 2004:30). It is asserted that all pupils should have access to active leaning, according to their own abilities and learning styles, which make inclusive teaching methodology another international priority to achieve the EFA goals. By accessing quality ECCE, pupils should also learn to become democratic citizens through the acquisition of the critical skills needed for a life free from discrimination, in which everyone has equal opportunities to develop themselves, their families and their communities. For this reason,

teaching methodologies should allow pupils' voices to be heard and foster competent decision-making (UNESCO 2004).

Giving a fixed (albeit broad) definition of quality ECCE means that, in the view of the international community, local educational settings which do not comply with such a definition need to be re-arranged in line with the international values and practices outlined at the EFA conferences. Consequently, teachers and teacher education acquire an important socializing role (Sayed 2006).

EFA recognizes that teachers are the “essential players in promoting quality education” and “advocates for, and catalysts of, change” (UNESCO 2000:21). For this reason, teacher education becomes an agent of change which should lead the transition of local teaching methodologies to more international educational principles and practices. As UNESCO stated, by accessing “training and ongoing professional support”, teachers will “understand diversity in learning styles and in the physical and intellectual development of students, and create stimulating, participatory learning environments” (ibid.). The ultimate aim of teacher education, then, is to train teachers to implement these principles and practices, in order to create the quality learning environment required to achieve the EFA goals. Quality learning environments should give pupils equal opportunity to access, attend and achieve; they should care for the cognitive, creative and emotional development of the child; and should be free from psychological and physical violence (UNESCO-UNICEF 2007).

### **1.2.1 Transferring international knowledge to local educational settings**

In this study, the ‘global’ approach to improving education pursued by the international community, which implies the transfer of international educational knowledge to local realities, is being illustrated. The study does not address the validity of international principles and practices *per se*, but instead the possibility of transferring them across different socio-cultural and geographical contexts. There are a number of related assumptions and values which can be identified as characteristic features of this approach to development, and which remain popular with agencies and organizations committed to the EFA goals (Steiner-Khamsi 2004:173).

The first of these is that universal educational principles and practices exist, and that these are common to all societies regardless of different contexts, cultures and histories (ibid. p.3). In this sense, all education systems in the world are believed to be pursuing the same goals, and to rely on (or strive towards) the same ideas of teaching and learning. The second assumption involves the idea of developing education, which is viewed in terms of expanding the number of beneficiaries who can access these international principles and practices (Steiner-Khamsi 2004:169). Quality ECCE, then, stands for education systems which accept, implement and employ the assets and guidelines devised by the international community.

The third assumption is that international educational principles and practices can be transferred across cultural and national contexts. According to the influential ‘new

institutionalist' group from the University of Stanford, for example, it is the practice of borrowing and lending educational knowledge which is seen to foster the convergence of education systems worldwide towards an international educational model, which is synonymous with quality education (Steiner-Khamsi 2004). This implies viewing teacher education as vehicle to transfer such practices to developing countries (Stephens 2007:13). From this perspective, teacher education can help to remove the obstacles which prevent any teacher from becoming a 'global' teacher, and consequently contribute to the improvement of education quality (UNESCO 2004; UNESCO 2000:21; UNESCO 2008).

Although the international community has demonstrated an awareness that international principles and practices are yet to be translated into locally-determined standards (UNESCO-UNICEF 2007:11; Stephens 2007), scholars have problematized the policy of transnational and cross-cultural transfer of educational knowledge. This study considers the 'culturalist' and the 'post-modernist' critiques.

### **1.3 The 'culturalist' critique of the EFA 'global' approach: the emotional and autopoietic nature of educational knowledge and settings**

Luhmann suggests that educational settings are self-referential systems, which use and produce educational knowledge according to specific environmental circumstances and cultural and historical traditions (in Steiner-Khamsi 2004:31). More specifically, he claims that any social system is autopoietic, or a network of production made up of components which, through their interaction, generate the network which produces and constitutes them. As the self-reference of autopoietic systems applies to all components of such systems, change will also occur in accordance with other components of the same system (Luhmann 1986).

This idiosyncrasy undermines the very idea of international practices for two reasons. Firstly, if educational principles and practices stem from and fit the local cultural context, they are by definition 'local'. Secondly, following the principle of autopoiesis (ibid:50), local communities and individuals will always read external inputs according to their own internal cultural references. As Gobbo argues, the problem with borrowing and lending educational knowledge is the question of managing cultural differences (2008), as transferring knowledge implies transferring cultures.

Understanding such claim requires a broader understanding of the concept of 'culture', and of the relation between culture and practice. In this regard, Stephens makes an important distinction. From a positivist or 'technicist' point of view, which seems to be shared by major agencies and organizations from the international community, culture is a common system of values and principles which is not necessarily influential upon people's daily actions. Instead, such values are confined to national anthems, artistic masterpieces and famous buildings, rather than in the practical decisions which individuals and communities make every day (Stephens 2007:30).

This positivist perspective has three main implications. The first is that, while cultures differ from one society to another, practical actions belong to a less specific sphere (thus they are more adaptable to change). The second is that new practices may be understood and implemented independently from the deep cultural differences which exist among societies. The third is that, given the 'technical' nature of certain actions, changing them would not necessarily require the rearrangement of existing norms and values. Following this logic, some scholars have suggested that the practice of corporal punishment in Egyptian schools could be eliminated by simply substituting it with alternative disciplinary techniques (Tantawi et al. 2009).

By contrast, from a culturalist perspective, cultures are viewed as systems of shared ideas, concepts, rules, and meanings which underpin and are expressed in the ways people think and act (Stephens 2007:28). In other words, cultures are the paradigms (or epistemologies) which provide the criteria to help people read situations and guide our actions and thoughts in daily life. Consequently, actions and thoughts are particular and emotional, rather than neutral and technical. This has very different implications from the 'technicist' approach, especially for education. Firstly, educational practices are not just technical actions, but rather cultural enterprises, which relate to broader and specific systems of values and principles. Secondly, classroom practices acquire an affective and emotional value, because they relate to people's deeper meanings in life. Thirdly, as educational principles and practices relate to a specific paradigm, they also form an intricate network with one another.

For example, if we look at the 'banking' education paradigm (that is, education as the process of accumulating notions – Freire 1972), this networking of values, principles and practices located within a paradigm becomes visible (Tabulawa 1997:191). 'Banking' education stems from the epistemological consideration that knowledge is fixed, unchangeable, and given. Thus it requires a type of learning which is deductive and passive, and a teaching method based on the transmission of contents. This also implies that the teacher is viewed as the repository of knowledge, and that this knowledge is poured into the students, who are viewed as 'empty vessels' to be filled with content information (Freire 1972). From this intertwined and self-referential perspective, then, attempts to substitute one educational practice with another would imply the re-arrangement of the whole existing network, with the result of being accepted superficially by the individual teacher, or even rejected by the educational settings.

Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism brings two more arguments in support of the culturalist perspective of educational autopoiesis, which show how specific cultural contexts influence education (Stuart et al 2009:32). Firstly, he highlighted the fact that pupils begin to learn before they attend school, by being in contact with the surrounding cultural and social context (Vygotsky in Pollard 1996:11). Consequently, pupils already have some notions and functions, which they developed contextually before accessing formal schooling through the process of 'enculturation' (Masemann 2003). Secondly, he stressed the fact that in school it is still the social context (especially the family and the classroom) which structures the capability and identity of the child. From this perspective of learning as social experience, the



pupils learn through osmosis with the cultural environment, thus differently, idiosyncratically, and socially ('cultural development', Bruner in Pollard 1996:122).

By acknowledging that educational practices are located within broad, situated and idiosyncratic cultural systems, and that the social context is also part of the learning experience, the culturalist perspective therefore problematizes the cross-cultural transfer of educational knowledge on three different grounds. Firstly, educational practices are not commodities, which can be singled out, removed, or exchanged without an impact upon social and individual realities. Instead, they are emotional items, rooted in the traditions and history of people and social groups, meaningful to their daily experiences, and also intertwined with each another and other values, norms, practices and environmental circumstances. For these reasons, they may be resistant to change, especially if this is pursued in a top-down manner from forces beyond specific local settings which do not consider the features of these settings.

Secondly, new educational practices need to be congruent (although not necessarily identical) with the existing education network. This is due to the 'social' nature of practices, which means that they survive in a local environment only if attuned with other local practices, principles and circumstances. Additionally, compatibility between existing and new practices is required by the fact that new practices are understood by the local beneficiaries in accordance to existing assets and criteria. Thirdly, the transfer of educational knowledge is jeopardized by the context-specific nature of practices, which belong to the specific context where they were developed, and so may not fit different settings. This undermines the claim of the international community that universal principles and practices may apply indistinctively worldwide, as also questioned by the post-modernist critique.

#### **1.4 The post-modernist critique of the EFA 'global' approach: the situated and political nature of (international) educational knowledge**

One assumption of the policy of borrowing and lending knowledge to improve education worldwide is that there are educational principles and practices which are universal, and so which are applicable to any educational system. Post-modernism criticises this perspective, claiming instead that such international assets are far from being 'natural' and 'universal', but are in fact historically, socially, culturally and geographically located within the modernist paradigm. Paradigms are coherent and self-sufficient systems of values and criteria which inspire individuals' ways of reading and acting in reality, on the basis that they are commonly accepted (Parker 1997).

According to some scholars, the modernist paradigm originated from the political events, cultural creations and technological innovations which occurred in Europe from the seventeenth century (Kumar 1997:107), although it was the Enlightenment which contributed to make it the solid system of thoughts and beliefs which still dominates the Global North nowadays. The shift of the ontological paradigm from traditional to modern occurred by re-defining the idea of 'rationality' as the ability to achieve pre-established targets 'efficiently'

(Parker 1997). On the grounds that the natural sciences were ‘scientifically’ rational (thus more efficient) than religion and tradition, they became a new foundation of epistemology and social organization (ibid.:10). The result was the gradual acquisition of supremacy by the scientific paradigm over the traditional ‘irrational’ world views and, more specifically, of “reason over ignorance, science over superstition, and order over disorder” (Burke 2000).

The principles of modern rationality deeply impacted education. The Enlightenment assumed that humanity moved compactly in ‘linear progression’ from ignorance to modern knowledge (Parker 1997:25; Stephens 2004:37). Accordingly, education should lead this process by transferring to young individuals the knowledge of the universal principles which govern the natural and social world, and the knowledge of scientific methods to investigate reality and recognize true from false. This would serve to rescue individuals from the darkness of ignorance and from the risk of distorting the truth. These were the aims of what Usher and Edwards call the ‘educational project’ of the Enlightenment which, according to philosophers such as Rousseau, would have eventually enlightened and emancipated all individuals (1994:125).

Since then, the paradigm of modernity has developed and spread across time and space, to influence mainstream educational theories and practices up to the present time (Usher and Edwards 1994:2 and 2008; Grigorenko 2007). This, however, did not occur without criticism. Modernity first came under scrutiny in 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Nietzsche claimed that paradigms are not universally valid, but serve the particular interest(s) of dominating power-centres. Paradigms, he argued, only appear coherent within their own conceptual framework, where values, assumptions and criteria refer to one another in the effort to pursue the power-centre’s interest (Callinicos 1989:64). This is the case, for example, of the ‘banking education’ paradigm illustrated above, where principles and practices are explained and implied by one another.

Despite the criticism which the paradigm of modernity attracted, education was again identified as the key element to economic growth and democracy, and so to the building of a ‘modern’ society, after the Second World War (Halsey et al 1997). These assets were grounded in three assumptions. Firstly, given the limited number of people with high intelligence, education had to select them and direct them to managerial occupations (‘skimming theory’). Secondly, since everyone will eventually become middle-class due to technological advancement, citizens need preparation to access more skilled occupations (‘human capital theory’). Thirdly, mixed educational experiences would facilitate tolerance and respect among people (‘human rights-based approach’) (ibid.:4).

In the 1960s, however, a new wave of criticism was moved by the academic movement of post-structuralism, which built on Nietzsche’s scepticism towards universal and objective knowledge by recognizing that universal truths are power devices to impose certain criteria, discard others, and reproduce the paradigm which guarantees the survival of the centre(s) in power. This criticism contributed to the development of the post-modernist epistemology.

Although there is no univocal and universal definition for post-modernism, many authors agree with Usher and Edwards that “the possibility of a multiplicity of perspectives is perhaps what most characterises a postmodern perspective” (Usher and Edwards 1994:26; Hill et al. 1999:29; Kanpol 1992:33, Kumar 1997:104). Post-modernism originated in the 1970s as a development of the epistemological debates initiated during the previous century, but it was also an attempt to explore alternatives to the dominant paradigm of modernity which, according to many, had not kept its promises. This feeling of distrust is well put by Usher and Edward, who wrote that many had begun to question

whether the dream of rational control and total knowledge through science...has not led to its opposite; on the one hand an increasing destruction of the planet in the name of progress and on the other, an increasing surveillance and regulation in the name of efficiency and accountability...More and more, it seems that the grand narratives which sustain and embody these [modern] values benefit the few with the cost being paid [...] by the environment, by women, by black and poor people  
(Usher and Edwards 1994:31).

The numerous wars, famines, and cases of mass murder which occurred during the second half of the twentieth century led to widespread disillusion with ‘modern’ narratives, which may be defined as broad paradigms (Usher and Edwards 1994:8) and with ‘modern’ sciences (Kumar 1997). The 1972 oil crisis, for example, undermined the ‘modern’ faith in unlimited economic growth. The struggle of groups and individuals to protect their identities and the increase of individualism showed that the Enlightenment educational project had not succeeded in homogenizing ethnicities or creating a common culture (Halsey et al. 1997:39).

Following these events, post-modernism gradually established itself as a critical voice opposing modernity and the universal application of its principles to social reality (Kanpol 1992:35). It offered a two-fold critique. Firstly, the totalizing attitude of modernity came under attack for exclusively representing the world view of what Halsey calls dominant, male, white power(s) (Halsey et al 1997:122), and for ignoring and repressing alternative epistemologies in the name of the assumed universality of ‘modern’ principles. Secondly, post-modernism highlighted a number of ‘modern’ principles as inadequate in understanding and representing a new global world, where identities and subjectivities had become fluid, shifting, multiple, and differentiated (Kumar 1997:98; Kanpol 1992:33).

More specifically, it criticized: the modern principle of bivalence, which splits reality into binaries (educated / illiterate, white / black); the principle of univocal meanings, which establishes that statements/social events may have one possible explanation only, thus making previously answered questions ‘unquestionable’ (Parker 1997); and the very notion that the validity of paradigms is only internal not universal. Post-modernism claimed instead that different values or explanations of the same phenomenon might be equally valid; that the validity of statements and events relies on the contingent and critical investigation of them; and that universal truths need to be tested for validity too, on the ground that, as Burke pointed out, no truth is superior to another in the post-modern world (Burke 2000).

However, post-modernism also attracted much criticism. The Marxist tradition, for example, accused it of hindering rather than encouraging change and multi-perspectives, largely because of its denial of the existence of universal social values to pursue conjunctly (Callinicos 1989:3; Hill et al. 1999:140). Others blamed it for searching only for meanings (thus paralysing critical action), for reducing individual actors to puppets of social forces (Hill et al. 1999:2 and 16), and for insisting on presenting only the irregularities which occur in the social world, which undermines people's hope (Kanpol 1992:40). The reply of post-modernist scholars was that emancipation means to acquire 'undistorted' knowledge of one's own paradigm, rather than freedom from ideological or cultural constraints as advocated by Marxism (Parker 1997:157), and that post-modernism still admits the existence of truth, though this is not in universal foundations but contingent and particular (Usher and Edwards 1994:27).

It is not clear whether post-modernism represented a 'fundamental break with the modernist society' (Halsey et al. 1997:13) or simply a different way of reading it (Kumar 1997:107). It arguably did not replace the paradigm of modernity, as 'modern' narratives still continue to dominate the present ontology and epistemology of education (Usher and Edwards 1994:184). The EFA community, for example, stems from two modernist assumptions. One is that individuals increase their productivity through the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes acquired through schooling, an idea that eventually became human capital theory (Woodhall in Halsey et al. 1997). Similarly, Psacharopoulos (a prominent World Bank economist) claimed that the benefits of education in terms of increased productivity could be measured by using the rate of return in education (RORE), which is a percentage describing the amount of future incomes compared to the present investment in education (ibid.:220).

Another 'modernist' idea is that education is a human right to which everyone is entitled. This right was first included in Article 22 of the 1793 French Declaration of the rights of the man and citizen, which explicitly stated the human right to education. It was also part of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and of other related universal pronouncements, which share the feature of being 'universal', or valid for everyone. Post-modernism does not question the existence of 'human rights', but the assumed 'universality' of such rights, on the grounds that 'universality' is a mechanism employed to socialize individuals, which the Enlightenment had inaugurated two centuries before (Parker 1997).

Both assumptions played an important role during the most recent phase of economic globalization. During this phase, education enjoyed a new consensus in the agenda for development as a means to win international economic competition, due to national governments' limited control and influence on the global economy (Halsey et al 1997:6). Additionally, the need to access and compete through new information technologies re-asserted the need for education to provide individuals with the suitable 'global' skills and knowledge.

In spite of the renewed popularity of international economic and rights-driven policies, the lesson of post-modernism is still highly pertinent, especially with regard to education. The

idea that education is not neutral, but a tool employed by the dominant power-centre(s) to promote and reinforce frameworks of values and criteria, is particularly important (Usher and Edwards 1994:28). From this belief stems the post-modernist claim that education should be sceptical of all systematic theorizations (ibid.). It should not, as claimed by modernists, contribute to the spread of certain values and information, but help individuals develop the ability to find their own knowledge and make their own assessments. The specific task of the teacher, then, would be to facilitate learning by questioning assumptions and addressing misconceptions. The teacher's ability to understand and accept that the social world consists of multiple (and at times contradictory) realities and explanations would be central to this (Parker 1997:117).

This is especially true of educational settings, whose realities are rich, disordered, uncertain, and multiple. From a post-modernist perspective, education cannot be a technical tool which works according to universal laws of cause and effect. Due to its shifting nature, it cannot lead learners to pre-established targets, nor evaluate learning against allegedly 'universal' criteria. Also, it cannot rely on sets of given techniques to solve specific classroom issues, because there are too many factors influencing classroom performance to create a portfolio of ready-made techniques (Parker 1997). The knowledge, targets and techniques employed in education should instead be continuously problematized and re-defined through dialoguing (Parker 1997:33) and by borrowing from different educational traditions (Usher and Edwards 1994:31).

By situating the policy of cross-cultural transfer of educational knowledge within the modernist and neo-liberal paradigms, post-modernism problematizes and politicizes knowledge transfer. From a post-modern perspective, knowledge transfer thus becomes an attempt to impose specific values by homogenizing (or even suffocating) local diversities in the name of falsely-assumed universality. In this sense, the practice of borrowing and lending knowledge becomes part of the broader process of spreading values from the Global North which Sayed refers to as 'international socialization' (2006), and of 'externalization', or the process by which some countries pay lip service to international guidelines and agreements, while simultaneously perpetuating national inequalities (Steiner-Khamsi 2004).

## Chapter 2. The politics of (Early Childhood) Education in Egypt

### 2.1 Education policy in Egypt

A culturalist and post-modernist perspective on the history of education policy in Egypt reveals that education has been far from a neutral, value-free or technical institution in the country. As will be discussed in this chapter, education policy in Egypt has been largely reflected the interests and values of the regimes in power, whether foreign or national (Sayed 2006:24).



Map 1: Egypt

For example, religious primary education was introduced in Egypt during the Arab occupation in the seventh century. Education as employed as an explicit means of ‘socialising’ their values, with *kuttabs* (elementary schools) used to spread and consolidate Islam and the Arabic language. Secular education was not implemented until the nineteenth century, under ‘the father of modern Egypt’ Muhammad Ali. Ali was motivated, firstly, by a

desire to consolidate his control over the population by separating political and secular issues from those of religion; education was to be used as an instrument for consensus and legitimacy (Starrett 1998). Secondly, Ali sought to produce a qualified workforce to serve his empire and to modernize the country; these aims viewed education both as a means to develop human capital as well as a modernizing agent (Starrett 1998). Another aim was to gain military and economic parity with Europe, and in order to achieve this, young Egyptians were sent to be educated in France and Britain until the first Egyptian Ministry of Education was established in 1838.

However, the pursuit of consensus jeopardized Ali's attempt to thoroughly modernize and secularize Egypt. According to Sayed, secular education for the masses was deliberately limited to basic literacy and numeracy skills (2006). As a result, only a small segment of the Egyptian urban population was involved in the modernization process. Ali's dual education policy led to the emergence of two distinct education systems in Egypt by the end of his rule. The first, secular and modern system served the rich minority, and benefitted from the influence of European approaches to education. By contrast, the second system served the majority of the Egyptian population, relied on traditional and religious values, and therefore emphasised the memorization of the Koran, training the memory and copying passages from Islamic texts (Starrett 1998).

The British occupation (1882-1919) reinforced this gap in the Egyptian education system, especially between the urban and the rural populations (Starrett 1998). Initially, British observers criticised the teaching methodologies employed in *kuttabs*, and in particular the repetition of content and the tone of religious reverence rather than developing understanding. Yeghen, the Egyptian Minister of Education, therefore set up a commission of experts in 1917 to introduce universal state elementary education in the country. This commission aimed to eradicate illiteracy, to spread modern manual skills and therefore to develop the country. It was assumed that, through education, people would both increase their productivity (or human capital) and understand the importance of order and stability (socialization and the legitimation of power).

In spite of this apparent interest in democratising education, the British approach to education in Egypt was as dualistic as Ali's during the previous century. The imperialists' main interest was to improve the agricultural productivity of the country, which would guarantee the repayment of debts owed to European creditors. Consequently, migration from the rural to urban areas was restricted, and industrial development restrained; providing only basic reading and writing skills to the future rural workforce was a key means of achieving this. In spite of previous criticisms of rote-learning in *kuttabs*, the British introduced an exam-driven education system which equally focussed on memorization, therefore discouraging more critical approaches to learning and enabling the reinforcement of colonial authority. Colonial education therefore aimed to mould the individual to fit society in a particular way, encouraging subordination and deference to authority through a schooling system and so using education as a socialiser and instrument of mass control (Starrett 1998).

The continuation of a two-tier education policy meant that the colonial reforms of education also failed to encourage modernity. This failure continued in the 1920s during the rule of Fuad I and Farouk, even following the declaration of education as a right for all Egyptians under the new Constitution (education as a human right). Attempts to modernize Egypt through education were also evident during the 1930s, when Egyptian educators, influenced by John Dewey, sought to change the centralized, traditional and exam-based system introduced by the British. These educators advocated new teaching methods which emphasised critical thinking over memorization through games, play, activities, physical education, and above all, promoted the practical application of skills and the active participation of pupils (the 'project method'). However, landowners and other educators feared that critical education would lead to the depletion of the rural workforce. Additionally, the 'project method' required small classrooms and highly trained teachers, neither of which was readily available in the country at the time. As a result, *kuttabs* continued to promote respect for patriarchal authority and the Koran through transmission education.

Attempts to modernize Egypt by transferring and implementing (Western) educational knowledge therefore failed under the regimes of Ali, the British and Fuad I and Farouk alike. As well as specific issues of cultural incompatibility and local environmental circumstances, education systems driven by the interests of those in power can be seen as deeply problematic to the process of knowledge transfer.

Nevertheless, following the 1952 Revolution, led by Nasser and Naguib, attempts to modernize the country through education continued. The right to universal education was reaffirmed, this time as a socializing institution which would spread socialist principles among the Egyptian people. The Revolution had a profound influence on education in Egypt in many ways. Firstly, it created a highly centralized and authoritarian education system which aimed to control and socialize its citizens, including the teachers and pupils, and to enforce a rigorous sense of hierarchy. Secondly, the regime pursued an ambiguous anti-religious policy, whose legacy is still felt in contemporary Egypt. This was partly fuelled by the government's fear of the threat to stability posed by religious political groups; in response to this, it suppressed religious educational institutions, and formally separated the primary and secondary education systems from religious schools in terms of competencies and curriculum.

However, Nasser (1956-1970) also recognised that Islam was the sole, unifying means to achieve the consensus required to rule the country (Esposito 1980), and to lead the international pan-Arabic movement. Islam was therefore affirmed as the official State religion, first in 1964 and subsequently in the 1971 Constitution (with Sadat, 1970 – 1981). In spite of Sadat's promotion of critical, scientific thinking to replace rote learning and memorization, the ambiguity of the government's position on religion (best expressed in Sadat's motto, 'science and faith') ensured that religious and traditional values largely survived within the national education system (Starret 1998).



The education system inherited by Mubarak (1981-2011) was free, universal, highly centralized, and officially secular. Its main functions were to act as socialiser of the values of the power in charge and to produce skilled workforce. Under Mubarak's rule, however, new international and national forces converged in the education system. In particular, this involved the neo-liberal framework for development, and the national priority of ensuring the regime's survival (Sayed 2006).

By signing up to the WTO in 1995, Egypt officially joined the free-market economy. Within this framework, the aim of education was to supply the knowledge and skills required to access the global market. Consequently, education policy put a particular emphasis on subjects such as English and ICT, as well as the introduction of technology in the classroom, and the production of a high profile workforce required by the global economy. This resulted in the meritocratic re-organisation of the education system, with exams at the end of each education cycle and students' future careers determined by their exam results (Hargreaves 2001). For example, students who failed the exam between primary and preparatory school were restricted to vocational preparatory schools, while access to general or technical secondary school was dictated by the results of the preparatory examination (MOE 200c:31).

Under Mubarak' regime, education in Egypt also became a matter of national concern. Sayed suggests that Mubarak employed the education system to protect national territory and the regime's sovereignty, or to ensure consensus and legitimacy (2006). During the 1992 war with Sudan, for example, Mubarak built new schools to boost nationalist support among Egyptian citizens on the southern border. Similarly, to contain the internal threat of Islamic fundamentalism, state schools were built in some of the poorest areas of the country in the 1990s, together with a tighter control upon the teachers.

The education system was further centralized for similar reasons, following Nasser's approach earlier in the twentieth century. Attempts were made between 2004 and 2008 to initiate the process of decentralization, including a number of ministerial decrees, laws, and the 2007 Cairo International conference on Decentralization of Education (MOE 2008:15). Important innovations gave the governorates much greater power and responsibility, including the authority to transfer, train, question and punish teachers; to participate in national decision-making processes, to contribute to the production of more flexible curricula, and to form parent-teacher boards. However, the MOE retained responsibility for key areas such as school construction, developing the national curriculum and textbooks, training and recruiting teachers, budget allocation and setting educational goals at all levels. Under Mubarak, the authority of the MOE was also extended to other non-state forms of education available in the country, such as the private and the religious / Al-Azhar sectors.

## **2.2 The gap in the national education system: modern and traditional education**

As discussed above, Mubarak sustained the two-tier education system inherited from his predecessors. This was through one policy which aimed to control the Egyptian population by promoting values such as obedience and respect for authority, and another which aimed to

produce a high profile, dynamic workforce through pedagogical approaches which emphasized critical thinking and problem-solving. This dualistic policy approach contributed to reproduction of the gap in the national education system inherited from the previous regimes, pursuing mass consensus and regime legitimacy on the one hand, and following a global neo-liberal approach on the other.

Quantitative and qualitative evidence illustrates the implication of this gap in the Egyptian education system (Hargreaves 1997; Sayed 2006). For example, recent international statistics show that education in Egypt has improved dramatically since the country committed to the 1990 EFA goals. The 2010 EFA Global Monitoring Report states that the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in primary education increased from 86% in 1991 to 96% in 2007, which suggests that Egypt is on course to achieve the goal of 100% primary enrolment by 2015. Similarly, improvements occurred in the Net Enrolment Rate (NER)<sup>1</sup> of pre-primary age children, increasing from 6% in 1991 to 17% in 2007. Some figures also gave point to the fact that the quality of education has also improved; since 1991 literacy rates among the youth population went up by 23%, and by 25% among the adult population (UNESCO 2010).

However, other data suggest that improvements in education are not equally distributed across the population. Enrolment figures for children in ECCE indicated a gap of 40 percentage points between Cairo and in the Minia Governorate in Upper Egypt, where far fewer children access pre-primary education (MOE 2007c:25; MOE 2008). This gap was further confirmed through classroom observations, interviews and informal conversations with Egyptian students from different social classes and geographical areas, which were carried out for this study. Data from interviews with secondary school students indicate that they perceive the education system as inspired by a Western, neo-liberal drive towards innovation and technology, promoting secular values such as democracy and individualism and largely using English. It is also seen to be benefitting from private investments and resources, innovative teaching and non-traditional pedagogical methodologies (D1-3).

By contrast, classroom observations in other schools showed a system concerned with respecting traditions, conforming to religious values, the employment of traditional pedagogical methods, the use of formal Arabic, and the promotion of nationalist principles. In the primary school next to the author's flat in Cairo, for example, pupils gathered every morning in the courtyard to sing the national anthem, attend the flag-raising ceremony, and repeat the alphabet letters by patterning letters and words.

Although this data does not in itself illustrate a clear-cut division, the Ministry of Education recognized in 2007 that a disparity does exist in the national education system, and committed to bridging the quality gap by modernizing the traditional system and realigning its quality with that of the higher tier (MOE 2007d). To the Ministry, defining education quality in 'modern' EFA terms, this meant to improve the traditional system by transferring

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<sup>1</sup> NER is the share of children in (i.e.) primary school age that are enrolled in primary school. GER is the share of children (regardless of their age) that are enrolled in (i.e.) primary school relatively to the population of primary school age.

the ‘modern’ educational practices which had already proved successful in the other sector (MOE 2007d:79). This commitment is evident in the 2007-2012 National Strategic Plan for Education, which states that the goal of the Plan is to “move from the traditional educational model, which for many years promoted rote learning , to a model that associates Egypt with a broader future by promoting critical thinking and creative approaches to problem-solving” (MOE 2007b:13). This implied a new educational paradigm, where education does not simply transmit information, but produces students who can debate, participate, and solve problems.

The MOE has therefore advocated a shift from education based on traditional rote memorization. This is characterised by schools where the teacher is the ‘expert’ and the students are passive and disengaged, the curriculum content is abstract, and assessment criteria reward memorization. The new methods should instead rely on more modern approaches, where the teacher is a reflective practitioner, the students are active in their learning, the assessment is formative, the learning environment is challenging and interactive, and learning occurs by discovery (MOE 2008). In terms of teacher education, this entails more training to improve teaching methods, to integrate ICT, and to encourage critical thinking and creativeness (MOE 2007b:10). In particular, methodologies based on children’s natural tendencies and features, for example those which involve music, art, play, mental abilities, and creativity (MOE 2007a:239), are to be encouraged. Teachers must also learn to identify links between different subjects, to encourage problem-solving approaches, use diverse learning activities (e.g. group work, co-operative learning) which explore the concept studies. In short, traditional teacher-centred methods are to be replaced with a child-centred ethos, focused on activity-based teaching and learning (MOE 2007c:28).

### **2.3 Early Childhood Care and Education in Egypt**

The gap in the national education system is also evident in the ECCE sector, in spite of the fact that this sector was introduced much more recently in Egypt. Prior to the General Administration of Kindergarten in the late 1980s, ECCE had traditionally been a privilege of the elites in the country (Christinia et al. 2003). Since the international community’s claim that investment in ECCE brings ‘a far higher return than does equal investment in secondary or higher education’ (ibid. p. 364), however, Egypt has committed to expanding the access to ECCE especially for the most disadvantaged children. The ‘First Decade of the Protection and Welfare of the Egyptian Child’ began in 1989, and this involved a comprehensive program of social, educational and health services for children.

Subsequent initiatives and decrees specifically focusing on the education and wellbeing of children were also introduced during the First Decade. For example, a Presidential decree issued at the Conference for Reform of Elementary Education in 1992 declared that all new primary schools had to include kindergarten classrooms. In 1994, Egypt opened up to private investment in ECCE, which would contribute to increasing educational opportunities in subsequent years and to facilitate the involvement of international agencies and NGOs in the national education system. In fact, ECCE is currently the sector which benefits the most from

international support (Sayed 2006:69 and 76; Christinia 2003:365). This takes the form of curriculum reforms, teacher training, and provision of facilities, on the basis that the government does not have sufficient funding to cover these areas, particularly because 95% of the education budget is allocated to pay teachers' wages. In 2006, several major agencies including JICA (Japan), USAID (US), the World Bank, UNESCO, and the Italian government were supporting ECCE in Egypt through exchange programs, reforms and debt-relief projects (UNESCO 2006). As a result, the intake of children in private and NGO pre-primary educational institutions equalled that of the state ECCE system in 2006 (Sayed 2006).

By the year 2000, sharp quantitative improvement had occurred in Egypt's ECCE system. The number of ECCE schools increased from 1997/98 to 1999/00 by 41% (3,991 schools), the number of pupils by 25% (almost half a million children were enrolled), and the number of teachers by 33% (nearly 18,000) (O'Gara and Lusk 2001). In 2000, Mubarak launched the Second Decade of the Child, which included the 2001 campaign to increase the enrolment rates to 60%. The opening of a kindergarten in 2003 in Mubarak's Educational City (built with funding from UNESCO) provided a model which was to be followed by all kindergartens in Egypt (see Picture 1).



*Picture 1 - Mrs Mubarak's visit for the inauguration of the model kindergarten in Mubarak's Educational City*

ECCE is here defined as the initial part of the education cycle, which consists of nursery (0-3 years) and kindergarten (4-5 years). As free education only includes the primary and preparatory stages, parents pay fees for their children's pre-primary education. However, funding is provided by the government as well as NGOs, such as UNESCO. At the age of six, pupils join the free and compulsory stage of education, which includes primary and preparatory school.

This is followed by three years in secondary education and two to five years in post-secondary education.

The ECCE system is highly centralized, and is controlled and coordinated by several government bodies. These include the Ministry of Education (training, infrastructure, curricula), the Ministry of Social Solidarity (nurseries), the Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs (private kindergartens), the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of International Cooperation. Meanwhile, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood monitors the provision of ECCE, submits evaluation reports to the Governorate, and it is in charge of ECCE policy development and mobilizing the public opinion on the needs of the child (O'Gara and Lusk 2001).

One of the stated aims of committing to ECCE improvement was the need for the government to take responsibility for this crucial phase of childhood, which implied that the child was no longer exclusive domain of the family (Chiara 2010), but also revealed the socializing function assigned to ECCE by the Mubarak's regime. Another aim was to prepare the pupils for primary education, as stated in Egypt's 1997 ratification of the 1989 UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Accordingly, ECCE was seen as an opportunity to encourage the comprehensive development of the child, and the education policy's main focus is on providing education, health and nutrition. The quantitative aim of the 2007 National Strategic Plan for Education was to reach 60% GER for ECCE by 2012, and ECCE in Egypt has improved at a persistent rate towards this goal. Data concerning the access to pre-primary education (MOE 2007c) show that there has been a marked increase in the number of schools (45%), classrooms (33%), teachers (30%) and pupils enrolled (29%) between 2001 and 2006. However, there is still a shortage of teachers, and the enrolment rate is low in comparison to international standards (MOE 2007b:24). ECCE was also falling short of these standards in terms of pupil/teacher ratios. In 2006, the average class size was 29 pupils, while international standards advised no more than 20. However, average class sizes varied across Governorates, from 43 in Alexandria to 18 in Northern Sinai. The MOE has also acknowledged that one in four teachers was not trained. Many lacked sufficient experience, academic knowledge and the motivation to deal with children properly. Consequently, teachers were initially provided with guide books concerning general teaching, personality development, behaviour management, and subject content knowledge.

The disparities in the ECCE education system are particularly evident between urban and rural areas, and between Governorates. The difference in enrolment and drop-out rates recorded across geographical areas is one of the most striking examples of this disparity, which according to the MOE is both quantitative and qualitative (MOE 2007c). Rural ECCE, for example, often suffers from fewer teachers, classrooms and resources, and experiences higher turn-over and drop-outs of the teachers (MOE 2007d). It also relies on traditional pedagogical approaches, where the students work towards the mastery of content through memorization, and studying is exclusively focused on 'storing' knowledge for primary education. In general, but not in all cases, kindergartens located in the rural areas are mainly overseen by the Government, while those in urban areas are covered by the private sector (O'Gara and Lusk 2001).

The aim of the 2007 National Strategic Plan for Education was to reduce such disparities by modernizing the large, traditional ECCE sector. The interventions intended to modernize ECCE included: increasing the number of classrooms and teachers; refurbishing classrooms, enabling parents to participate in local decision-making processes; increasing awareness of ECCE benefits, reducing of school fees, upgrading the curricula; and implementing projects in cooperation with international partners (e.g. the Early Childhood Education Enhancement Program with the World Bank and CIDA). One of the main priorities recognized by the MOE

to shifting the educational paradigm of ECCE was to provide more and better trained teachers (MOE 2007d).

#### **2.4 Educating teachers in Egypt: the ‘Applied science’ model**

Research has shown that teacher education in developing countries plays an important role in fostering education quality, and that trained teachers are more usually effective than those who do not receive any training (Dove 1986: 195). In fact, it is particularly in developing countries that trained teachers seem to offer better performances in comparison to those who are untrained, by bearing more professional attitudes, being less authoritarian, and obtaining higher pupil achievement (ibid.). Accordingly, the international community and the national government of Egypt are dependent on teacher education to improve the quality of education (that is, modernizing the traditional education system) and achieve the six EFA goals.

The aim of teacher education for ECCE in Egypt is to produce ‘modern’ teachers who will care for pupils’ happiness and welfare, and make use of art, sports, music, singing and other active teaching techniques. ECCE teachers were previously trained at three training institutions coordinated by the MOE which, according to an official report, lacked resources and qualified staff, and so were deemed to be inadequate (MOE 2007c:26). These institutions were located in Nasr City, Port Said, and 6<sup>th</sup> of October City (Giza). As an alternative to these institutions, the MOE introduced the in-service training model (ibid.) from 2008. The training curricula included self-learning, English, ICT, comprehensive evaluation, and distance learning (MOE 2008:12/18). The Universities of Cairo and Alexandria also provide training centres for ECCE teachers (four-year diploma), while other ten State Universities supply smaller programs (O’Gara and Lusk 2001). Recently, other faculties have also begun developing and delivering in-service training packages (UNESCO 2006).

However, teacher education is a problematic sector in Egypt. Firstly, teacher education is charged with category of workers who suffer from low social status and poor job satisfaction, especially in terms of demanding working conditions in the classroom (e.g. as a result of pupil/teacher ratio) and low salaries. In order to address this, Mubarak attempted to increase teacher salaries in 2009. This involved three multiple-choice tests (Arabic language, general pedagogy, and subject-specific knowledge), which teachers had to pass to receive a pay rise. According to an IT teacher from Cairo interviewed by the author, however, salaries increased by only 10%, and so he was forced to take up a supplementary job as taxi driver (I/x). Combined with the fact that kindergarten teacher appointments have decreased dramatically over the past decade, this may explain why the enrolment rates at the training centres have dropped exponentially (O’Gara and Lusk 2001).

Secondly, it is not clear if and how teacher education can encourage the paradigm shift from traditional to modern teaching as claimed by the MOE, given the culturalist challenges (discussed in Chapter 1) which cross-cultural knowledge transfer faces. These challenges include the ‘social’ nature of educational practices, which only exist and survive as part of a broader network of beliefs, other practices, and environmental circumstances; the ‘emotional’

nature of practices, which makes them part of the teachers' inner life experience; and the 'autopoietic' nature of educational settings, by which new practices are understood according to the existing ones. Questions remain as to whether 'modern' teaching techniques can work in traditional rural classrooms, or if traditional teachers would understand and agree to implement 'modern' teaching methods in their own context. Of course, it is not impossible to find a compromise between tradition and modernity even in the most disadvantaged areas. The kindergarten in Islah, 14 Km west of Cairo, is one example of such compromise (Perni 2010). Managed by a local NGO, it is a bright and colourful structure, where teachers receive training through periodic field visits. However, the financial costs of the compromise in this particular context are high, as each pupil costs about 100LE<sup>2</sup> per month. This is covered in part by the fees (parents pay 20LE per month), while the remaining amount is provided by donations from international agencies. This sort of compromise, then, is hardly sustainable, as it depends heavily on international financial aid.

There are also political issues to be considered. For example, questions of whether the regime would allow the modernization of traditional sectors of ECCE, and whether the centralized system would tolerate an increase in teachers' agency, which 'modern' teaching requires and produces. This is especially pertinent if we consider that Egyptian teacher education is under particularly strict surveillance by the government (MOE 2008), which also uses it as socializing institution and instrument to fulfil the national educational priorities of consensus and legitimacy (Sayed 2006). The fact that the training curriculum used at the University of Cairo (one of the main training centres) is still devised by the MOE (O'Gara and Lusk 2001) is indicative of the government's desire to retain control over the content and style of teacher education.

Issues of power and culture become even more problematic if we consider the training methodologies employed. It is certainly possible to find modern, dynamic teacher training projects in Egypt. In 2000, the Ministry of Education set up a national video-conferencing network for in-service teacher training, and established several distance learning centres throughout the country (Robinson and Latchem 2003:30). Other examples include the NSCE-led 'Children of the Nile' project, which provides teacher training (seven to ten days), and short refresher courses during vacations which do not follow the national curriculum (O'Gara and Lusk 2001). The CARE projects, which are similar to UNESCO community school projects, also provide pre-service training which consist of six days of general information about the community, five days of technical training, and twice-a-year refresher courses of four to five days. These courses pursued the core skills extracted from the national curriculum (ibid.).

Other examples of dynamic approaches to teacher training include a course organized by the Egyptian Ministry of Education (in partnership with UNESCO and the government of Japan) in 2009, which was specifically designed to train teachers for work in a mobile school in Aswan, and which the author joined as participant observer. The training (delivered by Mrs

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<sup>2</sup> 10 LE=1.3 EURO (exchange rate at 20/05/2012 from www.xe.com)

Nashua, responsible for training for special purposes at the MOE) included elements of constructivist pedagogy, classroom management, ICT, and knowledge of the conditions and customs of the targeted pupils, who were street children in this case. Above all, the course methodology entailed the use of ICT resources, participatory techniques, group activities, and micro-teaching.

However, these examples, which benefit from the involvement and guidance of international organizations, should be considered exceptions rather than the norm. The model of teacher education most commonly employed in Egypt bears markedly different rationales, assets and methodologies. On one hand, teacher education is deeply traditional, as it entails beliefs and practices such as paternalism, authoritarianism, respect for hierarchy and tradition, the view that teaching is a craft to be learned by imitating the 'experts', a strong emphasis on school discipline, and the belief that knowledge is objective and given. These beliefs and assumptions are often shared among trainees and trainers, as well as inspectors and policy makers (Dove 1986). While some of these values are a result of the influence of Mubarak's regime on education, others were inherited from the religious ethos which remained within the Egyptian education system in spite of previous education policies (Starrett 1998).

On the other hand, values and methods belonging to the modernist educational tradition are evident in the Egyptian teacher education system. The model which best reflects this tradition is the 'applied science' model of teacher education (Stuart et al. 2009:8). This top-down model works by providing trainees with the information to be transmitted to the students, the targets to be achieved and the techniques required to achieve them. This approach stems from the combination of several intertwined assumptions concerning the nature of teaching and learning. Teaching is viewed as a rational activity, which is controlled by cause and effect deterministic relations and where certain inputs necessarily lead to pre-established results. This means that, as claimed by the learning theory of behaviourism, the implementation of the correct action produces the expected results regardless of context and actors involved (ibid.: 29). The methodological implication is that teacher education should provide trainees with the knowledge and skills for identifying and implementing these 'correct' actions in the classroom.

Another key assumption of this model is that classroom performance is mainly driven by teachers' theoretical knowledge, which influences their action more than practical concerns and environmental circumstances. For this reason, the applied science model provides the trainees with large amounts of general pedagogical knowledge and subject-specific content matter, which trainees are then expected to implement in the classroom. This leads to another assumption, that once the trainees learn correct educational theories, they can implement them in the classroom.

Teaching is also viewed as a technical activity under the applied science model, which requires specific techniques to address the numerous issues arising during classroom performance. Consequently, the applied science model provides the trainees with previously tested techniques for classroom management, multi-grade teaching, topic presentation, and



activities to enhance pupils' learning, which the trainees must apply in practice. One feature of the knowledge and techniques provided by this training model is that they are viewed as universally valid, or "applicable to any teaching and learning context: to any child, by any teacher, in any school whatsoever" (Parker 1997:15). This implies an interpretation of knowledge as certain and fixed, which in turn requires the one-way transmission of information from trainer to trainees.

This model is widely employed in Egypt, including the training centres at the University of Cairo and Alexandria (O'Gara and Lusk 2001). The knowledge which these courses supply is mainly theoretical, and courses are limited to subject content, educational aims, pedagogical approaches, assessment procedures, and theories of learning and child development. The courses do not, however, cover topics such as environment, music, agriculture, motor skills, and special needs, which are viewed as fundamental to ensure the holistic development of the child (ibid.). These courses do not rely exclusively upon frontal lectures and one-way transmission of knowledge, as they also provide trainees with the opportunity to observe pupils in the classroom from one-way mirrors, to discuss educational issues during the training sessions, and to benefit from supervised practice. In reality, however, the high trainer / trainee ration renders supervision and discussion ineffective (ibid.).

The following sub-section outlines a case study, which was selected and investigated in order to provide a more in-depth understanding of the implementation and impact of the applied science model on traditional ECCE settings in Egypt.

#### **2.4.1 The 'Applied science' model in Egypt: a case study**

The selected case was a two year in-service training course organized by the University of Cairo in partnership with a foreign NGO (see appendix 12). The beneficiaries were teachers from four kindergartens, which were located in rural and peri-urban areas. The course was part of a broader project for community development and poverty alleviation financed by the EU, with the aim of producing teachers who were especially trained to work with young children in disadvantaged areas. The curriculum was established in advance by the NGO, according to 'modern' and human rights-based principles (appendix 12). These included child-centred, problem-solving, creative, inquiry-based, and critical teaching approaches, and also stressed the need for building inclusive learning environments.

According to the Professor in charge of the course, the training methodology involved allowing trainees acquire theoretical knowledge of educational principles and practices through a combination of lectures (24 sessions), workshops (13), group presentations (five), and brainstorming sessions (four). A guidebook was also provided to the trainees, who could also benefit from one individual feedback session per year. The observation of two training sessions (August 2008) illustrated the way in which the trainer employed a combination of frontal lecturing and questioning to elicit the correct answers from the trainees in order to transfer international knowledge. One underlying assumption, confirmed by the Professor, was that the principles and practices she had selected were "valid for any kindergarten

teacher, whether in NGOs, UNICEF, Egypt or outside” (I/p-03:37). The mid-course evaluation, however, showed that half of the trainees enrolled were failing to meet set targets.

The Professor’s blamed several factors in her analysis of these results, including: the trainees’ irregular attendance, lack of commitment, and laziness (I/p-26:00 and 32:00); head teachers’ lack of managerial skills and poor monitoring of teachers; the profit-driven attitude of the local Community Authorities (which caused the exponential increase of teacher/pupil ratio, in *ibid.* 34:20); and a lack of infrastructure (*ibid.* 36:40). The notion that parts of the curriculum may be poorly suited to specific teachers, or that the selected principles could be rearranged, was not considered, and in fact openly rejected (*ibid.* 32:46 and 33:24).

Unfortunately, it was not possible to assess whether the course achieved its targets, as it was cut short due to the high drop-out rates of trainees following the NGO’s request. From subsequent classroom observations of the trainees, however, it was apparent that the trainees had learned new techniques, games, activities and some general pedagogical theories (mainly rooted in the theory of behaviourism, such as the law of exercise, effect and stimulus-response-reinforcement). In spite of this, it was observed that most teachers retained existing principles and practices such as an emphasis on memorization, precision, corporal punishment, and a tendency to exclude pupils who were academically less successful than others.

This combination of incorporating old approaches with new methods was evident in the use of flashcards, real objects, story-telling and visual arts instead of the traditional rote learning technique. However, these methods were simply used in order to help pupils memorize through repetition, thus simply reproducing traditional habits in a new form. A specific example of this was an activity which employed flashcards, which had pasta (termed ‘macaroni’ cards) or rough paper glued onto cards to form letters or numbers. (Picture 2). These cards were shown to pupils, who had to repeat them collectively after the teacher. In this sense, the activity was rather passive and repetitive, rather than active and engaging. Another example was a bowling activity, during which pupils had threw a paper bowl and count the skittles which were still standing (plastic bottles). This second activity certainly caught the attention of the pupils, who were engaged and entertained. However, classroom observations revealed that patterns of pupils’ exclusion and mechanical repetition were still being reproduced, and that pupils were not given the chance to engage with or to use the content acquired.

The analysis of this case study suggests the limits of the applied science model of teacher education as means to sustainably transfer 'modern' educational knowledge to traditional ECCE



Picture 2 - 'macaroni' (left) and flashcard (right) representing respectively the number 1 and the Arabic letter (ba)

settings, and to bridge the gap between the modern and the

traditional education systems which cohabit in Egypt. Although the course claimed to rely upon principles such as child-centred teaching, visual teaching aids and constructive disciplinary practices, it in fact only introduced these methods superficially through games and aids (see appendix 12). Additionally, the course employed a top-down training methodology, largely through frontal lectures, and failed to provide trainees with guidance on their practical performance. This failure to acknowledge the autopoietic nature of educational practices led to the superficial implementation of new knowledge in the classroom.

Moreover, the training methodology did not allow the trainees to participate to the production of new educational knowledge, which implied that teaching was viewed as a technical rather than emotional activity. This caused the trainees to remain detached from the new knowledge, and prevented them from implementing it with the required motivation. Finally, the course failed to recognize the social and local nature of educational knowledge and settings, by attempting to single out and substitute traditional practices with others considered more modern and (according to the trainer) universally valid. Consequently, practices were treated as commodities, which caused the trainees to revert to their own practices once they returned to their classrooms.

This analysis confirmed that the process of knowledge transfer is hindered by many of the obstacles raised by culturalist and post-modernist critiques. This leads to the unsustainable implementation of international knowledge in developing settings, which in turn prevents the paradigm shift advocated by the international community and the Egyptian Ministry of Education alike. However, education research has claimed that some of the obstacles implicit in the knowledge transfer process may be bypassed by employing constructivist and reflective models of teacher education (Stuart et al. 2009; Tatto 1997; Carlson 1999), as these allow international knowledge to be accommodated in local educational settings by helping the trainees investigate their own beliefs and practices in light of new knowledge. Accordingly, the author designed and implemented a training course based on constructivist / reflective principles to investigate the knowledge transfer process in the light of this alternative training methodology. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4; the following chapter outlines the research methodology adopted.

## Chapter 3. Research methodology

### 3.1 Aim of the study and definition of sustainable knowledge transfer

The aim of this study is to assess the sustainability of the policy of cross-cultural international knowledge transfer. To devise a definition of sustainable transfer, it was considered that new knowledge cannot substitute existing knowledge, but rather assimilate, accommodate or reject it (Nespor 1987; Volet 1999). Assimilation implies that new information is incorporated into existing knowledge uncritically (thus making the transfer unsustainable because the transferees are not active in the process) or without significant change (which makes the transfer unproductive in the effort to improve local educational quality). On the other hand, accommodation requires reorganizing existing knowledge to accommodate the new one. If neither assimilation nor accommodation is successful, new knowledge is rejected. Sustainable transfer is therefore defined here as the process by which international knowledge is accommodated within local educational settings, as this implies that it is suited to the local setting and actively accepted by the beneficiaries (Volet 1999).

As will be discussed in Chapter 4, constructivist and reflective teacher education aims to help trainees to investigate their own educational beliefs and practices in the light of new knowledge, with the intent of addressing and correcting misconceptions and false assumptions, and helping them find their own (though informed) solutions to the problems in the classroom. In the process of helping the trainee develop personal and informed knowledge, this model of teacher education still involves the transfer of new knowledge. The *aim* of this study is therefore to investigate the accommodation of new knowledge in the process of refining existing knowledge, and to understand the circumstances which hinder or facilitate this process.

There are potential barriers implicit in cross-cultural knowledge transfer, as illustrated in Chapter 1. By claiming the universality of international knowledge, the international community seem to suggest that the only barriers to be overcome are technical issues and adjustable practicalities. Culturalist and post-modernist scholars, however, identify more complex barriers. These critiques argue that educational practices are not independent from the values and principles of teachers, and that these values are rooted in specific cultural paradigms. Therefore, they refute the notion that the knowledge promoted by the international community can be universal, and point out that this body of knowledge borrows from theories such as cognitive psychology, constructivist pedagogy and the communicative teaching approach, which originated and were developed in the Global North. This problematizes knowledge transfer by characterising international knowledge not global, but local (Mukhopadhyay and Sriprakash 2011), and therefore not universally valid. From this perspective, the process of knowledge transfer may lead to the export of values and practices to local realities (international socialization, in Steiner-Khamsi 2004), which would contribute to reproduce or even worsen existing disparities, inequalities, and misconceptions.

Another potential barrier arises from the view of education as an emotional enterprise, which is deeply situated within contexts and is organized according to intricate networks of practices and beliefs. Consequently, educational practices cannot be treated as commodities which can be removed or exchanged without affecting the normal life course of local people and communities. Finally, the fact that new knowledge is understood by local beneficiaries according to the existing criteria further problematizes the transfer process, because it is unclear the extent to which beneficiaries will understand and transform this new knowledge. Moreover, the knowledge transfer could be limited and superficial, thus causing the situation to revert to the original status or even worsen.

### **3.2 Investigating the dynamics of the knowledge transfer process and developing research questions**

To understand the circumstances and factors hindering (or facilitating) sustainable knowledge transfer, the investigation explores the dynamics involved in this process. The first dynamic concerns the process of transformation of new knowledge, which trainees need to re-arrange in order to make it practical and useful within a specific context, to their pupils, and in relation to their own knowledge and personality. More specifically, the study looks at whether and how existing knowledge is reproduced in the understanding and implementation of new knowledge (Research Question 1). This question aims to reveal whether knowledge transfer is a technical, value-free or a value-laden, cultural enterprise.

The second dynamic concerns the potential influence of the local and broad socio-cultural context on this process of transformation. More specifically, the study looks at the extent to which the durable and recurrent ‘dispositions’ which hindered or facilitated the accommodation of international knowledge were shared with the macro-, meso- and micro-socio-cultural context in Egypt. This aims to show whether knowledge transfer is an individual or social pursuit which reaches beyond the team of trainees to include the broader cultural environment.

The research questions are answered by analysing an in-service training course delivered by the author and modelled on constructivist and reflective assets, which introduced international knowledge in the form of communicative English language teaching to four teachers employed at a kindergarten within a peri-urban community situated in the south of Cairo. Table 1 illustrates the research plan of the study.

Overall Aim	Specific Aim	Research Questions	Investigated dynamics of the knowledge transfer process
To what extent is the policy of borrowing and lending international knowledge sustainable?	What circumstances hinder or facilitate sustainable knowledge transfer (accommodation)?	<b>RQ1:</b> What role does existing knowledge play in the trainees' transformation of the international knowledge proposed by the teacher educator?	Transformation of international knowledge by the local beneficiaries to accommodate new knowledge in the existing settings
		<b>RQ2:</b> To what extent are the trainees' recurrent dispositions shared with the macro-, meso- and micro- socio-cultural educational context?	Interference/influence of the socio-cultural context upon the trainees' understanding and implementation of international knowledge

Table 1: the research plan. The overall and specific aims of the study, the research questions addressed, and the knowledge transfer dynamics investigated by the questions.

### 3.3 The role of beliefs in teachers' classroom performance

Sustainable knowledge transfer involves the accommodation of new knowledge with local practices and the socio-cultural and physical environment. However, this may not simply be a matter of fitting new techniques and strategies into existing settings. On the contrary, according to culturalist and post-modernist scholars, educational practices are not independent from the values and principles of teachers (Pajares 1997, Nespor, Tatto, Volet 1999). This bond between principles and classroom performance develops through the domain of pedagogical content knowledge.

Models of teacher education such as the applied science model assume that classroom performance is mainly guided by teachers' theoretical knowledge about pedagogy, content matter, curriculum, and the learners. Following this assumption, courses based on these models are structured to transmit theoretical knowledge to the trainees, who are then expected to implement these theories in the classroom upon completion of the training course.

However, there is a fundamental misconception in this assumption. It is true that teaching performance is affected by the theoretical knowledge which teachers hold. More specifically, there are six knowledge domains which the literature views as strongly influential (diagram 1). One is *subject matter knowledge*, which is the quantity and depth of content knowledge (Shulman 1986b:7 and 11), and which supplies information about the central concepts and ideas of the subject, and a repertoire of examples, similes, metaphors, and analogies to explain them (Shulman and Gudmundsdottir 1987:60). Another is *curricular knowledge*, which is the understanding of instructional strategies (Shulman 1986b:10), philosophical directions and hidden objectives (Shulman and Gudmundsdottir 1987:60). This helps teachers to exemplify a topic's content, support weaker students, and evaluate them.

*Knowledge of general pedagogical principles* comprise the broad values often learned at the beginning of the teaching career, which may support teachers in classroom management by

suggesting instructional strategies (Morine-Dershimer and Kent 1999:25 and 28). The *knowledge of the learners* is the broad understanding of pupils' motivation, thinking processes, barriers to learning, and parents' expectations, which support teachers in the process of identification of misconceptions and/or challenges related to a topic (Shulman and Gudmundsdottir 1987:61). *Knowledge of the educational contexts* is a teacher's understanding of the contextual circumstances, which includes local values, resources, school and national policies (ibid). Finally, *knowledge of the educational aims* provides the information needed to establish the targets and assess the pupils (Magnusson, Krajcik and Borko 1999:109).

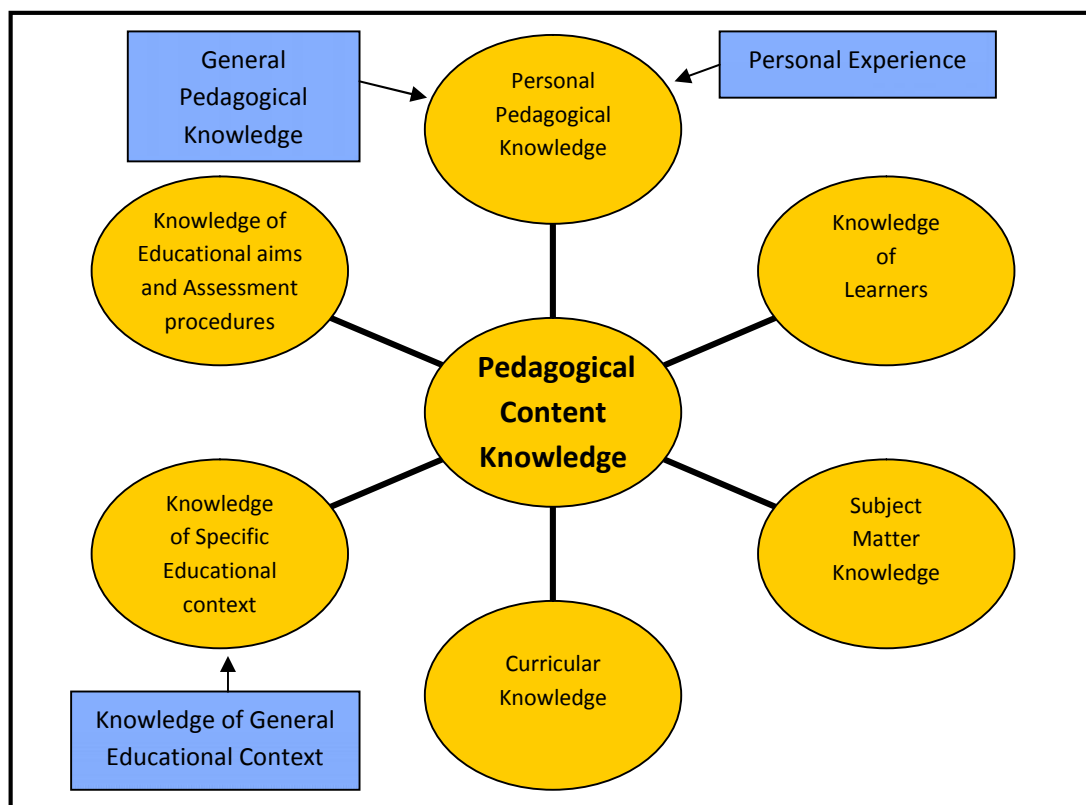


Diagram 1: The network of relationships between PCK and other knowledge domains (adapted from Morine-Dershimer and Kent 1999:22)

However, it is important to remember that these knowledge domains are theoretical. This means that they general and at times abstract information they provide may not influence classroom performance directly, because they are not related to a specific context or real-life situation. According to Shulman, teachers draw the actual information which they require for classroom performance from a different knowledge domain, which he termed 'pedagogical content knowledge' (PCK) (1986a and 1987). PCK is the practical knowledge of 'how' to teach a topic to specific students in a specific context. It is what distinguishes, for example, a teacher of History from an historian, because it provides the former with the tools and skills to make history teachable and understandable for specific learners and contexts. Tools may include analogies, demonstrations, metaphors, examples, and other forms of representation of a topic, while the skills may include a teacher's ability to foresee the content-related challenges and to devise pedagogical solutions to meet them (Shulman 1986b).

Evidently, this is not to suggest that theoretical knowledge is not useful to teaching. Rather, theoretical knowledge only becomes directly influential when a teacher actively combines this information with considerations of their specific environmental circumstances, the content to be taught, their pupils, the broader community context, and their own personality and experience. PCK is formed by selecting the knowledge from these domains which is most appropriate to the specific situation. According to some scholars, this selection is mainly driven by the beliefs of the teacher. Charon and the theory of symbolic interactionism, for example, explain that the selection of suitable knowledge is made by the teacher according to his or her perception of the specific elements included in the given situation, such as people, targets, and location (1989). This perception, in turn, is influenced by the perspective of the individual teacher, which consists of combinations of the personal beliefs needed to interpret that specific reality (Fenstermacher 1986).

This process establishes a bonding relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom performance, in the sense that beliefs affect teachers' decisions to act. This relationship also affects the dynamics of the knowledge transfer process; when new knowledge is introduced, this is interpreted and selected according to the existing beliefs of the trainees, who need to make it useful and practical before it can be implemented (that is, turn it into pedagogical content knowledge). For this reason, the trainees transform and re-arrange it according to their existing beliefs.

Over the last three decades, the literature on teachers' beliefs has grown exponentially (Pajares 1992; Pintrich 1990; Clark 1988; Ennis 1994; Bussin Chitteden 1976; Nespor 1987; Munby 1982 and 1984; Stephens 2007; Howes et al. 2011; Tatto 1998). Beliefs, which in the literature are also referred to as values, axioms, ideologies, opinions, perceptions, theories or practical principles, are extremely complex entities (Pajares 1992). Nespor (1987) identified four main features of beliefs. Firstly, they are taken-for-granted truths about the social and physical reality, which are unaffected by persuasion. Secondly, if generated by traumatic past experiences, they may be unreliable because they create alternative realities to an objective situation. Thirdly, they bear a strong emotional dimension which at times makes them independently operating from knowledge, or even influential upon it (for instance, they may determine how much energy a teacher spends on one topic, regardless of his or her acquaintance with the syllabus). Fourthly, beliefs have an episodic structure because they are located in the episodic memory, while knowledge is systematically stored. Thus, they can be incoherent and inappropriate to read specific situations objectively.

Beliefs do not require group consensus or internal consistency to be accepted and employed by the individual, unlike knowledge systems (Pajares 1992). Nor are they open to critical examination, because they are 'irrational' and 'emotional', and as such often take the form of condensed and simplified concept sentences. At the same time, in spite of these characteristics, beliefs are as influential upon individuals' cognitive and behavioural processes as knowledge, and at times even more so. When knowledge fails to provide an individual with the tools required to face a critical situation, the individual will switch to his or her beliefs, even though these may be inconsistent and non-logical (ibid.).



Beliefs are organized in clusters; clusters consist of beliefs and values (Pajares 1992). Attitudes are clusters of beliefs organized around an object or event, which predispose to action, though they may undertake continuous arrangement and so be inconsistent. A teacher's attitude towards discipline, for example, is a set of beliefs from which the teacher chooses when faced with a specific critical event, even by borrowing beliefs from other attitudes. Such networking creates the principles which prepare the teachers to act, by helping them understand information and interpret events. Values instead are judgemental/prescriptive beliefs, which replace the predisposition with an imperative to action.

There are many different types of beliefs. Those concerning identity, which are strong predictors of motivation and behaviour, include self-efficacy (e.g. teacher's confidence to be able to affect students' performance), self-esteem (e.g. teacher's perception of her own teaching abilities), and self-image (e.g. teacher's perception of her role as a teacher). By contrast, epistemological beliefs express the individual's view-point upon reality and the ways to get to know it (e.g. what knowledge is, what learning means). Finally, subject-specific beliefs address specific educational issues like counting or reading (e.g. tables should be memorized) (Pajares 1992). Beliefs also have differential power and intensity, as some may be stronger and more influential than others (Rokeach 1968). These include those related to identity and self, those which are un-derived (developed by direct encounter, as opposite to those learnt from others), those which shared with group(s) which the individual belongs to, those acquired early in life, and those which proved useful to understand or solve critical issues in the past.

Beliefs are acquired and formed throughout life. This especially occurs by enculturation (spontaneous assimilation of the surrounding reality), but also education (direct learning by which the initial assimilation is realigned with the social rules), and schooling (formal learning) (Gobbo 2003; Masemann 2003). The earlier a belief is acquired, the more the teacher relies upon it, because it has already proved helpful to the individual in making sense of reality and therefore provides a degree of comfort.

The fact that beliefs (particularly those concerning self-esteem, identity, and epistemology) are extremely influential upon the actions of teachers, as they affect teachers' perceptions of the classroom reality, implies that teacher education (and more broadly speaking any process of knowledge transfer which aims to be sustainable) is faced with the task of understanding and eventually re-arranging them. This task, however, is problematized by the nature of beliefs, which are complex, irrational, shifting, inconsistent, emotional, and social (in the sense that they are clustered with other beliefs), and by the fact that the learning of new beliefs relies on old beliefs to understand and make them useful. The following sub-section illustrates how the task of investigating beliefs was faced by the author in consideration of his dual identity of teacher educator and researcher.

### **3.4 Investigating beliefs: overcoming epistemological challenges through the concept of habitus**

It is the interplay of beliefs which facilitates or hinders the conditions for sustainable knowledge transfer to occur. If new knowledge is not considered useful in the light of a teacher's beliefs then it may be rejected or simply assimilated, but not accommodated.

However, the investigation of beliefs, which always underlie classroom practices, is challenged by the nature of beliefs and by the problematic relation between practices and beliefs. While it is true that the actions of teachers are influenced by their beliefs, and that beliefs are immanent to the teachers' daily life experiences, it should also be considered that the nature and organization of beliefs makes it very challenging to investigate them and their interplay. Firstly, the emotional nature of beliefs may make it difficult to elicit them from participants, who may be reluctant to reveal them. Even if not actively resistant participants may be unable to articulate their beliefs due to their shifting knowledge, blurred understanding or even lack of awareness of them. This may occur as beliefs are often tacit and taken-for-granted truths (Pajares 1992, Kagan 1992, Wood 1996).

Secondly, beliefs do not influence practices directly, but rather the perception(s) of the situation/context in which the practice will be implemented (Charon 1989). Consequently, patterns of practices and beliefs are rearranged continuously by the teachers in light of their ever-changing context, thus undermining the chances for the researcher to establish univocal and fixed relationships between practices and beliefs. Inferring beliefs from practices is further jeopardized by the fact that practices often reflect combinations of beliefs (often called 'perspectives', in Pajares 1992 and Charon 1989), rather than one single value or idea. As beliefs and their combinations are virtually infinite, establishing univocal and durable patterns of practice and belief is highly problematic. Thirdly, beliefs are developed by individuals throughout life by interacting with others (e.g. enculturation), within themselves (e.g. reflection), and with their contexts (Charon 1989). This means that they are peculiar to the individual teacher, and related to their own personality traits and life experience. In this case, the investigation of beliefs would be more suited to the field of psychology (*ibid.*), which reaches beyond the author's competencies and experience, and would render the research realistic due to the time constraints and the in-depth focus on individuals.

Post-structuralism, however, has questioned the idea that educational beliefs are exclusively individual, on the grounds that teaching is in fact a social activity and experience, which does not happen exclusively as a result of teachers' subjective instincts, intuitions, and will (Bourdieu 1977). In fact, as Hargreaves pointed out, although teachers are physically alone in the classroom, "psychologically they never are" (Hargreaves in Pollard 1996:320). In other words, teachers participate to the local culture(s) of teaching, which carry the "community's historically generated and collectively shared solutions" (*ibid.*), although to different extents and in agreement with their own personality.

This introduces Bourdieu's idea of habitus (1977). The habitus is a system of 'durable' and 'recurrent' dispositions (principles, beliefs, values, termed *doxa*) which influence individuals'

perceptions of situations, thus their decision to act, and eventually their actions, as these help individuals make sense of the reality and situations encountered. Such dispositions are socially developed by the individual throughout their life by interacting with others (e.g. process of enculturation), their contexts, and with themselves (e.g. reflection). They are therefore also shared (to a certain extent) with significant-others and social groups (Charon 1989). The habitus, then, consists of principles which are both 'objective', because acquired from the environment and shared with others, and 'subjective', because they are understood and implemented by the individual according to personality traits and the specificity of the context (Acciaioli 1981). Evidently, since human beings are not machines, the way in which such principles are implemented in practice remains the choice of the individual, particularly in light of the fact that contextual circumstances always change. At the same time, it is difficult to understand how a social activity such as teaching would occur if individuals acted in a random and exclusively subjective way. The habitus therefore represents a personal but common ground of dispositions which, together with purely subjective beliefs, give directions to the individual to act 'normally' in society, that is, to act 'objectively' as a social subject.

In this study, the notion of habitus supports the investigation of beliefs by helping the author to identify and select those which were recurrent and durable in individual trainees and their peers, and shared with the local and broad socio-cultural context (that is, the doxa), while excluding the beliefs which were exclusive to the subjectivity of the individual trainee (the individual 'I' as opposite to the collective 'Me', in Charon 1989). In this sense, the habitus is the space for the encounter of the objective and subjective, which Bourdieu introduced in an attempt to solve the long-debated dichotomy of social structures and individual agency (Fries 2009:332). Furthermore, the notion of habitus broadened the scope of the investigation of the knowledge transfer process to include the wider socio-cultural context, as this is where teaching actually takes place and should be considered, rather than in a vacuum (Stuart et al. 2009).

The fact that we develop such personally 'objective' dispositions throughout our life makes the habitus appear 'natural' and 'normal' to us, and so it remains unquestioned ('misrecognition' of doxa, in Bourdieu 1977). Accordingly, the habitus does not only help us make sense of things, but also preserves them as they are, thus inhibiting change. By recalling Nietzsche's criticism of the modernist assumption of universality, Bourdieu suggests that it is in the interest of certain power groups that a specific standardized mode of achieving and doing things is considered as the only way of acting (Acciaioli 1981). From this perspective, then, the habitus becomes an instrument for controlling individuals, as it limits the range of individual choices and actions to those who are perceived as more 'natural' and 'normal', and so accepted by ourselves and others. The question which this study wants to answer, then, is whether, how, and in what circumstances the interplay of international principles and local doxa hinder or facilitate the accommodation of international knowledge.

### **3.5 Research Question 1: what role do existing beliefs and practices play in the trainees' transformation of international educational knowledge? From here review**

To investigate the first dynamic – the interplay of international and local beliefs in the reproduction of existing dispositions – the author devised three sub-questions. The first aims to identify the existing educational practices for teaching English. The second maps the network of beliefs underlying such practices. The third looks at the extent to which the existing practices and beliefs were reproduced in the trainees' understanding and implementation of international knowledge.

#### **3.5.1 Research Question 1.1: what are the trainees' existing practices for teaching English language?**

This question aims to understand and define the locally accepted educational practices which the trainees employed regularly with the pupils to teach English. Practices are defined here as the formal and informal routines used to achieve targets and, more generally, to accomplish work (De Long 1997). Examples of practices included the repetition of letter-word patterns, and the employment of one-to-one tutoring during classroom teaching.

The methodology for the investigation of practices stems from the consideration that classroom performance is an extremely complex combination of events, which even the teachers may find challenging to break down and explain. For this reason, the methods of data collection often used to investigate teachers' practices such as interviewing or paper testing may fail to produce valid and thorough data (Gess-Newsome and Lederman 1999). Classroom observations may appear more useful in this sense, because they give the researcher the opportunity to witness teachers' process of delivering practices (Montgomery 1999). At the same time, unlike the natural sciences, the presence of the researcher may affect the social settings, and so the behaviour of the teacher and the pupils. Moreover, there are aspects of practices which may not be directly observable if not under specific circumstances (Bhaskar 1975). If used in isolation, then, each technique for investigating classroom practices raises methodological issues concerning confirmability and validity (Baxter and Lederman 1999:156). Accordingly, a combination of methods specifically designed for the circumstances was employed for data collection about teachers' practices. These consisted of two sets of lesson plans, self and peer lesson evaluations, and classroom observations.

#### ***Methods of data collection***

##### **1. Lesson planning (LP)**

This study accepts (in part) the post-modernist claim that there is no objective reality in social research, and that instead, social reality is what individuals perceive and believe (Parker 1997). Accordingly, the tool of lesson planning was chosen to enable the teachers deploy and define some of their own educational practices specific to English language teaching. There are also other methods which give teachers the opportunity to express themselves, such as questionnaires or short-answer tests. However, questions are raised concerning whether such information is actually indicative of teachers' practices as they happen in the classroom (Gess-Newsome and Lederman 1999; Stuart et al. 2009). One such criticism is grounded in

the observation that, often, testing does not address the knowledge which teachers actually use to select and implement practices in their specific context (Stuart et al. 2009; Shulman 1986b). To understand teachers' existing and recurrent educational practices, then, this question began by exploring teachers' practical pedagogical content knowledge of such practices. The main challenge for investigating practical knowledge was that teachers needed to visualize realistic teaching situations before they could deploy it. Accordingly, the trainees were asked to plan a lesson to be delivered in their own classroom.

The lesson planning strategy for teacher assessment was initially developed by a group of Dutch researchers (Van der Valk and Broekman 1999), although several changes were needed to adapt it to the specific situation. Models like the Dutch strategy share a prescriptive, selective and judgemental ethos, with clear a-priori definitions of PCK which are reflected in their components. According to John (2006:487), these are variations of the rational and systematic approach to lesson planning, which still inspires many contemporary approaches to teacher education. This dominant strategy of LP relies on two main assumptions. The first is that the lesson can be broken down into precise and observable and/or measurable components (Cherryholmes 1988), and the second is that lesson planning should develop according to a clear and pre-established order.

The belief that lessons develop according to a linear and rational sequence of stages (from the establishment to the achievement of objectives), and that the objectives should be a-priori and unchangeable guidelines for lesson planning (see for example Wheatley 2002:328-9), has been questioned. Some researchers instead believe that teachers' approaches to lesson planning, as with their approaches to classroom performance, are extremely idiosyncratic and personal because they are embedded in the individual as well as in the specific context (John 2006:490).

Furthermore, the knowledge needed to plan a lesson is not possessed by the teacher before the interaction begins, but it is generated by the teacher when s/he is actually faced with a specific task (Shulman 1986b). Consequently, the assessment required an alternative model of LP to the dominant one, which was able to let the teachers recreate and freely visualize realistic scenarios of classroom interactions. This in turn would encourage the teachers to transform their theoretical and personal knowledge into PCK, and transfer it eventually onto paper (Cvetek 2008:254). Rather than proposing specific case-studies to the teachers, the activity required teachers to build their own scenarios around topics of their choice, by recalling personal or known experiences concerning the teaching and/or learning of those topics, and by describing how they did behave or would have behaved in the specific situation, and why. This was assumed to recreate the mental and physical environment which teachers needed to develop situation-specific procedures and techniques (Cvetek 2008:254; Newton and Newton 2009:313).

The process of building a shared model for LP consisted of three steps (see course synopsis in Chapter 4, Session 4). The first was to discuss and define the areas which the lesson plan should touch upon (brainstorming). The trainees proposed to include a description of the

lesson's topic and objectives, together with activities, games, and teaching aids. The author's suggestions, which were borrowed from the literature, tried to let the teachers deploy as many practices and details as possible (Causton-Theoharis et al. 2008; Cherryholmes 1988; Wheatley 2002; Van der Valk and Broekman 1999; Shulman and Gudmundsdottir 1987). More specifically, the author wanted the teachers to use the lesson plans to illustrate how the topic would be presented to the pupils (e.g. what demonstrations, examples, and analogies teachers would employ in their classroom); to describe the challenges they expected from teaching the topic, and how these would be addressed (this aimed at investigating teachers' problem-solving skills); and to illustrate the arrangements made for multi-grade teaching and homework assignment.

The second step was to allow the teachers plan a mock-lesson during the training session, present it to the other teachers, and receive collective feedback. Eventually, a shared model of LP was agreed upon, and written on a flipchart. As homework, teachers were asked to plan three lessons by using the agreed model, which concerned respectively the subjects of English, Arabic and Mathematics. The third step consisted of letting the teachers deliver one of the lessons which they had planned, let the peers observe them, and evaluate each other's performances (including self-evaluation). The third step (planning and delivering) was repeated three times throughout the course, though limited to one subject.

## 2. Lesson Evaluation (LE)

Self and peer lesson evaluations were employed to investigate teachers' educational practices from their own perspectives as well as the perspectives of their peers and the headteacher. Although research has shown that inexperienced teachers would probably limit their evaluation to the description of observable events occurred during the lesson (Stuart et al. 2009), this unobtrusive method was purposely chosen to confirm whether teachers' implementation of practices was consistent with their intentions as expressed in the LPs. Moreover, it was assumed that by evaluating others and themselves, teachers would further disclose their teaching/learning processes and definitions with minimal interference from the trainer, and demonstrate what they valued most in teaching. Finally, peer/self-evaluation was chosen to help the teachers establish a link between their performance on paper and the one in the classroom, because it encouraged teachers to plan the lesson through a dialogue with real, context-specific, and personal teaching situations, which would tie the lesson plan "to the specifics of the discourse-community in which it is embedded" (John 2006:494). The head teacher also contributed to the activity by evaluating in writing all of teachers' classroom performances. The topic of preparing a peer-evaluation form was discussed during the training Session 5 (see course synopsis in Chapter 4). Lesson evaluations were employed three times throughout the course.

## 3. Classroom Observations (CO)

In consideration of the misconceptions and bias which a phenomenological approach to data collection may entail for presenting the trainees' perspective, classroom (or lesson) observations (CO) were also employed to strengthen the validity of the data produced by lesson planning and self /peer lesson evaluations (Montgomery 1999). The main benefit of

the classroom-based research method, which is too often ignored in the literature and by policy-makers, is that it provides insights which are otherwise inaccessible (O'Sullivan 2006). For example, it highlights teachers' working reality and provides data which are not only about the context, but also contextualized, that is, embedded in the context. Consequently, classroom observation may help understand what works in specific educational settings, which practices are more effective, and those that are not. It can also help to answer 'how' questions, such as 'how are new educational practices accommodated in the local reality', and 'why' questions, such as 'why are new educational practices being rejected' (ibid.). Finally, CO allows the researcher to verify the implementation of the practices described by the trainee on the paper. By taking the context into account, placing the teacher at the centre of the data collection process, and investigating the effectiveness of local educational practices, CO becomes very valuable to address issues concerning the transfer and the *in loco* implementation of educational knowledge.

There are however three drawbacks to employing CO, which may jeopardize the validity of data. Firstly, the presence of the observer in the classroom may alter the behaviour of the teacher and learners. For this reason, informal and unstructured COs were also carried out throughout the study, in conjunction with creating occasions for developing familiarity and mutual trust between the observer and the trainees. Secondly, the bias of the observer may distort the understanding of classroom events, and the interpretation of teacher and learner behaviour. This issue, which is common to most social research methods, was addressed by carrying out group discussions focusing on the issues raised by the observations, by conducting multiple sets of classroom observations, and by triangulating the data collected through observation with lesson plans and self-peers' evaluations.

The third drawback of CO is that, given the complexity of classroom performance, it is possible to overlook many aspects of classroom activity, leading to a tendency to record observable data only. These issues were addressed by employing a semi-structured model of CO, and by videoing classroom performances. The model included the items which were agreed with the trainees over Sessions 4 and 5, such as the introduction and explanation of the topic, metaphors and examples used to explain it, solutions devised by the teacher to meet topic-related challenges, and disciplinary practices employed. At the same time, other details were also recorded, such as the overall atmosphere of the class, the interest shown by the pupils, their degree of pupils' actual participation in the lesson, and the possibility for external disruption (e.g. road works, blackouts).

### **3.5.2 Research Question 1.2: what educational beliefs underlie the classroom practices of the trainees?**

This question maps out the possible connections between trainees' practices and the underlying educational beliefs. It focuses on the trainee who showed the strongest will to re-arrange her teaching methodology, in order to understand the problematic nature of the process of changing beliefs and going beyond the conscious will of the individual. At the same time, it also considered the beliefs and practices which were shared with another

trainee. This ensured that the study did not just rely on the subjective practices and beliefs exclusively related to one trainee's personality and life experience.

As discussed earlier, there are many challenges and complexities inherent to understanding beliefs, which some scholars seem to ignore by simply employing questionnaires to investigate them. One challenge is that, although highly desirable from a researcher's point of view, fixed and univocal patterns of practice-belief do not exist in reality. There exist, instead, clusters of shifting beliefs (attitudes) underlying groups of practices. Accordingly, the investigation of the trainees' beliefs began by identifying a group of practices which could be amenable to the same cluster of beliefs.

Another challenge is that beliefs are formed throughout life, and implemented according to specific contextual circumstances. Consequently, a methodology that provided insights into the broader life experience of the teachers and the local social reality was necessary. As these insights are often missed by quantitative research (Goodman 1988:130), ethnographic methods of data collection were purposely designed and employed to gather information upon some of the factors which influenced teachers' development and implementation of beliefs. The factors considered included: teachers' biographical experiences (e.g. school memories, social background), expectations for the future / of the course, participation in community life, working conditions, institutional features of the school (e.g. hiring policy, timetable), teachers' group dynamics, and the routines and interactions that constitute the everyday ecology of the classroom (Ellison et al. 2000).

Most beliefs are also tacit, emotional and unconscious, to the point that the teachers may be unwilling and/or unable to deploy them. Nevertheless, many researchers who are interested in building patterns of practices and beliefs rely heavily on interviews, because these give teachers the opportunity to explain themselves, their actions and behaviour (Bourdieu 1977; Goodman 1988; Van der Valk and Broekman 1999; Pajares 1992). The effectiveness of interviews as research method to investigate beliefs, however, is debatable, especially in cross-cultural settings. As Bourdieu pointed out (1999), there are many conditions to be met when investigating beliefs through interviewing, due to the distortions embedded in the research relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Distortions, he suggested, can be addressed by reducing the distance between the interviewer's and interviewees' perceptions / points of view upon the object of research. This can be achieved, he argued, in several ways. These include paying attention to both verbal and body language, ensuring social proximity and familiarity between researcher / interviewees, which guarantees that subjective reasoning / free choice will not be reduced to objective causes (objective determinism), and by acquiring preliminary knowledge of the context and interviewees (which goes beyond routinized understanding). Other measures include actively denouncing the tacit common-sense assumptions (to limit the influence of others' representations of reality upon individuals, such as the media), ensuring a permanent and continuous control of perspectives (what perspective the researcher is adopting at every stage of the research), and taking the perspective of the 'other' (e.g. if I were the interviewee, would I think/do as they say they would?).



Given the specific circumstances of the fieldwork, however, most of these conditions could not be met. Firstly, there was very limited (if none) access to the teacher trainees outside working hours, due to their family commitments and duties; participants were needed at home after work to attend to their children and older relatives. Secondly, the ethnicity of the author (male and non-Muslim) undermined the opportunity to interview the teachers (all female, under 25 years old) on a one-to-one and in-depth basis, and to establish the empathy between interviewer and interviewee emphasised by Bourdieu (1999). In fact, towards the end of the fieldwork, one of the trainees had to quit her kindergarten job as a result of the family pressure placed upon her due to the author's presence. Thirdly, the author's limited knowledge of the Arabic language meant that an interpreter was required, who was not always available when opportunities for informal conversations arose.

### ***Methods of data collection***

In spite of the limitations, the author's lengthy presence in the field (one year) and participation in the kindergarten and community social life produced a large amount of field notes and experiences, which were employed to strengthen the study's validity. Also, to compensate for the lack of interviews, other methods of data collection were employed in addition to lesson plans, self / peer lesson evaluations, and classroom observations to infer the trainees' beliefs. These included participant classroom observations, semi-structured group interviews with the teachers, teachers' short-answers concerning broad and specific educational issues raised during the course, teachers' comments upon local pages of literature related to education, and teachers' autobiographies.

Regarding teachers' autobiographies, research has shown that individual past experiences of schooling "provide teachers with metaphoric ways of thinking about teaching" (Pollard 1996:23). Asking the teachers to write about their schooling and life experiences is a useful way of raising awareness about their own beliefs and preconceptions, as these are often held unconsciously (Stuart et al. 2009:21) or regarded as 'normal', thus not easily available to investigation (John in Claxton et al. 1996:101). Autobiographies are also a valuable tool to collect information of ethnographic nature about teachers' beliefs, as past experiences are reflected in the teachers' present practices by suggesting teaching styles, providing positive and negative models of teacher, establishing hierarchies (e.g. between students and teacher), and influencing the choice of becoming a teacher (ibid.:91-97).

Data collected from the autobiographies concerned teachers' age, academic qualifications, family socio-economic background, personality traits, memories of schooling (the teacher as a learner) and of the best / worst teachers (role models and self-images), plans for the future, and reasons for becoming a teacher (Akyeampong and Stephens 2000). The trainees were also asked to include their expectations from the training course, because these may provide information about their personalities and beliefs concerning the role of the teacher (self-image). For example, if the teacher viewed the course as a chance to acquire new skills for dealing with management and pupils' learning, this might reveal the self-image of the teacher as controlling and as a source of expert knowledge (John in Claxton et al. 1996:101; Lazarus in ibid.:77).

One main limitation of autobiographies, and more generally speaking of using the past to understand the present, is that teachers may recall their memories with a ‘pupil’s eye view’ (Stuart et al. 2009:14). This implies that the descriptions given about e.g. the ‘best’ teacher may be limited to traits such as kindness and patience. At the same time, Bourdieu has rightly pointed out that past memories are not fixed, and that how we recall them is always tied to present problems (Elliott 2010:195; also the concept of ‘re-past’ in Marcel Proust). This helps understand why some of the problems mentioned by the teachers in their school memories were very much indicative of their present situation. For example, lack of learning time in the classroom was a major issue for Falak, both as a student and as a teacher.

### **3.5.3 Research Question 1.3: to what extent and how are the existing practices and beliefs reproduced in the trainees’ understanding and implementation of international educational practices?**

This question identifies Hafa’s most resistant, recurrent and deeply rooted beliefs and practices, and their impact on the process of knowledge accommodation. These recurrent dispositions were understood by looking at how and to what extent the existing network of beliefs and practices (identified in RQ 1.1 and 1.2) was reproduced in the new practices proposed by the author, which were implemented by Hafa in her final teaching performance. The investigation began by challenging the assumptions and misconceptions which the trainees and the author recognized in the trainees’ existing educational network through the introduction of relevant new practices and beliefs borrowed from the Communicative approach to English language teaching.

After this, data gathered from the *methods of data collection*, which were the four tasks for the final exam (lesson plan, videoed teaching practice, written self-evaluation and identification of overall objectives), as well as the author and head teacher’s classroom observations, were presented according to five areas of teaching performance. These described the practices employed by Hafa to implement the new educational knowledge, and identified the underlying beliefs according to the network mapped in RQ 1.1. and 1.2. The two sets of practices (one proposed by the author and the other implemented in the classroom by the trainee) were then compared to identify explicit cases of disagreement. These cases were investigated by selecting specific examples which would illustrate which specific existing beliefs and practices had affected the implementation of specific areas of new knowledge, and how they had done this. Finally, the beliefs and practices which were reproduced in the implementation of new knowledge were selected as Hafa’s recurrent dispositions.

### **3.6 Research Question 2: to what extent are the recurrent practices and beliefs rooted in the broader and local Egyptian socio-cultural educational context?**

To investigate the second dynamic, that is, the interplay of international, local beliefs, and the broader cultural context, the author explores the extent to which the ‘dispositions’ which hindered or facilitated the accommodation of international knowledge were also shared with and rooted in the macro-, meso- and micro- socio-cultural context in Egypt.

Since teaching does not occur in a vacuum, the cultural context in which teachers work and live is very influential upon teachers’ classroom performance (Stuart et al. 2009). This context includes traditions and customs, unwritten rules, taken-for-granted practices, beliefs implicit within the institutions (Pollard 1996:22), and institutional norms. The cultural context, for example, can be reflected in teachers’ practices and beliefs by establishing knowledge which is to be considered valid, useful and important (De Long 1997). It may also influence teachers’ self-image (Hargreaves in Pollard 1996:320), affect teachers’ selection of objectives and lesson strategy (Nespor 1987) or, on a more general level, may provide information to form perceptions (Charon 1989).

In this sense, the socio-cultural context may hinder the accommodation of international knowledge. Bourdieu (1977) called these shared dispositions, which are simultaneously internal and external to individual teachers, *doxa*, and the system of dispositions the *habitus*. He believed that there is a fine but problematic thread of cultural references running from the macro-level of educational culture down to teachers’ classroom practices. This ‘thread’ implies that some references are reproduced across different levels of school culture, and eventually influence the ways in which teachers think and act (Stephens 2007:27). The concept of *habitus*, then, is employed in this study because it establishes a connection, though not one which is fixed, deterministic or univocal, between institutional socio-cultural principles and values, teachers’ dispositions to act, and classroom practices (Acciaioli 1981). This problematizes the international community’s assumption that individual teachers (and teacher education) can be the main agents of change, as some of the principles and values which teachers consider as personal and natural (and which in turn influence their actions) may also be deeply embedded in the wider socio-cultural context. In turn, this implies that teachers may not be able to understand and implement new principles and practices, because these are not shared at the different levels of school culture.

Research Question 2 looks at the extent to which the dispositions identified in Research Question 1 reflected the meta-narratives and discourses which exist in the institutional norms, regulations, beliefs, and educational practices of the national and local socio-cultural context (Lyotard 1984; Foucault 1977 and 1980; Parker 1997). More specifically, Research Question 2 investigated and traced the trainees’ recurrent dispositions at the macro- (Ministry of Education, the University of Cairo, foreign NGOs working in the targeted community, the Egyptian society at large), meso- (the local community), and micro- (peers, head teacher, pupils, parents, and school management) levels of school cultures. The purpose is to understand whether knowledge transfer is an individual or social pursuit, which should look beyond the individual trainees to include the broader cultural environment.

### ***Methods of data collection***

The research tools employed for the investigation of this research question included a review of the official literature of the MOE (National Statistics and Strategic Plans, educational policies, and the official guidelines for their implementation), interviews with the kindergarten management, with individual teachers and head teachers of other schools and communities, with the Professor who designed the training course discussed in Chapter 2, a review of the documentation of the NGO's project implemented in the targeted community, of the training course curriculum, and of popular Egyptian literature (e.g. novels) related to education, religious literature and newspaper articles.

## **Chapter 4. Constructivist and Reflective teacher education in Egypt**

In this chapter, the theories behind constructivist and reflective teacher education are discussed. After this, the context of the fieldwork is introduced, including descriptions of the town, some examples of educational activities in the town, and an account of the kindergarten and its teachers. After establishing this context, the model of constructivist / reflective teacher education developed by the author, and how this was applied with kindergarten teachers in the fieldwork context, is discussed.

### **4.1 Constructivist and Reflective Teacher Education**

As discussed in Chapter 2, the applied science model of teacher education has been strongly criticized (Stuart et al. 2009). This critique is largely based on the model's claims to employ 'universal' principles, which are in fact locally situated and so may not be appropriate in all contexts. The model is also seen to disempower trainees due to its top-down approach, which ignores existing cultural frameworks, and also lacks practical guidance to support trainees in the implementation of principles and practices in the classroom. When trained according to this model, then, teachers may misinterpret the knowledge gained through their course, misunderstand the actual pedagogical message of the proposed new practices and activities, and so may simply revert to their old habits in challenging and critical situations, as illustrated in the case study in Chapter 2. This implies that knowledge transfer through the applied science model of teacher education may either lead to assimilation (uncritical acceptance) or rejection, and so it is not sustainable.

Although the applied science is still the most common model of teacher education throughout the world, alternative models of teacher education are gaining popularity in the international community (Stuart et al. 2009). One such model, based on the principles of cognitivism (Piaget), social constructivism (Vygotsky), and reflection (Schon), is being promoted on the basis that it is able to foster the accommodation of new knowledge within existing educational networks, and so has the potential to be sustainable. This accommodation occurs by helping trainees to develop awareness of their own educational knowledge, and recognize misconceptions and false assumptions in light of international knowledge. This approach aims to produce informed personal knowledge; the course designed by the author was consistent with this approach.

According to Piaget, learning is an innate process which occurs spontaneously by experiencing reality and then reflecting on experience. This is how people acquire ideas, criteria, and mental strategies (the abstract concepts) needed to make sense of and act in real life. For learning to occur, a combination of experience (doing) and reflection (thinking) is required ('praxis', in Freire 1972). This contrasts sharply with the behaviourist law of continuous exercise (e.g. repeating information), which produces memorization rather than actual and meaningful learning. Instead, learners should be given the opportunity to realise the significance of their experiences and interrogate reality, and organize these experiences conceptually.

Another principle of cognitivism is that learning occurs by connecting to and accommodating new ideas and knowledge into existing networks of beliefs and concepts. This contrasts explicitly with the principle underlying the applied science model, in which learning is synonymous with imprinting information into the learner's mind. In fact, for learning to take place, continuity must be established between the learner's existing knowledge and the new information being presented.

An important lesson gained from cognitivism is that the processes and outcomes of learning rely on the quality and quantity of information and beliefs already developed by the individual, which must be taken into consideration by teachers. This has two major implications for teaching activity. The first concerns the outcomes of learning, as existing misconceptions and false assumptions of the learner may be reproduced in the newly acquired information. The second concerns the process of learning, which is guided (and eventually manipulated) by the learner's personal knowledge, previous experience, and 'common sense'. Similarly, teacher educators need to investigate and understand trainees' personal knowledge and life experiences.

The theory of social constructivism builds on and develops these principles. As learning is a spontaneous process, teaching needs to reinforce and stimulate it by scaffolding, rather than by forcing it in a top-down approach (Stuart et al. 2009). 'Scaffolding' involves the facilitation of learning by meeting the learner's specific needs and learning styles. This includes guiding through the stages of the learning process, and most importantly, helping them to correct misconceptions and false assumptions implicit in their existing knowledge. From this perspective, then, teaching (and educating teachers) must involve supporting the learner in the process of understanding, developing awareness and refining existing knowledge. This process of supporting the learner occurs by creating situations where existing theories and assets are revealed to be incorrect.

If learning is a process through which new knowledge is constructed by the learner and the teacher rather than acquired top-down, and in which the learner must actively make decisions, then teaching implies a shared responsibility between the teacher and learner in the process of constructing this new knowledge. Accordingly, teaching (and educating teachers) should have a learner-centred focus which enables the learner to discover how to build his or her own new knowledge, and so to accommodate new knowledge in their existing network of information and beliefs.

Another important principle of constructivism is that learning is not an individual experience and activity, but a social enterprise which is strongly influenced by the socio-cultural context (Stuart et al. 2009). In other words, an individual's context will influence how and what they learn, and this context can include parents, fellow pupils, teachers, the wider community, and more generally, the learning and educational cultural of the specific setting. One of the main tasks of the teacher educator is therefore to understand and draw upon the educational culture of the learners. Another task is to create 'communities of learners', which scaffold the learning process of the individual by promoting non-cognitive objectives and skills.

Reflective learning is an equally important component of teacher education. This method of learning allows the learner to identify and examine the tacit understanding which has developed around their routine practices, to question their own definitions of teaching and learning, and to develop sustainable and informed alternatives. Through reflection, learners are able to address the tacit norms which inform their judgements, the theories implicit in certain behaviour, the emotional responses to particular events result in the learner adopting a particular course of action, the way in which problems are framed, and the role (self-image) which the learner has constructed for him or herself in the given setting. For this to happen, the teacher educator must present the trainees with scenarios in which unexpected or previously unknown events occur (e.g. teaching scenarios such as vignettes), present observable data about trainees' performance (e.g. feedback), and help trainees construct and implement new understandings in semi-structured settings (e.g. lesson planning, teaching practice, and evaluation).

By applying these principles, the author developed an original model of teacher education. The aim was not to use teacher education in order to substitute local with international knowledge, as in an applied science model, but to inform local beliefs and practices in an attempt to correct misconceptions and false assumptions in light of international knowledge. In other words, the author attempted to accommodate international knowledge into the local setting by helping trainees criticize and refine the existing educational culture, and find solutions to their own questions. In Freirean terms, this involved encouraging a shift from 'doxa' (uncritical acceptance of local culture) to the level of 'logos' (Freire 1972:62) by developing the trainees' *conscientizacao*, that is, critical consciousness.

The rationale for employing this model of teacher education stemmed from Freire's consideration that "we cannot go to the labourers [...] to give them knowledge or to impose upon them the model of the 'good man' [or good teacher] contained in a program whose content we have ourselves organized" (ibid.: 75). An authentic teacher educator should instead help learners to transform their own reality by developing an awareness and understanding of the existing situation, and of themselves as teachers.

This has three main implications for teacher education. Firstly, given the influence of existing networks of beliefs and knowledge upon the knowledge transfer process, a constructivist model of teacher education attempts to understand these existing networks and to help trainees develop an awareness of it, as these networks are often tacit and intricate. Moreover, as meaningful learning requires the combination of experience and reflection ('praxis' in Freire 1972), teacher education should allow trainees to implement their newly acquired knowledge in semi-structured settings and experience a guided analysis of this. Guidance is required as the process of reflection may be hindered by existing misconceptions, which need to be highlighted and proved wrong by discussing the implementation of new knowledge in light of academic and recognized educational theories, and by providing formative feedback (scaffolding). Additionally, as the process of knowledge transfer requires the trainees to be active in the acquisition and, above all, in the development of new educational knowledge, this needs to be built through discussion and discovery, or through suggestions and hints

rather than blocks of fully developed theories and/or practices (dialogue, in Freire 1972). Accordingly, it is the responsibility of the teacher educator to restrict the influence conferred by her or his authority and status, and to accept that power must be shared with the trainees. Finally, since existing knowledge cannot be substituted with new knowledge, the educator needs to establish continuity between the two sets of knowledge, and to guide the practical implementation of new principles and practices in the existing network. This prevents the teacher educator from developing judgmental attitudes towards local knowledge (Parker 1997).

#### **4.2 Introducing the fieldwork: the community, the kindergarten, and the trainees**

The kindergarten (Pictures 3-4) was situated in a small town to the south of Cairo. The town is located next to one of the main motorways and railway lines which originate in the capital. It is also next to one of the many canals originating from the river Nile, which is highly beneficial for agriculture, and is also used for washing clothes and dishes, for livestock, and for bathing in summer (Pictures 5-6). The motorway, canal and railway line divide the town into two unequal areas, which are connected by a bridge.



*Picture 3: aerial view of the town (Google Earth)*





Picture 4: close aerial view of the town (Google Earth). Keys: water canal (1), railway (2), motorway (3), micro-bus station and city centre (4), kindergarten (5)

The town did not have an officially designated city centre, but most business and meetings were held in the square adjacent the micro-bus station or in the mosques. It also lacked public facilities such as a hospital or a police station; these were located in a nearby town. However, a mobile health centre did visit the community on a weekly basis, and particularly provided pre-natal care. There were more than 50 mosques (D1-245) in the town at the time of the study, which were situated in each of the numerous districts of the town, and function as focal points for social gatherings. Most households had access to an electricity supply, and were equipped with fans, fridges, and televisions (some with satellite dishes). Few benefitted from running water (some had underground or rooftop tanks), but public fountains were available throughout the town. Most inhabitants (even those who were illiterate) owned and used mobile phones regularly.



Picture 5 - the water canal

Every Monday a market was held in the main square, which sold meat, fruit, vegetables, clothes and kitchen tools. There were also permanent shops, such as barber shops, one restaurant, greengrocers, butchers, clothes shops, garages, 'kiosks' (for cigarettes, snacks, batteries, mobile top-ups, and drinks), and an internet cafe. The most common means of public transportation within the community was the *tuk-tuk* (small motorized

rickshaws, often driven by young children), while private micro-buses provided regular and cheap links to other villages and towns within the governorate. In spite of the proximity to the railway line, there was no railway station in the town. Private means of transport included bicycles, animals (donkeys and camels), and few cars (Pictures 7-8).



*Picture 6 - one of the motorway's lanes*

According to a report prepared by a foreign NGO, there were 43,000 inhabitants in the town in 2008 (DPIC 2008). More than 90% of the women worked in agriculture, which also employed 60% of men. About 10% of men were employed in the local factories (mainly bricks and sugar), while the remaining 30% worked in commerce, construction, and government jobs. Temporary emigration to Libya and Saudi Arabia was also very common, especially to work in construction and oil and gas pipelines.



*Picture 7: bicycle for private transportation*



*Picture 8: donkey for private/goods transportation*

However, these data conflict with those provided by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, which stated that 40% of the inhabitants held a University degree (year 2006, quoted in DPIC 2008). In line with the DPIC data, and in contrast to the Central Agency statistics, field observations confirmed that most of the workforce was employed in the primary sector, and that the literacy rate was below the national average.

The community was officially headed by the Community Development Authority (CDA), although in practice it was controlled by the chiefs and councils of the family clans (approximately 13). The CDA only represented a few of these clans, some of which were characterised by long-established rivalries. Law and order in the community was administered by the family councils and imams (religious leaders), with minimal interference from the national authorities. There was, in fact, a shared perception that law and order were personal, family issues, rather than matters concerning national civil society. One of the

interviewees, for example, was proud and highly respected for having served a seven-year prison sentence for murdering the man who had killed his brother.

Education was highly valued by the inhabitants, in spite of the overall low literacy rate. However, there were no libraries or bookstores in the town. During the course of a day spent at a local shop with a photocopying machine, the author observed only four people using this service during a full working day, in order to copy identity cards or other legal documents. The shop also sold pens and exercise books for children, but received no customers for these items during the author's observation.

#### **4.2.1. Education in the town**

It was difficult to determine how many schools there were in the town, because access to official records was not granted. In order to provide an insight into some of the educational activities in the town, the author observed two classes: an English lesson in a primary school, and an adult literacy class provided for illiterate women in the community.

The author was granted access to one primary school, which was a two-storey building with over 1,000 pupils enrolled. Only one English lesson could be observed due to restricted access to the school (D2-13); there were over 30 pupils in the classroom, as well as 22 pupils marked as absent (which the teacher confirmed to be the usual number of absentees). Pupils sat on small desks, and were divided by gender. The girls were all veiled, although national law officially forbids this. The lesson lasted 40 minutes, was modelled on the grammar-translation method, and included four different topics: individual words, numbers, the modal verb 'must', and spelling. Pupils were asked questions while each topic was explained, and were then called individually to the board (one or two pupils per each topic) to do exercises such as gap-filling. Heavy caning was witnessed throughout the lesson, although this was focused exclusively on the pupils sitting at the back of the classroom. At the front of the classroom, the teacher had placed the head teacher's daughter, his own son, and the pupils of other prominent members of the community. These were the pupils who were engaged during the teacher's questioning.

After the lesson, the teacher complained about the demanding working conditions, which were created by the high teacher/pupil ratio, the repeated absence of pupils, the lack of textbooks and teaching aids, and the low pay, which did not meet the official minimum wage in Egypt of 400LE per month (Al-Ahram 2010). For this reason, he was forced to teach private ICT and English lessons in the afternoon. From the author's observation of the lesson, it was not possible to establish whether pupils were effectively learning English. The few pupils who were called to the board could spell one or two words, and / or could match drawings and words.

The extent of most pupils' English appeared to be limited to the question 'what's your name?', which they frequently shouted out to the author on the street. These brief exchanges usually came to an end when the same question was asked of the pupils. Pupils seemed

playful and high-spirited both within and outside the school (Picture 9), and did not seem particularly concerned by their poor performance in class. At the same time, informal conversations with the pupils (and the high rate of absenteeism) suggested that many avoided school in order to help their families in the fields, or because of corporal punishment in the classroom.

The local Community Development Authority provided adult literacy courses for women, which were financed by national and international funding, and held in the targeted kindergarten by the trainees. The women were organized into two groups and attended classes twice a week (two hours per session). According to the head teacher, the women had enrolled on the course primarily because they enjoyed the social experience of learning together, but also because



*Picture 9 - pupils outside school*

they wanted to learn to read the Koran, contribute to their children's education, and receive a certificate from the Adult Education Authority (D3-110). The author joined one lesson as participant observer. 13 women (mostly mothers of the pupils who were enrolled in the kindergarten) attended the lesson, which focused on Arabic words.

The methodology and the teacher's attitude were notably similar to the morning classes held for the young children in the kindergarten. The practices included breaking down single content units (letters and words), patterning letters and words, repetition, memorization, dictation, and spelling individual words. There was also plenty of revision during the class because, as the head teacher lamented, the women would not practise at home (D3-161). The courses created tensions in the community, because some of the husbands complained that women were spending time in the kindergarten when they should be attending to their duties at home. One of the women was even asked by her husband to leave their home as he did not want her to attend the course (D4-65).

#### **4.2.2. The kindergarten**

The construction of the kindergarten was funded by the NGO, which had also arranged the training course discussed in Chapter 2, and their involvement was part of a broader programme of poverty alleviation funded by the European Union. The kindergarten was located in a two-storey building, although the first floor was incomplete and therefore unusable. The ground floor was consisted of three classrooms, a hall, a small storage room and a toilet. Picture 10 below shows the entrance and hall, which was used as a classroom when the NGO held meetings on the premises.



Picture 10: the kindergarten's entrance and hall



Picture 11: outside the kindergarten

The three classrooms and the hall were equipped with working fans and neon lights. Running water was provided by an electric pump, which eventually broke down and was not replaced during the author's stay. Consequently, the cleaner used the nearby fountain to fetch water. The teachers shared a computer with loudspeakers, which they used to show cartoons and educational videos. The teaching aids and toys available included alphabet and number blocks, felt-tip pens, second-hand illustrated books, three educational wall charts, animal toys, and three rocking horses (Pictures 12 to 15).



Picture 12: Rocking horses



Picture 13: Illustrated books

The kindergarten underwent several changes during the author's ten-month stay. For example, the walls shown in Picture 10 were later decorated by Hafa with Disney characters, while school chairs and desks were brought in from the nearby Community Development Authority premises. Three new learning wall charts were also put up on the walls.



Picture 14: Felt-tip pens



Picture 15: Animal toys

The school day, which officially lasted from 8:15am to 1pm (Saturday to Thursday), was divided into nine periods of 30 minutes each. Breakfast was provided at the beginning of each day for a small fee (0.25 LE), in addition to the 10 LE monthly fee paid by each pupil. Table 2 shows the timetable with the subjects.

Time	8:15-9	9-9:30	9:30-10	10-10:30	10:30-11	11-11:30	11:30-12	12-12:30	12:30-13
Sat	B/E	Maths	Cpt	Arabic	V/H	Eng	Koran	PC	HW
Sun	B/E	Arabic	V/H	Eng	Cpt	Maths	B/G	S/T	HW
Mon	B/E	Eng	Cpt	Maths	V/H	Arabic	PC	Koran	HW
Tue	B/E	Maths	Cpt	Arabic	V/H	Eng	S/T	B/G	HW
Wed	B/E	Arabic	V/H	Eng	Cpt	Maths	Koran	PC	HW
Thu	B/E	Eng	Cpt	Maths	V/H	Arabic	B/G	S/T	HW

Table 2: The kindergarten timetable.<sup>3</sup>

However, the start of the day in the kindergarten was not generally so well-ordered. This is a description of a typical morning (December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009):

I arrive in front of the kindergarten at 8:00. Soon after, a woman comes to open the front door, then she leaves. Pupils begin to arrive at 8:30, mostly on their own. They all rush to the rocking horses, which they seem to enjoy very much. Then, the woman in charge of cleaning also arrives with her son. The children are dressed appropriately for winter. The atmosphere is pleasant. There are many flies inside the building, which however seem to bother only me. The headteacher switches on the fan, to prevent the flies from lying on the pupils. Some children have their own food, other buy from the cleaning lady a small packet of biscuits. More pupils arrive. Also the teachers arrive and prepare tea. After few physical exercises, the first lesson begins. It's 9:30.

(D1-246).

<sup>3</sup> Keys: B/E (breakfast and physical exercises), Eng (English), Cpt (concepts e.g. small and big), V/H (visual/listening activities, i.e. pupils' stimulation by teaching aids), B/G (board games), PC (watching videos), S/T (story-telling), HW (homework). The lessons in the cells highlighted in blue were never witnessed by the author.

The kindergarten personnel consisted of four teachers, the head teacher, and the cleaner, all of whom were female. There was also a male school manager, who also served as a coordinator between the kindergarten and the NGO. However, he was rarely on the premises. The teachers were aged between 22 and 24 years old. Two of them were married, one was engaged, and the other two (including the head teacher) were single. One of the teachers and the head teacher had University degrees, in History and Social studies respectively; the other three teachers had a school leaving certificate, and the cleaner was illiterate. The teachers were hired by the school manager according to three criteria: subject content knowledge and general level of literacy and numeracy (assessed by test), attitude towards children (assessed by interview), and references (D2-86). Much emphasis was put on their attitudes towards children, as it was commonly believed that a good kindergarten teacher had to treat her pupils as a mother treats her children.

According to the kindergarten's previous head teacher, who had left in 2009 (six months before the author's arrival), the kindergarten was suffering from issues concerning teaching methodology and classroom management. Regarding the former, she recalled that she had tried to encourage a shift from rote learning to less monotonous and repetitive practices, such as story-telling, games, and use of the computer, but without success. In her opinion, the teachers opposed her attempts to implement new teaching strategies and a richer curriculum, which would include social and life skills, hygiene and behaviour as well as academia. In terms of discipline and behaviour, she suggested that corporal punishment was still commonly used by the time she left the kindergarten. When asked her opinions on the content of a training course for teachers, she stated that teachers had to learn how to communicate with pupils. Overall, however, she felt that improving the kindergarten would be challenging, since "the teachers [don't] feel like changing as they came to work only for the money" (D1-293).

However, these opinions were not entirely confirmed by data gathered at the kindergarten, which seemed to be a less negative environment. The teachers did focus mainly on cognitive skills and repetition-based activities, but actual oral, rote-learning was not frequently observed. Corporal punishment was similarly rarely observed. The assertion that teachers lacked motivation to change and only worked for money was similarly challenged by data collected from the kindergarten itself. Teachers' expectations about the course (e.g. "to learn something new") suggested that they were interested in developing new skills, and teachers also expressed an interest in working with children and with each other. However, an insight into the status of kindergarten teachers suggested that there were strong de-motivating factors influencing the teachers.

The author observed that teaching in the kindergarten was a low-status occupation, which teachers undertook as temporary employment before marriage or moving to more high profile employment. For example, one of the trainees said that a friend of hers, a university graduate, had refused to work at the kindergarten because this would jeopardize her future chances of working for the government (I/t-13:48). Other teachers left the kindergarten to get married, or because their families and / or husbands opposed the idea of women working beyond the

home. This was justified by the argument that a married woman should not contribute financially to the household, because she would not be able to claim back money she had earned in the case of a divorce (I/t-01:00). Another explanation was related to status and reputation; it was implied that if a wife had to work, her husband did not earn enough to support the family. The combination of these pressures may have had a serious impact on the teachers; a phone call to the head teacher in October 2010 (after the fieldwork period) revealed that the kindergarten had been shut, and none of the trainees had gone back into teaching.

The working conditions in the kindergarten were also highly demanding. The teachers worked five hours a day, six days a week, and teaching six different subjects per day. Moreover, they were required to attend to their family and social duties after their working day was over. Resources in the school were scarce, as there were no books, stationary, or paper available. Each classroom accommodated between 20 and 30 pupils of different ages and abilities, with high rates of absence and drop out. The teachers' wage was 120LE per month, of which 70LE was paid by the foreign NGO and 50LE received from the local Community Development Authority (D1-44). During a group interview, all the teachers agreed that their pay was very low (I/t-07:00), especially in light of high local prices. One kilogram of beef, for example, was worth 12LE. Their salaries do not compare favourably with the average builder's wage, which was 60LE per day including food. According to the head teacher, a minimum of 1,000LE per month was required for a home-owning couple without children. But it became apparent that there were few other options available for educated young women who wanted to work beyond the home. Alternatives included working in the clothes factory, or as a shop assistant.

The author was introduced to the community and the kindergarten workers in September 2009 by the foreign NGO which had financed the school building and the training course. Initially, the author agreed to help the NGO form local committees of parents and children, in order to support the development of quality education and to promote gender equality. However, the NGO proved to be highly incompetent and ethnocentric in the pursuit of these targets, approaching their aims through the a-critical, top-down implementation of guidelines established by EuropeAid (appendix 12). This led to a failure to engage with the local culture, to the point of disregard and disrespect. One example of this was the tendency of female workers from the NGO to visit the community wearing knee-length skirts, and also to smoke in public. The community considered this behaviour as unacceptable and a violation of their code of conduct, and it provoked a strong reaction. When one of the local imams denounced the NGOs and its employees in a speech at the mosque, the author decided it would be prudent to disassociate himself from the NGO and continue his fieldwork independently. In order to do this, the author arranged a meeting the CDA representative and the kindergarten manager in order to propose delivering a training course for the kindergarten teachers. Subsequently, the author found accommodation with one of the families in the town for short periods over the year of fieldwork, which allowed him to carry out limited though meaningful ethnographic research with the local community and inhabitants.



### 4.3 The layout of the constructivist / reflective model of teacher education

This alternative model of teacher education, based on constructivist / reflective principles, was introduced because the use of applied model on the training course at the University of Cairo demonstrated the limitations of the applied science model as means to achieve sustainable knowledge transfer. The new course benefitted from three important lessons: teachers do not teach according to what they are told by the trainers; beliefs cannot truly be substituted (Pajares 1992); and existing beliefs and knowledge affect the process of knowledge transfer (Tillema 1994).

Unlike other models of teacher education, the training course developed by the author did not allow trainees to simply memorize subject and pedagogical knowledge, apply teaching tips blindly, and observe others' classroom performance. Instead, the training course aimed to help the teachers to discover their own principles and practices, in order to challenge and eventually change them (Dove 1986:207). Diagram 2 illustrates the structure of the training course, which was organized according to four overlapping phases.

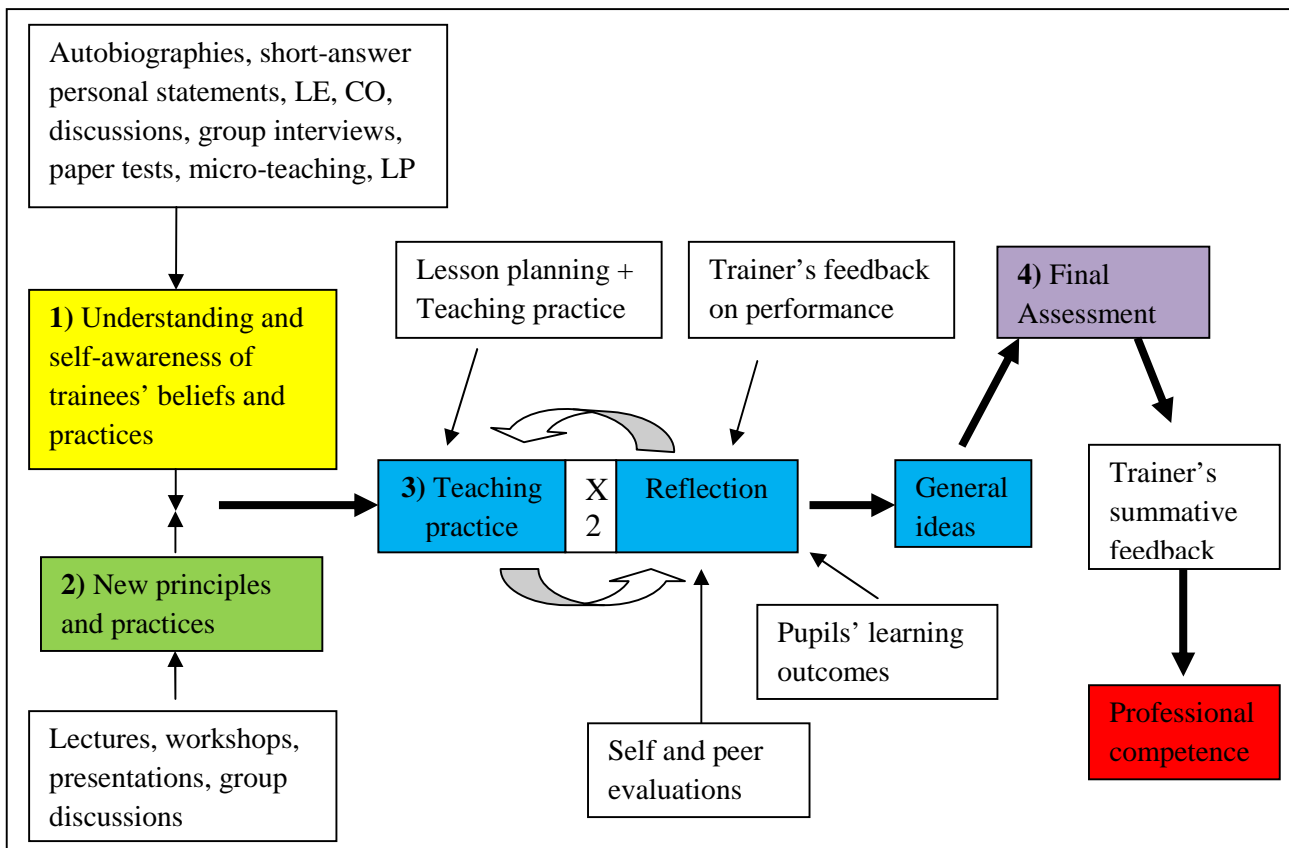


Diagram 2 (adapted from Wallace 1991, quoted in Stuart et al. 2009:9): the structure of the training course.

The process of understanding local knowledge and developing the trainees' awareness occurred mainly during the **Phase 1**. This phase also aimed to investigate the complexity of the local educational settings and the specific teaching and learning culture(s) of the trainees enrolled. Additionally, it helped the trainees to develop awareness and understanding of their own educational principles and practices. In order to develop this understanding, a number of

conventional and ethnographic tools were employed, including: lesson plans, self / peer lesson evaluations, classroom observations, trainees' autobiographies, short-answer personal statements, class discussions, paper tests, test results' analysis, group interviews, and micro-teaching.

**Phase 2** aimed to challenge local educational principles and practices by presenting suggestions (rather than fully developed theories) developed in the light of international teaching and learning theories such as the communicative approach to English language teaching, which addressed issues raised during *Phase 1*. The training methods employed were lectures, workshops, presentations, and group discussions.

From **Phase 3** onwards, the course developed according to Kolb's experiential learning model. This involves allowing trainees to practice in the classroom, making observations and relevant reflections upon the practice, developing new general educational ideas, and finally re-implementing these new, refined ideas in the classroom (this last step occurred in *Phase 4*) (Stuart et al. 2009: 47). According to Kolb's model, *Phase 3* was organized in 2 + 1 steps: implementation, reflection, and development of general ideas. Initially, the trainees were asked to plan and deliver a lesson by using the understanding of their educational culture which they had developed, along with the new principles and practices acquired during the phases 1 and 2 (step 1). After this, the trainees were guided in reflecting upon their teaching practices by employing tools such as self / peer lesson evaluations, analysis of pupils' learning outcomes, and individual and collective feedback from the trainer (step 2) (Pearson 1989). These steps were repeated twice, in order to allow the trainees to adjust their performance according to the new information and understanding developed, and to reflect upon the feedback they received. At the end of each step, general educational ideas were deployed and refined (step 3). Developing general ideas enabled the trainees to understand the criteria which underlay their teaching practices, and to establish a connection between this and the social context (Edwards et al. 2002).

Finally, during **Phase 4**, the trainees were assessed. Their assessment consisted of four tasks: lesson planning, teaching practice, self-evaluation of the performance, and identification of long-term educational targets. The aim of the assessment was threefold. Firstly, the cycle of Kolb's experiential learning model was completed by giving the trainees another chance to implement the educational knowledge which they had acquired during the previous phases. Secondly, the assessment allowed an understanding of how effective the chosen model of teacher education had been as a means for the sustainable transfer of international knowledge.

Finally, it provided an opportunity to understand the factors which had hindered the knowledge transfer process. From an analysis of the assessment's results, carried out by both the author and the head teacher, conclusive summative feedback was prepared for the benefit of the trainees enrolled on the course. The trainees were also awarded an end of the course certificate (see appendix 11).

#### 4.4 The synopsis of the training course

The in-service training course was organized into 11 sessions, and lasted from November 2009 to June 2010. It enrolled four teachers and the head teacher from a kindergarten located in the targeted community. None of the trainees (except for one, who left the course before the final assessment) had received prior training, but they had been working at the kindergarten for at least two months and up to one year. Each session lasted no longer than 90 minutes, in order to accommodate the trainees' household and family duties. The head teacher initially participated in the course as a trainee from Sessions 1 to 6, as co-trainer from Session 7, and finally as trainer in Sessions 10 and 11. Table 3 summarizes the process of the training course.

Session 1	Initial assessment – English language paper test
Session 2	Initial assessment – Analysis of paper test results (written commentaries)
Session 3	Initial assessment – Short-answer/personal statements and trainees' autobiographies
Session 4	Building research tools – Lesson plan model (lecture and workshop)
Session 5	Building research tools – Self-peers' evaluation form (lecture and workshop)
Session 6	Introducing international knowledge and engaging with local beliefs and practices
Session 7	Individual feedback on classroom performance (oral analysis of videos and written feedback)
Session 8	Establishing targets for self-evaluation – Proving misconceptions to be false and empowering trainees
Session 9 Session 9	Collective feedback on pupils' academic achievement – recognizing misconceptions and proposing more international knowledge
Session 10	Illustrating the final assessment's tasks
Session 11	Final assessment – Tasks: lesson planning, teaching practice, self-evaluation, and targets' identification (syllabi)

Table 3: Overview of the training course -Phases 1, 2, 3, and 4

##### 4.4.1 Phase 1: understanding trainees' educational principles and practices and developing trainees' self-awareness.

Sessions 1 and 2 were used to carry out an initial assessment of the trainees. There are numerous benefits of understanding the educational principles and practices of the trainees before training courses are delivered. These include the ability to identify teachers' specific educational needs and strengths, to establish communication between the trainer and the trainees (Montgomery and Hadfield 1989: 9), and to test teachers' efficiency (Gess-Newsome 1999). The specific rationale underlying this assessment was to gather an initial understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices, and to use this knowledge to stimulate trainees' awareness about their own principles, practices, behaviours, and images of teacher and learner. In this sense, it reached far beyond the simplistic and top-down attitude of much teacher education which always approaches trainees as if they are simply people whose practices need to be 'improved'.

During *Session 1*, the teachers were asked to take an English language paper test. The test was not designed to assess theoretical domains such as subject content or general pedagogical knowledge, as is often the case in mainstream teacher education (Stuart et al. 2009). Instead, the aim was to understand teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) with regard to English language teaching. However, assessing PCK is a challenging task, particularly because PCK does not exist within the teacher's mind, independent from specific situations such as the knowledge of grammar rules or general pedagogical theories. On the contrary, teachers need to be stimulated to produce PCK, which could occur with the trainer presenting scenarios, asking how teachers would behave in those specific circumstances, and then assessing their response (Stuart et al 2009).

There are different areas of knowledge which can be explored to investigate PCK. The test addressed two areas which were purposely chosen to explore trainees' problem-solving skills. The first area concerned the extent to which trainees knew about the thinking processes of their pupils. According to Smith and Neale, this can be understood by investigating teachers' awareness of the misconceptions and difficulties (termed 'challenges' in this study) which are most commonly associated with certain topics (1989:2; also in Fuson 1990:12; Shulman1986b:6; Rowan et al 2001:5). The second area is the trainees' knowledge of pedagogical strategies (termed 'Solutions') to help pupils overcome these challenges (Smith and Neale 1989). These knowledge areas are showed in the diagram 3 (adapted from Rowan et al 2001:16).

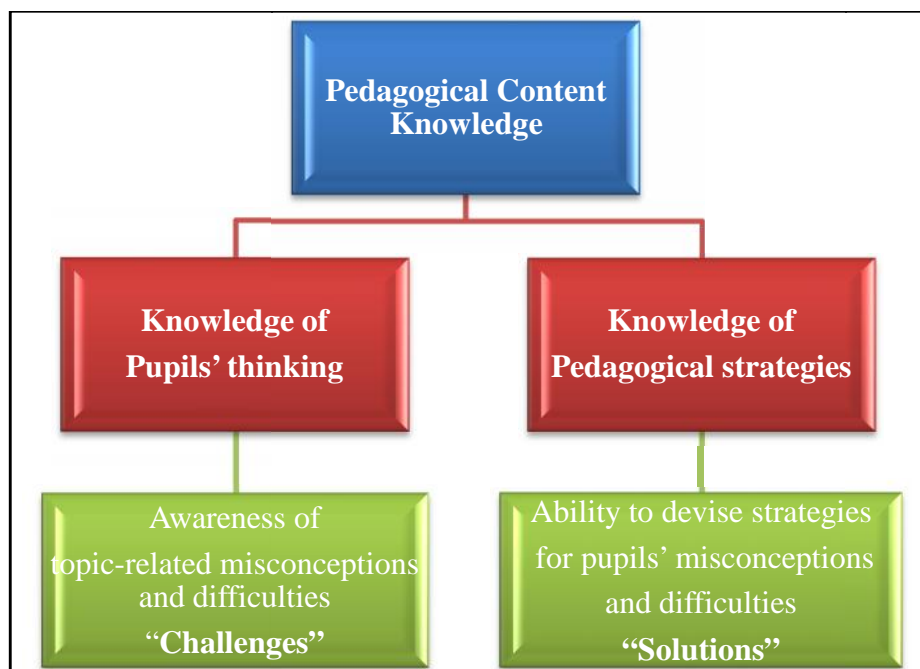


Diagram 3: The PCK knowledge areas investigated by the assessment

Trainees' answers to the paper test were initially analysed by using the competency-based assessment strategy (adapted from Stuart et al 2009:95). This strategy works by identifying and selecting specific competences (which are the cognitive and behavioural skills required to

teaching a topic – Shearron 1974:10 and 12) and by measuring the level of competency which teachers demonstrate in performing them.

The English language test (appendix 8) was designed by selecting specific topics from the English syllabus used in the local kindergarten. A number of items on the test depended upon “knowledge of the treatment of the content in educational situations” (Kromrey and Renfrow 1991:5) in order to be judged as a correct response. For example, Exercise 2 required trainees to demonstrate their pedagogical knowledge of the English alphabet by identifying the English letters which bore visual resemblance with the letters of the Arabic alphabet (e.g. and ‘C’), and which could therefore be misleading for pupils. Table 4 shows the criteria employed to assess trainees’ knowledge of pupils’ thinking. Competences and benchmarks are specified below. For the Arabic alphabet chart, please see appendix 1.

Knowledge of students’ thinking (English language)			
Competence	Novice	Basic	Proficient
Trainee recognizes visual resemblances	# of letters recognized	# of letters recognized	# of letters recognized

Table 4: Example of practical application of the Competency-based strategy to PCK

#### The English language test (Exercise 2 only)

The specific competence required by this exercise was the ability to recognize visual resemblances between English and Arabic letters. This competence was selected following an informal conversation with the head teacher of the local primary school, who mentioned that visual similarities between Arabic and English letters presented a major challenge to pupils’ English language-learning (D1-226).

*Teachers’ answers.* Table 5 shows the Arabic letters (first row) presented to the trainees and the English letters provided as answers. Four teachers identified between four and seven resembling letters. However, two teachers failed to recognize the similarity between and ‘P’, and instead wrote ‘M’, matching the English letter ‘M’ with its Arabic homonym. Similarly, another teacher matched with ‘T’, its English homonym.

<i>Teachers / Letters</i>					
Falak	D	E e	G	<b>M</b>	I i
Hafa	B	F	O	<b>M</b>	L
Ghadir	<b>T</b>				
Iba	D	E	O	P	I
Nasim	B	C G	O	P q	I

Table 5: Teachers’ answers for Exercise 2

*Benchmarks.* The exercise asked trainees to match one or two English letters to each of the five Arabic letters proposed. Teachers identified 0, 4, 5, 6 and 7 letters respectively. As the exercise had asked specifically to select visual resemblances rather than homonymous letters, benchmarks were established by combining the number of correct answers with the mistakes made, as follows: 7 – 5 letters and no mistakes (proficient level of competency), 6 – 4 letters

and 1 mistake (basic level); and 3 – 0 letters and more than 1 mistake (novice level). Table 6 summarizes the benchmarks employed to mark the exercise.

<b>Knowledge of students' thinking (English language)</b>			
<i>Competence</i>	<i>Novice</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Proficient</i>
Recognize visual resemblances	0 letters and +1 mistakes/blank	6-4 letters and 1 mistake	7-5 letters and 0 mistakes

Table 6: Competence and benchmarks for Exercise 2

*Test results.* As showed in table 7, two teachers showed a proficient level of competency, two teachers demonstrated the basic level, and one teacher the novice level.

<b>Knowledge of students' thinking (English language)</b>					
<i>Competences / Teachers</i>	Falak	Hafa	Ghadir	Iba	Nasim
Recognize visual resemblances	Basic	Basic	Novice	Proficient	Proficient

Table 7: Levels of competency for Exercise 2

Since all research tools have potential methodological limitations (Gess-Newsome p.156), in *Session 2* trainees were given the opportunity to view and break down the test results, and provide written explanations (in their individual research diaries) of the procedures they had employed during the test. More specifically, trainees were asked to explain how and why the letters they had chosen could represent a challenge to teaching and learning the English alphabet, and to devise pedagogical strategies to address such challenges. In other words, the trainees were asked to deploy their PCK. Tables 8-9 show the benchmarks established for each competence assessed by the answers of the trainees (written commentaries), and the results.

<i>Competences</i>	<i>Novice</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Proficient</i>
Explains how/why resembling letters could challenge pupils' learning	Does not recognize challenge nor provides explanation	Explains how/why resemblance can be challenging	Gives alternatives on how/why resemblance can be challenging
Devises/describes strategy for addressing the challenges	Does not describe any strategy	Describes strategy which does not address challenge	Describes strategy which addresses the specific challenge

Table 8: Competences and benchmarks for assessing teachers' PCK competences

<i>Competences / Teachers</i>	Falak	Hafa	Ghadir	Iba	Nasim
Explain how resembling letters could challenge pupils' learning	Novice	Basic	Novice	Novice	Novice
Devise/describe strategies to address the challenges	Novice	Novice	Novice	Novice	Novice

Table 9: Results of teachers' performance in PCK competences

Table 10 summarizes the levels of competency demonstrated in the paper test and written commentaries (exercise 2 only).

<i>Method</i>	<i>Competences</i>	Falak	Hafa	Ghadir	Iba	Nasim
Written Test	Recognizing visual resemblance between English and Arabic letters	Basic	Basic	Novice	Proficient	Proficient
Written Commentary	Explain how resembling letters could challenge pupils' learning	Novice	Basic	Novice	Novice	Novice
	Devise/describe strategies for addressing challenges	Novice	Novice	Novice	Novice	Novice

*Table 10: summary of competences and results for test and commentaries*

### ***Analysis of trainees' responses***

Table 10 shows that overall the teachers performed well in the written test, but could not generally give explanations for their answers, as demonstrated by the lower levels of competency showed in the written commentaries. The only exception was Hafa, who could explain what made the topic of English letters challenging for the pupils (Hd-2). However, none of the teachers, were able to devise and describe strategies ('Solutions') for addressing the challenges.

These results seem to suggest that the trainees had very little knowledge of pupils' thinking processes and pedagogical strategies in relation to teaching English letters, and that this assessment strategy was not relevant to the aim of understanding the trainees' educational culture, or to develop their self-awareness. At the same time, by searching for the factors (rather than competencies) which may have contributed to trainees' assessment performance in the specific circumstances, it was possible to gain an initial understanding of the local educational culture.

The ethnographic investigation of the test results involved looking at the cases of incongruence between test results and trainees' written commentaries, which revealed how trainees' performance beyond their competency level had been affected by their perspectives and definitions concerning the educational items on the assessment tasks beyond their actual competency level. The research tools employed for this investigation included the trainer's research journals and teachers' diaries; initial informal classroom observations; group interviews with the teachers and the chairman of the local Community Development Authority; informal conversations with the school manager and the head teacher; and an analysis of the literature.

The outcome of these investigations, which were used as a pilot and source for the subsequent analysis (see Chapter 5), revealed five important beliefs concerning the trainees' educational culture. These are outlined below.

#### ***1. Definition of assessment (procedures vs. outcomes)***

The aim of Exercise 2 was to help the trainees to develop self-awareness of the thought processes they had followed to answer the test (Stuart et al 2009:91). For this reason, the exercise was designed to accept almost any English letter which the teachers proposed, except for homonymy (that is, letters with the same sound). However, the trainees only

focussed on the outcomes of the test, and neglected the explanation of the procedures. Besides their lack of competency in PCK, which is still an important factor, five other factors were identified as influencing the trainees' performance.

a) *Assessment in Egypt* seems to take a very different approach to the procedural ethos which underlay the exercise proposed. Mubarak's ambition to modernize the country through education meant that assessment became central to the selection of the national elite who would access government jobs (Hargreaves 2001:259). Assessment in Egypt is therefore largely result-orientated, to the extent that teaching can become exclusively bound to helping students pass their exams rather than learning about particular topics (ibid.). In light of the fact that the trainees in this study all attended state schools during Mubarak's educational reforms during the 1990s, this national trend of focussing on outcomes may explain why the teachers seemed to value outcomes over procedures. Understanding this aspect of the educational culture in the country is paramount because, as Tabulawa pointed out, an exam-based education will have major implications for any attempt to promote pedagogical change (1997:198).

b) When trainees revealed the procedures they had followed during the exercise, this was an opportunity to gain an insight into their thought processes. However, even if trainees gave correct answers, these thought processes could appear approximate, illogical, simplistic or intuitive. As the head teacher said, "when it gets difficult to find the direct solutions for rules and principles and find yourself [struggling] to get any answer, never mind, try to find other solutions even if it was simple. Complicated ways are not necessarily applicable" (Nd-3) (for the trainees' and head teacher's quoted pages of diary please see appendices 3-7). This appeared to discourage the trainees from discussing their procedures.

c) Trainees' focus on outcomes was also reinforced by a series of events which preceded the test. In particular, the fact that the author was introduced to the school by the foreign NGO which had financed the building of the kindergarten may have influence the way in which he was perceived. The NGO was still present in the community, trying to implement a new project to foster human rights by creating local committees of parents, children and women (D1). Amid, the kindergarten manager, was more interested in receiving financial support from the NGO to build the second floor of the kindergarten than in creating these committees (D1-260/1). Accordingly, he wanted to show that the NGO's previous financial support had produced quality results, and put external, *institutional pressure* on the trainees to demonstrate proficiency in the test. For Amid, proficiency concerned exclusively the ability to answer questions correctly.

d) During the test, the trainees viewed themselves as *students rather than teachers*, which affected their low performance in the second task of the assessment; students are not required to disclose knowledge of procedures in the same way that teachers are. This notion is confirmed by the nature of the needs related to English language which the teachers expressed. While trainees were asked to identify their weaknesses in English from a teaching perspective (e.g., the strategies they would need to learn to teach English to their pupils),



trainees instead concentrated on typical student needs including learning vocabulary (Id-24), grammar rules (Id-24 and Nd-15), translation (Fd-18, Gd-14), sentence composition (Gd-14), and the need to keep practising the language after English lessons (Hd-20).

e) The trainees viewed the author as a *potential inspector* sent from the NGO to assess the teachers' quality. This showed, for example, from the concern they expressed during a group interview on whether the test's results would be shared with the NGO (I/t). The same concern was shared by the chairman of the local Community Development Authority, who asked whether and to what extent the author was independent from the NGO (I/s). This was in spite of the assurances given that the NGO had no influence whatsoever on the course, and that the author was not accountable to them (e.g. I/s).

## **2. Challenges of writing about procedures**

The choice of employing diaries to enable the teachers to do homework, undertake training-related tasks, and more generally communicating to keep track of the course, was complicated due to the language barrier and the trainees' social and family commitments. However, the author had not anticipated that writing about procedures and pedagogical ideas would as complicated as it proved to be (Var Der Valk and Broekman 1999:20).

## **3. Unfamiliar knowledge domain investigated**

Shulman states that assessing teachers' subject matter knowledge alone provides no information about teachers' performance in the classroom (1986a). Accordingly, the competency required by the test was not based on traditional cognitive abilities, but on the practical domain of teaching/learning (PCK). However, teachers were more accustomed to traditional testing, like the proper use of *grammar* and the ability to *translate*. The fact that the exercise did not require any grammar / translation-related competence, and instead specific pedagogical content competences which were beyond the trainees' previous experience in English teaching and learning, may have contributed to their failure to understand the exercise.

## **4. Static challenges without pedagogical solutions**

Challenges are the specific features of a topic which may hinder its learning or teaching (Rowan et al 2001:5). These were explained to the trainees as the topical features which may cause pupils to ask questions during the lesson. In subsequent sessions, the trainees gave definitions of challenges without addressing the specific causes or presenting feasible solutions apart from practice or slower teaching pace. These challenges mainly concerned pupils' different levels of ability (Fd-29, Id-35, Nd-28, Fd-49, Gd-32, Hd-43, Nd-35), topic-related issues such as similar letterforms (Hd-30, Fd-53, Gd-34, Id-50, Nd-30), and method-related challenges such as remembering the alphabetical order (Gd-16/19, Hd-41, Id-53, Nd-37).

## **5. Teacher-centred perspective**

The methodology employed for Session 2 did not match the trainees' expectations. An email from the NGO's human resources developer (who had joined the session as an interpreter),

described trainees' response to the session, noting that the trainees "could not believe that [I] need[ed] to know their answers...". She also considered the role-play employed by the author, which required the trainees to imagine the lesson from the perspective of a pupil, as too innovative for the local trainees.

This initial investigation of the trainees' educational culture showed that there were significant differences between the trainer and the trainees. These concerned perceptions of educational issues (assessment as summative, trainees as students, author as inspector), the influence of the management upon the trainees (which the author had not taken into account), the fact that procedures were not considered important in the local setting, the features of locally-accepted English teaching (stemming from principles of the grammar-translation method), and the trainees' teacher-centred approach to classroom performance. There was, as Carlsen said, a substantial difference in labelling educational issues (1999).

Nevertheless, this understanding was useful when arranging the research methodology. From the recognized emphasis on outcomes and the tendency to neglect procedures, for example, the author understood that other paper tests had to be avoided, and that the establishment of fixed and measurable targets could have produced anxiety and competitiveness. This included English language paper tests, which would be jeopardized by the trainees' habit of focusing on grammar-translation related tasks only. Also, asking trainees to talk or write about procedures without helping them to visualize realistic teaching scenarios, or to ask them to imagine teaching from the pupils' perspective, had proved ineffective and beyond their sphere of experience. The trainees' belief that the author was in fact an inspector (revealed during the analysis of the test) also suggested the limitations of relying upon classroom observations. These were therefore employed together with lesson planning and lesson evaluation. Finally, the pressure placed upon the trainees and the head teacher by the kindergarten management led to the decision that keeping the kindergarten manager at arm's length would be beneficial for the research process.

In an attempt to further develop this awareness and understanding of trainees' educational culture, *Session 3* gave the trainees the opportunity to express their opinions on a number of educational issues by commenting on seven statements which, borrowed from Stuart et al. (2009), were illustrated and discussed during the session. This activity required the trainees to state whether and why they agreed/disagreed with the statements in their diaries as a homework assignment (Stuart et al 2009:21/23). Statement 1 was related to discipline, and asked whether, although corporal punishment in kindergarten was wrong, waving the cane might still be useful to maintain discipline in the classroom and to encourage the pupils to concentrate. Statement 2 aimed to understand the extent to which religious habits affected local education, and asked whether teachers should help pupils learn to write with their right hand and refrain from using the left hand, which in the Arab world is considered unclean.

Statement 3 sought to understand the trainees' image of themselves as teachers by asking whether teachers should ever apologize to pupils. Statement 4 also investigated the trainees' perspective on their self-image as teachers, asking if a teacher only needed to learn practical

skills and activities/games in order to become a good teacher. Statement 5 asked whether learning was synonymous with memorizing through repetition, in order to understand the trainees' beliefs relating to learning. Statement 6 concerned gender, and enquired if girls needed less schooling because they would be at home once they were married anyway. Finally, Statement 7 investigated the trainees' attitudes towards their pupils by asking them to comment on the statement that 'nowadays pupils do not listen as they used to'. The answers to these statements were examined during data analysis (see Chapter 5).

In order to acquire a more holistic understanding of the trainees' educational beliefs, they were also asked to prepare educational autobiographies (Stuart et al. 2009) by responding in writing to the following topics:

- a) Introduce yourself and your family;
- b) Describe your experience as kindergarten and/or primary school pupil;
- c) Recall the best and/or worst teachers and describe the qualities which made them as such;
- d) Explain why you decided to become a teacher, and what teacher you are/would like to be;
- e) Envisage your life in five years' time.

The aim of the autobiographies was to provide information concerning the trainees' self-images as teachers, which has been shown in existing research to be among the most influential beliefs upon classroom performance (Fenstermacher 1986).

#### **4.4.2 Phase 2 and Phase 3: trainees develop an informed personal teaching methodology**

Up to this point, although useful information had been gathered in terms of trainees' principles and practices, the trainees still appeared in the midst of the process of developing an awareness of their knowledge and of themselves as teachers. This was seen as an obstacle to the introduction of new educational principles and practices simply by lecturing the trainees. Consequently, a set of activities was proposed. These included lesson planning followed by teaching practice, and an evaluation of teaching performance. The aim was threefold: to further stimulate teachers' investigation of their own and their peers' teaching; to present the trainees with a problem-solving framework for lesson planning; and to gather more data for the study concerning teachers' educational principles and practices.

*Session 4* consisted of a short lecture, in which lesson structure was explored and re-arranged in line with a problem-solving approach, which was developed by reviewing relevant academic literature and by discussing it with the trainees. The rationale for introducing lesson planning was in order to provide trainees with a tool to explore their own teaching culture and to help the author monitor their progress. The short lecture proved necessary, as previous samples of trainees' lesson plans had shown that their lesson planning was limited to the description of objectives and activities.

Eventually, it was agreed that the trainees would plan a lesson by illustrating how they would represent and explain a topic through analogies, examples, and metaphors (which is where

PCK is manifested – Shulman 1986b); how they would highlight the connection between the topic and the real life experience of pupils (Dewey 1922); how they would build the new topic based on pupils' previous knowledge ('continuity'); the topic-related misconceptions and difficulties ('challenges') which the trainee could anticipate the pupils facing during the lesson (Fuson 1999:12/14); relevant pedagogical solutions they would envisage (Shulman 1986b:6; Rowan et al.2001:2); suggestions for simultaneous multi-level teaching which they could identify; and how they would structure and assign homework.

After the short lecture, the trainees were each asked to plan a mock-lesson by making use of the author's suggestions, and to share these with their peers at the end of the session (micro-teaching). Finally, as homework, the trainees were asked to plan three lessons upon topics of their choice (English, Arabic and Maths), to teach one of these lessons, and to comment in writing upon their own and their peers' performance.

Before the homework was handed in, *Session 5* was delivered to discuss and organize self / peers' lesson evaluation. This is a complex process, as research has showed that inexperienced teachers are likely to limit their evaluation to descriptions of observable events which occur during lessons (Stuart et al. 2009). Accordingly, the session was organized by identifying a number of questions which the trainees had to answer while observing and evaluating their own and others' performances. These included: evaluating the feasibility of the selected objectives, the efficiency of the introduction and presentation of the topic, the nature and appropriateness of the challenges identified and of the proposed solutions, and giving final suggestions to their peers.

The aim of *Session 6* was to discuss local theories of how pupils learn the letters of the alphabet (English and Arabic language), to question locally-accepted assumptions concerning the written representation of knowledge and repetition for memorization, and to suggest and demonstrate some relevant international principles, practices and skills. This was both a response to trainees' request to learn 'something new' from the training course (which they had expressed in writing during one of the activities in Session 3), and an attempt to deconstruct and understand the methods for teaching letters which were in use in the kindergarten.

The session used a combined lecture and workshop approach. Initially, suggestions for discussion were collected from the trainees' written commentaries, and organized around two broad topics. The first topic concerned the practice of memorizing and repeating information (letters of the alphabet, in this case), which was shared by all the trainees to varying degrees (and with a degree of criticism). The discussion aimed to engage the trainees with the locally shared idea that learning is synonymous with memorizing and retrieving information and with the locally-accepted behaviourist principle of the law of exercise. Instead, the author introduced the internationally-derived notion that memorization and repetition are exclusive, energy-consuming practices which may not provide quality learning. Instead, it was emphasised that pupils' active understanding of subject matter and engagement between the teacher and the pupils should be fostered, in opposition to rigid 'chalk 'n' talk', memorization

or one-way transmission of content knowledge (UNESCO 2004; UNESCO 2008; MOE 2007d).

Some of the trainees had already questioned these traditional teaching practices, as the following quotations illustrate:

Repetition teaches clever students (proverb). But repetition only helps with memorizing. But when you memorize without understanding, it is easily forgotten. If I explain to a child a lesson, without trying to use memorization, it would be better (Hd-9).

The moment you finish your studying by heart, you'll forget all what learnt. So the most suitable method is to practise and to be involved in activities which so much affect the child and s/he will memorize it. Because through practice and repetition the child manages to memorize what she studies by heart (Id-16).

The problem is that some children cannot distinguish [between some letters] (Gd-34).

Hafa had difficulty as some children didn't remember or got confused between letters and and . I agree with her that a lot of times children can forget the dots or the shapes. This is a problem for the teacher when doing revision (Nd-30).

During the discussion on the drawbacks of repetition for content memorization, all the trainees agreed that memorization and repetition were extremely time and energy-consuming. However, none of the trainees lamented the passivity which teachers and pupils were exposed to by implementing such method. On the contrary, they all suggested giving the pupils more repetition-based exercises as a strategy to overcome these obstacles, which repeated ideas they had expressed in their diaries.

The second topic discussed during Session 6 concerned the local practice (and related beliefs) of first teaching individual letters, and then moving on to writing and reading whole words ('sequential learning'). Some related quotes read:

In order that children know how to pronounce and read words of Rabbit or Lion, it is a must to learn how to read and write a, b, c, d (Fd-29).

Learn English letters to easily learn English words afterwards (Fd-34).

It is useful and very important that the child knows how to read and write letters before the words' (Fd-50); 'it is necessary to make children at this stage memorize by themselves alphabet from A to Z (Gd-16).

To teach kids the alphabet though identifying 'A' followed by B, B followed by C. Each alphabet [letter] is explained one by one separately. Following this we repeat and play games of alphabet (Gd-19).

Kids will learn at this stage ten capital letters in English and be acquainted with English. Kids by learning the above can know few words in English (Gd-23).

[...] in order to read or write [words] we have to learn these three letters A B T (Hd-29).

In this case, the discussion aimed to present trainees with an argument which questioned their sequential approach to teaching languages, and which supported the introduction of an alternative method. This alternative method proposed that, first, visual representations of knowledge such as objects, flashcards or drawings are introduced, followed by whole words, and finally each individual letter which formed that word. This new method was devised by borrowing from the principles and practices of the communicative approach to English language teaching (Swan and Smith 2001). One of these principles states that words are symbols for real objects before being combinations of letters. Consequently, it is more natural and straightforward for the pupils to associate a word with an object which they can relate to, instead of a group of isolated letters which they are not familiar with. At the same time, to ensure continuity with the local emphasis on individual letters, it was also suggested that once the pupils had connected whole words to the objects, the words could be broken down to teach the individual letters which formed them.

However, three trainees expressed concern about implementing this method in the classroom. During the session, Iba re-stated her belief that teaching should still follow the sequence 'letter to word' and increase the practice of repetition (AS6-1550). Hafa feared that starting with whole words would be too challenging for pupils (AS6-1600), though she recognized that teaching individual letters would leave the pupil with the challenging task of combining them into a word (ibid.). Falak preferred her own method, of teaching each letter by associating it to the three vowel sounds (e.g. 'ba, bu, bi') through repeated practice, then eventually moving to whole words (AS6-2420).

The author therefore used a specific example to challenge the trainees' assumption that letters should be learned before words. The trainees were asked whether they had learned to say and recognize the word *Baba* (Arabic for father) by spelling it, or via some other forms association, and whether in their opinion the whole word *Baba* conveyed a stronger meaning than the individual letters ' '. Next, three English words ('chair', 'house' and 'yellow') were introduced to show the trainees that the knowledge of those words was not affected by their lack of spelling skills. This was demonstrated by the fact that the trainees could name the pictures of the objects, but not spell correctly the corresponding English words. The principle underlying this new teaching method was that it is possible to use an English word, and therefore to learn it even if the exact pronunciation and shape of the individual letters which make up a word is not known.

Although the trainees eventually agreed to try out the new method in the classroom, most of them remained uneasy about this. Hafa, for example, showed concern about the parents, who might question the 'picture-word-letter' method, although Iba argued for her right to choose her own methods in the classroom (AS6-4730). The session was concluded by giving the trainees an assignment, which required them to plan a lesson for teaching an English topic

according to the communicative method. The trainees were also told that the author would observe and video their classroom performance.

During *Session 7*, individual feedback was given to the trainees using the videos of the lessons. The author had already watched and analysed these videos, and selected a number of relevant events to be discussed and written about in the feedback for each trainee on individual hand-outs. These were handed to the trainees at the beginning of the session. The comments included positive remarks, the analysis of critical passages, and suggestions for improvement. One comment concerned the practice of associating a letter with one word only (e.g. 'C' – cat), in consideration of the non-phonetic nature of the English alphabet, which means that the same letter can produce different sounds according to the letters it is combined with. For example, the sound of letter 'C' would be /sɪ:/ in 'city', but /k/ in 'cat'. Another comment addressed the practice of introducing simultaneously the letter 'a' in upper and lower cases, which appeared too confusing for the pupils. One suggestion was to use flashcards representing the objects pictured by a letter (e.g. for the Arabic letter *fa*, *faraola* – strawberry, and *farasha* – butterfly).

The reaction of the trainees to the feedback was mixed, but critical and defensive overall. One of the trainees asserted that the communicative principles and practices introduced in the previous session were unfit in the local context, and did not suit her teaching style. In her view, this had confused her behaviour in the classroom, and caused her to make the mistakes highlighted in her feedback. Another trainee questioned the communicative approach to teaching languages since it did not familiarise pupils with the letters of the alphabet. Instead, she preferred to employ her teaching method, which was also the way she and her parents had learnt. One other trainee was less forthcoming, and simply commented that she preferred her own method. Hafa was the only trainee to accept her feedback positively, as shown by her subsequent classroom performance, where she implemented the suggestions made by the author.

The session was concluded by a discussion of pupils' educational needs, in light of the job opportunities offered by the community. According to most trainees, the types of employment offered by the community required limited acquaintance with literacy and numeracy, which the existing teaching methods could easily provide. As shown below, however, rather than reflecting trainees' actual beliefs, these responses seemed more indicative of trainees' defensive reaction to the author's feedback.

*Session 8* was structured to respond to the trainees' negative and critical reaction to the feedback given during the previous session. The aim of the session was threefold. Firstly, the author wanted to avoid further conflict with the trainees; jeopardizing the relationship between trainer and trainees would undermine the process and outcomes of the course. Secondly, while it was clear that the trainees still believed their skills and teaching methods could be improved through training, their confusion as to how their progress would be measured has discouraged and disempowered them. Consequently, *Session 8* aimed to

increase trainees' agency by allowing them choose the criteria by which their classroom performance would be evaluated. Thirdly, Session 7 had shown that the trainees had not yet fully developed an awareness and acceptance of the misconceptions implicit in their educational beliefs and practices. As a consequence, Session 8 created the conditions for trainees to realise that their misconceptions were false.

In light of these aims, the trainees were asked to select their own criteria to measure classroom performance during Session 8. The chosen criterion was the academic achievement of their pupils, according to their learning abilities. Certainly, this criterion does not match the holistic vision of ECCE in international approaches discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, which includes health, citizenship, emotions and social skills as key aims of ECCE. At the same time, however, this exclusively academic focus was consistent with local perceptions of the aim of education and recognized as valid by the individual trainees, as well as the parents (who only enquired about the reading and writing skills of their children) and the kindergarten management. Scholars have questioned approaches in which different targets are set for pupils with different learning abilities, claiming instead that teachers should utilise different methods to achieve the same target for all pupils. In this case, however, these wider critiques and issues were set aside in favour of respecting the trainees' decisions, as the aim of the session was to empower trainees and to increase their self-awareness.

During the session, the trainees were given a grid (see Table 11 below) and asked to identify different short-term targets to be achieved within two weeks by pupils belonging to groups with different learning abilities. The subjects to choose from were English, Mathematics and Arabic language. Trainees were set a homework assignment, which involved preparing a lesson according to the hand-out completed during a session. This included choosing a teaching method, the specific targets for the lesson and forms of assessment in advance. It was also decided that the author would only observe the class in which for pupils were evaluated, which took place at the end of the 2-week period. The form of evaluation chosen by the trainees involved assessing pupils' written and oral performance by using the blackboard.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>What my pupils can learn in 2 weeks</b>
3-4 yrs	Upper group	e.g. letters A and B
	Lower group	e.g. letter A
5-6 yrs	Upper group	
	Lower group	

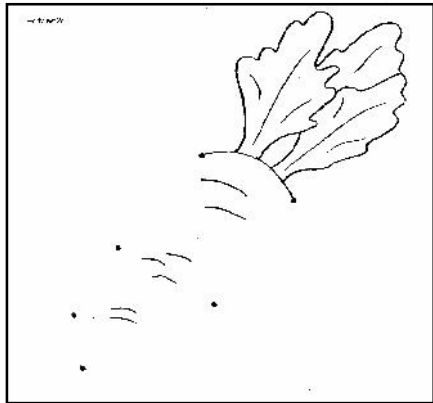
*Table 11: The grid used to help the trainees devise short-term targets*

*Session 9* presented the results of the observed evaluations to the trainees, which were the academic results of two weeks' teaching using the existing teaching methodology. The feedback was given collectively, by grouping the four performances and presenting a summary to the trainees. This showed that among the pupils belonging to the upper group called to the blackboard, 80% had achieved the target established by the teacher. At the same time, among the pupils belonging to the lower group, only 45% had achieved the target, while

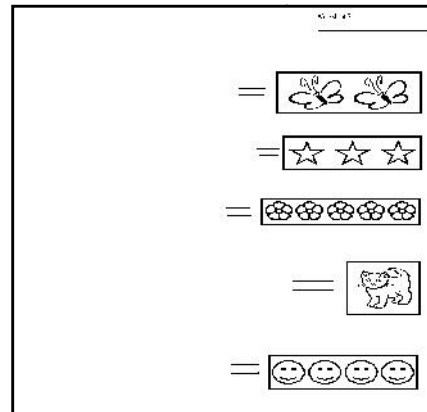


41% showed severe problems with writing. This seemed to confirm the local proverb mentioned by Hafa: repetition had succeeded in teaching the ‘clever’ students, but proved ineffective for those who were less able.

The poor performance of the pupils in the lower ability group convinced the trainees to resume the training and to try again the communicative teaching practices presented during Session 6. New skills and activities were also suggested during Session 9. These included games, drawings, tales, and pictures – two examples are pictured below (Pictures 16-17).



Picture 16: join the dots to draw the carrot (each dot represents a letter)



Picture 17: write the letters for the words for the pictured objects

#### 4.4.3 Phase 4: the final assessment

Ideally, the author would have carried out another session of lesson planning, teaching practice and formative feedback in order to help trainees to implement the communicative teaching methodology in their classroom. However, pressure from the trainees’ families and from the Ministry of Social Solidarity (who had sent inspectors to monitor the author’s activity), led the course to being shortened prematurely. This local and higher level pressure also meant that the summative feedback planned for the fourth phase of the course could not be delivered to the trainees.

During *Session 10*, the tasks of the final assessment (which were intended to take place in the following session) were illustrated to the trainees. The tasks aimed to further develop the trainees’ awareness of their own educational principles and practices (including misconceptions and false assumptions), and to assess their ability to implement the communicative teaching methods. Other tasks focused on developing trainees’ ability to evaluate their own classroom performance, to define topic-related challenges and devise suitable pedagogical solutions, and to identify long-term educational targets. To support the trainees, the head teacher and the author also prepared a portfolio (see appendices 9-10), which was left with the trainees for two weeks. The folder included a visual illustration of the communicative method, the suggestions discussed over the previous sessions to facilitate all pupils’ access to learning, and the description of activities and games which could help the trainees for planning the lesson for the final assessment.

The assessment (*Session 11*) consisted of four tasks, which were explained in detail by the head teacher who, by the end of the course, had acquired not just the confidence to communicate in English with the trainer and to translate to the trainees, but also to discuss her own pedagogical issues with her teachers. This was partly the result of a semi-structured English course which the author had delivered to the head teacher, but primarily due to the joint analysis of the videos of trainees' lessons. These analysis sessions had created the opportunity to exchange opinions, and to formulate new and shared ideas.

The first task of Session 11 was to plan a lesson by adapting the specific criteria of the model agreed during Session 4, which was readjusted throughout the course. Accordingly, the trainees were asked to identify objectives and activities for each group of pupils; illustrate the selected topic; describe the challenges and the solutions to help pupils overcome them; deploy skills for simultaneous multi-level teaching; employ teaching aids; and structure and assign homework. The second task involved delivering the planned lesson to the pupils (teaching practice). In this case, trainees were asked in particular to: focus on implementing group and visual learning techniques; refrain from using corporal punishment; and to assess the pupils throughout the lesson. The third task consisted of writing an evaluation of their performance in the less, guided by questions such as 'what did I do right?', and 'what should I improve?'. Trainees were also asked to follow the evaluation form developed during Session 5 as part of this task. The final task required the trainees to identify realistic targets which their pupils were likely to achieve by the end of the school year.

The tasks were marked by both the author and the head teacher, who agreed on a number of indicators. This agreement resulted from the author and the head teacher's joint analysis of the recorded exam lessons, which provided many suggestions and topics for discussion. With regard to the lesson plan (Task 1), indicators were selected and relevant qualitative criteria agreed. These criteria stated that the lesson's objectives had to be connected to pupils' previous knowledge, relevant, feasible and inclusive of non-cognitive aims, and the topic had to be presented as whole-class activity and by engaging and allowing all pupils to participate. Additionally, challenges had to be identified from a child-centred perspective, solutions had to be original and capable of meeting such challenges, and the teaching method had to foster the inclusion of all pupils. Finally, the activities were expected to be attractive, suitable to differing abilities, and fostering collective learning, the teaching aids had to be sustainable and engaging, and homework had to be presented as whole-class activity, differentiated according to the pupils' abilities, and inclusive of visual representations of knowledge.

Regarding teaching practice (Task 2), indicators and criteria were also selected. These included those identified for Task 1, and added several other criteria, including: multi-level teaching arrangements should be made for pupils with lower academic abilities; discipline should be maintained by engaging the pupils; alternative methods should be used if the pupils did not understand the first explanation; pupils should be allowed to transform content; and that homework should affirm pupils' agency and autonomy.

The criteria for the self-evaluation in Task 3 were as follows: the trainee should be able to explain why something had gone wrong and provide practical suggestions for improvement; the trainee should show awareness of the pupils' level of understanding and thinking processes; and that she should explain if her objectives had been achieved. Finally, regarding the overall targets (Task 4), the main criteria were teachers' ability to identify realistic topics and to include non-cognitive targets.

## **Chapter 5. Data presentation, analysis and overall findings**

### **5.1 Research Question 1.1: What are the trainees' existing practices for teaching English language?**

This question aims to understand and define the locally-accepted and recurrent educational practices which the trainees employ regularly in the classroom to teach English. Practices cannot simply be inferred from classroom observations, as they are intertwined with other practices and contextual elements, and this undermines the researcher's ability to isolate them. Moreover, the researcher's presence in the classroom may affect teachers' performance, to the point that the teachers may perform activities differently from their usual teaching routine. At the same time, teachers cannot be asked about their recurrent practices (e.g. through interviews) because classroom performance is often the product of contingent improvisation (see pedagogical content knowledge in Chapter 4). This means that classroom performance changes continually according to numerous factors, including the pupils in the classroom on a given day, or specific environmental circumstances such as the weather, lack of electricity, or external disruptions (e.g. road works). Moreover, some practices pertain exclusively to the individual and her personality traits, and so they cannot be seen as representative of the 'local' educational culture.

Accordingly, the author employed a combination of methods for data collection; each of these methods was repeated twice, which produced a large (and at times contradictory) amount of data. The process of data analysis was organized into five overlapping stages: data gathering, data selection (identification of emerging repeated patterns of practices), isolation of repeated practices, assessment for validity of the practices identified (statement analysis and triangulation), and cross-checking of identified practices with practices of other trainees (Patton 2002:376). The aim of the analysis was to identify the educational practices which actually recurred in the teachers' daily performance, independent of the researcher's presence, which could therefore be considered as indicative of the local educational culture.

The analysis mainly concerned the cases of two trainees, Falak and Hafa, and the first set of lessons focused on English, Arabic and Maths. For the second and final assignments the trainees were free to select and plan a lesson on a subject of their choice. Two trainees, who were less confident in their proficiency in English, chose Arabic and Maths for their final assignments. This undermined the continuity between subjects required for the analysis (as this focussed on English); however, their data were still used to strengthen the validity of the practices inferred from the other two selected cases, and to establish whether practices could be considered as locally-shared practices or specific to the individual trainee.

Falak (Case 1) was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, she had chosen English as the subject for her second lesson. Secondly, of the trainees who had attended the applied science model training course (discussed in Chapter 2), Falak was the only trainee who was still working at the kindergarten. This meant that she had an expansive repertoire of well-structured activities and games, and a higher level of awareness concerning her own educational culture. Hafa

(Case 2) was similarly selected because she chose English as her subject for all three assignments. Additionally, although she had not received any prior training, she was well-acquainted with the guidelines provided by the course trainer (discussed in Chapter 2), which presented structured activities and games. Finally, and most importantly, she was selected for being strong-willed and sincerely motivated to implement the new educational principles and practices advised by the author, and to use this as a means to enrich (rather than completely change) her teaching methodology. In her diary, for example, she stated,

Most important is that I have strong feeling for challenging, not surrendering easily  
(Hd-1).

It was therefore assumed that eventual obstacles to the implementation of new knowledge would take the form of wider sociological and cultural issues, rather than resistance from the individual trainee (due to e.g. personality and / or lack of motivation).

The findings of this section present the educational practices involved in both trainees' approach to teaching English. However, the description of the data analysis process focuses on Falak's practices, as the same process was used for both trainees. Additionally, Hafa's practices are described in the discussion of Research Question 1.2

### **5.1.1 Stages of analysis**

An inductive analysis was carried out, which aimed to allow relevant educational practices emerge from the data (Patton 2002). The first stage of the analysis involved gathering and organizing data concerning trainees' English language teaching practices. Data were gathered from two sets of lesson plans, self-peers' lesson evaluations, classroom observations, and other ethnographic methods for data collection discussed in Chapter 3. In light of the large amount of data, the information was initially organized into nine broad categories, which matched the areas of classroom performance specified in the model of lesson plan and in the evaluation form (Sessions 4 and 5 of the training course). These areas were: personal information about the trainee, physical context (classroom), objectives of the lesson, representation and explanation of content, challenges and relevant pedagogical solutions identified by trainees, teaching and learning strategies deployed, activities proposed to the pupils (including games and teaching aids), arrangements made for simultaneous multi-grade teaching, and issues concerning classroom management and discipline.

During the second stage of analysis, information organized in these nine areas concerning the same practice was selected according to emerging patterns, and triangulated to identify a number of recurrent practices (Kellehear 1993). During the third stage of analysis, in order to refine the practices identified, a statement indicative of each practice was selected from the data and assessed for internal validity according to the criteria of quality (e.g. evidence-based, value statements), verifiability by the researcher, and frequency in the sources (Patton 2002). Specific examples in which the practice was implemented were also included. Furthermore, at this stage a number of incongruent claims and practices could be identified, which were

used to challenge the local practices during the training course (Sessions 6-10). During the fourth and final stage of analysis, once the practices had been identified, refined and assessed for validity, they were cross-checked with the practices identified (Case 2), to exclude practices which were not shared. The educational practices identified through this analysis could therefore be considered as representative of the group of trainees enrolled on the course.

### 5.1.2 Data presentation and analysis (Falak, Case 1)

*Personal information.* At the time of the study, Falak was 22 years old. She held a leaving certificate from a technical institute, and had not attended kindergarten as a child. She was engaged to be married, which eventually resulted in her withdrawal from the course during its final stages. She had been working as teacher in the kindergarten for almost a year, while attending the applied science teacher training course. She scored the lowest marks in the paper test employed for the initial assessment.

*Description of the classroom* (see Pictures 18 to 21 below). Falak's typical lesson addressed around 20 pupils (both boys and girls), who were aged four to six years, and were accommodated on adult chairs in a semi-circle without desks. The classroom was equipped with a small blackboard (which meant that written instructions etc. were barely legible) and limited supply of chalk. An alphabet chart was positioned high up on the wall, above the blackboard, which the pupils similarly could not read. There was a working fan, two neon lights, and a small foldable desk which served as teaching post (D1-45). The window was equipped with a mosquito net, although the number of flies in the room was often overwhelming due to the pile of rubbish which accumulated outside the kindergarten. This was disruptive for the teaching and learning process, as well as for data collection.



Picture 18: Falak's classroom and pupils



Picture 19: Alphabet wall chart and blackboard



Picture 20: Rubbish piled outside the school



Picture 21: Flies on the school shutters

### ***Practice 1: patterning individual letterforms and spelling sounds***

*Description of the practice:* Presenting individual letterforms by combining them with the letter's spelling sound ('a'-/ei/; 'b'-/bi:/) (for the English phonetic alphabet chart, please see appendix 2).

*Procedure:* the teacher spells out letter 'a' as /ei/, then writes letter 'a' on the board (or vice-versa), while the pupils are observing from their seat. Then, the pupils repeat in group after the teacher the spelling sound /ei/, and come to the board individually to write letter 'a'.

*Statement:* "to slowly read the alphabets [letters] from A to Z to kids. Verbally first, and then in written forms, to assist them study all by heart" (Fd-36).

*Validity:* This statement, taken from the English lesson plan, was chosen as indicative of the targeted practice for two reasons. Firstly, it goes beyond a description of the strategy, and explains why the strategy was chosen (e.g., this practice helps pupils to memorize the letters of the alphabet). By providing a rationale for the practice, this quote was assumed to be indicative of the trainees' actual practice because it was a value statement (Patton 2002). Secondly, this practice was witnessed repeatedly by the author during classroom observations, particularly for oral revision at the beginning of the school day or in the presentation of new letters. The identified practice revealed an emphasis on individual letters, which was shared with other data gathered at the second stage of the analysis.

With regard to the lesson's objective, for example, Falak stated explicitly that the lesson aimed to help pupils recognize individual letters (Fd-38). Accordingly, most suggested activities involved practising individual letters. These included rearranging letters in alphabetical order (Fd-38); identifying individual letters within words (e.g. find 'a' in 'ant') (Fd-37); combining individual letters to form words and names; identifying letters with similar shapes (Fd-31/32); mentioning words which included the targeted letter (Fd-33); and counting the letters included in a word (Fd-39). This emphasis was evident in the topic-related challenges and solutions identified by Falak, suggested by the following quotation:

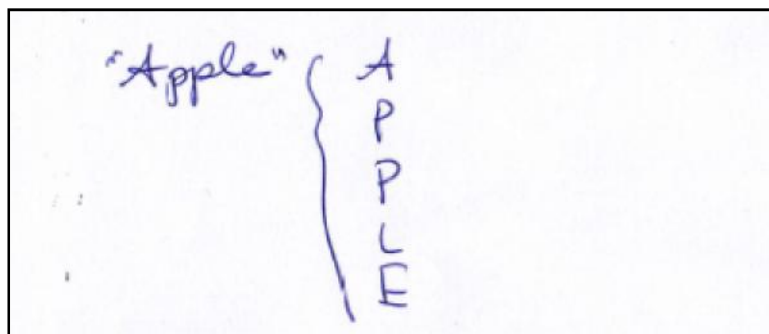
To read and write [the letters of the alphabet] [...] takes time, and I should not rush to finish all alphabet quickly to ensure that the kids learnt all alphabet [letters] [because] it is a must to learn how to read and write a, b, c, d (Fd-29/30).

Similarly, another quotation from one of her peers recalled a parents' meeting, when Falak asked a mother to support her daughter at home by allowing her to memorize two letters per day (Id-46/47). Falak also explained this emphasis on individual letters by saying that they were propaedeutic to learning whole words, a claim first in the Arabic lesson plan and again in the English lesson plan.

In order that children know how to pronounce and read words like 'arnab' or 'asad', it is a must to learn how to read and write 'a, b, c, d' (Fd-29/30).

In order to easily learn the English word 'apple', pupils first need to learn the individual letters (Fd-35).

Falak's rationale for these claims was that words were combinations of individual letters. This belief was expressed by writing the word as 'a-p-p-l-e' (Picture 22) (Fd-35), and, during an informal conversation, by employing the metaphor of 'bricks and walls' to describe the relationship between individual letters and whole words. The same assumption was also evident in activities during the Maths lesson, where adding involved counting the individual units needed by the first number to reach the final result (e.g.  $2 + 3 = 2 + 1 + 1 + 1$ ). Just as words were viewed as combinations of letters, numbers were also viewed as combinations of single units.



Picture 22: Falak's representation of the word 'A-P-P-L-E'

*Incongruities:* One incongruent element in Falak's practice concerned the association of individual letters and sounds (e.g. 'a'-/ei/). The trainee used a 'sub-lexical' systematic reading method which associated letters and sounds before introducing whole words (Richards and Rodgers 2001). Unlike methods such as 'phonics learning', however, which works by associating letters with the sound they may acquire within words (e.g. the sound /k/ can be associated to letters 'c' 'k' and 'ck'), the teacher only paired individual letters with their spelling sound. So, for example, she would write the letter 'a' on the board and read it out as /ei/, thus ignoring the other sounds which letter 'a' may produce when combined with other letters in a word. This jeopardized the efficiency of her method, leaving the pupil unable to recognize the same letter in different words.



## **Practice 2: patterning letters with words**

*Description of the practice:* presenting individual letters by combining them with the initial letter's spelling sound and shape of whole words (/ei/-/ apəl/; 'a'-'apple').

*Procedure:* the teacher associates letters and words in writing by using the blackboard ('a – apple'), and then orally (/ei/-/ apəl/) (or vice-versa), while the pupils observe from their seats. The pupils repeat the combination (/ei/-/ apəl/) after the teacher as a group, and then come to the blackboard individually to write letter 'a' and the word 'apple'.

*Statement:* "The beginning is so simple as I read letters. Kids then notice that the word 'apple' starts with 'a', and so on and so forth [for the other letters]" (Fd-36).

*Validity:* This statement, selected from the English lesson plan, was chosen as indicative of the identified practice for three reasons. Firstly, it explains why this practice is employed, with a claim that pupils would 'notice' the similarity between letters and words (value statement). Secondly, it reveals that the same practice will be employed with all the letters of the English alphabet. Thirdly, the practice illustrated by the statement was witnessed repeatedly by the author during classroom observations, particularly for oral revision (D1-45). Unlike the first practice, this second practice has no explicit reference elsewhere in the lesson plans or evaluations. However, it stems from the same assumption, namely that words are combinations of letters. It was also reflected in two activities deployed by Falak, which involved finding words starting with the given letter (Fd-33) and matching letters to words according to their initials (Fd-37).

The practice also matched one of the objectives of Falak's lessons, which was to "teach kids reading [...] some words and studying them by heart" (Fd-34). Moreover, similar activities were observed in two other kindergartens and in the local primary school, and it was also reflected in the structure of the learning wall maps in Falak and Hafa's classrooms. These wall maps (in Arabic and English) represented a letter matched with a word according to its initials (see Pictures 23 and 24). Other learning wall maps, which the author found in one of Cairo's major stationary shops, similarly included a picture of the object represented by the word, together with the word and its initial letter highlighted.



*Pictures 23 and 24: examples of learning wall maps available at Cairo's stationary shops*

*Incongruities:* The first incongruent element of Falak's practice concerned the statement itself. This claimed that, according to the trainee, pupils would learn the patterns of letter and word by listening to the teacher reading the letters in alphabetical order. It is not clear, however, how pupils notice that 'apple' (pron. / apəl/) starts with the letter 'a', if this is pronounced /ei/. Considering the non-phonetic nature of the English alphabet, this problem would also recur with many other letters, for example with the letter 'c' (pron. /si:/), which was often associated with the word 'cat' (pron. (/kæt/)). This occurred with other letters as well, as different pronunciations of the letter 'a' indicated whether it is used in 'angel' (/ 'eɪndʒəl/), 'apple' (/ apəl/), 'cat' (/kæt/), or 'about' (/ə 'baʊt/).

Consequently, while the written pattern would still benefit from the visual similarity between the isolated 'a' and the letter 'a' situated at the beginning of the word, the oral pattern only relied upon being presented contiguously. The second incongruity concerned the rationale for using this practice ('a-p-p-l-e'). According to Falak, pupils would learn whole words by learning the spelling and shape of the individual letters which made up these words. Classroom observations, however, showed that the trainee employed a rather different teaching strategy ('a – a-pple'), in which only the initial letter of the word was taught explicitly and directly.

The author observed that, by March, the pupils in Falak's classroom were only familiar with four to five letters of the English alphabet. From this, it could be inferred that it was evidently not possible to rely on the knowledge acquired to support the learning of whole words by combining individual letters. This incongruity may provide one explanation for the value Falak placed on her pupils' ability to display their knowledge of words. This was inferred from an informal conversation between Falak, the head teacher and the author, in which Falak proudly mentioned that one of her pupil's grandparents was impressed by hearing the boy pronounce a whole English word (recalled from memory). The trainee's aim was apparently for pupils to learn the words at least orally, as she saw this as evidence of their learning.

### ***Practice 3: Repeating content for memorizing information***

*Description of the practice:* Allowing pupils to repeat single content items and letter-word patterns to facilitate memorization.

*Procedure:* After presenting the content (e.g. individual letters), the teacher helps the pupil to memorize it by repeating the content orally (rote learning), in writing (e.g. homework, board work), or through activities and games.

*Statement:* "To teach kids reading of some words and studying them by heart" (Fd-34)

*Validity.* This descriptive statement, selected from the English lesson plan, shows that Falak views learning as synonymous with memorizing the information given by the teacher. The

trainee's use of the phrase 'study by heart' on several other occasions supports the validity of this statement:

To slowly read the alphabets [...]. Verbally first and then in written forms to assist them study all by heart (Fd-36),

[...] to push him/her observe and study the letters by heart (Fd-38).

The validity of the statement is also supported by the fact that the author witnessed this practice repeatedly during classroom observations. The practice of memorizing was also implicit in the nature of the topic presentation. In order to teach letters, for example, the trainee paired individual letters with their spelling sound ('a'=/eɪ/) (Fd-34), while in order to teach words, these were paired with their initials (/eɪ/-/ apəl/) (Fd-36). These combinations (and particularly the oral ones) were mainly based on contiguity rather than similarity; in other words, there was no clear relationship between the letter and its sound apart from being presented contiguously.

Similarly, this topic presentation did not allow pupils to link new information to content which had been previously acquired. As a result, new information could only be memorized from scratch, which in turn required the constant and daily repetition of the information ('practice and drill'). Failing to practise new content would result in the pupils forgetting it, as the trainee herself noticed when she identified the challenges of this teaching method (Fd-30). The practice of breaking down the content into small parts (e.g. 'a-p-p-l-e') was also implied by the definition of learning as memorization, as the whole content was considered too challenging to be memorized by the pupils, and so it had to be broken down into smaller parts (e.g. individual letters).

The practice of repetition was also reflected in the nature of homework tasks; in one example, the teacher wrote individual letters and / or words on the top of a page in their exercise books, and pupils were simply asked to re-write these letters or words vertically down the page. Finally, the trainee explicitly linked memorization and repetition in the following statement:

We can repeat numbers or words, but memorizing sometimes for some children is hard in the beginning and afterwards, it becomes easier depend on teachers and mothers. It is role of mothers and teachers (Fd-10).

The implication of this statement is that it is the responsibility of teachers and parents to guarantee and increase pupils' exposure to the content, in order to ensure that pupils can memorize the content (Id-46/47).

#### ***Practice 4: one-to-one tutoring***

*Description of the practice:* Explaining the topic to pupils individually during whole-class teaching.

*Procedure:* After a brief whole-class presentation and explanation of the content, pupils are called individually to the board to be given further explanation and an opportunity to practice it.

*Statement:* “sometimes it is difficult to let read all of them [pupils] in the class” (Fd-29)

*Validity:* This statement, selected from the Arabic lesson plan, explains the rationale for employing the one-to-one tutoring practice, which was seen as necessary due to the challenging nature of the teaching method based on memorizing small parts of content through daily repetition. Falak identified several challenges associated with this method, including the fact that it was time and energy-consuming, and in particular that some pupils were left behind during the whole-class explanation and activity. Consequently, they required opportunities for individual explanation and practice. Although the actual practice of one-to-one tutoring was not explicitly mentioned in the lesson plans or evaluations, the author witnessed this practice repeatedly during classroom observations, particularly during the second part of the lesson and when homework was assigned. Furthermore, data were gathered concerning another practice, ‘model learning’, which the trainee presented as complementary to one-to-one tutoring. When Falak was asked about the benefits to the rest of the pupils in a class during one-to-one tutoring, she replied that they would learn by listening to and observing the pupils called to the board.

*Incongruities:* ‘Model learning’ (or *Alqudwah Al Hassina*, selection of the ‘good model’) is accepted and encouraged in the Arab-Islamic tradition, because “it emerges from the Holy Koran advice to the believers to consider the Prophet (PBUH) behaviour as the good model and a reference to their behaviour” (Khan 2005:4). This practice mainly consists of observing a model’s behaviour, and implementing in practice what was seen and heard. However, model learning does not only imply observation, but also imitation of the model and developing further cognitive knowledge about the model through illustrations, demonstrations or role play (ibid.) However, Falak’s pupils did not seem to take up the opportunity to practice the observed behaviour of their peers. Rather than the exemplification of good behaviour, the class often became restless and disruptive during supposed ‘observation’ periods while individual pupils were at the blackboard, which resulted in punishment.

#### ***Practice 5: putting discipline before pupils’ engagement***

*Description of the practice:* Waving the cane (Picture 25), hitting furniture, and / or beating the pupils.

*Procedure:* When pupils became excessively disruptive, Falak would wave the cane around, hit furniture with it, and in some cases lightly hit the pupils on their shoulders and arms to silence them.

*Statement:* “some children [still] like to make noise. These children cannot focus in a quiet environment. So they have to be punished to define their mistakes” (Fd-6)

*Validity:* This value statement, selected from Falak’s written commentaries, explains the rationale for employing the cane as disciplinary practice. This is primarily that the pupils who enjoy making noise become disruptive, and so have to be disciplined. However, data collected about Falak’s use of the cane (which was a hard wooden stick, one metre in



*Picture 25 - the cane in use in the kindergarten*

length, which was shared by the head teacher, the other trainees, and the school personnel) were ambiguous. During the initial, informal classroom observations, pupils were punished by being made to stand next to the door (D1-46), by being scolded and admonished, or by making them hold their hand in front of their mouth. However, during the formal monitoring and evaluation of classroom performance as part of the training course, Falak’s attitude changed. In particular, during the first structured observation, she was seen running to grab the cane, waving it in front of the pupils, and keeping it on her desk for the whole lesson (D1-256/259). This was not an isolated case, and this behaviour was often repeated, including occasions of actual (though light) beating.

Falak’s use of the cane targeted pupils who were lower achievers and who sat farther away from the trainee. She mainly used the cane during one-to-one tutoring, when the rest of the class were meant to silently observe and learn from their peers, but instead attempted to engage with the lesson. It was apparent that, although the author’s presence had initially encouraged a different approach to discipline, controlling the pupils was a significant concern for Falak. In particular, she seemed to view pupils’ unsolicited interest in the lesson as disruptive and intimidating. This was confirmed in a written comment about recognizing her own mistakes in front of the pupils:

I do not have to apologize to children because in some cases, this will make them more rebellion [rebellious] and this will intimidate me in front of any child and he can get used to the idea that I apologize to him (Fd-8).

This suggests that Falak used caning both as a disciplinary method and a means of self-defence.

### 5.1.3 Data presentation and analysis (Hafa, Case 2)

*Personal information.* Hafa was 23 years old at the time of this study, and described herself in the following terms:

I am a normal girl, living in a normal family, with a normal life. [...] Thank God I have a lot of hobbies. I like drawing, writing memos and poetry, watching horror and action movies and I like to build gifts, especially Valentine. I like housework, without exceptions. In the spare time I usually visit my relatives and friends and I write memos listening to romantic and sad music (Hd-13).

Hafa was part of a family of six, who she described as happy in spite of problems they were going through (her family and her eventually left the town in the summer of 2010). She was philosophical about this, reflecting that “this is the way it is, as life goes through happiness and sadness” (Hd-12). Further describing her family, she wrote:

My parents are the most important things in my life. I appreciate how they taught us the meaning of love, loyalty, honesty accountability and freedom. They have taught us a lot of principles, what life is, what the black and white are, how to face hard times and do not give up (Hd-12).

Hafa held a leaving certificate from a commercial institute, and she scored the highest marks in the paper test after the head teacher. She had attended kindergarten as a child, describing herself as a ‘clean and quiet and clever girl’ who was loved by all the teachers, although she recalled that she did not like playing or running like other children.

During break time I was sitting alone in the classroom. It does not mean I was scared or worried, I just wanted to be in class by myself. Even at home I would prefer be with my toys by myself (Hd-14).

Similarly, in primary school, she recalled that she was

...a clever student, loved by friends and teachers. I was quiet, lonely. I used to like the library, especially stories. I liked reading stories, I used to disclose the authors strategy/method and to apply to my stories, which was my hobby when I was 8 (Hd-15).

She was a confident and assertive young woman, and had recently ended her relationship with her fiancé because he had refused to give up smoking. Hafa had been working as teacher in the kindergarten for six months, although she had not anticipated a career as a teacher. In fact, she had become a teacher by chance, after passing the NGO’s selection procedure for joining the kindergarten. Since joining, she noted that she had learnt to “like children and my ability to work with them” (Hd-18).

It seemed that Hafa had not attended the NGO’s training course, and from her account, it seemed that she was only somewhat familiar with the guidelines provided by the teacher educator. Hafa held strong, conservative religious views, which was apparent on an occasion

when she refused to sit next to a young, unmarried Egyptian couple in a fast food restaurant in Cairo, as they were being openly affectionate and physically demonstrative. When asked about her future, she wrote the following

This [is] in God's hands, while humans cannot guarantee their life even for a second. So, how can you ask me about the next five years? Anyway I hope to be more successful than what I am doing now, either here in the kindergarten or anywhere else. When I was younger [...] I thought I would become accountant or doctor because I like science and maths. But inshallah (Hd-19).



Picture 26 - Hafa in her classroom

*Description of the classroom* (see Pictures 26 to 29 below): Hafa's lessons typically addressed around 25 pupils (boys and girls), who were aged four to five years old. Some of the pupils sat on adult-sized chairs without desks, others on the floor. The classroom was equipped with a large but still barely legible blackboard, with a limited supply of chalk. An alphabet chart was positioned high up on the wall, above the blackboard, which was also difficult for pupils to read.

There was a working fan, two neon lights, and a small foldable desk which served as teaching post (D1-45). There was also a fridge, a gas canister, a cupboard and a PC in the classroom – the latter was not functioning at the time of the study. There was no natural light, as the window was obstructed by a wall. In March, the layout of the classroom was re-arranged, with two rows of desks and benches (nailed to the floor) and two new wall charts (Chap. 5).



Picture 27 - Hafa's pupils (initial layout)



Pictures 28/29  
Classroom  
furniture



### 5.1.4 Findings: Falak and Hafa's shared practices

Table 12 summarizes the educational practices inferred from the analysis which were shared between Falak and Hafa.

<b>Falak</b>	<b>Hafa</b>
Emphasis on individual letters ( <i>patterning letterforms and spelling sounds</i> )	Emphasis on individual letters ( <i>breaking down letterforms</i> )
Patterning letters with words (contiguity)	Patterning letters with words (contiguity)
Repeating content for memorizing information (practice and drill)	Repeating content for memorizing information (practice and drill)
One-to-one tutoring	One-to-one tutoring
Putting discipline before pupils' engagement ( <i>caning</i> )	Putting discipline before pupils' engagement ( <i>facing the wall; scolding</i> )

Table 12: Educational practices for English language teaching shared between Falak and Hafa

Between the two sets of practices, two minor differences were evident. The first was that Hafa, while still putting emphasis on teaching individual letters and patterning letterforms and spelling sounds, also used to break down each letterform on the blackboard into strokes and curves, and to employ metaphors to describe each part (for example, letter ' ' was explained as a meatball located under a dish). The second was that, unlike Falak, Hafa avoided caning or even waving the cane, and instead employed other methods such as making disruptive pupils face the wall or scolding them. She was, nevertheless, still very strict in terms of classroom discipline. In her diary, she noted that although she disagreed with corporal punishment,

...sometimes, shouting at a child is not enough. So that is why physical punishment is needed (Hd-7).

Other educational practices which were identified through the analysis but were not shared between the two trainees (e.g. Falak's implementation of games such as bowling), have not been included here.



## **5.2 Research Question 1.2: What educational beliefs underlie the classroom practices of the trainees?**

This section maps out the network of educational beliefs underlying the classroom practices identified in Research Question 1.1. It is important to note that eliciting beliefs from trainees is hindered by the fact that these may be perceived as private, as they belong to their personal life history and are a fundamental part of their identity. Consequently, discussing beliefs may reveal personal feelings or perspectives which trainees may prefer to remain concealed. This was the case, for example, in the initial assessment (Sessions 1-2, Chapter 4), when trainees preferred not to discuss the processes they had gone through when answering questions. It was felt that this might reveal their actual thought processes, which could appear approximate, illogical, simplistic or intuitive even if they had supplied the correct answers.

The way in which trainees perceived the author – as an inspector rather than a facilitator – may have also inhibited the open expression of their beliefs. This perception was evident from the initial assessment, and further reinforced by the kindergarten manager Amid, who introduced a significant amount of tension by trying to portray the trainees as quality teachers in order to encourage the NGO to provide funds to complete construction on the kindergarten building. Finally, the task of eliciting beliefs was jeopardized by the fact that the trainees were asked to write (rather than talk) about their beliefs, which has proved to be challenging in previous research (Var Der Valk and Broekman 1999:20), especially in settings with limited levels of literacy (D3-14).

Another challenge when eliciting beliefs, particularly those which are held by the whole group, is that they can often be tacit, unspoken, and taken-for-granted ('doxa', in Bourdieu 1977). They could therefore be considered as 'what everybody knows', which means that there would not have been a need to express or discuss them previously. Similarly, these beliefs could concern topics which are 'not necessary to know', or even concepts which are beyond one's immediate grasp. This was again the case, for example, during the initial assessment and in the knowledge domain addressed by the paper test, which aimed to investigate the pedagogical content knowledge domain, which the trainees were unable to answer because they had never been asked to think of these concepts explore before, as Hafa observed after taking the test (Hd-2).

There are also challenges which are implicit in the process of inferring beliefs indirectly, for example from classroom practices. Firstly, there are no univocal and fixed connections between practices and beliefs, because these are continuously re-arranged according to the personal and contextual circumstances in which the practices are implemented (the presence of the researcher is one of these variable factors) (Charon 1989). Secondly, trainees may not put all of their beliefs into practice because they are not suited to specific environmental circumstances (Johnson et al. 2000), or because they are beliefs created by the trainees as alternatives to reality (Nespor 1987). Thirdly, while beliefs are organized in clusters (attitudes) around a specific object (e.g. discipline), some beliefs can be borrowed temporarily from other attitudes in certain circumstances, even if they are inconsistent with

the other beliefs clustered around the same object. As a consequence, this multiplies the already high number of possible combinations of beliefs underlying a single practice.

The analysis illustrated in this section was structured to meet these challenges implicit in the process of understanding beliefs. In particular, it benefitted from two assumptions. Firstly, knowledge of beliefs cannot be ‘fished out’ of the trainees, but needs to be built collaboratively by creating opportunities to develop empathy and meaningful deployment of practices (like lesson plans and teaching practice). On the basis of this assumption, quantitative research methods such as questionnaires were not used, even though these are very common among scholars investigating teachers’ beliefs (e.g. Nettle 1998; Murphy 2000). Secondly, it was assumed that the relationship between beliefs and practice needs to be problematized and assessed for validity before data concerning beliefs can be employed ‘blindly’ in a study.

The analysis started by mapping a group of recurrent, durable and intertwined practices, organized around one of the practices (identified in RQ 1.1) which was shared by Hafa and Falak. After this, it mapped out one of the possible clusters of recurrent, durable beliefs related to such practices (an ‘attitude’). The analysis developed through three overlapping stages. These stages were as follows:

- 1) Selecting one of Hafa’s practices from Research Question 1.1;
- 2) Identifying other practices related to the selected practice and understand the relationships between them;
- 3) Identifying educational beliefs which were related to the group of practices and understand the relationships among them. Diagrams 4 and 5 show the map of practices identified around the selected practice of ‘repetition’ (analysis stages 1 and 2).

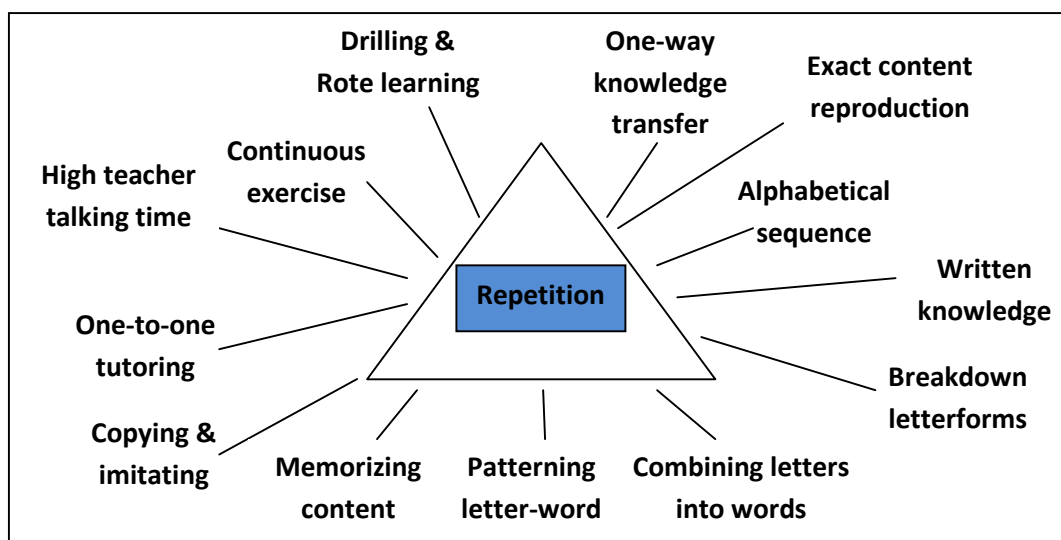


Diagram 4: The network of local educational practices related to the selected practice of ‘repetition’

As beliefs are potentially infinite, the analysis aimed to inductively investigate those types of beliefs which were seen as particularly influential upon fieldwork, both within the literature

(e.g Pajares 1992; John 2006; Stuart et al. 2009) and in post-fieldwork reflections. These were: epistemological beliefs (what learning means, how we learn, what knowledge is, and what knowledge should be taught); identity beliefs (features of good teaching and of the good teacher, self-image of the trainees as teachers); subject-specific beliefs (how languages are taught and learned, what words are); and broader beliefs concerning schooling and education in Egypt. Diagram 5 shows the map of beliefs identified around the group of practices related to the practice of ‘repetition’ (analysis stage 3).

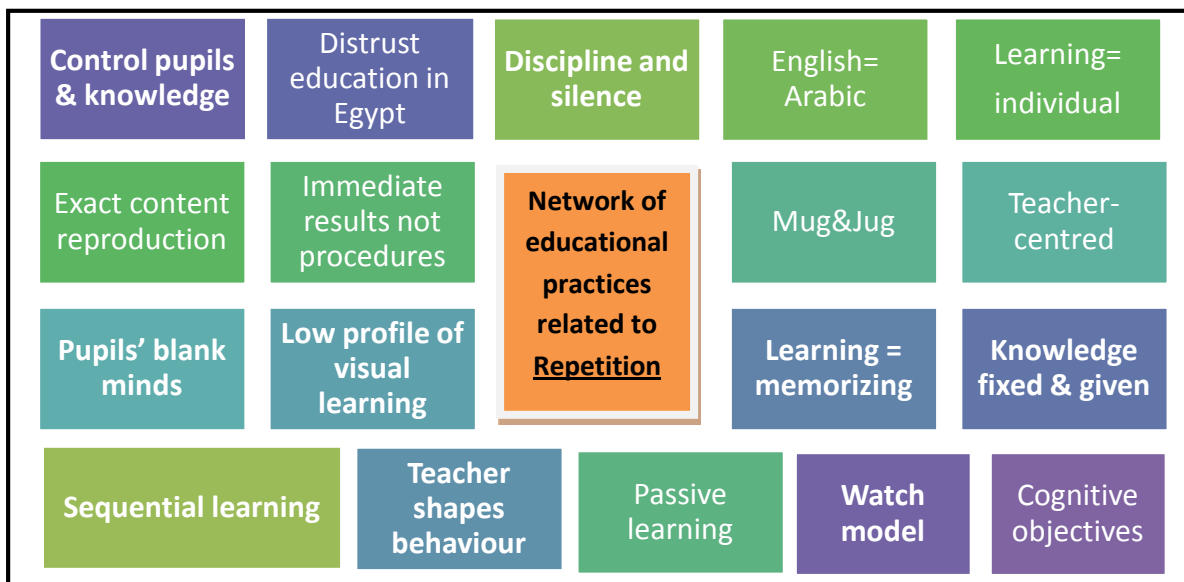


Diagram 5: The cluster of beliefs related to the selected network of educational practices

The four criteria employed to assess the validity of the inferred patterns of beliefs and practices were as follows:

- 1) Beliefs were shared among Hafa, Falak, and the other trainees. This criterion was selected because some practices and beliefs are contingent to the specific circumstances and individual personality traits (Charon 1989), and so cannot be considered ‘recurrent’.
- 2) The same belief was mentioned, or related to the same practice, in more than one source (frequency). This criterion was selected because patterns of practices and beliefs are continuously re-arranged, which problematizes the attempt to identify fixed and univocal patterns.
- 3) The inferred belief was coherent with the stated practice (e.g. in the lesson plan) and with the implementation of the practice (e.g. as understood from classroom observations). This criterion, suggested by several scholars (Goodman 1988; Janesick 1977; Rockeach 1968; Tabachnick&Zeichner 1984), was chosen because coherence would strengthen the validity of the inferred pattern.
- 4) The inferred belief was not coherent with the stated practice (e.g. in the lesson plan) and/or with the implementation of the practice (e.g. as understood from classroom observations). This criterion, suggested by other scholars (Gobbo 2003; ‘critical incident’ methodology), was chosen for three reasons. Firstly, a potential incongruity is that tacit beliefs may surface (Bourdieu 1999); secondly, holding a belief is not always

synonymous with being able to implement it (Johnson et al. 2000); and thirdly, beliefs are not necessarily organized in harmonious and coherent systems like knowledge (Pajares 1992). Accordingly, anomalies and exceptions may reveal beliefs which otherwise would remain unveiled.

### 5.2.1 Data presentation and analysis (Hafa, Stages 1-3)

The inductive analysis of Hafa's data produced information concerning four categories (or types) of beliefs. The information is presented in narrative form for each category by illustrating firstly, how practices and beliefs required and implied one another; secondly, whether practices and beliefs were shared with other trainees; and thirdly, how frequently they appeared in the sources. These categories were identified by answering questions which emerged from existing literature (especially Claxton in Claxton et al. 1996:45). These categories of beliefs concerned the nature of and the methods for learning, the features of the 'good' teacher, and the nature of knowledge. Some practices and beliefs applied to more than one category.

#### 1. *What is learning?*

When Hafa was asked whether learning was about **memorizing information**, she replied that if pupils memorize without understanding, they will forget the new information, and so it is would be better to avoid allowing pupils to memorize content in the classroom (Hd-9). The limitations of memorizing content matter were also mentioned when recalling her own experiences at school:

This feeling that during the lesson I understood, but afterwards I forgot everything  
(Hd-20).

However, the reality of Hafa's teaching performance contradicted these sentiments. In the English and Arabic lesson plans, for example, she explicitly and repeatedly stated that the aim of the lesson was to let pupils memorize information, which she called 'studying by heart' (Hd-24/26/31). These efforts were also recognized and appreciated by her peers (e.g. Id-49/51; Gd-34), including Falak, who used the same expression 'studying by heart' to define the mnemonic nature of learning (Fd-35).

The belief that learning consisted of memorizing information were also apparent in Hafa's teaching practices, which the author observed in the classroom and also inferred from lesson plans and peer evaluations. One such practice was that of presenting content which had no relation to pupils' existing knowledge and mental schema, which is one feature of memory-based learning (Montgomery 1999:104). This was evident in a lesson which aimed to teach letters , which Hafa presented to the pupils as individual and self-sufficient items to be learned 'by heart' (Hd-29).

Another practice which implied memorization was patterning items of content which often bore no oral similarities (e.g. /eɪ-/-'apəl/). In this case, learning was assumed to occur

because of contiguity, that is, due to the fact that the two items were presented simultaneously and in close proximity. However, this prevented pupils from establishing a logical connection between the two items, thus leaving no other option than to memorize the pattern (D2-63). Forms of assessment inferred from classroom observations were also grounded in memorization, in that they mainly required the pupils to recall content from memory (Hov).

The inconsistency between Hafa's initial statements about learning and her actual teaching practices may be explained by the trainee's belief that there are different ways of learning related to content matter and 'stages of life' (Hd-50). Memorizing was seen as better-suited for the process of teaching letters to young pupils because, in Hafa's words, at that age pupils' minds were still '**blank**' (Hd-32; D3-104). However, observations of the adult literacy classes given by Hafa to a group of illiterate women showed very similar practices, which suggested that the trainee perhaps considered all first-time learners to have 'blank' minds.

## *2. How do we learn?*

The learning process described by Hafa relies on the gradual presentation and acquisition of information, until the complete picture is understood ('**sequential learning**', in Montgomery 1999:112). Accordingly, the taught content was purposely broken down by the trainee into smaller parts, which were presented to the pupils as self-sufficient items. In this sense, letterforms were represented as combinations of dots, dashes and curves (D2-63/64), words as combinations of single letters, and speech as a combination of words (Hd-29). This form of content representation, which was also shared by Falak and the other trainees (e.g. 'a-p-p-l-e'), underlay the strategies and activities described and implemented by Hafa for teaching individual letters. On one occasion, for example, she wrote two letters on the blackboard and compared them by addressing the differences in the position of dashes and dots (e.g. and ) (D2-63; Hov). In two other cases, she wrote the letter on the board and explained it characterising the base as a plate and the dot as a meatball (Hd-29 and 56). Also, in the second English lesson plan, she compared English and Arabic numbers by highlighting the different directions of the two digits (e.g. left for '2' and right for ) (Hd-32).

This emphasis on single content units implied other beliefs and practices. For example, as these units were presented as unrelated to the whole content, they had to be memorized even though they made no sense to the pupils. Another example was evident from the fact that parts had to be memorized and then combined correctly to produce the whole content. Hafa did demonstrate an awareness of the drawbacks of this learning model (Hd-31), commonly termed the '**watch model**' (Claxton in Claxton et al. 1996:53). However, while she could not explain how pupils may be supported in the process of combining smaller parts into whole content, she commented explicitly in her diary that the pupils who had forgotten, or not understood, or even missed classes would be able to memorize and remember single content units by repeating the topic frequently (Hd-58).

The practice of **repetition**, which is defined here as the continuous re-presentation of the same content, but in different forms (Montgomery 1999:106), relates to beliefs concerning

‘sequential learning’, ‘memorization’ and ‘blank minds’. This was primarily assumed because single content units were presented in a way that did not relate to the learners’ previous knowledge, or to other single (and sometimes whole) content units. The only exceptions were some letter-word patterns such as ‘b – bag’. The forms of repetition employed by Hafa included oral repetition of the same letter (e.g. drilling), copying / imitating the teacher’s handwriting (e.g. in the homework), and oral/written repetition of the same letter-word pattern.



Picture 30 - pupil-led repetition (not in Hafa’s class)

Hafa believed that the practice of repetition would help pupils to memorize the content and ‘grasp’ what they had found difficult during the explanation (Hd-26/33). This follows the behaviourist law of exercise, by which content learning is facilitated by repeated exposure (Stuart et al. 2009). Hafa’s assertion that “repetition teaches clever students” (Hd-9) seemed to confirm this. However, Hafa did not limit this practice to traditional rote learning (that is, mechanical oral repetition), but also employed other exercises which helped pupils practise and acquire the given patterns and information. One example of this was when a pupil was asked to match letters and words on the board by drawing a line, and asked them to orally repeat the pattern identified (D2-63).

Hafa’s use of these activities can be seen in light of her expectations of the training course, which she hoped would enable her to learn new exercises which still involved repetition, but would help to keep the pupils engaged and attentive (Hd-64). The repertoire of activities which she employed also revealed a belief that learning is a **passive activity**, in which knowledge is acquired externally rather than through active discovery. Similarly, employing repetition implied that the learner was unaware of the processes needed to achieve the correct answer, because this practice consisted of directly presenting the **results** of a learning process without illustrating the required procedure. This may explain why Hafa was not able to describe the process for combining letters into words, or the procedures which she had used to arrive at her answers in the paper test during the initial assessment.

Repetition occurred in individual and whole-class teaching, from memory, after the teacher, or after one of the pupils (Hd-29/36; Hov; Nd-31; see also Picture 30), and it was used by Hafa for content explanation and revision (Hd-58).



Picture 31 - individual letters (teaching aids)

The fact that the same practices (including the repetition of single letters in alphabetical order) were employed for English and Arabic shows that Hafa and the other trainees believed that the **same methodology** could be employed to teach both languages. However, this belief is arguably misconceived, as there are significant differences between the two languages. For example, while the letters are arranged in the Arabic alphabet according to similar sounds and shapes to facilitate learning, this is not the case of the English alphabet, whose contiguous order does not particularly support pupils' learning.

One-to-one tutoring was another practice related to the learning process which Hafa implemented in all the observed lessons. This practice is related to several beliefs. As well as the trainee's controlling approach to pupils and content manner, there was an emphasis on the precision of knowledge. Moreover, the extent to which Hafa made use of this practice (in one case, only four minutes of a 36 minute lesson involved whole-class teaching) revealed another important belief, namely that learning is mainly an **individual activity**. According to this belief, pupils learn better by receiving individualized care and attention, which allows them to practise content matter, clarify doubts, and receive corrections. This personal tutoring occurred when homework was assigned (again, individually), and particularly during lesson time. This approach to teaching was used to such an extent that rather than complementing a whole-class approach, it practically replaced it.

In addition to this, Hafa explicitly argued that whole-class teaching (and the methods she employed) were inefficient in supporting pupils' learning (Hd-31; Nd-30). This was based on her own experience of **whole-class education in Egypt**, which in her opinion was unable to provide the students with the knowledge and skills required to pass exams or contribute to national development. This therefore created the need for one-to-one home tutoring (Hd-11).

### *3. What are the features of the 'good' teacher?*

When asked to describe the characteristics of her favourite and least favourite teachers (Varghese et al. 2005; Lazarus in Claxton et al. 1996:77), Hafa mainly highlighted features concerning the teacher-pupil relationship. The best teacher, she said, used to behave like an older brother with her and the other students, while the worst teacher preferred to establish clear boundaries in the classroom – “I am the teacher so I ask, you are the student so you learn” (Hd-16/17). This emphasis on the teacher as good communicator was also evident in other statements, in which Hafa emphasised the importance of understanding pupils' thinking processes and needs (Hd-8); of giving pupils chances to express their opinions; and of keeping pupils motivated even if a mistake occurred (Hd-42). This belief was reflected in Hafa's attitude to her own pupils in the classroom; the author observed that she appeared firm but calm, motivating and very patient with the children (Hov; D3-100). Hafa's body language during one-to-one tutoring was a particular example of this, as she leaned towards pupils, picked them up to help them write on the blackboard, and praised them after the exercise (Hov).

Other data, however, showed that Hafa did not define ‘good’ teaching as synonymous with pupil-centred approaches, but stressed the importance of exercising **control** over pupils and subject matter alike. With regard to the former, the objective of one of Hafa’s lesson plans was to teach pupils to obey orders like ‘stop’ or ‘sit down’, particularly if they did not want to (Hd-35/36). More specifically, pupils had to learn how to follow teacher’s orders as soon as they heard the command (Hd-35; Nd-27). The idea that a ‘good’ teacher should **shape the behaviour** of pupils was further suggested in Hafa’s assertion that, at such young age, pupils ignored the rules of any good social behaviour (Hd-32). This meant that it was necessary to ‘imprint’ social rules into their minds (also quoted in Gd-27/28, Id-42/43, and Nd-27).

From this data, it was apparent that Hafa shared other trainees’ belief that, unless pupils learned to be quiet and behave properly in the classroom, they would not be able to learn. This in turn made **discipline** and **silence** the main features of an effective learning environment (the ‘culture of silence’, in Freire 1972). Another example of Hafa exercising control over the pupils was the employment of the practice of one-to-one tutoring which, as mentioned earlier, the author witnessed in all the observed lessons. Hafa’s insistence that the rest of the class remained silent and observed the one-to-one tuition at the blackboard, and subsequent disciplining of pupils when they did not comply with this, provided an example of her need to control pupils at all times.

Hafa’s controlling attitude also extended to the content matter. This was evident in the practice of ‘patterning’, where fixed combinations of letters and words organized in alphabetical order were presented to the pupils (e.g. – *farasha*), who then had to reproduce them orally and / or in writing (D2-63). The fact that pupils were asked to **reproduce information** as evidence of learning immediately and exactly as received from the teacher further increased Hafa’s influence upon the content matter. This priority given to **precision** and **proficiency** in acquiring and reproducing content (**immediate results**) over communication and content transformation was also reflected in the practices of repetition and breaking down of content (e.g. letterforms) into small parts. Hafa used these practices on the basis that pupils had to be proficient in reading and writing the letters they already knew before a new letter could be taught (sequential learning).

In this sense, one-to-one tutoring also provided an opportunity for the teacher to help pupils to refine the information acquired during the explanation, and so increased the pupil’s proficiency. One practice which stemmed from Hafa’s controlling attitude upon both pupils and content was the high percentage of ‘teacher talking time’, which the author witnessed in the observed lessons. The trainee spoke for the majority of the lesson time, while pupils only given the opportunity to speak when questioned, when leading the oral rote learning, or during breaks.

From these data, then, it appears that Hafa’s idea of the good teacher was in many ways closer to the description she had given of her least favourite teacher. It was mainly **teacher-centred**, thus entailing a view upon teaching as an activity for the **one-way transmission** of knowledge rather than for communicating, in which the teacher’s main tasks were to fill the



students with given knowledge ('**mug & jug**' teaching, in Freire 1972; Stuart et al. 2009:55). This also involved ensuring the exact reproduction of content by establishing clearly defined roles in terms of who learns and who teaches.

#### *4. What is knowledge and what knowledge should be taught?*

Hafa seemed aware that pupils may prefer drawing to writing (as expressed in advice she gave to a colleague – Hd-42), while she had demonstrated her own creativity and drawing skills by decorating the kindergarten with pictures of cartoon characters (D4-296). However, in spite of this, Hafa perceived written representations of content (such as letters, words and numbers) as the means to achieve 'proper' learning. This was evident in her Arabic lesson plan, in which she pointed out that the explanation of a topic (the verbal **one-way transmission** of information, aided by the blackboard) was usually only effective with half the class, which meant that one-to-one tutoring was necessary (Hd-31). One-to-one teaching was perceived as advantageous in this case as pupils were given the chance to practice writing letters under close supervision. Hafa clearly considered this to be indispensable for learning to take place.

Hafa's reliance on **written representations of knowledge** (in this case, letters and words) was also reflected in other practices and statements. In the self-evaluation, for example, she asserted that in order for pupils to understand the lesson, a teacher must write the letter first, and then read it out (Hd-61). Similarly, the homework she set consisted exclusively of writing letters and words in vertical columns on the pages of the exercise book. Homework was assigned individually by the trainee to each pupil and checked meticulously at the end of the school day, as it was seen as the major proof of learning for parents. This practice was shared by all the trainees of the kindergarten focussed on in this study, as well as the teachers at another kindergarten in the community. The objectives identified by Hafa for her lesson plans also demonstrated her concern with teaching pupils how to write, including writing in the direction from left to right, which was specifically required for learning to write in English (Hd-82/83).

This emphasis on written knowledge was also reflected in other beliefs and practices. For example, the belief that words were combinations of letters (rather than symbols for real objects – Hd-43) made written knowledge self-sufficient and independent from reality (not just a symbolic representation of it), which lent it equal dignity and importance. Also, the belief that pupils had to learn to write before they could be introduced to words (Hd-29) meant that learning letters had become the fundamental initial stage of language-learning (Hd-54; Nd-30). The perceived importance of this approach is perhaps best reflected in a proverb quoted by Hafa:

I will become a follower of whoever teaches me a letter (Hd-11).

This emphasis on written knowledge relates to the need to reproduce proficiently and exactly; written knowledge is, by definition, precise and immune from arbitrary interpretation. This leads to another belief concerning knowledge, namely that it is **fixed, given** and



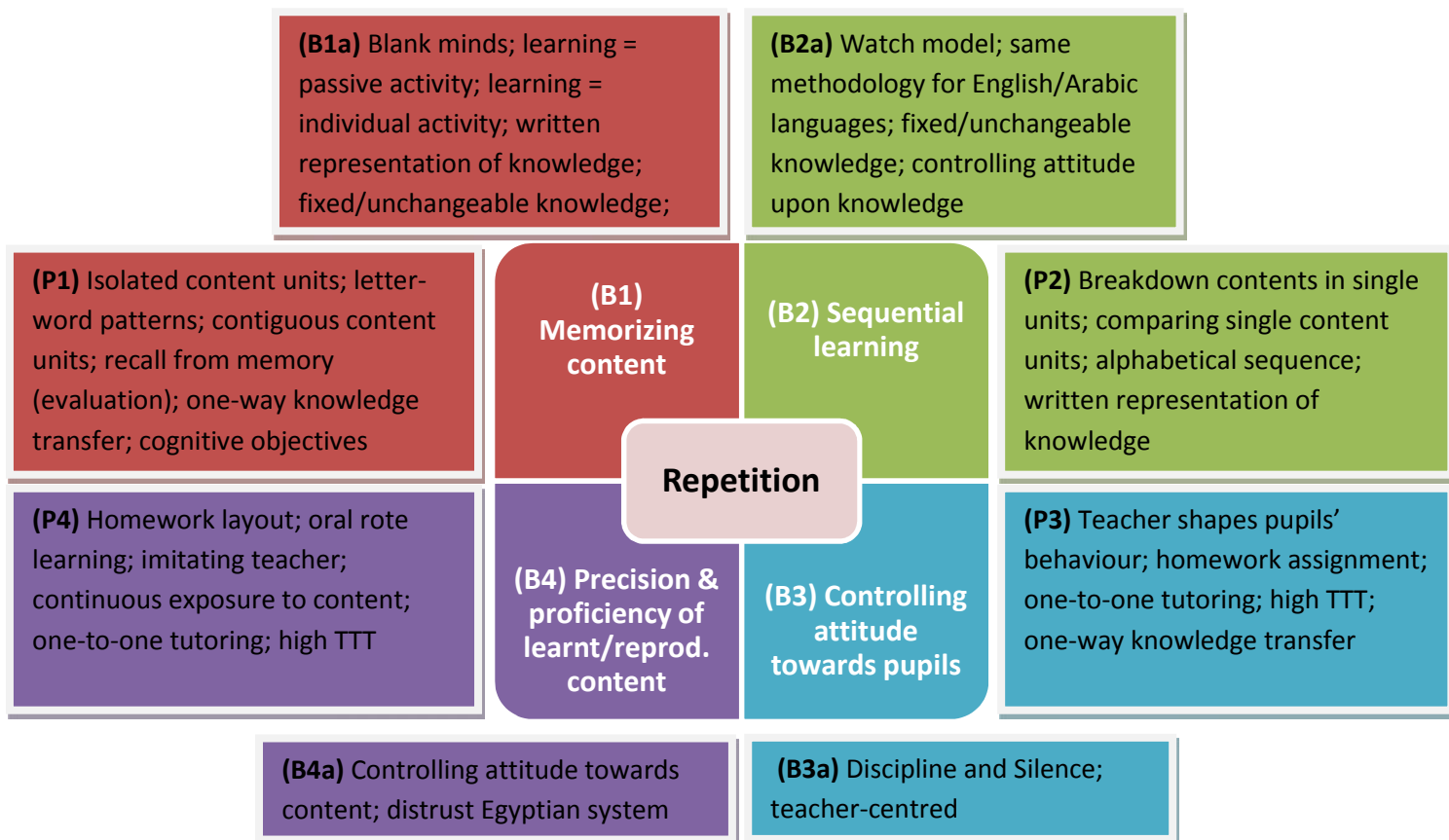


Diagram 6: The simplified local network of practices and beliefs (summary of findings from RQs 1/2).  
Key: (B) beliefs; (P) practices

It was primarily understood that trainees perceived the aim of schooling in terms of teaching cognitive objectives, although behaviour-related targets may still be pursued by specifically-designed lessons. More specific practices and related beliefs identified during the two stages of analysis are discussed in more detail below.

1. The following practices were identified as requiring and implying repetition: contiguous presentation of content units, incomplete combination of units into whole content, and criteria chosen for content assessment (e.g. exact reproduction of information) **(P1)**. These practices were linked to the belief that learning is synonymous with memorizing cognitive information **(B1)**, as well as her beliefs that pupils' minds are 'blank', that learning is a passive activity, and that immediate results are the only evidence of 'real' learning **(B1a)**.
2. Practices which facilitated repetition included: presentation of content (such as alphabetical ordering of content), breaking down content into single content units, patterning individual letters and words, and an emphasis on written rather than visual representations of knowledge **(P2)**. These practices were related to the belief that learning is 'sequential' **(B2)**, and together were understood as consistent with the 'watch model'. The belief that English and Arabic could be taught by employing the same methodology was also reflected in these practices

(particularly letter-word patterning and the alphabet sequence), while the emphasis on written representations was seen as related to the belief that knowledge was fixed and unchangeable (**B2a**).

3. Several practices were identified as creating opportunities for content repetition, including: one-to-one tutoring, one-way knowledge transmission and the related high rate of teacher talking time, which limited the pupils' talking time to the repetition of the given content (**P3**).

The trainee's controlling attitude towards pupils (**B3**) was significantly linked to these practices. The beliefs that discipline and silence were essential for learning, and the related focus on a teacher-centred classroom, in which pupils are viewed as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge ('mug and jug') (**B3a**) were also connected to these practices.

4. Finally, practices which consisted of implementing repetition in different forms were: drilling, oral rote learning, the process of copying / imitating the teacher (e.g. homework structure), and one-to-one tutoring (**P4**).

These practices were linked to the belief that new content units could only be introduced once pupils had shown precision and proficiency in reproducing the content exactly as demonstrated by the teacher (**B4**). The trainees' desire to exercise control over knowledge and a mistrust of the Egyptian education system were also identified as key beliefs underlying the practices of repetition, patterning and assessment, and one-to-one tutoring in particular (**B4a**).

### 5.3 Research Question 1.3: How are existing practices and beliefs reproduced in the trainees' understanding and implementation of international educational knowledge?

#### 5.3.1 Challenging existing beliefs and practices by introducing international educational knowledge

Before the impact of trainees' existing network of practices and beliefs upon international knowledge is discussed, it is necessary to illustrate how this international knowledge was presented to the trainees. As outlined in Chapter 3, the second phase of the training course (more specifically Sessions 6 to 10) involved: 1) addressing the contradictions and misconceptions which the author understood in relation to the trainees' educational beliefs and practices for teaching English language, and 2) presenting international educational knowledge to the trainees, in an attempt to challenge these local values and to help the trainees consider and devise sustainable alternatives. In particular, two sets of local practices and beliefs were addressed by the author.

The first set of practices and beliefs involved the belief that learning was synonymous with *memorizing* content, and that single content units (individual letters) had to be memorized through the practice of *repetition*. This set was chosen as trainees' comments revealed it to be a common, shared belief among all of them. For example, Falak asserted that teachers and parents should help pupils to memorize content, which explicitly linked the process of learning with the processes of repetition and memorization (Fd-10). Ghadir suggested the same belief by stating that older pupils may help the youngsters memorize by repeating (Gd-33). Finally, Iba explicitly wrote the following:

...the most suitable method is to practise and to be involved in activities which so much affect the child and s/he will memorize it. Because through practice and repetition the child manage[s] to memorize what she studies by heart (Id-16).

The second set of educational values were evident in the belief that single content units (individual letters) had to be memorized first, in order to learn writing and reading whole words, and understand their meaning ('*sequential learning*' and '*watch model*'). This set was chosen as it complemented the first set of beliefs and practices, and because it was also shared among Hafa (Hd-29) and her colleagues. Several statements from Falak supported this:

in order that children know how to pronounce and read words of Rabbit or Lion, it is a must to learn how to read and write a, b, c, d (Fd-19).

[it is necessary to] learn English letters to easily learn English words afterwards (Fd-34).

it is useful and very important that the child knows how to read and write letters before the words (Fd-50).

Similarly, Ghadir commented that,

it is necessary to make children at this stage memorize by themselves alphabet from A to Z (Gd-19).

Finally, Iba asserted that

...there should be [a] strong/solid ground of language letters to be able to teach words (Id-29).

These two sets of practices and beliefs were also chosen due to an assumption that, since trainees has already demonstrated an awareness of their problematic nature, addressing them would facilitated the process of the trainees questioning their assumptions. The following quotations from Hafa and Ghadir suggested their critiques of the first and second set of values respectively.

Repetition only helps with memorizing. But when you memorize without understanding, it is easily forgotten (Hd-9)

The problem is that some children cannot distinguish [between some letters] (Gd-34).

The head teacher also agreed that the pupils may often forget the exact combination of curves and dots, which prevented them from distinguishing between letters with similar shape and memorizing them (Nd-30). Moreover, most trainees complained about the time and energy consuming nature of sequential learning. Sessions 6-1 therefore stemmed from the consideration that in order to help the trainees question their own assumptions, investigate their doubts and above all find sustainable alternatives, the discussion needed to focus on the beliefs and practices which had arisen from their own observations (RQs 1.1 and 1.2).

The belief related to '*sequential learning*' – the idea that whole words can only be learned once the pupils are acquainted with individual letters – was first challenged with an example referring to the trainees' childhood. The author argued that the trainees had not first pronounced the word 'Abu' (Arabic for father) because they were familiar with the three letters which composed it, but due to the visual and emotional association of the word with a well-known face. Additionally, it was pointed out that the spelling sound of each Arabic letter provided little information about the word's pronunciation. This was also evident in English, where the individual spelling sounds of the word 'house' (spelling: / eɪtʃ/, / ou/, /ju:/, /ɛs/, /i:/) was used as an example to indicate that minimal guidance was provided to read the whole word (whole-word: pron. /haʊs/). These examples aimed to undermine the practice of *patterning* spelling sounds and words.

Another problem raised concerning 'sequential learning' was the challenge of remembering de-contextualized individual letters, and this focussed on two particular issues. Firstly, individual letters are found rarely in the real world, and so it is difficult for pupils to make connections between new knowledge and their daily life experience. Secondly, letters do not bear an immediately recognizable connection to each other when they are not meaningfully

combined within a word. This also questioned the practice of presenting letters according to *alphabetical sequence*, because (especially for the English language) letters in the alphabet are simply arranged *contiguously*, lacking a logical relationship. Moreover, since letters are unrelated to each other and to pupils' prior knowledge and life experience, they need to be repeated *continuously* (e.g. *oral rote learning*), which the trainees themselves noted to be a time and energy consuming practice.

In order to further encourage the trainees to question the practice of sequential learning, the author proposed an exercise in which he drew objects on the board, and trainees had to call out their English names, identify their colour, and spell out their names. While the trainees were able to answer the first two questions correctly, they found it very challenging to spell the words for objects and colours which they had just pronounced. This exercise aimed to show the trainees that they were already acquainted with words without being able to write or spell them. Another aim was to challenge the belief that *written* representations of knowledge (words and letters) bear stronger learning potential than visual content representation, by demonstrating how the pictures could still foster learning by helping the trainees to recall the English words for objects. The second part of this exercised allowed the trainees to ask each other the English names and colours of objects located in the classroom. This offered an alternative to the strategy of language learning through repetition, which relied on using language to communicate instead.

This also questioned the practice of *one-to-one tutoring* on two grounds. Firstly the exercise had shown that language learning is less demanding and more effective when pursued as a social rather than *individual activity*, because of the practical, functional, and social nature of language. Secondly, all pupils would benefit simultaneously from the lesson through whole class communication. This would avoid the disruption caused when the majority of the class is excluded from the lesson during one-to-one tutoring in the trainees' language classes.

Finally, the belief related to the '*watch model*' (combining single content parts into wholes) was addressed by highlighting two contradictions which had emerged from lesson plans and classroom observations. Firstly, pupils were only acquainted with few letters of the English (and Arabic) alphabet, which undermined the attempt to combine letters into words. Secondly, the trainees had never been observed implementing this practice in the classroom. In fact, Hafa explicitly admitted that she did not know how this combination of letters into words occurred, concluding that this probably happened by intuition.

In light of these challenges, and in the interest of guaranteeing continuity between existing and international beliefs and practices, the author proposed and illustrated a set of activities aimed at teaching English letters and words to the trainees. These suggested activities borrowed from the principles and practices of communicative language teaching, and the trainees were asked to test the efficiency and effectiveness of these practices.

### 5.3.2 Data presentation and analysis (Hafa, Stages 1-3)

This analysis focuses on data collected from Hafa's performance in the four tasks of the final assessment (Phase 4 of the training course). These tasks involved lesson planning, teaching practice, self-evaluation of teaching practice, and establishing overall English language targets for the pupils. The aim of the analysis was to explore how Hafa read and implemented the international knowledge presented over the course, and to understand how and to what extent the network of beliefs and practices inferred from RQs 1.1 and 1.2 still guided her classroom performance and affected the accommodation of new knowledge.

The analysis is presented in three stages. Firstly, the international knowledge and practices which the author had presented to the trainees are illustrated. Next, Hafa's final classroom performance is described. Finally, the two sets of practices are compared in the final performance in order to retrieve the network of beliefs and practices identified through RQs 1.1 and 1.2 in the final teaching performance.

#### *Stage 1: presentation of international knowledge*

The author's presentation of international knowledge was organized according to four areas of teachers' performance: establishing objectives, whole-class teaching, group activities, and homework.

With regard to the first area, the trainees were advised to establish a lesson objective by taking both cognitive and non-cognitive targets into account. For the former, trainees suggested individual letters (all the letters composing a word) and whole words, while for the latter, it was proposed that pupils would learn to connect visual and written representations of knowledge, working in a group (developing social skills) and using content matter for communication.

The second area concerned whole-class teaching, in which realia (objects from everyday life) were introduced. Realia were used in order to strengthen pupils' associations between the words for objects and the objects themselves, via tactile and multidimensional connections. The objects which were chosen were familiar to the children, safe to handle and relevant to the lesson objective. For example, if the objective of the lesson included teaching the letter 'a', two types of relationship could be considered. One concerns the shape of the letter, so the chosen objects could bear visual similarity with the targeted letterform (e.g. A – door). The other concerns the sound of the letter, so that the object's pattern letter-word would be based on the similarity between speech sounds (e.g. A – angel, pronounced /eɪ-/ 'eɪndʒəl/), rather than spelling sounds (A – apple, pronounced /eɪ-/ 'æpəl/).

Pupils would also be given the chance to interact with the realia from the beginning of the lesson, by passing the objects among themselves or drawing them in their exercise books. As an alternative or complementary activity to realia, the trainee could present the objects by using pictures, drawings, or flashcards. There was still an emphasis on allowing pupils to interact with them by reproducing, colouring, exchanging, or grouping them according to e.g.



colour. Once the objects or images of the objects are presented, the trainee would help the pupils connect them to each other in order to reproduce relationships from real life situations. One suggested activity was for the trainee to invent and narrate a story which included the chosen objects. Within the tale, the objects would interact with one another, therefore stimulating the interest and imagination of the pupils, and establishing a relationship between the objects and pupils' real life experience. The trainee would conclude the whole-class teaching phase of the lesson by writing the words for the objects next to their pictures on the blackboard, and finally the targeted, individual letters related to these words.

The third area concerned group work activities. The aim of these activities was to allow pupils to use the content acquired during whole-class teaching, namely to transform it and to use it for communication. One suggested activity was to organise the pupils into groups, give each group a set of flashcards picturing the chosen objects, help them to invent an alternative story (or to re-tell the story told by the trainee), and allow them to present the story to the other groups using the flashcards. Another complementary activity was to prepare flashcards picturing the individual letters included in the chosen words, arrange pupils into groups, give one set of flashcards to each group, and allow the pupils to combine the flashcards to re-build the targeted words and compare the obtained combinations with the other groups.

The fourth and final area involved setting homework. It was suggested that the homework should stem from the lesson delivered, building upon the activities which were introduced. For example, pupils could be asked to draw one of the objects presented by the trainee and to associate the drawing to the relevant word and/or letter. Additionally, pupils could copy all the letters which composed one of the words and draw the relevant object in their exercise books (horizontally rather than vertically as in previous homework tasks). Finally, it was suggested that homework was given as whole-class teaching practice, not individually, which would save time and energy to the trainee, and increase pupils' agency and levels of participation to the lesson.

### Stage 2: description of Hafa's final performance

The description of Hafa's final performance is organized according to five broad categories of classroom performance: how Hafa established both specific lesson and overall objectives; her presentation and explanation of the topic; her use of whole-class teaching strategies and individual and/or group activities (including teaching aids); and how she structured and assigned homework.

Hafa chose English letters and words as the topic for her final teaching performance. The lesson objective was to learn a single content unit (specifically, to write and read the letter 'd') by gaining familiarity with four English words (Hd-75). The objective did not address the other letters in the words, nor any did it consider non-cognitive matter such as fostering social skills.

In preparation for the lesson, the trainee drew four objects at the corners of the blackboard ('dog, desk, door, dish'), then wrote the words for the objects next to each drawing, and

finally drew the letter 'd' in the middle of the board by using a bold large font (Pictures 33a and 33b). The objects had been chosen due to pupils' familiarity with them, and due to the speech sound similarity between the targeted letter and the words' initial (/di :/- /dɒg/). As she had anticipated in the lesson plan (Hd-75), the topic was introduced by letting the pupils repeat letter-words patterns after the trainee (e.g. 'd – dog', 'd – door') in the form of traditional oral rote learning, thus ignoring the drawings. In fact, Hafa explicitly rejected the pedagogical potential of the pictures, asserting that without words accompanying them, pupils would not be able to recognize the pictures. Accordingly, Hafa erased the drawings from the blackboard once she had introduced the topic, and the subsequent emphasis was on the words and letters alone. This matched the approach outlined by Hafa in her lesson plan (Hd-77).



Picture 33a and 33b: Hafa's topic presentation (in the classroom and in the lesson plan).

Before explaining the topic, Hafa told a short story; this was the only whole-class activity used during the lesson after the pattern repetition. In an informal conversation with the author, Hafa revealed that this story was intended to establish a relationship between the otherwise unrelated objects, and to help pupils familiarize themselves with sound of the letter 'd'. The story was a simple account of a dog opening a door, sitting on a desk, and drinking from a dish, and it failed to hold the pupils' attention. It was told in summary form rather than being narrated, and Hafa did not use any body language to bring the story to life. It also lacked detail, and failed to inspire the pupils to imagine the objects interacting in a real-life situation (D4-78). Moreover, were not given an opportunity to interact with the story after it had been told, for example by drawing their own pictures of the objects, by asking questions, or by re-arranging the objects' order.

Instead, pupils listened passively to the story, and once it was over, the follow-up activity involved pupils repeating the story exactly as they had heard it from the trainee. Rather than an opportunity for pupils to engage with and transform the lesson's content, story-telling simply became another opportunity for Hafa to exert control over the subject matter. This was apparent, for example, when Hafa interrupted and corrected pupils while they were trying to repeat the story. Although Hafa repeated the tale five times during the lesson, first

as part of the initial whole-class explanation of the topic, then individually to several late comers, none of the pupils who were called to the board were able to replicate the story word-for-word as the trainee expected. During this classroom observation, Hafa appeared deeply disappointed, as pupils' failure to repeat the story was taken to suggest that the activity had not produced immediate learning outcomes. As a result, she reverted to collective repetition and drilling the individual letter and letter-word patterns. This concluded the whole-class teaching phase, which was characterized by high teacher talking time, one-way transmission of knowledge, and a relatively short period within the whole lesson (around five to six minutes).

The rest of the lesson was then taken up by one-to-one tutoring (Picture 34). 14 pupils out of 25 were called individually to the board, spending two and a half minutes on average with Hafa. Pupils at the blackboard were asked to carry out tasks including practising the letter 'd' and the word 'dog' in writing, repeating oral patterns of letter-word, gap-filling exercises, naming the objects pictured on the board, and identifying the targeted objects in the room (though this was limited to 'desk' and 'door'). Some pupils did therefore benefit from more active and engaging teaching (D4-180).



Picture 34 – one-to-one tutoring

The pupils who did not go to the board, however, were not given any tasks or exercises to work on individually or in groups, nor were they given the opportunity to join in the lessons taking place at the blackboard. This was in spite of their eagerness to participate (evident as they repeatedly rose their hands and asked questions from their seats, though only initially), which was partly fuelled by the pictures of objects drawn on the board. But rather than engaging with their enthusiasm,

Hafa was more interested in keeping them quiet so that they could observe their peers at the blackboard, and they were scolded if they did not remain silent (Picture 35). The main reason Hafa did not allow pupils to work without her direct supervision was due to a concern that this would result in indiscipline, including pupils being noisy and leaving their seats (Hd-81). Discipline was also the criterion she employed to select the pupils for one-to-one tutoring (D4-89).

As shown in Picture 35, teaching aids were only employed during one-to-one tutoring. The aids consisted of three sets of flashcards, picturing respectively the English letters 'a, b, c, d', the English words 'dog, desk, door, dish', and the four drawings of the objects represented by each word, which Hafa had specifically prepared for this lesson. The author observed three activities which involved teaching aids. The first involved



Picture 35 - excluding pupils during one to one tutoring

asking the pupils to identify the letter 'd' among the letter cards, and the word 'dog' among the word cards (which were arranged face-up on the teacher's desk). The second activity involved the pupils using flashcards to re-build letter-word patterns. During the third activity, one of the pupils chose a card and asked the rest of the class to say what the pictured item was (Picture 36). This last practice was also observed in another kindergarten, whose teachers had attended the training course discussed in Chapter 2. However, although these activities required pupils' active involvement, individual pupils only handled the flashcards briefly; for the most part, Hafa held onto them (D4-88). Additionally, during the activities, some pupils left their seats in order to see the flashcards more clearly and to join in the activity. Rather than encouraging their interest, Hafa viewed this as disruptive and 'bad' behaviour, and so scolded these pupils and returned them to their seats.



Picture 36: using flashcards for repetition

Homework was set individually, with each pupil bringing his or her exercise book to the front of the class, where Hafa would write down their assignments. This also provided Hafa with an opportunity to check each pupil's learning outcomes, and to repeat the information already introduced during the lesson. The homework assignment was the same for all pupils, and followed up on the activities carried out during the one-to-one tutoring sessions. This was in spite of the fact that only some pupils had been involved with these activities during the lesson.

In comparison to previous lessons, two changes were observed in the homework structure. Firstly, Hafa drew a picture of a dog next to the letter 'd' and the corresponding word in pupils' exercise books. This appeared to be an attempt to introduce elements of visual learning to the assignment, as pupils were asked to colour in the drawing. Secondly, although pupils were asked to copy letters and words which Hafa had written in their books, they were asked to write their versions horizontally to reflect the writing direction in English. This followed a suggestion which the author had made earlier, and also adapted the previous practice of asking pupils to write English words vertically, following the writing direction of the Arabic language (Hd-77/78/80).

*Stage 3: Hafa's transformation of international knowledge*

In order to understand the way in which Hafa transformed international knowledge, the analysis concluded by retrieving Hafa's existing beliefs and practices in her final classroom performance. This was done by comparing the practices proposed by the author and the trainee's implementation of them, as shown in Table 13, and by referring the mismatches to the network of existing practices and beliefs (RQ 1.1 and 1.2).

<b>Original practices (as presented by the author)</b>	<b>Implemented practices (as performed by the trainee)</b>
Cognitive objective (all individual letters composing the whole word and/or whole words)	Cognitive objective (single content unit: letter 'd')
Non-cognitive objectives (connecting visual/written knowledge, working in group, using content by transformation and communication)	Non-cognitive objectives are not stated in the lesson plan, nor pursued explicitly in the teaching practice
Participatory and interactive whole-class lesson teaching (1/4 of whole lesson)	One-way knowledge transmission and high teacher talking time during whole-class lesson teaching (1/8 of whole lesson)
Introduces realia/pictures to strengthen pupils' association of objects with words for objects, without written knowledge	Introduces drawings of objects next to written words for objects and targeted individual letter (Pictures 33a/b)
Chooses objects familiar to pupils	Chooses objects familiar to pupils
Choose objects related to cognitive objectives by similar shape (letter D and 'door')	Does not choose objects related to cognitive objective by similar shape (letter D and 'desk')
Chooses objects where words for objects are related to cognitive objectives by similar	Chooses objects where words for objects are related to cognitive objective by similar speech

speech sound (A – angel)	sound (D – dog, door, desk, dish)
Pupils interacting with objects as whole-class activity (drawing, exchanging pictures, arranging pictures according to colours or shapes)	Pupils repeating the letter-word patterns written on the board after the teacher; no drawing tasks are proposed; drawings are deleted after introduction to topic
Connects objects one another to reproduce real life situations and stimulate pupils' imagination (story-telling); lets pupils engage with tale	Tale lacks details, narration and action; pupils asked to repeat the story exactly as told; teacher reverts to rote learning
Writes words and individual letters on the board at the end of whole-class teaching phase	Writes words and individual letters on the board at the beginning of whole-class teaching phase (Pictures 33a/b)
Implements group work activities (1/2 of whole lesson)	Implements activities as one-to-one tutoring (3/4 of whole lesson – Picture 34): practise writing 'd' and 'dog', repeat orally letter-word patterns, gap-filling exercises, name pictured objects, identify objects in the room
Allows all pupils participate to the activities	Neglects other pupils during one-to-one tutoring (Picture 35), and scolds those who try to participate; pupils participate by repeating after the flashcards only (Picture 36)
Sets of flashcards picturing individual letters to let groups combine them to produce whole words (transform content matter as group activity) and compare the obtained combinations with the other groups.	Set of four flashcards representing letters a, b, c, d; pupil is asked to identify letter 'd'; flashcards controlled by Hafa
Sets of flashcards picturing objects to let groups produce/re-arrange a story and present it to peers (transform and communicate content matter)	Three sets of four flashcards (letters a,b,c,d; words and pictures of dog, door, desk, dish); pupil is asked to use flashcards to re-build letter-word patterns
Set homework as whole-class lesson teaching to increase pupils' participation (1/4 of whole lesson)	Sets homework as individual practice, also a chance for more one-to-one tutoring (1/8 of whole lesson)
Homework which follows-up on lesson's group activities	Homework which follows-up on lesson's one-to-one activities
Pupils draw objects and write letters/words for object on exercise book	Teacher draws objects and writes letters/words for objects on exercise book
Pupils write all individual letters (which make up words) horizontally on exercise book	Teacher writes one individual letter/word on exercise books to be copied horizontally by pupils

Table 13: The new educational practices as presented by the author (left) and as implemented by the trainee (right). The practices highlighted in purple in the right column are identical to the ones proposed by the author.

Table 13 suggests that the educational knowledge proposed by the author was transformed, and in many cases distorted, by the trainee, even if this did not involve an explicit rejection. Examining the explicit discrepancies between the two sets of practices in light of the findings from RQs 1.1 and 1.2 suggests that existing beliefs and practices were still guiding Hafa's classroom performance by the end of the training course, hindering the accommodation of knowledge proposed by the author.

Data were organized according to five broad, overlapping categories of recurrent beliefs and practices: memorization and repetition; emphasis on written knowledge; precision and proficiency of learnt content; one-to-one tutoring; and teachers' control over pupils (discipline). For each category, examples were provided to illustrate how specific beliefs hindered and / or contradicted the author's suggestions. The suggested values specifically hindered were as follows: visual learning; contextualized content learning; pupils' active engagement with the content; pupils' participation in the lesson; content transformation; communication through the content; collective/group learning; and pupils' agency and empowerment. Diagram 7 illustrates this process of inferring Hafa's recurrent dispositions from her teaching performances.

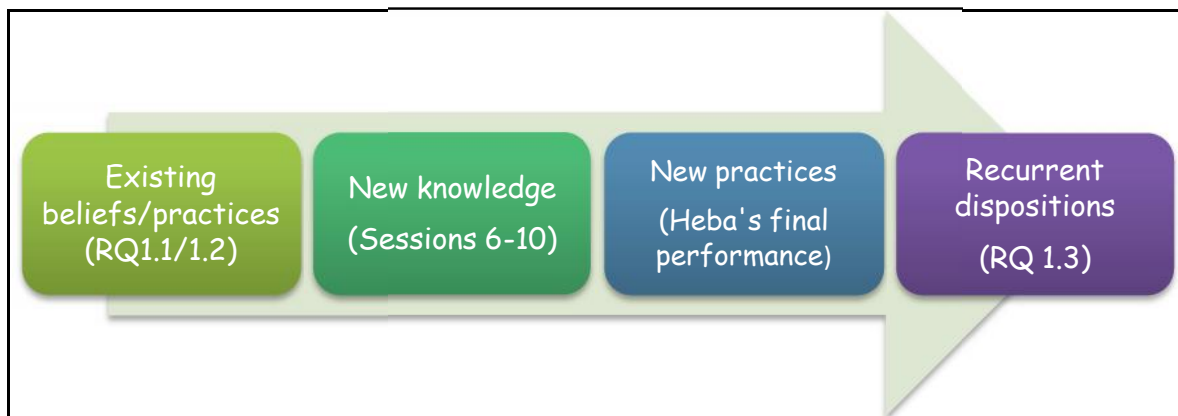


Diagram 7: The process of inferring Hafa's recurrent dispositions from her final teaching performance (RQ 1).

1. The cluster of Hafa's existing beliefs and practices is mapped out in RQs 1.1 and 1.2.
2. New knowledge is introduced by the author (visual learning, contextualized content learning, pupils' active engagement with the content, pupils' participation in the lesson, content transformation, communication through the content, collective/group learning, and pupils' agency and empowerment)
3. Hafa implements new knowledge in her final teaching performance (final assessment)
4. Hafa's recurrent dispositions are manifested and reproduced in cases of incongruence between existing and new practices (RQ 1.3), then categorised (memorization and repetition, emphasis on written knowledge, precision and proficiency of learnt content, one-to-one tutoring, and teachers' control upon pupils/discipline).

### **Categories of recurrent beliefs and practices**

#### **Memorization and repetition**

For the identification of the lesson objective, the author made two suggestions; to teach whole English words, and to teach all the letters included in an English word (e.g. 'd-o-g.') before combining them to build that word during the same lesson. However, the trainee did not follow either of these suggestions. With regard to the former, Hafa believed that whole words could not be learned if the pupils were not first acquainted with all the letters of the alphabet, thus re-proposing the 'a-p-p-l-e' approach to the topic. As a result, whole words were still employed in the lesson, even though this was a tool to facilitate pupils' acquisition of a targeted individual letter.

The second suggestion was rejected because Hafa believed that learning more than one letter at the time would be too demanding for the pupils, and so she selected a single content unit instead (letter 'd'). This choice stemmed from the trainee's existing belief that learning requires breaking down the topic into small parts, which must be taught separately (sequential learning), and only then combined into whole content (watch model). In other words, by learning all the individual letters separately (lesson by lesson), the pupils would eventually be able to recognize and reproduce whole words. However, aiming to teach a single content unit (learned separately from other single units and from the whole content) as a lesson objective meant that Hafa presented the targeting topic as an isolated and self-sufficient item which could only be memorized (rather than understood) by the pupils. This was due to the fact that it was disconnected from pupils' existing knowledge of other content parts (e.g. letters), and from recognizable whole content such as a word or an object.

Consequently, the content was *de-contextualized*, as Hafa only established a connection between the similarity in speech sound and shape between the letter and the words' initials ('d'-'dog'). The need to memorize a single content unit required the practice of repetition, which was at the heart of most of the activities implemented by the trainee and which also prevented the implementation of the author's suggestions. This was the case, for example, when asking pupils to repeat letter-word patterns which were written on the board during the topic's presentation (oral rote learning), which Hafa employed instead of allowing pupils to interact with the drawings next to the words. This meant that the opportunity to explain the topic through *visual learning* was neglected.

The extensive use of one-to-one tutoring was a clear example of the way in which repetition hindered pupils' *group/collective learning*. This practice simply provided a further opportunity for pupils to engage in more repetition-based tasks, such as learning oral letter-word patterns by rote, being drilled in the targeted letter, and reproducing the letter by writing on the blackboard. The use of teaching aids such as flashcards again provided a stark contrast between repetition-based activities and *active engagement with the content* as suggested by the author; pupils being asked to show the flashcards to their peers, who then repeated the pictured item, was a particular example of this.

### **Written representation of knowledge**

The author placed a strong emphasis on visual learning, in the interest of fostering the participation and inclusion of all pupils in the lesson, and facilitating the acquisition of content matter. Following this approach, the author suggested that the topic could be presented through the use of pictures and drawings, so that pupils could associate the words for particular objects with the images of those objects. Similarly, it was also suggested that the introduction of the written words and letters should be delayed until the end of the whole-class teaching phase of the lesson.

However, Hafa instead chose to introduce the written words for each object from the beginning of the lesson, alongside their pictorial representations on the blackboard. She stated



in her lesson plan that this was because the pupils needed to see the written words in order to remember the English names for the pictured objects. In light of the fact that the pupils could not read English, it was not clear how this would be useful for them; this contradiction reveals that the emphasis on written knowledge inferred from RQs 1.1 and 1.2 was still guiding Hafa's teaching performance. This emphasis, which in turn devalued *visual learning*, was evident from the way in which the drawings were completely neglected while Hafa explained the topic. Additionally, no drawing tasks were proposed during the lesson, and pupils were not given the opportunity to interact with the images of the objects pictured on the board, for example, by drawing them in their exercise books as the author had suggested.

Even during one-to-one tutoring, only some of the pupils were given a brief opportunity to interact with the images by being asked to name the objects on the board, which they were unable to do. The drawings were also erased periodically during the lesson, and re-introduced only occasionally. This is in contrast to the written words, which remained on the blackboard throughout the lesson. Hafa's emphasis on written representations of knowledge was further evident from her insistence on following alphabetical order when using flashcards representing individual letters ('a', 'b', 'c', 'd'). This emphasis also hindered the implementation of another value inherent the author's suggestions, which was to *communicate* by using the content. While the author had suggested that the pupils should be allowed to re-arrange the story told by the teacher, and to re-narrate it to their peers by using the pictorial flashcards, Hafa instead only allowed the pupils interact with the cards representing words and letters. Unsurprisingly, given their young age and minimal acquaintance with the English language, the pupils were unable to communicate with the flashcards.

### **Precision and proficiency in the learnt/reproduced content**

One of the main challenges when implementing the communicative approach to language learning is that it requires the teacher to develop a high level of tolerance for pupils' mistakes. This stems from the emphasis on using language to communicate, rather than on grammatical and syntactical precision. The aim is therefore not for pupils to use the language correctly from the start, but for pupils to become acquainted with the language through communication. The teacher must therefore create opportunities to allow open communication, distinguish between errors and mistakes, provide the scaffolding needed by the student to communicate in good-enough way, encourage the student during this process, and understand whether the student is progressing in terms of objectives which they are unaware of.

While allowing a significant margin of error is a fundamental requirement to the successful implementation of the communicative approach, this practice was incongruent with the trainee's beliefs. These had been developed through her personal experience of language learning; Hafa has learnt English through the grammar-translation method, which was evident from the analysis of her paper test (Sessions 1 and 2). As a result, most of the trainee's activities revealed an emphasis upon precision and proficiency in the process of learning and

reproducing the content, which in turn hindered the implementation of the practices proposed by the author.

This emphasis, was apparent in the practice of breaking down letterforms into curves and lines, which Hafa employed during one-to-one tutoring to help the pupils learn to write letter 'd'. This practice undermined the author's suggestion of providing *contextualized content learning*, and instead presented the content as isolated and self-sufficient items. The belief that pupils had to become thoroughly familiar with single content units before whole content could be introduced was also inherent in other tasks employed in one-to-one tutoring, such as the oral drilling of single letters and letter-word patterns. The emphasis on these practices, which required the trainee to teach pupils individually, meant that Hafa could not introduce the collective activities required for *group learning*.

This belief in learning content proficiently and precisely also caused Hafa to resist the author's suggestion that pupils should be allowed to *transform content*. Examples of this belief included the structure of the homework, which required pupils to copy single content units in their exercise book, and Hafa's insistence that pupils repeated her story exactly as she had told it. Moreover, when pupils failed to re-tell the story precisely, Hafa would repeatedly interrupt and correct them until they told the 'right' version, which completely contradicted the author's suggestion that pupils should be allowed to use the content for functional *communication*.

The desire for precision and proficiency was also apparent in the trainee's assessment criteria, which expected pupils to recognise (orally and / or in writing) the targeted single content unit as soon as they completed the activity. As a result, when pupils failed to correctly identify the letter 'd' at the end of the story-telling session, Hafa interrupted the subsequent activity and reverted to repeating letter-word patterns. This prevented pupils from *engaging actively with the content* by participating in the story. Finally, Hafa viewed the practice of writing homework individually in each pupil's exercise book as an opportunity to refine the content which pupils had acquired during the lesson. This once again demonstrated the emphasis on precision and proficiency which prevented Hafa from employing *collective learning* and from fostering pupils' *agency* and participation.

### **One-to-one tutoring**

Communication is a social activity, which involves exchanging information and engaging with other people's perspectives. Accordingly, the communicative approach to language teaching requires all pupils to interact with one another by using the content acquired during the lesson. Following this approach, the author suggested that the trainees should avoid one-to-one tutoring, and instead try out group-based activities such as organising the pupils into groups, allowing each group to re-tell the story by using the flashcards, and to present their new version to the rest of the class using the pictures. However, Hafa ignored these suggestions, preferring to address the pupils individually through one-to-one teaching for the majority of the lesson time.

Hafa opted for one-to-one tutoring for several reasons. Crucially, this practice was consistent with her emphasis on written knowledge and on precision and proficiency when learning content. The demanding nature of whole-class teaching based on memorization and repetition of single content units and her desire to exert control over knowledge and pupils also played a key role in her decision to continue with one-to-one teaching. Finally, this practice was also justified by a belief that pupils needed extra one-to-one support in order to compensate for the inefficiency of collective education in the Egyptian schooling system.

Hafa's implementation of one-to-one tutoring and other related activities inhibited the implementation of the author's suggestions. Pupils' *active participation* in the lesson, for example, was undermined by only allowing individual pupils to use the flashcards, thereby limiting the rest of the pupils' participation in the activity to the repetition of information on the flashcards. Moreover, flashcards were only given to pupils occasionally, and were for the most part used by Hafa for oral rote learning. Repetition-based activities implemented during one-to-one tutoring, such as rebuilding letter-word patterns with the flashcards, also inhibited the use of content for *communication*. Importantly, these activities did not allow pupils to use the content to interact meaningfully with each other or with the trainee.

The extensive use of one-to-one tutoring throughout the lesson, which is by definition 'individual', was diametrically opposed to the practice of *group/collective learning* suggested by the author, and prevented the trainee from grouping the pupils and implementing activities which aimed at collective content learning. The only observed activity which could have fostered collective learning involved allowing pupils to identify the pictured objects in the room, for example by giving each group of pupils a pictorial flashcard, and asking pupils to name the group members representing particular objects. However, this activity was in fact only implemented in one-to-one tutoring.

### **Teachers' controlling attitude towards pupils (discipline)**

Participation, communication and open interaction – both between the trainee and pupils, and among the pupils themselves – were encouraged by the author at all the stages of the lesson as a condition for the successful implementation of the communicative approach. This approach, however, does not imply that the teacher simply re-arranges pupils into groups, or introduces games and teaching aids (e.g. flashcards) which may facilitate and promote the engagement of the pupils with the content matter and with other pupils. It also requires the teacher's informed tolerance towards the potential noise, disruption, and 'misbehaviour' which new layouts and activities may produce; in other words, the teacher needs to be aware and confident that the potential disturbance and even chaos are part and parcel of the approach she is trying to implement. She also needs to be willing to allow pupils to communicate by using the content without the fear of being interrupted, corrected, scolded or embarrassed in front of their peers. Crucially, this shift from a teacher-centred to a pupil-centred classroom involves the teacher renouncing some of the power she traditionally holds and sharing this with pupils. Finally, the teacher should be able to adapt the planned lesson objectives and activities in response to the progression of the lesson, particularly as the

communicative approach may lead to pupils performing and interacting in previously unanticipated ways.

However, Hafa's strict maintenance of control over the pupils through the lesson (previously discussed in RQs 1.1 and 1.2 in relation to other practices and beliefs) completely contradicts these requirements of the communicative approach. Beliefs that the teacher should shape pupils' behaviour, that learning must take place in a silent environment and that the roles of teacher and pupils are clearly defined all imply that discipline is essential to 'good' teaching. This belief and controlling attitude was also evident in Hafa's final teaching performance, and prevented her from putting the author's suggestions into practice. The high teacher talking time and one-way transmission of knowledge, for example, which occurred during the whole-class teaching phase, prevented the pupils from *participating in the lesson* by making them passive learners and by failing to provide occasions for them to interact with the teacher.

Similarly, the extensive use of one-to-one tutoring, which was also related to Hafa's controlling attitude (as shown by the trainee deliberately excluding the rest of the class during the practice), affected pupils' ability to *engage with the content* and interact with one another (*collective/group learning*) by taking up most of the lesson's time and energy of the trainee, and by entailing only repetition-based activities. Even the introduction of teaching aids such as flashcards did not enable pupils to *communicate* through the content, as the trainee's emphasis on control meant that pupils could only occasionally handle the teaching aids and use them only to repeat letter-word patterns. Finally, Hafa's controlling attitude also appeared in the homework assignment, which she wrote personally on the exercise books, and so failed to *empower* the pupils and develop their sense of *agency* by doing this by themselves.

### 5.3.3 Findings: tracing existing beliefs and practices in Hafa’s final performance

Although Hafa did not explicitly criticize the practices suggested by the author during the course sessions, and in fact showed willingness to implement them in her classroom, these practices were transformed and often distorted in her lessons. The analysis indicated that Hafa’s pre-course beliefs and practices had a significant impact upon this transformation in her final teaching performance. Table 14 juxtaposes the existing beliefs and practices which guided Hafa’s final performance and the aspects of the communicative approach most affected by them.

Existing beliefs and practices	Aspects of the communicative approach most affected
Memorization and repetition	Visual learning
	Contextualized content learning
	Collective/group learning
	Pupils’ active engagement with/transformation of content
Written knowledge	Visual learning
	Communicating through the content
Precision and proficiency of the learnt content	Contextualized content learning
	Pupils’ active engagement with / transformation of the content
	Communicating through the content
	Collective/group learning
	Pupils’ agency and empowerment
One-to-one tutoring	Pupils’ participation in the lesson
	Communicating through the content
	Collective/group learning
Teacher’s controlling attitude towards pupils	Pupils’ active engagement with/transformation of the content
	Pupils’ participation in the lesson
	Communicating through the content
	Collective/group learning
	Pupils’ agency and empowerment

Table 14: the existing beliefs and practices which guided Hafa’s final performance and the aspects of the communicative approach which were most affected by them (grouped by colour)

## **5.4 Research Question 2: To what extent are the trainees' recurrent practices and beliefs rooted in the broader and local Egyptian socio-cultural context?**

Research Question 1 identified five recurrent dispositions (beliefs and practices) which, by the end of the training course, were still guiding the trainee's teaching performance. These dispositions deeply hindered the implementation of the suggestions made by the author, and the fact that they were not affected by the training course was almost certainly due to methodological issues implicit in the training model employed and in its delivery. At the same time, research (see Chapter 4) has shown that teachers don't teach in a vacuum, but in a socio-cultural context, which can prove highly influential in teachers' classroom performance, and consequently on the process of accommodating new knowledge.

As Bourdieu suggested, this influence is exerted since some of the educational beliefs and practices of the individual teachers may be shared with the broader socio-cultural context, which in turn encourages their reproduction and maintenance (habitus – 1977). The process of knowledge accommodation is therefore challenged further by the fact that Hafa's recurrent dispositions may be shared with this broader context. For this reason, Research Question 2 looked at the extent to which the trainee's recurrent hindering dispositions reflected the educational meta-narratives and discourses which were evident in the macro-, meso- and micro- socio-cultural context. The analysis explored in detail three recurrent dispositions: one-to-one tutoring, the teacher's controlling attitude towards the pupils, and the cluster which included an emphasis on written knowledge, repetition, memorization, and the proficient learning of content units.

### **5.4.1 Data presentation and analysis**

#### **One-to-one tutoring**

Research Question 1 showed that the practice of one-to-one tutoring, which was largely employed by Hafa and her peers, supported the overall negative perception of whole-class teaching. Firstly, Hafa viewed whole-class teaching based on the repetition of single content units as extremely time and energy consuming for both teachers and pupils. One problem was related to the fact that content units had to be practised on a daily basis and in different forms (e.g. oral rote learning, exercises, games), which often left the pupils bored and tired. During an informal classroom observation of another teacher's lesson, pupils were in fact observed falling asleep during the rote learning exercise.

Secondly, the frequent absence of pupils and their different learning abilities also made whole-class teaching ineffective, as most pupils were excluded from learning and so fell behind. Thirdly, Hafa's perceptions were influenced by her personal experience of the Egyptian education system, which had failed to prepare her for her exams and prevented her from attending university. The trainee's lack of trust in whole-class teaching therefore encouraged the extensive employment of one-to-one tutoring in the classroom. This negative perception of whole-class teaching and, conversely, the strong reliance upon individual

learning, appeared to be shared at large by the Egyptian people, which was reflected in the widespread practice of individual home tutoring.

Hafa confirmed that private tutoring is a very common practice in Egypt (Hd-17). The MOE, which formally banned it, calculated that 50% of the students enrolled in basic education and 80% of those attending general secondary education receive private tutoring (MOE 2007d:46). In his popular novel *Taxi*, Al Khamissi states that “the question of education and private lessons is right at the top of the list of Egyptian’s concerns [...], and every Egyptian struggles to make a living so that he can give his earnings to private teachers” (Al Khamissi 2007:111).

According to the Ministry of Education, private tutoring is a long-established practice. Previously employed for particularly challenging topics and short-time help, it has now become a wide spread phenomenon among families which can afford it. This means that low-income families, who cannot afford private tuition, often have to withdraw their children from school. The Ministry asserts that this is a result of the traditional pedagogy employed by the teachers; their poor teaching performance de-motivates poorer students, causes them to dropout, and results in their parents’ distrust of the state education system (MOE 2007d:47 and 49).

While private tutoring is viewed by the authorities as the root of numerous problems in the Egyptian education system, other scholars have provided a more complex analysis of the phenomenon. According to Sayed, private tutoring has become so widespread because the low standard of teaching in schools does not adequately prepare students for their exams. Overcrowded classrooms and poor facilities are two of the factors fuelling this low educational standard, but the poor quality of teachers is also key. This is particularly pertinent in light of the fact that, until the late 1980s, teachers were recruited from those who had scored the lowest marks in the national school leaving exams (Sayed 2006:72).

In addition to this, working conditions are also very demanding, while teachers’ motivation and remuneration are far from satisfactory (teachers earn between 500 and 600LE per month). Low salaries mean that private tutoring, as a supplementary income-generating activity, is almost a necessity for teachers. Unfortunately, this has also led to some teachers decreasing the quality of their classroom teaching in order to create a need for private tutoring, or impose it as condition for being awarded high marks. Private home tutoring is also viewed as essential (for families who can afford it) if they want their children to pass their exams (Hargreaves 2001). A taxi driver interviewed by Al Khamissi, for example, claimed to pay 120LE per month for private tuition for his two daughters (2007:112). The high costs of private tuition evidently mean that children from low-income families are more likely to perform poorly in school and to fail their exams (Sayed 2006).

However, teachers’ poor working conditions and remuneration, the lack of facilities and training, and overall low teaching quality are not the only reasons behind the high demand for private tuition; the exam-based structure of the Egyptian education system itself is also a key

explanatory factor. The Egyptian education system is arranged into six stages: nursery (0-3 years), pre-primary (4-5 years), primary (6-11 years), preparatory (12-14 years), secondary (15-17 years) and higher education (18-22 years). While the nursery and pre-primary stages are not part of the formal, free education system, both primary and preparatory education are compulsory and free. In order to access preparatory education, an exam must be passed at the end of the primary stage. If pupils fail this exam after two attempts, they can progress to vocational preparatory schools, while those who pass in two or fewer attempts can progress to general preparatory schools. An exam must also be passed at the end of preparatory school in order to access secondary education; according to their performance in this exam, students either proceed to either to general secondary education (and then to university), or to technical secondary education (which will lead to a career in the vocational or technical workforce) (MOE 2007d:31). Passing primary and preparatory leaving exams therefore plays a key role in students' education and future career prospects, and the private tutoring sector is fuelled by parents' combined distrust of the national education system and belief that private tutoring will improve their child's chances of exam success.

The solution to the problem of private tutoring proposed by the MOE in the 2007-2012 National Strategic Plan for Education was to re-gain the trust of the parents by creating a modern, quality schooling environment and by decentralizing the system in order to encourage greater community involvement (MOE 2007b:26). At the same time, a system of fines for parent and teachers who requested and offered home tutoring was introduced (Chiumeo 2010). At the time of this study, however, Egyptians' distrust of the education system was still common. One of the taxi drivers interviewed by Al Khamissi, for example, claimed that his son (who was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school) could not even write his name, adding that education for everyone no more than fantasy (2007:112). Another taxi driver went even further, stating that children do not learn anything in school apart from the national anthem, which was why he had withdrawn his sons from school (ibid.: 162). One of the taxi drivers interviewed by the author, who also worked as IT teacher in a preparatory school in Cairo, described the Egyptian education system as 'the worst in the world'; with 90 pupils in a classroom and only one available computer, he argued that "there is no chance for pupils to learn anything". This, he continued, was simply the product of Mubarak's regime, but was embedded in the Egyptian education since Sadat. He was lucky, he concluded, because his parents had taught him and helped him to pass his exams (I/x).

The teachers enrolled on the training course expressed broadly similar opinions when asked about the quality of the Egyptian education system. According to Hafa, for example, education did not have a positive 'social image' as it once did, as people no longer believed that education would improve their future (Hd-10/11). She believed that education had deteriorated to the point that the popular saying 'study and you will succeed, cheat and you will score higher' now reflected the reality (Hd-71). She identified three possible explanations for the negative status of national education. Firstly, pupils and parents only viewed education in material terms – namely, as a means to get a certificate. In academic terms, this phenomenon is known as the 'diploma disease', which occurs when the education system fails to convey skills and knowledge, but (at least in theory) is simply seen as a means



to provide certification in order to access the labour market (Sayed 2006:49). The second reason was that parents were not taking to the streets to demand a better education for their children, which in turn had made Egypt “one of the last countries in the world” (Hd-72) – these somewhat prophetic comments were made one year before the 2011 revolution. Hafa’s third explanation was that private universities allowed less able students to compete with their colleagues from state universities, and to find better jobs by ‘patronage’ (Hd-73). Falak and Iba offered similar explanations, saying that ‘education [in Egypt] is very bad’ and that “only rich people can learn well” (Id-66). The head teacher also pointed out that the quality of education was so low that “if the student does not pay for the private lessons, he will not learn well” (Nd-40).

Together with her peers, Hafa recognized that a key problem affecting the Egyptian education system was the unequal access to quality education and, subsequently, to the labour market. By employing the practice of one-to-one tutoring, however, she did not seem to recognize that she was reproducing in her classroom the unequal system which she criticised so strongly in wider society, as only the pupils who could benefit from individual tutoring were able to score high marks and proceed to the end of the educational cycle. This was apparent in the evaluation of pupils’ learning outcomes, which Hafa and the author carried out together before the final assessment (see Training course phase 3, between Sessions 8 and 9).

The evaluation confirmed that 80% of the pupils who belonged to the group which benefitted more frequently from one-to-one tutoring did achieve the targets set by the trainee (1/3 of the pupils overall), while less than 50% of those who were only exposed to whole-class teaching could produce satisfying outcomes. Among the latter group who enjoyed least chances for one-to-one tutoring, few were able to write legibly. When the author asked Hafa whether one-to-one tutoring was placing this latter group at a disadvantage, however, she asserted that these pupils were too disruptive to be called to the board, and / or too young to benefit from individual learning. Instead, they had to learn by observing the pupils who were called to the blackboard, which, as discussed earlier, reflects the Islamic principle of ‘Alqudwah Al Hassina’ (selection of the Good Model). This principle, which Bruner defined as the ‘imitative learner’ (Alexander 2000), claimed that pupils would learn by imitating a model. If they were not learning, she concluded, it was because they had not paid attention or made enough effort to acquire the content information.

### **Teacher’s controlling attitude upon the pupils (discipline)**

Hafa’s controlling attitude informed many of her classroom practices, including high teacher talking time, numerous activities based on content repetition, extensive implementation of one-to-one tutoring, control over teaching aids, individual assignment of homework, and a lack of group-based activities. This controlling attitude also interacted with other beliefs, as discussed in Research Question 1. Some of the beliefs, for example, concerned the roles of the teacher and pupils, which were seen as fixed and defined. The teacher must shape the behaviour of her pupils (for example, by teaching them to respect elders – Hd-7), and pupils must listen, observe and imitate the teacher. In order to achieve this, effective learning environments must be quiet and ordered. It was these beliefs and practices surrounding

discipline, control and the fixed roles of teacher and pupil which prevented the author's suggested from being implemented. Specifically, suggestions which were not implemented included allowing pupils' to engage with and transform content, encouraging their active participation in the lesson, creating opportunities to communicate by using the content, encouraging group and collective learning, and fostering pupils' agency and empowerment.

Hafa demonstrated that discipline was one important feature of a good teacher in her self-evaluation (Task 3, final assessment) when she apologized for the pupils' 'misbehaviour' during the flashcard activity (Hd-84). This emphasis on discipline was not limited to the group of trainees enrolled on the course, but was evident at various levels of Egyptian society. The extensive debates on corporal punishment, for example, confirmed this close and problematic relationship between discipline, classroom management, and education.

Discipline in school is crucial in Arab-Islamic *therbia* (education), because it is believed that children must learn what is *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (prohibited) through education. The cycles (or fundamentals) of *halal* and *haram*, which control the life of a Muslim (Tantawi et al. 2009:4), are learned through disciplinary practices – including corporal punishment – based on reward and punishment. Most Arab-Islamic scholars agree that corporal punishment for children is rejected by the Koran, the Sunnah and ancient scholars such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (Khan 2005:5). On this and other grounds, the late Prof. Tantawi (Grand Imam of the prestigious Al-Azhar University) recently declared with UNICEF that “no parent, or teacher or employer has the right to smack a child” and that “all forms of corporal punishment should be avoided as a means of disciplining children” (Tantawi et al. 2009:56). There are, he continued, valid alternative disciplinary methods, such as withholding rewards, admonition, and imposing temporary isolation, which are more effective in communicating punishment and do not have implications for children's current health and future attitudes towards violence (ibid.: p.57). The Egyptian Government has officially adopted a similar position, issuing a ministerial directive on November 17<sup>th</sup> 1998 which stated that corporal punishment should not be used in schools (Global Initiative 2011).

In spite of this, research has revealed that corporal punishment is still an everyday practice in Egyptian schools (Khan 2005:6). Internet blogs (El Awady 2010), videos (Sky News 2011), online groups (Reem undated), and events such as the death of an 11 year old student who was murdered by his Maths teacher in 2008 (Reem 2008), are only a few of the many cases which were defined as 'unacceptable' in the 2011 Report of the UN-endorsed 'Global Initiative to End Corporal Punishment for Children' (Global Initiative 2011). There has been much speculation over the continued prevalence of corporal punishment. One explanation identified by the 2011 Report was that the 1998 Ministerial Directive was still not affirmed in law, and that existing legislation did not explicitly condemn corporal punishment (ibid.). This, therefore, did not prevent teachers from hitting their pupils. This gap between stated policy intentions and actual implementation shows that the debate about the use and effectiveness of corporal punishment is still far from resolved in Egypt (Khan 2005:5). For example, several Arab-Islamic scholars who are broadly critical of physical punishment still

justify beating students with a light stick in extreme cases and within certain boundaries (Alwan 1997 and Diab 1992 cited in Khan 2005:6; Alshukhaibi et al 1997).

This conditional justification of corporal punishment was also observed in the kindergarten, although in diverse forms. Examples of corporal punishment witnessed during visits and classroom observations mainly involved waving the cane, occasional light caning on the shoulders, and on one occasion, heavy beating. Data collected about Falak's use of the cane showed that caning was both a classroom management practice and a method for self-defence. This confirmed Woods' idea that emphasis on discipline is not only a matter of power, but it may also be related to the 'survival' syndrome, in which classroom strategies are dictated by teachers' feeling that they need to 'survive' a lesson rather than their interest in pedagogical issues (Woods, quoted in Pollard 1996:86). In contrast to Falak, Hafa was never seen using the cane or shouting, and she actually openly condemned the practice of hitting pupils (Hd-5). However, as discussed in Research Question 1, she employed other forms of punishment (e.g. scolding pupils or making them stand by the blackboard and face the wall) to address issues for which others resolved through caning. One such problem was pupils' attempt to participate during one-to-one tutoring.

Other classroom observations, in the local primary school and a kindergarten in a nearby community, suggested that corporal punishment was commonly used by teachers beyond the kindergarten in this study. One example was witnessed in the lesson delivered by Amid, the manager of the targeted kindergarten who also worked as an English teacher in the local primary school. Amid caned pupils who were repeatedly disruptive on their hands, and twisted parts of their body (D2-14/15). It was also noted, however, that there were 56 pupils in the classroom, most of whom lacked stationary and textbooks, which made the lesson highly challenging for the teacher.

Whether advocating corporal punishment or alternative practices, both sides of the debate on school discipline still appear to be rooted in the behaviourist principles of reward, reinforcement and punishment, or 'positive' teaching (Merrett and Wheldall in Pollard 1996:100). One main asset of positive teaching is the belief that learning must coexist with (and in fact occurs through) an improvement in behaviour. Pupils getting on with their quietly is therefore prioritised over encouraging their learning through active participation in a lesson.

### **Written representation of knowledge, repetition, memorization, and the precision / proficiency of learnt/reproduced content**

Hafa's emphasis on written knowledge, memorization, repetition and proficient content learning hindered the implementation of suggestions such as the employment of visual and collective learning, the contextualization and transformation of content, and the use of content for communication. This emphasis, shared by all the trainees enrolled on the course, motivated many of their teaching practices, such as: breaking down letterforms, presenting isolated single content units, repeating letter-words patterns, one-to-one tutoring, and copying and imitating the teacher in the homework. While the MOE is officially discouraging these

beliefs and practices in favour of more active teaching and learning strategies (MOE 2007d), they are nevertheless deeply rooted in the religious and cultural identity of Egyptians.

Broadly speaking, written words are at the heart of Islamic culture, and many Arabs' lives (Gibb 1972). The Koran, which consists of the transcribed speeches delivered by the Prophet in the last 20 years of his life, is regarded as "the transcript of a tablet preserved in heaven" (Dawood 1976:9), and so the infallible word of Allah. It is said to have been dictated to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel, who addressed him by telling to 'recite' (Surat Al'-Alay), which is the English translation of the word 'Koran', and which made the pursuit of (written) knowledge an obligation for every Muslim (Christina et al. 2003:357). Initially, the Koranic revelations were committed to memory by professional 'remembrancers'. During Muhammad's life-time, the verses were written on palm leaves, stones and other materials. Finally, during the caliphate of Othman (c. 644-56 AD), a written version of the Koran was issued. This version is still used today. During an interview conducted as part of this study (I/z), an Egyptian English teacher interpreted these facts by saying that Allah gave life by using words, which were preserved because they were written down; it is for this reason that written words are at the heart of the Koran and Islam (D2-23).

In spite of repeated translation attempts, the Koran remains essentially untranslatable because, like poetry, its deeper meanings are embedded in the emotional power of the language and in its musicality, which cannot be expressed by the everyday language of translation (Gibb 1972:4). In order to access these deeper meanings, Arabs recite repeatedly the words of the Koran exactly as they are written several times a day, therefore renewing and confirming the teaching of Allah, which is a 'living condition' employed to make sense of reality rather than a passively inherited religious dogma (ibid.: 3). The written language of the Koran is therefore the active means to reach Allah, and the depository of the moral, spiritual, and practical assets which guide the daily life of many Arabs. Repetition, at the same time, is not viewed as the passive reproduction of words, but a means to penetrate and discover the deeper meaning of such words.

Arabic language is also the main cultural symbol which, more than trading or proximity, defines the Arab world; it also allows particularly fast, immediate communication since it relies on primary units, which are the words (Gibb 1972). Consequently, written language is viewed as the key means in preserving a collective cultural and religious Arab identity as it transcends time, environmental changes, and the temporary physical existence of human beings. In other words, it ensures (together with memorization and repetition) the accuracy of the information transmitted, which in Arabic is known as *silsila* (the chain). Written language, then, helps the socialization of an Arab identity, and is also a means to transcend the physical and temporary constraints of matter and achieve immortality (Dhaouadi 2008).

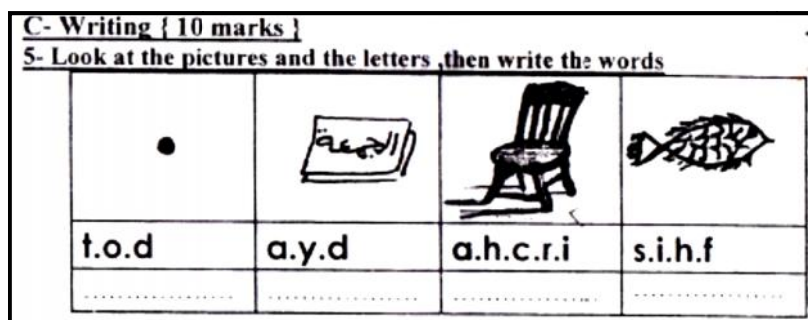
Written language is also viewed as the supreme form of art, which Arabs use to express their imagination and artistic feelings because (unlike figurative arts) they are simple and discreet, and are more appealing both to the individual and the masses (Gibb 1972:5). Although figurative arts such as painting are becoming increasingly important among certain sections

of the Egyptian population (particularly the upper class in Cairo), it should be noted that traditionally, these arts have received little to no attention in Islamic culture. This is due to the belief that only Allah can represent life. This explains the absence of paintings or frescos in mosques, as seen in Christian churches, and on a more education-specific level, many parents' belief that figurative arts do not help pupils learn. This was also suggested by one of the JICA volunteers interviewed in relation to her assignment as a kindergarten teacher trainer for special needs children in Luxor.

Parents of the pupils enrolled in the kindergarten shared the belief that written knowledge was the main aim of education and proof of learning. This was inferred from parents' appreciation of their children's writing skills which they expressed during short interviews with the author (D4-37/47/49), and from the fact that the parents who came periodically to the kindergarten in order to check their children's improvement only asked the teachers to demonstrate their children's writing skills (D3-152). Among the interviewees, only one valued the fact that since joining the kindergarten her child had learnt to be more respectful.

The guiding influence of Koranic learning and of the cultural symbolic power of written Arabic upon the beliefs and practices concerning English language teaching inferred from the study was not made explicit by the trainees. The trainees actually agreed that Koranic learning required the knowledge of specific rules (Gd-41, Hd-52, Id-58, Nd-39), which were necessary to understand the deeper meanings of the holy text (thus the messages of Allah). These rules were viewed as fixed, and changing them was considered 'unacceptable' (Nd-39). Consequently, learning the written words of the Koran was only possible through repetition and memorization (e.g. Id-58). By contrast, the trainees asserted that modern languages were subject to continuous change, and so they required different teaching and learning strategies from the Koran. Specific differences between the methodologies used by the trainees to teach Arabic, English and the Koran, however, were not identified. Actually, observations of Koran lessons in the kindergarten showed identical teaching methodologies, based on memorization through repetition, emphasis on fixed and unchangeable written language, and precision and proficiency in the reproduction of the content matter. The author's suggestion of teaching the Koran by using drawings or parables was strongly criticized by the trainees and ignored.

Hafa and the trainees also shared the belief that words represented combinations of letters (a.p.p.l.e.) (e.g. Hd-29). Consequently, pupils needed to become acquainted with individual letters first, before they could learn whole words. This assumption was made explicit by the head teacher ("it is natural to start education step by step, by knowing the letters and how to write it [...] and how to pronounce it, and then learning the words" – Nd-38), and was also shared with the wider socio-cultural context. For example, it was apparent in one of the tasks included in the National English Language Test for Primary School, as shown in Picture 37 below.



Picture 37: National English language test (Primary school, grade 2)

Additionally, when asked what pupils should have learned by the time they left kindergarten, the English teacher from the local primary school (which pupils from the kindergarten would attend after the kindergarten cycle) asserted that they should be familiar with all the letters of the English alphabet, both in writing and orally, upper and lower cases (D2-77). Similarly, the Arabic teacher from the same school stated that knowledge of all the letters of the Arabic alphabet was the main requirement (D2-78).

In light of these assertions, it seems that even if the training course had been successful in shifting the emphasis from individual letters to words in the kindergarten, pupils risked to be penalized in the primary school. This emphasis on learning individual letters proficiently and 'by heart' was not limited to the targeted community. The Professor from the University of Cairo, who designed and delivered the training course financed by the NGO (discussed in Chapter 2), established similar English language objectives for the pupils, namely to memorize all the letters of the alphabet. One possible reason for encouraging pupils to memorize individual English letters was inferred from the considerations made by an Egyptian English teacher, who remarked during an interview that in Arabic, all the words are built according to roots made of 2 / 3 / 4 letters (I/z). This is the case, for example, of the words related to the word 'book' (*kitab*), where the root 'KTB' is also found in *maktabah* (library), *kataba* (to write), *maktab* (office), and *kuttub* (elementary school). In light of the fact that vowels are also rarely included in the written language (with the exception of the Koran), learning roots of individual letters in Arabic meant that pupils would eventually be able to learn whole words (D2-22). However, this is importantly not the case in English, which is not a root-based language. Similarly, while the letters of the Arabic alphabet are arranged according to similar shapes and sounds (e.g. , or ), this is not the case in the English alphabet, which does not follow a logical order.

Hafa's emphasis upon precision and proficiency in learning and reproducing content was also shared with her colleagues and the broader context, as it was rooted in their personal experience as students in the national education system. In Egypt (as in many other countries) English is taught following the grammar-translation method (Gahin and Myhill 2001), which views the learning of foreign languages as a 'mental discipline'. The approach consists of analysing and studying the grammatical rules of the language and then practising them by translation. One practice which is central to this approach is the accurate use of language items (Bowen, undated). The fact that the trainees were still guided by their schooling

experience was apparent in their commentaries on the paper test (Sessions 1 and 2) and from the initial classroom observations.

With regard to Exercise 2 of the test, for example, Falak and Hafa thought they had to translate the Arabic letters into English, which probably led them to make mistakes relating to homonymy. The trainees were also observed employing translation with their pupils regularly (e.g. Iba used to let the pupils repeat the line 'B – Ball - Cora', in D3-147), and translation was also often mentioned in their lesson plans. The following quotes are examples of this:

I do read first the word in Arabic, followed by the word in English (Fd-35).

I draw 'A' and describe it in Arabic (Gd-24).

...if he [the pupil] knows [that] 'tuffaha' means apple, I am pretty sure that he understands my lesson (Id-30).

Additionally, two trainees stated that translation was their weakness in English.

...in English I find it hard to translate English into Arabic (Fd-18).

I cannot for now compose/structure complete sentence and unable to translate (Gd-14).

By contrast, the other two trainees identified poor knowledge of grammar rules as their key weakness (Nd-15 and Id-25), which is evidently the other key component of the grammar-translation method.

## **5.5 Overall findings**

The aim of this study was to understand the circumstances which may hinder or facilitate the transfer of international educational knowledge to developing contexts, within the framework of constructivist and reflective teacher education. This involved investigating the interplay of new and existing beliefs and practices within the broad socio-cultural context.

The resistant nature of practices and beliefs was already apparent in Research Question 1, which demonstrated the way in which the trainee's existing knowledge affected her understanding and implementation of the practices suggested by the author. This primarily took the form of complete transformation and distortion, and so rejection, of their original meaning. This transformation led to the implementation of practices which were mostly unsustainable and inefficient. However, on a few occasions, the beliefs and practices proposed by the author were not completely rejected. The suggestion of presenting the topic by using objects and pictures (visual learning), which is compared to the trainee's actual implementation in the final performance in Table 15, was one practice which was partially accepted.

Author: introduces realia/pictures to strengthen pupils' association of objects with words for objects, without using written knowledge

Trainee: introduces objects' drawings, adjacently to written words for objects and the targeted individual letter

Table 15: comparison of forms of topic's presentation, as suggested by the author (left) and as implemented by the trainee (right).

In this case, the trainee implemented the author's suggestion by presenting the topic through the images of the objects (drawings), although she also included the objects' written representations (words) and targeted letter, which the author had suggested adding at the end of the presentation instead. The comparison reveals that Hafa did not completely reject the idea that visual knowledge would contribute to pupils' learning; she had chosen objects which were already familiar to the pupils (like dog and door), and she kept drawing (and erasing) the pictures on the board. This happened during the one-to-one tutoring activity pictured below (Picture 38a), when Hafa added the drawing of a dog on the board next to letter 'D' and the word 'dog'.

Additionally, for the homework assignment, Hafa drew the picture of the dog in the pupils' exercise books, which pupils were then asked to colour in. This demonstrates that elements borrowed from the author's suggestions could be still implemented and combined to complement the topic's written presentation (that is, accommodated). The same practice of combining written and visual elements was also promoted by the Ministry of Education, which employed a mixture of letters, words and pictures in the National English language test (see picture 38b). This fostered a tolerance of differences (Volet 1999).



Pictures 38 a/b: mixing written and visual elements (Hafa on the left, MOE on the right)

At the same time, the fact that the activities implemented by Hafa (letter-word patterning, breaking down individual letters) focussed exclusively on written forms of knowledge demonstrates that this was still the most influential belief on her performance, leading to a rejection of the author's suggestion of implementing activities based on visual learning and content-based communication. In this case, then, the advised practice which Hafa accepted and accommodated only included drawings on the blackboard and in exercise books next to words and letters. This may have occurred because the suggestion appeared plausible,



intelligible, congruent with her existing belief concerning written knowledge (Posner et al. 1982; Tillema 1994), and it was compatible with the existing physical environment in terms of resources (chalk and blackboard) (Johnson et al. 2000:356).

The implementation of activities which allowed pupils to engage with the visual representations of the content did not take place because this was viewed as incongruent with three of the trainee's recurrent beliefs. Firstly, the assumed priority of written knowledge was a powerful belief shared with the broader cultural and normative context (including parents' expectations, national exams and religious precedent) (Rokeach 1968). Secondly, visual learning was incongruent with the belief that learning was synonymous with memorization as it did not entail the repetition of single content units, which was understood as one of the trainee's central beliefs as well as one which was evident in wider Egyptian educational culture. Thirdly, visual learning was also incongruent with the belief that the content needed to be learnt proficiently and precisely, which could only be guaranteed by written knowledge (according to both the trainee and the MOE).

There were further reasons which influenced Hafa's choice to neglect visual learning. For example, the trainee was content with her existing belief concerning written knowledge, as this was reinforced by her past teaching experiences. Moreover, the story-telling activity, which Hafa actively employed to present visual elements (the drawings on the board), did not produce the expected results in terms of immediate learning outcomes. This discouraged her to the point that she reverted to rote-learning. The trainee was evidently dissatisfied with the practical implementation of visual learning, which affected its accommodation (Nespor 1987).

Another case of superficial accommodation but overall rejection of the author's suggestions involved the implementation of collective and group-based activities. This aimed to allow all pupils to participate in the lesson, transform the content and use it to communicate. One suggested activity was for the trainee to prepare flashcards picturing the individual letters included in the chosen words, arrange the pupils into groups, give one set of flashcards to each group, and allow the pupils combine the flashcards to re-build the targeted words and compare the combinations with the other groups. None of these suggestions were implemented by the trainee.

The suggestion of preparing flashcards picturing all the letters included in a word (e.g. 'd, o, g') addressed three issues which were identified as particularly important by the author. Firstly, it aimed to adjust the fallacy implicit in the trainee's implementation of the 'watch model', which did not assist the pupils in the process of combining individual letters into whole words. Secondly, it would ensure consistency between new knowledge and the existing belief that words were combinations of letters. Thirdly, it aimed to allow pupils to interact with the content and to be exposed to multisensory stimulation.

Hafa followed the author's suggestion of preparing and employing flashcards, which was consistent with her practice witnessed in previous informal classroom observations, and so

intelligible and plausible. The practice of flashcards was also employed at the regional level, as other teachers were observed using flashcards in a kindergarten not far from the targeted town. The specific proposal of presenting flashcards which pictured the three to four letters included in a word, however, was not congruent with Hafa's belief that teaching more than two letters per day was too demanding for pupils, as previous classroom observations demonstrated. This belief, in turn, relied on the notion that learning was synonymous with memorizing single content units. For this reason, Hafa preferred her method based on single unit memorization through repetition, which was shared with the local and broader educational and cultural context. As the trainee wrote in her diary, this was the way "her parents and she had learnt" (Hd-50). This was in spite of her dissatisfaction with the method, because it was time and energy consuming, and did not effectively engage all the pupils. Consequently, the trainee prepared flashcards picturing only the first four letters of the English alphabet, focussing the activities exclusively on the targeted letter 'd'.

The suggestion concerning pupils' arrangement into groups, which stemmed from the socio-constructivist belief that learning is a social activity, aimed explicitly to foster inclusion and participation of all pupils in the lesson, and to create occasions for collective learning through teaching aids. This practice was neglected by the trainee, who implemented the flashcard-based activities exclusively during one-to-one tutoring, while scolding the other pupils who would try to join in the lesson. Hafa's rejection of the suggestion to implement group-based activities has several explanations. From the perspective of the physical environment, the suggestion did not suit the new layout of the classroom, as the desks were nailed to the floor, many pupils did not have desks and there were up to four pupils at each desk, the classroom was small, and on the day of the final performance there were more than 25 pupils in the lesson (see Picture 39).



Picture 39 - new layout of Hafa's classroom

Furthermore, Hafa had only prepared three different sets of flashcards (letters, words and pictures), which could not be distributed to the large number of groups which the pupils would have formed. Some of her existing and recurrent beliefs were also incongruent with the author's suggestion. The disruption and noise which group work produces, especially among kindergarten pupils who were not used to work together, would have clashed with the trainee's self-image as a

teacher – whose first duty is to shape and control the pupils' behaviour through discipline. The notion that effective learning environments must be quiet and ordered to allow the pupils to listen, observe and imitate the teacher (Model learning) also contradicted the potential chaos arising from group work, an assumption which also relates to the beliefs of precise content learning, fixed and unchangeable knowledge, and the idea that knowledge

should be acquired exactly as transmitted by the teacher (one-way knowledge transmission and ‘mug & jug’).

Hafa’s personal experience in the Egyptian education system, which had failed to prepare students for their exams through a whole-class approach and resulted in individual learning through private tuition, also contrasted with the author’s proposal related to collective learning experiences. In this sense, the trainee’s distrust towards collective learning was un-derived, and so more resistant to change because it had been developed through direct experience and reinforced by her present perception that whole-class teaching would be ineffective in engaging all her pupils. A further incongruent belief related to Hafa’s dependence on repetition as a teaching strategy for content memorization. As the practice of repetition cannot be implemented through group work, this was deliberately avoided. Finally, the trainee believed that the power dynamics within the classroom, that is, the role of teacher and pupils, should be fixed and clearly marked.

This hindered the implementation of the author’s suggestion to sharing teaching aids with the pupils, as this would imply the teacher sharing her power with them. Instead, Hafa preferred to retain control over the pupils and knowledge (as represented by the teaching aids in this case), and so rarely handed over the flashcards, even to individual pupils (see Picture 40). This attitude towards power dynamics was common in the Egyptian education system and, more broadly speaking, in Egyptian society.



Picture 40 – Hafa’s control over flashcards

Table 16 summarizes the findings concerning the circumstances which hindered or facilitated the trainee’s accommodation of the international knowledge proposed by the author (focusing on visual and collective/group learning).

Author’s suggestions	Accommodation/ rejection	Circumstances
	Accommodation: mixing written / visual items in topic presentation and homework	Practice is plausible / intelligible (also implemented by the trainee in previous lessons) Congruent w/ belief of written representation of knowledge (written/visual elements can coexist) Fitting physical environment (available resources)

Visual learning (mix and engage w/ written & visual items)		Practice shared w/ other trainees and MOE (e.g. National Exam)
	Rejection: engaging w/ visual items	Practice not shared w/ other trainees and MOE (e.g. National Exam)
		Incongruent w/ belief of priority to written representation of knowledge (shared w/ parents and MOE)
		Incongruent w/ belief of learning as memorizing through repetition (rooted in broader cultural context)
		Incongruent w/ belief that only written representation of knowledge guarantees precision/proficiency (shared w/ parents and rooted in broad cultural context)
		Hafa not dissatisfied w/ existing written knowledge-based practices
		Hafa dissatisfied w/ implementation of visual learning
Collective and group-based learning (teaching aids, pupils' participation)	Accommodation: employing flashcards (aids)	Plausible/intelligible (previously employed by the trainee)
	Rejection: flashcards picturing all letters of a word	Practice shared w/ peers and teachers from other kindergarten
		Incongruent w/ belief of teaching max 2 letters per day (inferred from previous class observations)
		Incongruent w/ belief that learning means memorizing single content units (rooted in broad cultural context)
	Rejection: arrange pupils into groups	Dissatisfied w/ practice of repeating single content units (though shared w/ broad cultural context)
		Not fitting the physical environment (layout)
		Suitable resources not available (flashcards)
		Incongruent w/ self-image that teacher shapes/controls pupils' behaviour (rooted in broad cultural context)
		Incongruent w/ belief of quiet learning environment for model learning (rooted in broad cultural context)
		Incongruent w/ belief of precise content learning (rooted in broad cultural context)
Incongruent w/ belief of fixed/unchangeable knowledge (rooted in broad cultural context)		
Incongruent w/ belief of acquiring knowledge exactly as transmitted (teaching as one-way transmission and mug & jug) (rooted in broad cultural context)		
Distrust collective learning due to personal experience (un-derived belief shared w/ peers)		

		and Egyptian people)
		Distrust collective learning due to dissatisfaction w/ own whole-class teaching method
		Incongruent w/ belief that learning occurs through repetition (shared w/ peers and rooted in broad cultural context)
		Incongruent w/ belief that teacher should not share power with pupils (rooted in broad cultural context)

*Table 16: overview of the circumstances which led to accommodation and rejection of the author's suggestions. The circumstances which allowed accommodation are highlighted in green. The circumstances which hindered accommodation and encouraged rejection are highlighted in red.*

## 5.6 Discussion

The findings confirmed the main assumption discussed initially and throughout this study: cross-cultural knowledge transfer is a problematic practice. One main factor affecting the knowledge transfer process concerns the *autopoietic* nature of education systems, which are networks producing components which, through their interaction, generate the network which produces and constitutes them (Luhmann 1986). This also implies that when new educational knowledge is introduced in a system, it is understood, re-arranged and implemented according to the networks of beliefs and practices of that system. For this reason, new knowledge must be *congruent* with (though not mechanically identical to) the knowledge already in place ('congruence hypothesis' – Tillema 1994:601).

As discussed in the case above, involving the author's suggestion to implement visual learning, it appears that Hafa transformed this practice to fit into the local network of beliefs and practices, with the result that the trainee accepted the items of the practice which were congruent with local knowledge but rejected the others. For example, she was able to mix visual and written representations of knowledge on the blackboard and in pupils' exercise books by drawing pictures next to words and letters, because this practice was congruent (though not identical) with the existing belief that knowledge should be learned through written forms. However, the proposal of engaging the pupils with visual representations of knowledge such as drawings was rejected, because it was incongruent with Hafa's other central beliefs. One of these was that learning was synonymous with memorizing single content units through repetition, which could not be applied to drawings or other visual forms of knowledge. Another was that single content units had to be learnt precisely and proficiently by the pupils, which could only be guaranteed through written representations of knowledge.

The same process occurred with another of the author's suggestions, involving the use of teaching aids in the form of flashcards. Hafa prepared three sets of four flashcards for her final performance, which represented individual letters, words and pictures. This practice was not only congruent but also identical to others previously employed by the trainee in her lessons, when she had used flashcards to strengthen pupils' learning of the content. The

second part of the suggestion, however, which asked the trainee to prepare flashcards which represented three to four letters which formed a word (to be combined by the pupils as activity), was rejected. The reason is that this was *incongruent* with Hafa's belief that teaching more than two letters per day was too demanding for pupils and that learning should proceed by memorizing single content units in alphabetical order. The suggestion, which was fully rejected by the trainee, was to arrange the pupils into groups and use the flashcards for collective learning. Hafa limited the use of teaching aids to one-to-one tutoring once again, thus rejecting the proposed implementation of group-based activities, because the newly proposed and existing educational beliefs and practices were incongruent.

More specifically, the noise produced by group work clashed with the trainee's self-image as teacher (in terms of the person who shapes pupils' behaviour and maintains discipline), and with her belief that quiet learning environments are required for pupils to listen, observe and imitate the teacher (model learning). This, in turn, also conflicted with her existing beliefs of precise content learning, fixed and unchangeable knowledge, one-way knowledge transmission, learning through repetition, and 'mug & jug' teaching. Collective learning was also inconsistent with Hafa's personal experience within the Egyptian education system and with the assumption that the teacher should not share her power with the pupils.

The study confirmed another important issue highlighted in the literature as problematic for knowledge transfer, namely that educational practices are *not commodities* which can be substituted or exchanged with new practices (De Long 1997). This is because they are interconnected and located within complex clusters of beliefs. Changing one practice, then, would require *re-arranging the whole network* of local knowledge. The intricacy and binding nature of such a network was evident from the findings in Research Questions 1.1 and 1.2, which mapped out one possible network of Hafa's educational practices and beliefs in relation to the practice of repetition. This practice (in its different forms, which included oral rote learning and copying the teacher's handwriting) appeared intertwined with and implied by the local practices of presenting the content in alphabetical order, breaking down the content into single content units, patterning individual letters and words, and presenting single content units contiguously.

Other recurrent practices which provided chances for the implementation of repetition were one-to-one tutoring, one-way knowledge transmission, and the high rate of teacher talking time, which limited the pupils' talking time to the repetition of the given content only. This repetition-related network was also situated within a cluster of recurrent, powerful, and central (thus binding) beliefs. The belief that learning is synonymous with memorizing cognitive information is at the core of this cluster. This required the practice of repetition for imprinting information in pupils' minds, which were considered 'blank' by the trainee, e.g. lacking pre-existent cognitive structures. Learning was also viewed as a process of gradual acquisition of single content units (sequential learning), which implied the practice of breaking down of the content into small parts to be memorized via repetition and subsequently combined into whole content (watch model). The extensive employment of repetition also stemmed from the fact that the trainee valued and required immediate results

as proof of learning, which drilling and rote learning would produce, at least superficially, and for a short time after the activity. These results were also necessary in order to prove pupils' proficiency in the acquisition of content, which the pupils were expected to reproduce precisely as transmitted by the teacher. In turn, this was rooted in the belief that knowledge was fixed, given, and unchangeable, which required the practice of repetition as means for the exact transmission of knowledge.

This exact transmission was also related to the belief that written representations of knowledge carried stronger pedagogical potential than visual forms such as drawings. Consequently, when the author suggested that the trainee engaged the pupils with visual learning, the proposal was also challenged and opposed by the whole network of practices and beliefs, including the priority of written knowledge, the idea of learning as the process of memorization through repetition, the need for transmitting exact knowledge, and leading the pupils to the proficient learning of single content units.

The fact that educational practices are not commodities which can be easily substituted was also apparent in the intimate and emotional connection between the trainee and her existing practices and beliefs, because they were intrinsic to her past and current life experience (Stephens 2007). The author's proposal concerning collective and group-based learning, for example, clashed with the trainee's identity as teacher and with her personal experience as a student, which research has identified to be among the most influential factors upon teaching performance and teachers' decisions (Fenstermacher 1986, Charon 1989, Stuart et al. 2009). Additionally, collective and group-based learning does not imply simply re-arranging pupils' seating arrangements and / or introducing games and teaching aids. On the contrary, it requires the teacher's informed tolerance of the noise, disruption, and misbehaviour which this approach can produce. This includes an understanding that disturbance and even chaos are part of group learning approaches within communicative English language teaching. Moreover, this same method requires the teacher's willingness to share the power she usually wields with her pupils, in order to enable them to use the content for communicating without fear of being interrupted, corrected, scolded or embarrassed in front of their peers (referred to as 'handing over the stick', in Chambers 1997).

However, these requirements contrasted sharply with the trainee's image of being a 'good' teacher as understood in this study. One belief implicit in this image was that the teacher should shape the behaviour of the pupils and 'imprint' social rules in their minds. Another was that, unless pupils learn to behave properly in the classroom, they will not be able to learn academic content, which makes discipline and silence the main features of effective learning environments (Freire 1972). This emphasis was also connected to Hafa's notion that the roles of teacher and pupils were clearly defined and had to be distinguished in terms of power distribution and decision-making. These beliefs were deeply embedded in the way in which the trainee perceived her teaching performance, as evident by the fact that they were reflected in all the practices Hafa employed (e.g. one-to-one tutoring), and were consistent with the other central beliefs (e.g. 'mug & jug').

Hafa's *past experience* also supported her decision to avoid allowing the pupils to work in groups, and to employ practices based on individual learning instead. The trainee had developed this belief through direct experience as a student in the Egyptian education system, which had been unable to prepare her for exams without private tuition, and eventually prevented her from attending university. The trainee's distrust of collective learning also reduced the time she allocated for whole-class teaching, and encouraged instead the extensive employment of one-to-one tutoring in the classroom. As this was an un-derived belief, that is, developed through direct exposure, it was extremely resistant to outside interference (Rokeach 1968).

One final, crucial issue affecting the accommodation of new knowledge concerns the fact that the educational knowledge employed in specific settings by individual trainees is also *shared* with other stakeholders (pupils, parents, management, other teachers) and *rooted* in the broad cultural context of history, norms, customs, and traditions (Bourdieu 1977; Steiner-Khamsi 2004). When this broad *agreement* was respected, the author's suggestions were accommodated. For example, the trainee agreed to mix written and visual items in the presentation of the topic and in the homework, because it was a practice shared with other trainees in the kindergarten and with the Ministry of Education, which employed this approach in the national exam test. Conversely, *disagreement* with the community and the cultural context contributed to the trainee rejecting the suggestion of engaging pupils with visual representations of knowledge. For instance, one reason underlying the rejection of visual learning was that this practice was incongruent with the belief that learning is synonymous with memorizing through repetition, and that only the written representation of knowledge can lead to learning (when defined as exact and proficient acquisition of knowledge).

Research Question 2, then, demonstrated that these beliefs were deeply rooted in the religious and cultural identity of Egyptians. Written words, for example, are at the heart of Islamic culture and many Arabs' lives. Firstly, as the Koran is seen as the exact transcript of a tablet preserved in Heaven, the words written on its pages are considered to be the exact representation and emanation of Allah's will and teachings. Their accuracy and immortality (the *silsila*, or chain) was only assured by writing them down. The will and teachings of Allah are implicit in these words, although they are not immediately understandable. The teachings can instead be inferred, as in poetry, from the combination of words and the structure of sentences, from their musicality (the word Koran means 'recital'). The Koran, then, is recited repeatedly throughout the day exactly as it was written, in the attempt to grasp the words' inner meanings.

Emphasis upon the written representation of language was also strengthened by the fact that the Arabic language is the main cultural symbol which unites the Arab world; writing is the instrument which preserves this language accurately, while visual arts are traditionally discouraged since this reproduction of knowledge and life is viewed as a prerogative of Allah alone. Another key reason for the rejection of the author's suggestions was that these beliefs surrounding written knowledge were also shared by the local community, particularly by



parents and teachers from other schools. The former distrusted figurative arts as an instrument for meaningful learning, valuing instead written representations of knowledge as proof that knowledge was being acquired. The latter, meanwhile, were focused on ensuring that the pupils in the kindergarten learned how to write the individual letters of the alphabet.

## **Chapter 6. Concluding reflections: rethinking cross-cultural Teacher Education**

### **6.1 The habitus and the individual**

This study identified four barriers to the sustainability of the knowledge transfer process:

- 1) Local educational practices proved to be intertwined with each other, rather than independent commodities
- 2) The trainees were emotionally attached to their existing knowledge, which was rooted in their past and present life experiences
- 3) The existing knowledge benefitted from group consensus, and was shared with the local and broad cultural contexts
- 4) The process of understanding and implementing new knowledge employed existing criteria.

Accommodation of new knowledge was therefore hindered by the autopoietic, value-laden, idiosyncratic and social nature of educational knowledge and settings. For successful accommodation, the compatibility/congruence of new knowledge with (some of the) existing practices, beliefs and the broader cultural context was required.

This need for congruency suggests that international educational knowledge cannot be considered universal or neutral, and that local and national education systems are not converging into a global model of shared targets and practices. Although ethnographic investigations are evidently not generalizable, it does appear from this study that the policy of borrowing and lending international knowledge chosen by the international community (and Egypt) to improve education worldwide has not proved sustainable. This is particularly true in cases where the international educational knowledge is incongruent with the local educational culture and with the normative and cultural context(s), as experienced at the kindergarten in this study.

Nevertheless, the benefits of these unsustainable policies were not clear from this study. It may be that case that, as Steiner-Khamsi argues (2004), these policies are a product of the Egyptian government's interest in 'externalization'. This involves maintaining the status quo, while benefitting from international regard and funding. From this perspective, it seems to be a striking coincidence that Egypt has received the maximum amount of foreign aid from the USA, second only to Israel, over the last two decades (Wang 2011), and collected 10% of all international financial aid for development between 1990 and 2000 (Sayed 2006). In spite of this funding, recent political events such as the 2011 Revolution suggested that the Egyptian government had not been implementing changes in line with its international agreements.

However, the unsustainability of borrowing and lending knowledge does not necessarily imply that teacher education has no potential to improve education quality in developing countries, nor does this study suggest a deterministic conclusion that individuals are merely

shaped by their socio-cultural contexts. On the contrary, this research aims to encourage reflection upon teacher education by highlighting the limitations of attempts to transfer international knowledge to individual trainees. Whether top-down or constructivist, reflective approaches, these attempts are hindered by the autopoietic nature of the socio-cultural context, which operates from both inside and outside the single trainee (the habitus), and by the value-laden ethos of any knowledge system.

As Bourdieu has argued, the habitus hinders change (1977). It does so by preventing individuals from recognizing the implicit false assumptions in their principles and practices, by leaving existing knowledge unquestioned, and by encouraging its acceptance – ‘this is the way it is, and the way it always has been’. Within the context of education, the habitus also discourages and de-motivates teachers by making them feel protected by using familiar practices, and isolated in any attempts to challenge the status quo. This was evident in Hafa’s experience; in spite of her initially strong interest in implementing change, she eventually *chose* to comply with more traditional forces. The complex, intertwined and binding nature of classroom practices, the difficulty of interpreting the value of a foreign teaching approach, and the withdrawal of her peers (who decided not to plan an English language lesson for the final assessment) were all important challenges to her desire to implement change.

Evidently, the training methodology employed by the author also affected the knowledge transfer process. For example, starting by addressing trainees’ misconceptions and drawbacks (that is, problem-solving approach) did not help develop empathy with the trainees. The trainees lacked as well practical guidance on how to implement the author’s theoretical suggestions. The combination of lesson planning, teaching practice, and lesson evaluation, was highly valuable from a research point of view, as it allowed in-depth data to be collected with minimal interference from the author. However, from a training point of view, these methods did support only in part the informed participation of the trainees in the process of knowledge building, especially because the method of diaries was time and energy consuming. Similarly, the combination of lesson observation and feedback did not assist the trainees in understanding their own practices and developing practical adjustments as they lacked guidance on how to proceed, and because feedback was perceived as judgemental rather than formative.

Interestingly, some scholars have proposed the practice of ‘co-teaching+feedback’ to replace the ‘observation + feedback’ training combination, as this would support the trainees’ participation in shared classroom performance (Edwards et al. 2002). However, co-teaching, as with other strategies such as lesson planning, feedback, and above all self-reflection, maintains an emphasis upon the individual and personal sense-making of classroom performance. This means that these practices still rely on a limited notion of agency, ignoring “a system of common values and shared commitment to socially oriented goals” (Edwards et al. 2002:104). From this study, it was clear that working with trainees as individuals was a flawed approach, as it failed to consider the power of the habitus upon the individual, and the challenge it presents to introducing change.

## 6.2 United we stand, divided we fall

Based on these reflections it appears that teacher education needs to be re-conceptualised in order to overcome the restraints imposed by the habitus. One potential alternative was highlighted by Dewey almost a century ago, who wrote that educational learning occurs if there is engagement of the individual with the social group (1922). Building on Kurt Lewin's understanding of group dynamics, Cartwright (1951) also suggested that standards for behaviour are set by the group to which one belongs. Consequently, even if the target is to refine the behaviour of individuals, teacher education must address the group:

Whether [people] change or resist change will be greatly influenced by the nature of these groups. Attempts to change [behaviour] must be concerned with the dynamics of groups

(Cartwright 1951:4).

Teacher education, then, should be reconceptualised as a group experience rather than an individual pursuit.

However, in order to train a group, this group (or a team) needs to be established. One key feature of a team is that all members have a sense of belonging to the group, or 'membership' (Cartwright 1951). While the trainees at the kindergarten could be counted as a group, they did not constitute a team in this sense. This was partly to do with the high turnover of teachers in the kindergarten – three teachers had left just before the training course began, and the head teacher had just been appointed. This meant that the teachers were accustomed to establishing temporary social relationships with their colleagues, as they were expected to leave at any time. Working as a kindergarten teacher was in fact viewed as a provisional occupation, which reinforced the perception of the group as transitory and impermanent. Moreover, the fact that the management retained responsibility for most decisions in the kindergarten (down to the petty cash for purchasing school materials such as cardboard or pencils) denied the teachers and the head teacher of any influence or decision-making power, which in turn disempowered the group.

This dominance of the management also inhibited another requirement for creating a sense of membership to a team, namely the prestige of belonging to the group in the eyes of other members. While the author could successfully build a meaningful, empowering professional relationship with the head teacher, for example by delivering personalized English language classes, sharing the planning and implementation of training sessions, and the preparation of a portfolio of activities for the final assessment, the management seemed to work against these empowering aims. This was apparent throughout the author's stay in the field. For example, the kindergarten manager would contradict and reprimand the head teacher in front of the trainees, and took major decisions without consulting her. Additionally, he retained important responsibilities such as interviewing and selecting teaching candidates, preparing the timetable, deciding the pedagogical approach, disciplining the teachers, and allocating

money. When asked about the kindergarten expenses for electricity, for example, the head teacher showed complete lack of awareness.

The lack of a stable group configuration and recognized leadership were a significant obstacle for the trainees to experience a sense of contribution, to feel valued, and to develop group membership (Maslow 1970), and so to work as a team. The study revealed that isolating trainees while attempting to implement change was unsustainable and ineffective; this suggested that there is a need for teacher educators to first create a sense of teamwork and co-operation between trainees, which can be used as a basis for change later on. Research has shown that cooperative learning can be particularly useful to achieving this (Kagan 1990, 1994; Gobbo 2010).

### **6.3 Cooperative teacher education vs. local educators**

Cooperative learning is a teaching approach which aims to allow learners to capitalize on each another's resources and skills in an attempt to build team spirit, develop shared understanding of the challenges implicit in daily teaching practices, and to find locally suitable and sustainable solutions. It implies a focus on group dynamics and procedures rather than on the content knowledge which the teacher educators are often expected to deliver to trainees, thus circumscribing the influence of foreign knowledge which international teacher educators inevitably bring with them. The benefit of this approach is that answers are found from within the complex still local network of practices and beliefs (as the one illustrated in Chapter 5), rather than brought in from the outside. Consequently, there is no need to fit external suggestions and concepts into the complex network formed by local beliefs and practices, because the network itself develops its own solutions.

In cooperative teacher education, then, it is the knowledge of these training procedures that distinguishes the educator from the trainees, rather than the knowledge of pedagogical 'solutions' to local problems. One procedure which may enable trainees to find a shared, local (rather than internationally-informed) answer to a problem, for example, consists of allowing trainees to understand that all they all 'have a voice'. This aims to challenge individuals' potential fear of being penalized for expressing ideas within a group. Consequently, one appropriate technique would be to let the trainees discuss an issue in small groups, then choose a representative of the group and present the group findings to the others.

However, two important considerations should be made. The first is that, as shown by this study, no knowledge is value-free. On the contrary, knowledge is always the expression of specific paradigms, that is, centres of power. Power controls knowledge by dictating how statements are to be made discursively meaningful, by establishing the criteria by which statements may be considered valid or true (Foucault 1980: 112). These rules do not particularly concern grammar or semantics, but the combination of individual statements with those preceding and following it (Bakhtin 1981 and 1986). The influence of power upon this combination of statements is not limited to the content knowledge which teacher educators may possess, but also extends to any other form of knowledge, including procedures and

techniques (such as those involved in cooperative learning). This implies that, along with content knowledge, the knowledge of procedures is also located within a specific paradigm, thus value-laden. As a consequence, the cross-cultural implementation of cooperative teacher education could still entail the transfer of international knowledge.

The second consideration is that, given the value-laden nature of knowledge, the employment of cooperative teacher education also entails a paradigm shift for the educator. This involves moving away from a top-down framework of substituting local with international science (as in the applied science model), and also the process of establishing internationally ‘correct’ answers, or adjusting local knowledge in the light of international knowledge (as in the author’s constructivist-reflective model). This shift should occur in the interests of facilitating trainees’ exploration of local knowledge by employing procedures and techniques (rather than content) which may facilitate this investigation (Freire 1972).

However, paradigm shifts do not simply involve learning new social skills or classroom and group techniques (Gobbo 2010). This is especially true for teacher educators who, like the author, grew up (as a student and a teacher) within the *auctores* paradigm, which entails a high respect for people who write, teach, and educate, viewing them as ‘authorities’. In spite of attending numerous courses and modules on constructivist, reflective and participatory approaches (e.g. at the University of Sussex, and with the UK-based Voluntary Service Overseas organization), it took the author four long years (and the writing of this dissertation) to understand and accept that knowledge transfer is unsustainable and ethnocentric even while appearing to be a democratically-informed process of refining local practices. Other concepts which had to be understood over time included the notion that trainees need to be fully trusted as they are the only ones who know how to solve their own problems, and that trainees can only be facilitated (rather than led or pushed) in the pursuit of their own truth. Certainly, the trainees’ request for an expert, for a (a Doctor, as the trainees used to call the author) who would answer their questions and give solutions to their problems, contributed to the author’s response in that sense. But the ‘doctor’ was already there, deeply embedded in the author, and waiting for being actualized.

From this study, it can be understood that international knowledge transfer is both unsustainable and inevitable. Unsustainable because educational systems are autopoietic and idiosyncratic, and educational knowledge is value-laden and situated; inevitable because paradigms influence any type of knowledge, and because thorough paradigm shifts are rare not just for the trainees but also for teacher educators. This encourages a debate concerning the role of international teacher education and educators in the efforts to achieve the sustainable development of education worldwide. Evidently, this is a complex debate with far-reaching implications. Nevertheless, this study suggests that cross-cultural teacher education should refrain from identifying international solutions or sustainable ways to transfer knowledge and ‘best’ practices, and focus instead on building local educational knowledge, that is, existing knowledge which is liberated from false assumptions and misconceptions in the light of its own, and not international, criteria.

The leading actors in this process should be chosen among local educators, as they would be more able than international educators to decipher the intricate network of local beliefs and practices, understand its emotional and cultural value, find sustainable solutions from within this network, and free local knowledge from misconceptions and false assumptions according to its own standards. Local educators, however, need not be professors from universities situated in the targeted countries, who (as discussed in Chapter 2) may subscribe to very different paradigm.

On the contrary, people from the local communities should be chosen, who are simultaneously insiders and outsiders, exposed to different educational cultures and emotionally attached to their own, thus able to select and implement appropriate new knowledge while ensuring continuity and compatibility between new knowledge, existing beliefs and the social contexts. The head teacher of the kindergarten, who had lived in the community but also studied and worked outside it, is an example of both an insider and an outsider. It is these informed individuals who can work as agents of change, and whom teacher education should consider key to the sustainable development of education within local settings.

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