



Research Article

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Linguistic Awareness and Knowledge among Prospective English Teachers in Kuwait: Implications in Inclusive Classrooms

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Abstract

The study explored the knowledge of Kuwaiti prospective teachers in linguistic constructs related to English literacy coaching in developmentally, linguistically and culturally inclusive classrooms. A total of 150 prospective teachers were assessed using an online questionnaire based on a widely used survey instrument. A deficit of explicit knowledge was observed in the phonological, morphological and orthographic awareness constructs, with a marginally improved performance in the knowledge of teaching instruction. These results, in conjunction with the lack of correlation between performance levels and completed credit hours, suggest that no significant gains in knowledge are made throughout the core curriculum modules of English teaching preparation. The findings reveal the necessity of greater attention towards language content and materials presented to prospective teachers, enabling better decisions on the optimal literacy instruction practices for children with differing abilities in inclusive classrooms in Kuwait.

Keywords: *English literacy, phonological awareness, morphological awareness, orthographic awareness, teaching instructions, prospective teachers, inclusive classrooms*

1. Introduction

The task of teaching English as a second language has seen various developments over the years, enabled by a large body of research. Yet the challenge of highlighting and promoting linguistic awareness remains and requires particular attention, especially in classrooms of differing cultural backgrounds, first language varieties, and learning needs. These conditions clearly demand further insight and resourcefulness from teachers. The multicultural and multilingual situation of Kuwait provides an exemplary setting for the purposes of this study, which also benefits from the inclusion policies adopted for integrating special needs children in mainstream schools.

From the cultural perspective, non-Kuwaiti Arab communities who represent a large proportion of the population (Egyptian Arab, Lebanese Arab, etc...) are greatly involved in Kuwaiti society as foreign workers, and a large segment of them occupy teaching positions. Their respective variant dialects of Arabic which can be mutually incomprehensible are often used with children for informal communication and instruction at schools. Alongside exposing children to diverse forms of Arabic by teachers of different nationalities, the culture of Asian communities who speak different languages such as Bengali, Hindi, and Filipino is in direct contact with Kuwaiti children as live-in housemaids (Ahmad, 2016). Exposing children at an early age to culturally diverse backgrounds may cause particular difficulties with their language awareness and literacy learning abilities (Cohen

& Cowen, 2008). Also, teaching linguistic skills without considering variations of language and culture is found to negatively affect the students' reception of linguistic terms, concepts, and awareness (Metz, 2018).

From the linguistic perspective, a key challenge is posed to Kuwaiti beginners by their prerequisite exposure to the classical (Qur'anic) and the standard (formal) written forms of Arabic, as means for learning instruction. Both forms are considerably distinct from the Kuwaiti spoken version of Arabic across all language domains including the phonological, morphological, orthographic aspects and the lexical choices made by speakers (Ferguson, 1959; Holes, 1998; 2004; Habash, 2007; Aljenaie & Farghal 2009; Ayyad & Bernhardt, 2009; Taqi, 2010; Aljenaie, 2010; Al-Qenaie, 2011). Kuwaiti spoken Arabic, on the other hand, has variant forms in accordance with the speaker's community affiliation. In addition, Kuwaiti children also begin learning English as a new foreign language from an early schooling stage. Hence, young Kuwaiti readers are not expected to be capable of using an existing competence in the features of every day dialectic Arabic as an advantage for the purpose of acquiring the basic literacy skills of their formal language (Maamouri, 1977; 1998). Exposure to different cultural communities and different linguistic varieties of the first language at home, in addition to the official form of the language which is considerably different from the spoken one at an early age in school, may exert an effect on the beginners' ability to recognise the linguistic distinctions on which the English language is constructed. Evidence shows that native speakers of Arabic tend to make noticeable errors in their English learning process (Thyab, 2016). In return, the use of English was also found to negatively impact the mother tongue maintenance of Arab children (Hanani, 2009). Beginning readers in such circumstances require more direct instructional assistance from teachers especially in the early stages of teaching and if they have specific learning needs.

From an inclusion perspective, Kuwait responded to the diversity of learner's abilities by the gradual integration of certain categories of special needs into the mainstream schools. The Ministry of Education applied the inclusive measures first to the hearing impaired in 1996/1997 and thereafter slow-learners as well as those with learning difficulties (M.O.E, 2008). It is well established that many hearing impaired children demonstrate delays in phonological and morphological awareness skills in the beginning stages of reading practice (Breadmore, 2008; Spencer & Tomblin, 2009; Almusawi, 2014). It is also known that most learners with reading difficulties show a core scarcity in language processing (Bryant & Bradley, 1983; Tunmer & Nesdale, 1986; Goswami & Bryant, 1990; Lyon, 1995). Explicit instruction of linguistic awareness is believed to be indispensable for these groups: the hearing impaired (Colin, Magnan, Ecalle & Leybaert, 2007), slow-learners (Hawkins, 1984), and those with learning difficulties (Berninger & Wolf, 2009).

1.1 Teachers' Linguistic Awareness

Meta-analyses of instruction studies confirmed that teachers' content knowledge is a determinant of students' attainment (Hattie, 2009). It is also crucially related to the instruction and guidance they provide in various areas (Ball, Thames & Phelps, 2008) for different learners including those who struggle with reading (Berninger & Wolf, 2009; Washburn, Joshi & Cantrell, 2011). Reading research specifically indicates that teachers' level of phonemic (Torgesen, Wagner & Rashotte, 1994; Mather, Bos & Babur, 2001; Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski & Chard, 2001; Puliatte, 2015), morphemic (Baumann, Edwards, Boland, Olejnik & Kame'enui, 2003; Khoshkhoonejad, Khalifelu & Abdipour, 2016) and orthographic (Carreker, Joshi & Boulware-Gooden, 2010; Moats, 2009; Moats & Foorman, 2003) awareness, and subsequently their instructional practices is highly beneficial to learners' improvement and preventive from reading failure.

According to the reading research (Berninger & Wolf, 2009; Prema, 2011; Watson et al., 2017), those three types of linguistic skills; phonological, morphological and orthographic awareness indicate that successful literacy teaching should be included explicitly and systematically in instructional practices. Phonological awareness is the most basic skill in promoting early literacy success (Adams, 1990; Stanovich & Siegel, 1994; Nunes & Bryant, 2009). It is regarded as the ability to recognise and intentionally manipulate the non-meaningful abstract units such as rhyme,

alliteration, syllables, and phonemes within words. The most sophisticated level in the progressive continuum of phonological awareness development is phonemic awareness, which is the ability to analyse and manipulate the smallest individual phonetic constituents in words. Numerous studies have found that children who demonstrated the highest levels of phonemic awareness became more skilled readers (Bradley & Bryant, 1983; 1985; Stanovich, Cunningham & Cramer, 1984; Adams, Foorman, Lundberg & Beeler, 1998). It is a predictor and a correlative of a student's reading attainment (Adams, 1991) independently of their level of intelligence or other metalinguistic awareness (Stanovich, 1993; Almusawi, 2014; Ali, 2014). Morphological awareness is also a fundamental skill in stimulating literacy attainment (Carlisle, 1988; 1995; 2000; 2003; 2004; Carlisle & Stone, 2005; Mahony, Singson & Mann, 2000). It is the ability to distinguish and manipulate the smallest meaningful constituents such as suffixes, roots, and prefixes within words. An explicit awareness of morphemes, which can be a single phoneme or a combination of phonemes, is critical to all aspects of literacy development (Carlisle, 1995; Deacon & Kirby, 2004; Nunes & Bryant, 2006; Mahony et al., 2000). There exists a close and dependent relationship between phonological and morphological awareness (Mann, 2000) and between morphological awareness and reading achievement (Mahony, 1994; Casalis & Louis-Alexandre, 2000). But since the written form of English has a deep morphophonemic representation (Moats, 2009; Nunes & Bryant, 2009; Henry, 2010), then the knowledge of how printed language may represent the spoken language in various ways is essential (Moats, 2000; Snow, Griffin & Burns, 2005). This is referred to as orthographic awareness, which corresponds to the predictable mapping of letter symbols into their speech sounds. The orthographic awareness which can be quite complex and inconsistent (Geudens, 2006; Moat, 2009) develops independently of the phonological awareness. The influence of children's orthographic awareness on phonological awareness tasks, however, is clear and obvious (Castles, Holmes, Neath & Kinoshita, 2003). Generally, however, the conscious ability to reflect on and manipulate the word's parts by means of the structure and components of a language code is referred to as the linguistic awareness (Masny, 1997; Carter, 2003). Linguistic awareness is a critical component in teacher education that can effectively shape a learner's competence (Bolitho & Tomlinson, 1995). Moats (2009) who consistently investigated teachers' level of linguistic awareness in a context where English was the mother tongue of learners advocated for counting on teachers' instructional practices rather than relying on other factors such as learner's gender, Intelligence Quotient, socioeconomic status, or learning style. However, delivering the instructional practices of phonemic, morphemic and orthographic awareness clearly and explicitly depends on the levels of teachers' knowledge which is often weak and incompetent (Moats, 1994). Teachers commonly displayed insufficient knowledge about the characteristics and structure of spoken and written English which disadvantages beginning learners who are especially in need of explicit instruction (Brady & Moats, 1997; Moats, 1999; National Reading Panel, 2000; Moats & Foorman, 2003, Crim et al., 2008). Learner's explicit and declarative knowledge of linguistic rules and forms is developed through instructional methods and practices, whilst implicit or procedural knowledge is intuitive and acquired without awareness (Schmidt, 1990; 1993a; 1993b).

Based on a conclusion made by Norris and Ortega (2000) following a synthesis and analysis of 49 published studies on second language instruction, explicit teaching instruction was found to be more effective than implicit instruction. This evidence moulded international policies to require informed reading instruction and demand professional development to reduce the consequences and severity of reading failure and ensure competent and effective English teaching. Lyon (1994) also asserted that teachers should employ subtle and sensitive efforts and apply a range of techniques to promote children in learning the foundation skills of standard English especially if it is not spoken as a mother tongue. Opportunities to occupy linguistic awareness activities should be abundant, frequent, and enjoyable so children can reach their full potential (Gunn, Simmons & Kameenui, 1995). Thus, teachers are supposed to be well-prepared and deeply knowledgeable to effectively implement these and other instructional methods that may overcome children's multifaceted challenges, especially if the classroom represents a multicultural, multilingual and multiliterate context.

1.2 Education and Teacher Preparation in Kuwait

Education in present-day Kuwait reflects the persistent interplay between religious traditions within the conservative culture and the demands of a modern 21st century. Its stated aim of allowing students to take part in global interactions through improved understanding and more prosperous social interactions is to be achieved through a multinational team of experts, who monitor and aid local projects responsible for developing the conventional Kuwaiti curriculum and for fostering inclusiveness (Singer, Samihaian, Holbrook & Crisan, 2014).

However, despite vigorous efforts and substantial budgets, Kuwaiti students continue to perform poorly in various international assessments such as TIMSS (EFA Report Kuwait (2014; Ahmad & Greenhalgh-Spencer, 2017) and PIRLS (Alanba, 2018). This has raised concern in the Ministry of Education and the Kuwait National Council for Educational Development (NCED) together with the World Bank for an urgent need to re-evaluate the educational system. Apart from the development plan of 2010–2014 (EFA Report Kuwait, 2014), a five-year (2014-2019) reformation period was launched with the aim of improving teaching and instruction in all vital areas such as curricula renovation and adopting national standards. As per law no.8 for 2010, the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs in Kuwait also developed a five-year strategy (2014 – 2019) to support access for students with disabilities to inclusive educational services (PADA, 2018). Undoubtedly, teachers in such instances will need a repertoire of linguistic skills and awareness, as well as explicit teaching instruction, to effectively address the diversity and special needs of all learners within the classrooms. Improving language awareness and pedagogy can facilitate first and second language learning (Pomphrey & Burley, 2009). Further, the limitations of inclusive education and social participation in Kuwaiti primary schools (Alqallaf, 2015), may also be overcome as a result.

With regards to English language teaching in Kuwait, the Ministry of education had made it a priority to lower the age of English language instruction from 10 to 6 years old (Al-Mutawa, 1996) and to replace local English teachers with foreign ones (Akbar, 2007), with the aim of improving teaching quality and learning outcomes. English was introduced to first-grade primary schoolers in 1993 then implemented in 2007 as a compulsory subject at the kindergarten level (Al-Darwish, 2013). However, following controversy and debate raised by the public, children are currently no longer exposed to English in kindergarten nor taught by native English speakers. This is not all, as considerable debate continued about whether the four macro-skills of, speaking, reading, listening and writing should be taught to children from first grade (Jaffer, 2003; Mohammad, 2008). A general concern was additionally circulated among the public regarding the effect of studying English as a foreign language on the children's acquisition of the Arabic language (Al-Mutawa, 1996; 2002).

Based on the formative assessment components developed by ELT General Supervision for the English major (Kuwait Ministry of Education, 2017-2018), six-year-old first grade students are supposed to be able to rhyme, blend and segment sounds, spell grade level words, find the missing letter in CVC words, and read aloud letters, words, phrases and sentences. The teaching policy presented in the first-grade curriculum and teaching plan, however, is missing the focus on methods that explicitly and systematically enhance linguistic awareness.

The preparation of teaching profession in Kuwait is provided through a small number of higher education institutions, mainly the Faculty of Education at Kuwait University, as well as the College of Basic Education (CBE) which is affiliated to the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET). Both institutions are involved in teacher preparation through four-year programs leading to a bachelor degree and a teaching license in various educational disciplines. The CBE which is mainly involved in preparing primary school teachers offers an English major with an objective of developing knowledge, awareness, and proficiency of the English language in order to properly instruct the young beginning learners. The main components of the English program currently include a core general education of 30 credit hours, an English intensive course of 60 credit hours and a vocational training course of 40 credit hours.

The teacher preparation curriculum at CBE was criticised in a report on education commissioned by the Kuwaiti government (NIE, 2013) which considered their preparation level to be biased toward subject knowledge. The report commented on the relative dominance of major subjects, sacrificing overall teaching competence as evidenced by the allocation of only 30 credits

for general education and 40 credits for vocational courses compared to 60 credits for the major subject. A recommendation was then made for a rearrangement of the credit hour weightings system. In particular, generic and subject-specific knowledge and exercises should be given heavier weightings due to their highlighted importance (NIE, 2013: 2). The report which found a significant proportion of teachers performing at below expected levels also blamed the pressure placed on the CBE by the government to create degree places to satisfy any number of school leavers with satisfactory grades. This left the college with a disproportionate number of prospective teachers that exceeds the capacity of building space and staff to implement the necessary strategies or curriculum. The report concluded that there is a substantial quality deficit in prospective teachers, who graduate with poor awareness and an inability to interpret subject content in inventive ways instead of simply following the text guides. It observed a lack of skills required in dealing with different styles of learners including those with special educational needs (NIE, 2013: 105). In a 2012 study by AL-Nwaiem inspecting the language improvement component in the English program at the CBE, revealed major shortcomings in learning and teaching resources and facilities. The study did not however specifically address the linguistics components but reported that students in the English Department face a variety of linguistic challenges. They were not satisfied with the opportunities provided to them to strengthen their language skills and complained about the outdated textbooks, the non-challenging topics, and the testing of purely rote-learned materials. In-service teachers were also criticised for their rote teaching which follows the sequence of textbooks with the single objective of covering the books' content to prepare their students to pass examinations (Ayoub, 2012). On a higher institutional level, the Civil Service Bureau and the Ministry of Education both critiqued the weak outputs of CBE and declared that a large number of graduate instructors are not qualified to engage in the labour market and need intensive courses in English teaching instruction (Ajial, 2015).

2. The Study Approach

In the multicultural, multilingual and multiliterate background of Kuwait, this study is conducted to assess primary school English teachers' linguistic awareness and instructional competencies as measures of education and preparation standards. The following research questions are specifically addressed:

1. To what extent are prospective English teachers knowledgeable and aware of the linguistic areas needed for English teaching instruction?
2. Is there a correlation between completed credit hours and the levels of knowledge and awareness among prospective English teachers? Is the college curriculum effective in making a difference to their levels of knowledge?
3. Do the linguistic skills, namely the phonological, morphological and orthographic awareness, predict the prospective teachers' instruction skills based on the courses they study?

The approach followed to answer these questions was comparable to studies which measured teachers' knowledge in areas identified as imperative for their profession (Moats, 1994; Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski & Chard, 2001; Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich & Stanovich, 2004; Nicholson, 2007; Crim et al., 2008; Cunningham, Zibulsky & Callahan, 2009). The Teacher Knowledge Survey (TKS) by Moats and Foorman (2003) is an adaptation of the Informal Survey of Linguistic Knowledge developed initially by the same author (Moats, 1994). It is consistently used in the literature by many scholars (Moats & Lyon, 1996; Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski & Chard, 2001; Crim et al., 2008; Brady et al., 2009; McCutchen, Green, Abbott & Sanders, 2009; Cunningham et al., 2009). The statements identified in the TKS are considered sufficient for measuring the prospective teachers' level of phonological, morphological and orthographic awareness and their preparedness for the future profession.

3. Methodology and Data Analysis

The online survey was created and electronically distributed using Google forms and was open for

three months between May and August 2017. The participating sample was randomly selected from the English department at the College of Basic Education (CBE) which is affiliated to the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET). Respondents' answers were kept anonymous and confidential.

The survey consisted of 27 questions in total; 20 multiple choice and 7 true and false questions. It was divided into two sections; one for collecting demographic data including the total number of credit hours finished, and the other for surveying the prospective teachers' knowledge of English language and the components of reading instruction. A total of 12 questions examined their phonological awareness, half of which specifically targeted their phonemic awareness while the other half examined their syllabic awareness. The morphological and orthographic awareness were allocated 4 items each. The remaining 7 questions examined the prospective teachers' knowledge of instructional practices that they can employ in their classroom activities. Data analyses were conducted on raw scores for the number of correct answers in each category.

One hundred and fifty respondents, who were female prospective teachers undertook the assessment questionnaire. The data shows that the vast majority of respondents (90.7%) had passed between 0 and 120 credits with only those in the final graduation course (9.3%) surpassing this range. Below 120 completed credits, respondents were evenly distributed across the four 30-credit intervals reflecting their stage in the program, as illustrated in Figure 1:

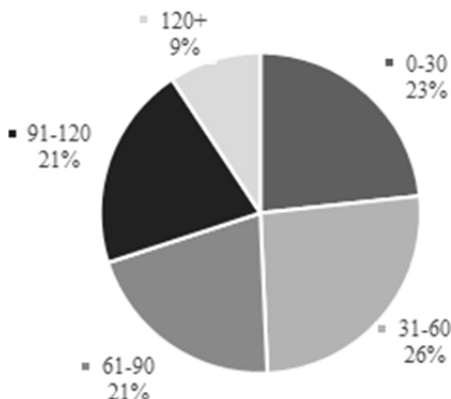


Figure 1: Percentages of the Survey Respondents based on Passed Credit Hours

The first part of the questionnaire measures the phonological awareness divided into two specified categories, syllables, and phonemes. Overall, students attained a mean score of 3.8 out of 12 (31.6%), but when analysed separately, the prospective teachers' knowledge was biased towards syllables awareness. In this category, the six questions concerned with identifying the number of spoken syllables in a given word were successfully answered with a mean of 2.8 out of 6 (46.7%). The respondents were asked to pick the number of syllables in certain words such as nationality, enabling and shirt to which were correctly answered by 38%, 43.3% and 66.7% of participants respectively. These poor results can be attributed to the responses given to the sixth question in the section regarding the definition of syllables, where only 51.3% answered appropriately. The responses were even lower when the subjects were asked to identify the number of phonemes or distinct speech sounds in different words such as straight (15.3%), explain (3.3%), know (26.7%) and eighth (35.3%). The average score for this question was the lowest at around 17.2%.

The second main section examined the extent to which prospective English teachers are knowledgeable across the areas of morphemic awareness by asking four questions regarding prefixes, suffixes, and others. Examples include: "Which of the following words has a prefix?" or "Which of the following words has an adjective suffix?". The mean percentage score of the

morphemic awareness questions was 21.8%. The number of correct answers in each question under the morphemic awareness section ranged from 20 to 41 out of 150, revealing a shortage in the respondents' knowledge of morphemes. Thirdly, the four orthographic awareness questions including "Why is there a double n in stunning?" were answered with an average score of 28.75%, which is almost identical to the overall phonological awareness mean score with a difference of only 3%. The final section of the test measures the prospective teachers' knowledge about effective English language instruction. Respondents showed a relatively good amount of knowledge in this section, achieving a mean score of 3.3 out of 7 (47.29%). Table 1 summarises the descriptive analyses for the different sections studied:

Table 1: Descriptive Analyses of the Five Sections Tested in the Survey

	No. of Questions	Maximum Achieved	Mean	Mean Percentage	Std. Deviation
1. Phonological Awareness	12	12	3.81	31.75	1.406
1a. Syllables Awareness	6	6	2.78	46.33	1.654
1b. Phonemes Awareness	6	6	1.03	17.17	1.161
2. Morphological Awareness	4	3	0.87	21.75	0.833
3. Orthographic Awareness	4	3	1.15	28.75	0.915
4. Teaching Instructions	7	6	3.31	47.29	1.351

Overall, the results show that prospective teachers have a very low level of linguistic awareness and professional preparation for future English instruction. Their overall results ranged between 3-19 correct answers out of 27 questions. The average score was approximately 34%. Analyses of Pearson's correlation coefficient were conducted for the five main sections of the survey and the number of credits completed by the prospective teachers' to measure the effectiveness of the educational programs undertaken to improve their knowledge across the different language areas. No significant values were detected, revealing a qualitative deficit in the educational system for preparing teachers adequately. However, a positive correlation was found between the orthographic awareness results with the phonemes awareness with an r^2 value of .210 ($p = .01$).

Furthermore, linear regression analyses were carried out to investigate whether the linguistic awareness skills assessed through 20 questions are good indicators of the pedagogical instruction skills measured by the final 7 questions. These linguistic skills were tested both individually and collectively with the control of credit hours passed to remove any potential variance associated with the incurred advantage of additional learning time. The phonological awareness, consisting of both syllables and phonemes awareness, resulted in the regression equation $F(2, 147) = .288$, $p > .05$ with an R^2 value of .004. When tested individually, the results attained were similarly insignificant with $F(2, 147) = .202$ ($p > .05$), $R^2 = .003$ for the syllables awareness, and $F(2, 147) = .147$ ($p > .05$), $R^2 = .002$ for the phonemes awareness as predictors of teaching instruction levels. The results of the regression analyses were as follows for the morphological awareness $F(2, 147) = .076$ ($p > .05$), $R^2 = .001$, and the orthographic awareness $F(2, 147) = 1.032$ ($p > .05$), $R^2 = .014$. These values show no significant prediction results, implying that the prospective teachers' instruction skills, regardless of their passed credit hours, do not have a strong foundation based on their linguistic awareness skills.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to inspect the phonological, morphological and orthographic awareness levels that enable prospective teachers to implement effective English language instruction in Kuwaiti primary schools. The study was based on reading research which established that successful literacy acquisition is highly associated with the sufficient knowledge of teachers regarding the structure and characteristics of the language as a requirement for employing explicit instruction (Moats, 1994; 2009; Torgesen et al., 1994; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Mather et al., 2001;

Bos et al., 2001; Puliatte, 2015; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Baumann et al., 2003; Carreker et al., 2010; Khoshkhoonejad et al., 2016).

The findings revealed that the majority of prospective teachers in the CBE did not demonstrate thorough knowledge and skills that allow them to effectively instruct the English language components in their future career. This is despite the present and continuous calls from global (National Reading Panel, 2000) and local (M.O.E., 2008) educational organisations to raise teachers' level of theoretical knowledge and practical skill as critical components for the reading development of typical (Adams, 1990; Ehri & Nunes, 2002) and struggling learners (Ehri & McCormick, 1998; Ehri et al., 2001).

These results are largely consistent with those of earlier studies (Moats, 1994; Mather et al., 2001; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Carroll, 2006; Crim et al., 2008; Spencer et al., 2008; Cunningham et al., 2009; Carreker et al., 2010; Washburn et al., 2011; Clark, 2015) which showed that pre- or in-service teachers often lack sufficient knowledge about the spoken and written structure of the taught language. The prospective teachers in this study showed even lower levels in many of the linguistic aspects examined. Their mean percentage of correct answers in counting syllables (51.3%) was substantially lower in comparison to the study by Washburn et al. (2011) which found that the teachers' ability to count syllables in words was around 93%. Counting syllables was also an area of strength for teachers examined in the studies of Moats (2009), Crim et al. (2008) and Clark (2015), with a mean percentage of correct answers at around 88%, 85%, and 81% respectively. In identifying the number of phonemes, only 17.17 % of the participants in the current study were able to correctly do so with the six presented stimuli. The accuracy rate demonstrated by Moats (2009) however, was around 39%, with similar results by Crim et al. (2008) at 35%, Washburn et al. (2011) at 52% and Clark (2015) at 45.5%. Remarkably, participants in all reported studies including the current one, were more successful at counting and defining syllables than phonemes when required. They were however least successful with morpheme identification. In identifying the morphemic structures in words, the participant's accuracy rate for the current study was about 22% which almost mirrors the value of 21% found by Moats (2009), but surpasses the value of 15.3% found by Crim et al. (2008) and falls far behind the 54% achieved in the study of Washburn et al. (2011).

Overall, the prospective teachers who participated in this study did not show adequate levels of orthographic knowledge necessary to teach children how to read and spell efficiently. Their level of 28.75% was significantly lower compared with Moats' study (2009) in which the participants obtained a mean of 38.5%. Demonstrably, their orthographic awareness level of 28.75% is almost parallel to their phonological (31.75%) and morphological (21.75%) awareness, a finding reported in earlier studies indicating a close relationship between the phonological and morphological awareness (Mann, 2000) and between the phonological and orthographic awareness (Castles et al., 2003). Furthermore, their knowledge for instructing literacy of 47.29% was not comparable to the knowledge level detected in the study of Moats (2009) which had an average of 59%. When comparing their knowledge to their linguistic awareness, the results might suggest that those prospective teachers will fail in demonstrating greater explicit awareness of literacy skills in their future teaching practice, due to the lack of association with their implicit phonemic, morphemic and orthographic skills. This expectation was emphasised with the results of the conducted regression analyses, which implied that the participants' knowledge in adapting teaching instruction, regardless of their passed credit hours, does not have a strong foundation based on their linguistic awareness skills.

It is implied that the curriculum, syllabi, and textbooks that the prospective teachers are currently undertaking are not consistent with the research base and not effective in improving their linguistic awareness. This is firstly due to the poor overall performance across the inspected domains of phonological, morphological and orthographic awareness which revealed only 26% as a mean percentage of correct answers. And secondly, no correlation was found between their awareness levels and the credit units they have passed.

Scholars have agreed that the acquirement of second language literacy skills depends on the quality of schooling which includes the intensity and thoroughness in teacher preparation (August & Shanahan, 2006). In light of the Kuwaiti multicultural, multilingual and multiliterate context

discussed above, enhancing teaching skills is of particular essence to fulfilling the requirements of English learning and to satisfy all of the linguistic components in its literacy. Cecil, Gipe, and Marcy (2014) asserted that students from diverse ethnicities present difficulty or confusion in practicing the pronunciation and gaining the fluency of English. This is because they have been raised in an environment where the linguistics only consist of comprehending certain sounds and making out specific letters common to the phonetics of conventional practice. A Kuwaiti student, for example, may experience difficulty in producing some phonemes that are non-existent in the spoken and the standard Arabic. Phonological and other linguistic features of mother languages may confuse second language learners as they may be required to apprehend phonemes and recognise letters that they find odd.

The observation of Moats in 1994 is still tangible in the context of this study. She attributed the insufficient linguistic knowledge consistently found in English teachers to the absence of certain standards in teachers' preparation programs, the complexity of the subject matter, the time needed to acquire it and the difficulty in reactivating a thorough awareness of speech. August and Calderon (2006) confirmed that once this knowledge is mastered, it can professionally direct teachers to an improved understanding of the student's requirements. Moats (1994) investigated the teachers' perspectives and they agreed that learning such content before commencing teaching would be highly beneficial in organising their instruction, giving supportive examples, justifying phoneme-grapheme relationships, and even interpreting student errors to provide constructive corrective feedback.

5. Conclusion

Empirical research agreed that the level of teachers' linguistic knowledge is associated with the time allocated to practice explicit instruction on linguistically-based approaches as well as students' literacy growth (McCutchen et al., 2002; McCutchen, Harry, Cunningham, Cox, Sidman & Covill, 2002; Piasta, Connor, Fishman & Morrison, 2009; Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). The results of the present study imply that the participating prospective teachers who are believed to be representative of their colleagues are lacking the requisite knowledge essential to deliver explicit instruction of linguistic awareness to their future classroom practice. Evidently, this practice does not have the potential to meet the Kuwaiti five-year reform pillars target (2014-2019), established for enhancing professional practice and teaching based on national standards, which requires a commitment to diversity and inclusion.

The National Reading Panel (2000) strongly recommended an explicit and systematic English language instruction in the early literacy stage. It asserted that teachers should acknowledge that achieving linguistic awareness is a valuable means for reading and spelling success rather than an end in itself. Explicit linguistic instruction would not only result in second language literacy success (see Hernandez, 2017 for a review) but would also provide early intervention for reading difficulties (Foorman, 2007; McGettigan, 2016). Locally, the implementation of direct and explicit instruction in teaching English by breaking down the targeted task into basic concepts and components was found to substantially improve the English learning fluency in the non-native context of primary public schools in Kuwait (Al-Shammari, Al-Sharoufi & Yawkey, 2008).

The current study, in agreement with the study of AL-Nwaiem (2012), strongly recommends the stakeholders to revise and rebuild the course content and materials to meet the demands of better equipped, more competent future English teachers from the CBE. To achieve this, an increase in the number of basic language skills components in the course program is recommended, even if this results in sacrificing some of the less relevant and constructive courses such as English literature or history.

Introducing the prospective teachers with the effectiveness of applying their phonological, morphological and orthographic knowledge in practice would deliver literacy instruction to developmentally, linguistically and culturally inclusive classrooms in the best possible manner. Investigations of effective literacy teacher preparations suggest that early and structured tutorials and supported field experiences (Al-Otaiba et al., 2011), in addition to evaluating teacher preparation textbooks to include code-focused instructional principles (Joshi et al., 2009) holds the

potential to help prospective teachers to be responsive regarding their students' learning, and thoughtfully adapt instructions as needed.

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