

Setting the Stage for Transformative Learning in MA TESOL Classrooms at a Saudi University

Nesreen Alzhrani

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1558-5198>

English Language Institute (ELI), King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

nalzhrani@kau.edu.sa

Abstract

This article explores the impact of transformative theory on the learning outcomes of seven Saudi female student-teachers enrolled in a Master's TESOL course at a Saudi university. They were actively engaged in designing learning materials for learners with special needs. In this intervention, transformative theory principles were used. They involved dialogue, authentic assessment, and structured reflection. Following the intervention, data were collected using focus group discussions and document analysis. The data were analysed using Mezirow's transformative theory components: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action. The findings reveal the experience supported the participants' autonomy, providing them with opportunities to reflect on their teaching practices, and improved their knowledge construction skills. Based on the results, the author makes a case for greater use of transformative theory approaches in designing and implementing teacher education.

Keywords: transformative theory; TESOL programme; teacher education; learning outcomes; higher education

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Introduction

A growing body of research has emphasised applying critical pedagogical principles to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' education (Crookes and Lehner 1998; Santana-Williamson 2000; Sharma and Phyak 2017). These studies suggest that certain boundaries and assumptions need to be challenged about second language acquisition (SLA) to prepare teachers to move from reinforcing top-down policies to formulating and mapping SLA policies (Santana-Williamson 2000). More specifically, supporters of critical pedagogy have proposed that Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programmes should accommodate concepts and practices from other fields of education that advocate change and provide a solid base for teachers' moral and philosophical development (Crookes and Lehner 1998; Santana-Williamson 2000). This reasoning stems from the fact that teachers must engage with critical pedagogy grounded in their lives as it promotes teachers' ability to interpret, challenge, and transform the world around them (Brown 2004; De los Ríos and Souto 2015). One method to achieve this goal is through transformative theory (TT), which is widely conceived to form a significant part of certain pre-service teachers' education (Carrington and Selva 2010; De los Ríos and Souto 2015).

Because this study draws on TT principles, a detailed discussion of these principles will be provided in the remaining part of this section. An attempt will mainly be made to discuss the four TT components, that is, experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action (Mezirow 2000), along with the role played by TT in assisting the students in constructing knowledge.

To begin with, TT is an approach to learning in which students critically examine their previously entrenched beliefs, principles, and standpoints to arrive at a holistic view of thinking and behaving (Mezirow 1978). In other words, it is a process of ongoing evolution within students' frames of references and a critical re-examination of their ontological and epistemological assumptions to develop appropriate problem-solving skills and help bring about social change (Brown 2004). The construction and allocation of revised interpretation of the meaning of a significant experience in the world constitute the TT process (Taylor and Cranton 2012), which is based on four components. The first component, experience, involves creating a learning experience that allows teachers to critically question and reflect on their understanding of how to structure meaning and examine assumptions and cultural references that have informed their teaching experience (Cartwright and Noone 2006; Fetherston and Kelly 2007). The learning experience should reflect real-life situations and cultivate small-group discussions to evaluate reasons, look at the evidence, and solve problems (Mezirow 1997). Second, critical reflection enables the individual to decide how to manage their experience, solve problems, and refine assumptions (Merriam 2004; Mezirow 1997). Third, reflective discourse provides individuals with opportunities to develop perspectives based on their reflections. In this component, learners often revise their frames of references and reflect on their experiences to achieve a shift in values, beliefs,

or perspectives (Taylor and Cranton 2012). This is because we change our frames of reference through critical reflection on the presumptions our perspectives and attitudes are based on (Mezirow 1997). Finally, the action involves immediate or delayed action on the students' thoughtful insights (Mezirow 2000). It requires learners to change themselves by developing an awareness of the constraining structures driving praxis, leading them to reach political forces to alter their world (Calleja 2014). In all this, TT clearly emphasises teachers' adoption of pedagogies that allow learners to practise autonomy and construct knowledge (Mezirow 1997). This is discussed below in relation to TT.

Given that TT encompasses pedagogies that support autonomy and promote active knowledge construction (Fraser et al. 2007), TT-based classes should be freed from traditional methods of acquiring knowledge. Students become engaged as active inquirers to plan the world they wish to live in (Mezirow 2000). What is more, TT-based classes should endorse the students' freedom to choose how and what to learn and be capable of innovative and critical thinking (Enkhtur and Yamamoto 2017). Thus, teachers should move learners from a banking model of education based on information accumulation to a transformative model in which their experience and prior knowledge are reconfigured (Freire 2017). As such, TT rejects two types of teaching: the content-driven teaching that does not challenge students' assumptions in relation to creating change (Sterling 2011), and teaching that reflects a neoliberal ideology that views education as an instrument designed to prepare individuals to meet the market needs (Enkhtur and Yamamoto 2017).

In addition, TT stimulates the construction of knowledge so that students learn through experiences that may reconfigure how they view education and teaching to ensure closer attention to social justice (Vescio, Bondy, and Poekert 2009). This approach involves unresolved challenges to unsettle the students' assumptions and stimulate their thinking (Cranton 2002), setting the stage for TT (Taylor and Cranton 2013). At that stage, the teachers' role is to provide students with the necessary skills to interpret and filter current knowledge and literature to solve problems, make decisions, and plan policies to achieve their goals in their context (Mezirow 1997). Teachers must also adopt specific pedagogical practices that focus on the "growth of individuals" via a systematic agency (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015). Such practices are found in classroom dialogue, authentic content, and fostering critical reflection (Mezirow 1997; Taylor and Cranton 2012). However, to facilitate such strategies, educators need to create a safe environment for students to interact and share their thoughts (Mezirow 1997). This is because TT is associated with feelings of discomfort and resistance on the part of students because it challenges them, making TT challenging to plan and implement in the classroom (Blake, Sterling, and Goodson 2013). Despite such feelings, results from previous studies support the use of TT in teaching. It was found that TT allowed the student-teachers to examine their assumptions and theories concerning certain pedagogical and academic practices in their context (Ukpokodu 2009). Moreover, Fetherston and Kelly (2007) demonstrate that the implementation of TT had a significant impact on

expanding students' knowledge that coincided with the targeted learning objective of the course. It also allowed them to reconstruct and revise taken-for-granted values by reflecting on their experiences (Fetherston and Kelly 2007). Quillinan et al. (2019) report equivalent results. They found that students became more sensitised to their former ways of thinking and developed new perspectives and beliefs about some issues, such as their abilities and academic capacities. However, despite the considerable details available in the literature regarding the use of TT in higher education instruction, there is less enquiry about its utilisation and impact on students' learning outcomes in Master's in TESOL courses.

Where the Saudi context is concerned, previous research recommends that EFL programmes should be precise and focus on curricular activities that embrace several aspects of English pedagogy (Al-Hazmi 2003). Given the circumstances, they could adopt coherent and rational approaches based on critical pedagogy in TESOL education to encourage Saudi teachers to construct pedagogical practices that are sensitive to their local context (Barnawi 2019; Barnawi and Le Ha 2015). They could also foster the responsible use of autonomy and emphasise explicit discussions of teachers' discretion, rights, and obligations (Almanee 2020). Students should explore new points of view to challenge ideas and concepts to enhance their critical thinking skills (Algraini and McIntyre-Mills 2019).

In addition, my experience of being a former transitional student who spent eight years finishing an MA in TESOL and a PhD in Australia has informed how I interpret and select teaching theories. Through my learning experience in the MA TESOL programme, I found that solving problems and actively engaging in the learning process transformed my perceptions of my view of the world, and my understanding of matters to do with equity, justice, and unstructured education. Consequently, I became aware of TT as identified within inner circle (Kachru 1985) pedagogy and have attempted to adopt that approach in my teaching context. My pedagogical decisions reflect my teaching values and philosophy. Like Mezirow (1997), I want to provide my student-teachers with opportunities to construct knowledge, practise autonomy, plan innovative pedagogical approaches, and reform policies to either challenge or solve teaching and learning issues found in their context. I sought to achieve this by immersing my students in specific tasks that would develop an awareness of the complex issues concerning pedagogy and teaching.

This study aims to report intervention results with seven Saudi female TESOL student-teachers enrolled in an MA TESOL programme at a Saudi university in light of TT principles. The need for this study emanates from the fact that limited TT-related studies were conducted in the MA TESOL programmes in the Middle East. This article addresses a gap in the literature by investigating student-teachers' perspectives on the impact of TT experience on their learning outcomes in an MA TESOL programme. It answers the following questions:

1. What was the impact of TT on student-teachers' learning outcomes?
2. How did the student-teachers engage with the four components of TT?

Materials and Methods

The TT experience in this study was implemented using the following teaching strategies: dialogue, authentic practice, and the fostering of critical reflection (Mezirow 1997; Taylor and Cranton 2012). The primary purpose of the dialogue was to share power with students. This dialogue was about what they wanted to discuss and learn regarding special needs (SNs) education. The resulting dialogue covered aspects of their previous experience, provided detailed accounts of their teaching choices and pedagogical practices with students with SNs in the Saudi context, and negotiated the course development. The outcome of such dialogue informed the selected practice for the authentic task. They chose to plan a complete learning experience for a student with an SN case in a mainstream classroom.

I designed a task-based assignment involving challenges and problems to resolve for the authentic practice. This practice was achieved by asking them to design and create original learning materials for a single lesson that would address and include the needs of a student with an SN in a mainstream classroom setting. After they had finished their first project, critical reflection was fostered. Students were asked to write a critical reflection on their experience with the task-based assignment, the authentic practice, and their decisions to complete the learning materials task, including the alternatives proposed to address different issues. They were also asked to outline their assumptions and views concerning teaching a student with an SN in a mainstream classroom and to compare them to what was presented in their Saudi context.

Participants

Participants for this study were seven female student-teachers, as education in Saudi Arabia separates classes in higher education on a gender basis. They were enrolled in an MA TESOL programme at a Saudi university. All programme enrollees (15 students) were approached by email, inviting them to participate. Seven candidates agreed to give access to their lesson plans and reflective journals and to participate in focus group discussions. Their experience in teaching ranged from zero to eight years. They signed consent forms so that their focus group discussions could be recorded on tape and to have their data reported. The consent form was signed on the understanding that they could withdraw from the study at any stage. Table 1 provides the participants' age and experience information; their names have been removed because I agreed with the participants not to reveal their names.

Table 1: Participants' information

Participants	Age	Teaching experience
First participant	29	0
Second participant	30	7
Third participant	26	1
Fourth participant	29	6
Fifth participant	30	0
Sixth participant	31	8
Seventh participant	30	6

Data Collection and Analysis

The study was undertaken following a qualitative method design that involved compiling data from focus group discussions (Creswell and Poth 2016). Focus group discussions were conducted in two rounds, in which four and three participants joined in, respectively. Mezirow's (2000) four components of TT—experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action—were used as a framework to guide data collection and analysis to explore the participants' perspectives on the impact of TT experience on their learning outcomes in an MA TESOL programme at a Saudi university.

Data collection took place one year after completion of the intervention to allow the student-teachers to decide whether to participate in the study or to withdraw. Ethics approval was obtained from the postgraduate unit in my faculty. I started by examining the participants' sample lesson plans and reflections to understand how they had designed their lessons (see Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6). This step was essential to understand their reflective journals, which were based on their experiences in designing lesson plans for students with SNs in mainstream classrooms. I then reviewed their reflective journals to understand and examine their experiences to inform the questions for the focus group discussions. All group discussions took place in a public library outside the faculty. My questions for the focus group discussions protocol were based on Mezirow's (2000) four components of TT. The discussions evolved around describing what took place in each component from the participants' perspectives to understand the impact of TT on their learning outcomes.

The data were analysed following conventional content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005) to determine what had been involved in the participants' learning experience

(Padilla-Díaz 2015). All group discussions were conducted in English and transcribed directly after each meeting. To comply with ethics requirements, I sent the final version of the results document to the participants to obtain their approval and confirm that the interpretation of the data matched the intended meaning they wanted to deliver to the readers.

II. Lesson Plan

Topic: Winter	Date: 19 th of March, 2019
Time: 9- 9:45 a.m.	Length: 45 minutes
The context and the students	
25 high school students in the Third Grade at a public school in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. They are between 17-19 years old. They have been studying English for over 5 years. The level in English Proficiency for the majority of the class is A2 and four students are considered advanced (B1). I have one special needs student with a hard of hearing problem. They take 4 classes per week.	
Assumed prior knowledge:	
Students are familiar with the topic and they can describe the changes in the four seasons in their native language. They have learned the basic grammatical structures and they can use and understand adjectives in their comparative form in English.	
General Lesson Objective:	
This lesson aims to teach students how to use words related to the changes in the four seasons.	
Learning Outcomes:	
By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- answer comprehension questions about the different seasons. 2- spell some words related to changes in the seasons and their effects on life. 3- identify the appropriate time for each season. 	

Figure 1: A sample of a participant's lesson plan

Aids and materials			
Whiteboard			
Slide show			
A short reading passage titled: Winter			
A very short video (2 mins) titled: Why do we have different seasons? Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgHmqv_-UbQ			
Speakers with high quality volume			
Flash Cards			
Worksheets			
Special worksheets aided by pictures (for the special needs student)			
Video transcript (for the special needs student given to her to read before class)			
Skills:			
Reading and Listening			
New vocabulary:			
Tilt- hemisphere- migrate- hibernate- orbit- plenty- reversed			
Procedures	Interaction	Time	Class Material
1- Introduction: Show the students pictures of the different seasons and ask: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Can you describe these pictures?- Which season is the coldest? Which is the hottest?	T ←→ class S ←→ T	5 mins	Slide Show

Figure 2: A sample of a participant's lesson plan

<p>- Why do you think the temperature changes from one season to the other?</p> <p>Students' answers show the amount of knowledge and vocabulary they have about the topic. More time allotted for the introduction because the teacher needs to repeat each answer slowly and loudly because the class includes a special needs student.</p>			
<p>Body of the lesson: Reading</p> <p>- Ask the students to read the first paragraph silently and answer the question: "What are the winter months in the Northern Hemisphere?"</p> <p>- Introduce and explain the word "Hemisphere"</p>  <p>- Ask the students to read the second paragraph silently and answer the following questions:</p> <p>Q-Is there more daylight time during the summer months or winter months?</p> <p>Q-What causes the seasons to change?</p>	<p>T ↔ class</p> <p>S ↔ T</p>	<p>15 mins.</p>	<p>1- Reading Passage with comprehension questions (a sample is provided at the end of this lesson plan for the special needs student because the passage is broken down into parts and includes written instructions)</p> <p>2- Flash Cards for Vocabulary</p>

Figure 3: A sample of a participant's lesson plan

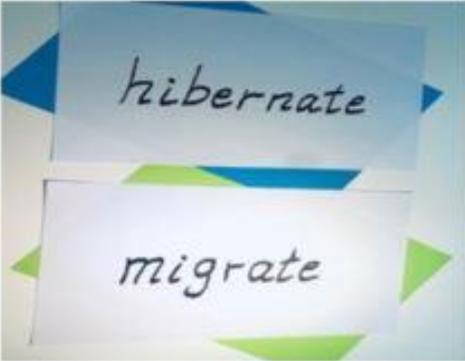
<p>- Introduce and explain the word "tilt."</p>  <p>- Ask the students to read the third paragraph silently and answer the questions:</p> <p>Q- What does the word <i>hibernate</i> mean? List two animals that hibernate.</p> <p>Q- What do squirrels, and raccoons do to prepare for the winter?</p> <p>Q- What does the word <i>migrate</i> mean?</p> <p>- Introduce and explain the words "<i>migrate</i> and <i>hibernate</i>."</p> 			
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Figure 4: A sample of a participant's lesson plan

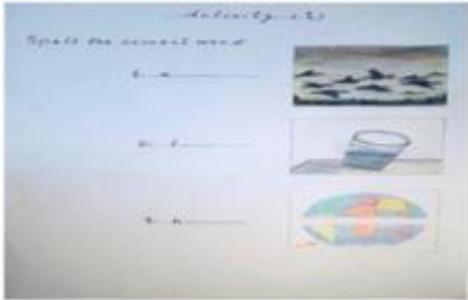
<p>Ask the students to read the fourth paragraph silently and answer the question:</p> <p>- Name three activities mentioned that require a frozen pond or lake.</p> <p>Read the passage to students slowly and loudly (Teacher modelling).</p>	<p>T ↔ class</p>		
<p>Activity (1): (Assessment of LO2)</p> <p>- Hand the students the first worksheets of activity (1), and ask them to spell the following words:</p> <p>Migrate</p> <p>Tilt</p> <p>Hemisphere</p> <p>- Uncover the flash cards that include the correct spelling of the above three words and have students assess themselves.</p> 	<p>T ↔ Class</p>	<p>3 mins</p>	<p>1- Worksheets (a special worksheet illustrated by my hand drawings and clues is given to the SN student, a sample is provided at the end of this lesson plan)</p> <p>2- Flash Cards</p>

Figure 5: A sample of a participant’s lesson plan

Results

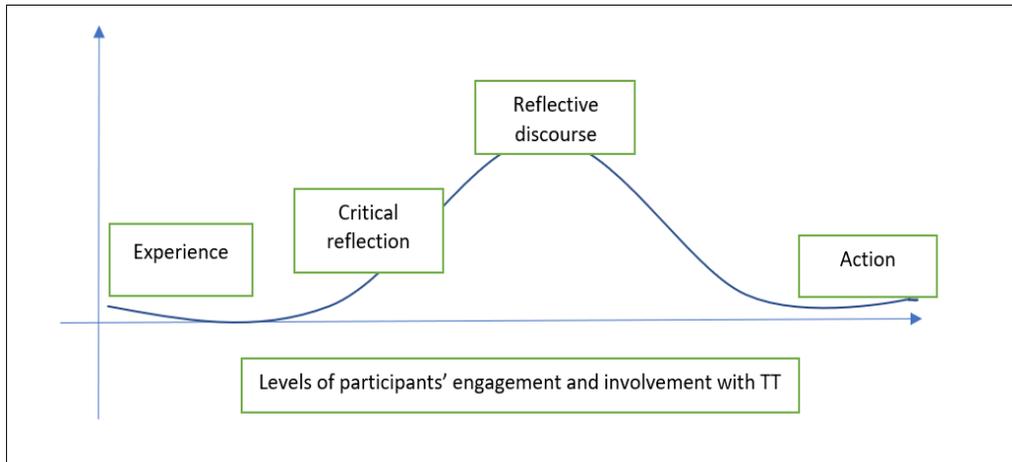


Figure 7: The dynamic curve of the TT process

I chose to present the results in a figure that reflects the dynamic of the TT process from the participants' perspectives (see Figure 7). This is because I noticed that group discussions conducted for this study followed a certain dynamic, described as follows: each meeting started quietly with a few words about the *experience* component of TT. Then, the dynamic of the discussions began to change steadily during the *critical reflection* component as they talked about their choices of scenarios. After that, when we reached the point where we discussed issues in *reflective discourse*, the nature of the discussions changed and became more exciting, tense, and energetic, and everyone wanted to express an opinion or tell a story. Finally, we reached the *action* component in which the discussions calmed down again, and excitement and energy about the topic became bland. The same dynamic can be projected on the levels of the participants' engagement and involvement with TT experience by designing their own lesson plan scenarios for SNs. The coming section describes and explains this dynamic in detail.

Figure 7 reports the participants' feedback regarding their TT experience. It is divided according to Mezirow's (2000) four components of TT theory: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action. In the first component, *experience*, it is clear from the figure that the participants' engagement and interaction with the questions during the focus group discussions about the impact of TT on their learning outcomes were relatively slow. This slow engagement was apparent in the following extracts from the group discussion meetings:

I know nothing about special needs students and how to teach them or even the different types of special needs students. (First participant)

This was new for me, even though I have a lot of teachers in my family. Yeah, but they have never told me about special needs students and how much work they need to address their needs. It was challenging choosing a special need case. I did not think that I was qualified enough to teach them or know how to teach them exactly. (Second participant)

The participants were still trying to identify the problem, define the solutions, and label the tools they may need to solve the dilemma. However, there were doubts about whether they could do the task or not. Figure 7 shows that feelings of discomfort and intimidation expressed by participants started to increase during the focus group discussions. As a result, the student-teachers' choices fluctuated, but in different directions, with some of the student-teachers pointing out that they were careful not to complicate issues and, therefore, chose manageable SNs cases. Other student-teachers challenged themselves to their limits. For example, participants mentioned:

I was very frustrated with it; we had to design learning materials and I'd never done this before so at the beginning I was pretty intimidated. (First participant)

I was afraid at the beginning that it was so challenging. Every time I looked at the syllabus I was like, am I going to finish this assignment? (Second participant)

I was reluctant at the beginning. I was thinking, who I am to choose material and plan teaching? But then I took steps to go forward and was able finish it. (Seventh participant)

The knowledge I gained established a sense of responsibility in me as a teacher, and a sense of curiosity as a researcher. This course made me realise that I actually need to look into more details than I thought was necessary, and as a result in the lesson plan, I chose the most uncomplicated case in my opinion which was low vision. (Third participant)

An inner voice told me to challenge myself and go ahead in accomplishing the lesson plan and designing the learning materials. Thus, I started from scratch, I was lost at the beginning but then everything moved smoothly and easily. (Fourth participant)

They wanted to know what they were capable of and to evaluate their competencies. This allowed the participants in the *reflective discourse* to function as productive learners who were able to generate knowledge. The figure depicts a dramatic escalation in the participants' reflections on the knowledge constructed during the TT experience in reflective discourse. This includes knowledge about the constraining forces that affect decision-making in their context, teaching English to students with SNs, and appreciating their role as teachers. The following quotations from the group discussions reflect such dynamics in the process:

Because you were emphasising that you should feel free to write whatever you feel and to express what you feel, I think that it really helped me not to think of boundaries, I could write whatever I thought important. (First participant)

I think the extent of freedom that the teacher allowed herself was important. The freedom with which she spoke is how I will express myself. For our class, for example, there was a comfort in not only criticising but also in highlighting the positives and the negatives of the educational system and engaging with people of different views and talking about our experiences. (Second participant)

I used to think that Saudis were autonomous, but then I thought no they're not autonomous. I used to think I'm autonomous but after reflection I think autonomy is a new concept to all of us. (Third participant)

As a learner I do not mind autonomy. In this course it helped us to evaluate things critically; it is an important life skill. However, looking at autonomous learning from my teacher's point of view, I must put certain aspects into consideration before concluding whether I would use this approach with my learners or not. Some of the aspects I would put into consideration are the context and students' levels. (Fourth participant)

Standardisation hinders the teacher because okay the teacher wants you to be autonomous and the students are attempting to be autonomous. But I think autonomy here is struggling to start because of standardisation. (Fifth participant)

This experience taught me that, as an EFL teacher, I should be organised, confident, dedicated, creative and most importantly accepting your students regardless of their capabilities or behaviours. (Sixth participant)

I had a student with a SN condition which still makes me feel very sad and guilty; like sometimes before I sleep, I think about her. The assignment brought up the guilt and the responsibility I was like seeing her face was stressed out. I used to ask: why aren't you getting this? Why aren't you reading? And she was just silent. This assignment was very emotional to me. I felt like responsibility of being aware of the different disabilities because these are silent or hidden disabilities. (Seventh participant)

In the final component, *action*, participants' reflections gradually flatten out, as the figure indicates. They decided to react to the previous components' issues and take action. Below are some of their plans for future change:

This project was a deep self-reflection project in which I redesigned a lesson plan, with a specific SN case in mind that allowed me to think outside the box. I was able to think of possible different methods and strategies of teaching to accommodate this SN case. (First participant)

During the lesson planning phase, I understood how challenging it is to be a teacher. Teachers must anticipate and be attentive to every detail in the classroom. (The second participant)

This learning experience opened my eyes toward issues that I personally have not paid attention toward before. Resultantly, that made me value my major and my career as a

teacher and researcher because we really do valuable efforts that make someone's life easier and successful. Thus, I am now a more passionate teacher and researcher. (Third participant)

I intend to give my students the freedom to choose their own topics and offer to guide those who need my help and encourage their innovative ideas. In addition, I can use reflective writing to teach my students both self-evaluation and good English writing at the same time. (Sixth participant)

In the discussion section, participants' perceptions of TT experience are considered with discussion and analysis about the impact of this intervention on their capabilities as teachers and MA TESOL students.

Discussion

This section attempts to interpret the study findings reported in the results section above. Data are discussed under respective components, that is, experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action.

Experience

The data indicate that the participants conceived the experience as challenging. This challenge was caused by the feeling of being responsible for solving a problem and being unfamiliar with SN cases in mainstream classrooms. They realised it requires a more robust and critical approach to generate options and reflect critically on their beliefs and the surrounding world (Sharma and Phyak 2017). Challenges are discussed in the second element.

Critical Reflection

The participants indicated that they were challenged and intimidated when conducting their tasks. This is entirely predictable as TT is associated with feelings of discomfort and resistance in students because it is challenging to plan and implement in the classroom (Blake, Sterling, and Goodson 2013). This interpretation is consistent with previous research findings that Saudi students feel particularly uncomfortable with tasks that focus on critical thinking and challenge their assumptions (Saba 2041). Unfortunately, this situation is aggravated by formal education as it draws heavily on traditional teaching methods (Barnawi 2019). That is, Saudi formal education follows a top-down policy wherein teachers passively follow instructions that come from policymakers (Elyas and Picard 2012). Consequently, both teachers and their students depend on a predetermined theoretical framework for learning and teaching (Barnawi 2019), which deprives them from acquiring critical thinking skills.

Reflective Discourse

In reflective discourse, the results are also consistent with Ukpokodu's (2009) findings that using TT in teacher education allows the student-teachers to examine their

assumptions and theories concerning certain pedagogical and academic practices. The participants in this study stated that they had developed certain convictions and passions for teaching practices for three reasons: TT-based experiments enabled them to improve their teaching skills; they had become appreciative of their role in building students' self-esteem and confidence; and they reported that their knowledge of techniques to deal with students with SNs had developed. Their perspectives and attitudes towards such students had altered from tending primarily to feel sorry for them to realising that practical improvements can be made to enhance their learning opportunities. This finding receives support from the finding that TT allows students to revise their taken-for-granted values via reflecting on their experiences (Fetherston and Kelly 2007). It also aligns with Quillinan et al.'s (2019) finding that TT encourages participants to develop new perspectives and beliefs concerning certain matters, such as their teaching abilities.

Regarding knowledge construction, the four components of TT reported in the results sections reveal that participants learned deeply and constructively through critically inspecting their assumptions and beliefs to reach a conclusion that may change previous views and convictions (Mezirow 2000). As the data outline, the results are in line with Freire (2017); the participants appreciated learning new skills, moving from information accumulation to a transformative model, acting as active learners, and taking charge of their own learning experience. It is apparent that the participants believed that learning at the postgraduate level should not be based on regulations. The data indicate that this outcome was due to classroom dialogue in which student-teachers engaged in meaningful discussions about their beliefs and assumptions. This form of discussion was achieved by building mutual understanding and creating a trust bond between them and me in the classroom that helped them feel safe to voice their opinions about the course plan and design. It was also achieved through sharing power over curriculum development between me and the student-teachers. This finding supports Mezirow (2000) and Quillinan et al. (2019) that fostering mutual understanding and trust is vital to having a safe environment for dialogue among teachers and students.

Another structural practice that participants in reflective discourse reported is standardisation found in higher education (HE). The HE sectors comprise a political and economic agenda that has resulted in a shift in focus concerning knowledge acquisition that emphasises obtaining economic benefits and sustaining the job market (Gibbons 1998). Such a shift has fostered more structured education in HE and limited the use of critical pedagogy in Saudi Arabia, resulting in less critical thinking as applied to teaching and in greater numbers of EFL teachers who believe that they need to focus only on teaching language structures (Barnawi 2019). Therefore, HE follows the principles of Constructive Alignment (CA) in teaching and evaluating student learning. The CA principles restrict the pedagogical choices of the academics involved in teaching and influence how they plan courses to achieve the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs). CA principles restrict students' learning gains, overlook their hidden talents, creativity, concerns, and passions, and limit their access to certain areas of

knowledge to meet fixed benchmarks configured by the HE provider. We must understand that postgraduate students prefer freedom from such restrictions because they know what they want to learn and investigate. In addition, following the principles of CA means that we assume that students have the same abilities and will achieve similar results. In doing so, we do not respect individual differences. Participants in this study were open about their learning abilities and performances. They differed in how they conducted their projects; as explained by the data, some chose to challenge their learning competencies, and others chose not to.

Action

In the final component, action, the data sketch out the participants' desire to make changes after taking this course and their intentions for the future. They wanted to undertake courses that focus on reflective writing and give students the freedom to choose and plan their topics. The results accord with Fraser et al. (2007) that TT supports students' autonomy and exercise of freedom to alter their world (Calleja 2014). This sense of freedom enabled the participants to become flexible and open to different possibilities when taking charge of planning and learning how to negotiate and compromise in terms of their respective scenarios. They were also made responsible for verifying whether their final projects would be applicable to their context. This exercise of freedom, responsibility, and autonomy fostered the participants' confidence and capacity to become independent learners ready to take action (Mezirow 1997).

Nevertheless, some researchers might wish to argue that the whole experiment is irrelevant to the Saudi context since, as implied in the introduction, traditional classrooms are immune to critical pedagogies. This understanding supports the lack of attention given to TT in the region, as evidenced by the few studies conducted in the Middle Eastern countries. However, this argument could be rejected on three grounds.

First, this study has suggested that TT could be implemented in the Saudi context if, according to Mezirow (1997), teachers ensured that their students had all the skills and understanding necessary for TT. This was achieved in this study through dialogue and sharing power over the course. Second, the participants in this study were satisfied with their control over their learning experience. This is because TT promotes autonomy, allowing them to reflect on their values, claims, and experience instead of unquestioningly acting on those of others (Mezirow 1997). Third, an MA TESOL programme falls under the umbrella of humanities and social sciences, in which knowledge is based on a constructivist paradigm. This means that the knowledge base in social sciences and humanities is constructed upon evaluating multiple perspectives based on evidence and reason (Marra and Palmer 2008). There is a strong relationship between classroom instruction and settings and the degree of complexity that students show regarding discipline (Marra and Palmer 2008). Students in an MA TESOL programme need to use their professional development skills in learning, such as creativity, critical thinking, and putting theory into practice. This is supported by Ellis

(1997), who argues that teachers craft their knowledge to emphasise their personality rather than learning technical knowledge in TESOL.

Limitations and Future Studies

This study contributes to the knowledge of TT in three ways. First, this study suggests that TT prompted learners enrolled in an MA TESOL programme to develop valuable capabilities for critical reflective practice, supported participants' autonomy, and improved their knowledge construction competencies. Second, TT could be implemented in MA TESOL programmes if teacher-educators follow the guidelines of TT learning, including opportunities for dialogue, authentic assessment, and structured reflection. Third, learning in TT is not straightforward; instead, it follows a progressive downward curve. To explain, learning in TT begins with a dilemma to resolve and then escalates to a stage where learners conduct a critical reflective course to review their convictions and beliefs in preparation for changing or developing them in the action stage. However, it is not to be readily inferred that the findings of this study could be used in other fields of teacher education. Further research is needed to confirm whether TT is applicable in other fields and if it impacts students' learning outcomes.

The participants indicated that they were challenged and intimidated when conducting their tasks. Further insight into how such feelings were coped with is needed, requiring targeted research to clarify how participants engaged in TT make sense of the multiple emotional and cognitive dynamics involved.

This study has a few limitations. The data represent one course in a particular context. In addition, the number of the participants was small, only seven participants; thus, the results of this study cannot be generalised to other contexts. Despite the limitations, it is hoped that the current study offers an increased understanding of TT's impact and application in an MA TESOL programme and higher education.

Availability of Data and Material

The data supporting this study's findings are not openly available due to the agreement stated in the consent form and signed by the participants that their identity will remain anonymous.

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Competing Interests

The author reported no potential conflict of interest.

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