Assessment of English Language Student Teachers' Perceptions of their Competency in Light of Teacher Professional Standards (ELTPSs) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract:

The issue of professional teaching standards has recently generated considerable interest of the Ministry of Education in KSA and elsewhere. The purpose of this research paper was to examine the extent to which the Professional Standards for English language teachers are applied by the English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University. The descriptive method was used. The whole population (N=126) of all English language senior female student teachers during the second semester 2016 /2017 was sampled. Data were gathered through a questionnaire. The participants were asked to evaluate their competencies based on the given items in the questionnaire on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from "incompetent" to "highly competent". Findings revealed that the student teachers perceived themselves to be highly competent in language proficiency with the mean scores (4.68), and theoretical knowledge (4.27), However, they were uncertain of their competency in the theoretical (3.37), curriculum design (3.14), and language pedagogy (2.81). Findings were discussed in the light of the preparation program syllabus, as well as previous related literature. Based on the research results, recommendations and suggestions for future studies were proposed.

Keywords: Student teacher, Teacher Preparation Programs, EFL teacher, English Language Teacher Professional Standards (ELTPSs), Teaching competencies, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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تقويم طالبات التدريب الميداني في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية لمستوى كفاءتهن التدريسية وفقا للمعايير المهنية لمعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية

الملخص:

حظيت المعايير المهنية للتدريس مؤخرا باهتمام كبير، سواء في المملكة العربية السعودية، أو غيرها من دول العالم، وعليه فقد هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى التعرف على مستوى الكفاءات التدريسية لطالبات التدريب الميداني في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، في ضوء المعايير المهنية لمعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية، التي حددها المركز الوطني للقياس والتقويم في التعليم العالي في المملكة العربية السعودية. وذلك من وجهة نظرهن. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي، واستخدمت الاستبانة أداة لجمع البيانات، وشملت العينة جميع الطالبات المتدربات وقت إجراء الدراسة، البالغ عددهن (126) متدربة، حيث طلب منهن تقييم كفاءاتهن التدريسية، وفقاً لمقياس ليكرت خماسي، يتدرج من "غير كفء" إلى "درجة عالية من الكفاءة". وكشفت النتائج عن اعتقاد المتدربات أنهن على درجة عالية من الكفاءة، في معياري إتقان اللغة (4.68)، والمعرفة النظرية (4.27)، وغير متأكدات من كفاءتهن في كل من معيار تطبيق النظريات (3.37)، وتصميم المناهج (3.14)، وعلوم تدريس اللغة (2.81). وقد نوقشت النتائج وتم تفسيرها في ضوء كل من الخطة الدراسية لبرنامج الإعداد والأدبيات السابقة ذات الصلة بموضوع الدراسة، وقدمت الدراسة عددا من التوصيات والدراسات المستقبلية المقترحة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الطالبة المتدربة، برامج إعداد المعلمات، معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية، المعايير المهنية لمعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، الكفايات التدريسية، المملكة العربية السعودية.

Introduction:

It is widely documented that qualified teachers account for stronger students' achievement, larger learning gains, national progress, and prosperity. Available research and empirical evidence of student achievement validated the relationship between high quality teaching and students' high performance (Cuttance, 2001; Darling-Hammond, LaFors, & Snyder, 2001; Rowe, Turner, & Lane, 2002; Rowe, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009; Hanushek, 2010; Glazerman et al., 2010; National Research Council, 2010; Harris, 2012; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013; Feuer, Floden, Chudowsky, & Ahn, 2013). Taking this relationship into account, the quality of teacher and teacher preparation programs have become a preeminent concern of researchers and policymakers in recent years. Internationally, policymakers and authorities worked to professionalize teaching through establishing standards for accreditation "similar to medicine and law" (Vergari & Hess, 2002, p. 50). Thus, teacher preparation programs and institutions are revised according to accreditation standards and benchmarks. Teachers and candidates for teaching are also evaluated by licensure exams, and they have to meet teaching license requirements to be admitted or continued in the profession.

In 1984, UNESCO recommended that teaching should be regarded as a profession, and it should be viewed as "a form of public service which requires expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study" (Federal Ministry of Education, 2010, p.13).

Over the past four decades, the competency based teaching movement and the national frameworks for Professional Standards for Teaching have emerged and received a great concern from researchers, educators, and educational authorities around the world (AMCETYA, 2003). The term "Competencies" refers to a set of skills that the effective specialist in any domain has to possess and is competent to do. These skills are articulated and formulated as a set of standards which could "be operationalized into actions" so that they could be evaluated and assessed (Department of Education, 2006; Røkenes, 2016).

To address these issues, a growing body of research lent itself to defining, articulating, and communicating the qualities and competencies that the good teacher had to possess. The results of competency based teaching studies (Elbaz, 1983; Kyriacou, 1986; Ginsburg & Spatig, 1988; Penn, 1990; Goodlad, 1991), (as cited in Pantic, 2011) gave a path to the national and international professional standards for teaching. Therefore, nations as Saudi Arabia have worked on their national professional standards for teaching, refined, and developed these standards and adapted them as criteria for selecting and keeping teachers in the career of instruction.

The introduction of Teachers' Standards was also critical to teachers themselves, as they would use them as an appropriate self-evaluation' instrument to assess their competencies, determine their training needs, give and receive feedback from colleagues (Department of Education, 2013 Ambag, 2015).

In recent years, KSA government, as the case of other countries has witnessed educational reforms that are driven by standards-based education to promote quality teaching. Consequently, King Abdullah's Project for Developing Education (Tatweer: تطوير) began its works on 2007. A year later; the Saudi National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment (NCAAA) was launched in 2008. NCAAA operated as a government body which works independently of the Ministry of Higher Education and aimed to establish "standards and criteria for academic accreditation and assessment and to accredit postsecondary institutions and the programs they offer" (NCAAA, 2015, p. 3).

One of the bold steps toward quality teaching is "the teacher professional standards project". The project is set up and undertaken by the National Centre for Assessment (Qiyas: قياس) as one of the projects implemented under the strategic partnership between the Ministry of Education and (Qiyas) to promote the competence of teachers and hence achieve the goals of the Ministry and boost its outcomes (Qiyas, 2014, p. 4). Teacher Professional Standards provide a theoretical framework that established, at a national level, the agreed dimensions of effective teaching. The project and its assessment tools are considered one of the main subprojects of King Abdullah's Project for Developing Education" (Qiyas, 2014, p. 4).

Teacher professional standards (TPSs) have influenced educational reforms regarding policies of hiring teachers. Relying on Teacher Professional Standards (TPSs) and indicators, (Qiyas) had initiated and developed standardized tests in different teaching majors to assess new teachers' readiness for employability.

In 2014, Qiyas released the preliminary version of English language Teacher Professional Standards (ELTPSs), which included (27) standards, and (115) indicators distributed over five domains. Over time, Qiyas refined and improved its standards. In 2016, Qiyas released the updated standards that put greater emphasis on candidates' knowledge of their subjects and their skills in teaching subject matter content to their students. The updated standards consisted of (16) standards and (56) indicators distributed over five domains (language pedagogy, curriculum design, theoretical knowledge, theoretical application, and language proficiency) (Qiyas, 2016, pp. 4 -7). It could be said that the updated version of English language Teacher Professional Standards included the most crucial elements of English language teacher preparation, and achieved an acceptable balance between Language Proficiency and Language Pedagogy.

Statement of The Problem:

Teacher professional standards (TPSs), and standardized tests based on these standards have influenced policies of selecting and employing teachers. With the launch of Teacher professional standards, it could be argued that only the well-prepared and qualified teachers are likely to be admitted in the teaching career.

With an increasing number of candidate teachers failing to get the minimum scores to pass the English Language Teacher Professional Standards Test (ELTPST), the quality and effectiveness of teachers' preparation and readiness become more vital, particularly when we know that universities do not track their graduate's scores in Teacher Professional Standards Test (TPSTs).

Being a member in Qiyas executive committee, and a practicum educational supervisor at the English language department at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University, the researcher has witnessed the worries of student teachers and their strife to prepare for (ELTPSs) test. Sharing student teachers their concerns, the researcher is sceptical about their preparation and whether their preparation program has equipped them with the necessary competencies to pass the (ELTPSs) test. The current research paper comes as an attempt to assess the extent to which the Professional Standards for English language teachers (ELTPSs) are applied by the English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University.

QUESTIONS

The current research addresses one major question:

To what extent do English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency according to English language teachers' professional standards (ELTPS)?

Five sub questions emerged from the major question, which are as follows:

1. To what extent do English language student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency in the "language pedagogy" domain?

2. To what extent do English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency in the "curriculum design" domain?

3. To what extent do English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency in the "theoretical knowledge" domain?

4. To what extent do English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency in the "theoretical application" domain?

5. To what extent do English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency in the "language proficiency" domain?

Objectives:

The main purpose of this paper is to investigate English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluation of their actual level of competency based on the English language Teacher Professional Standard (ELTPS). Along with the main purpose, comes the aim of having more detailed information regarding participants' competencies, training needs, and strengths of their preparedness.

Significance of the study:

The review of previous literature indicated that there had been no studies carried out to evaluate teaching competencies of English language female student teachers at Al-Imam University according to English language professional teacher standards(ELTPSs). Accordingly, this would be the first study in that domain. Lack of research on Saudi' Teacher Professional Standards Test (TPSTs) is certainly attributed to their recent launch in 2016. Therefore, it is expected that this study would pave the way for more studies in the same direction and it would be a future reference for them.

Findings of the study may have valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of English language teacher preparation program.Hopefully, the results would provide the university 'decision makers with reliable information to promote evidence-informed decisions that might improve the English language program in preparing its graduates to meet the professional teacher standards requirements.

Definition of Terms:

Student Teachers (STs): are senior students in teacher preparation programs who are doing their teaching practicum as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for BA in education. Student Teachers in the current study refers to female student teachers enrolled in the English language program at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University who have just finished their teaching practicum that lasted for 16 weeks during the second semester 2016/ 2017.

Teacher Preparation Programs (TPPs): refers to undergraduate programs (diploma and Bachelor degree programs) that prepare student teachers to earn a degree in teaching (Hussain, 2013). Teacher preparation program in the current study refers to the Bachelor program offered by the English department at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University to prepare students to be English language teachers after graduation.

Competency Level: Competency is defined as "the individual's ability to use, apply and demonstrate a group of related awareness, knowledge, skills, and attitudes to perform tasks and duties successfully and which can be measured against well-accepted standards (levels)" (Wahba, 2013, p. 1). Competency level in the current study refers to the English language female student teachers' ability to use, apply and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and understanding expected of competent and effective English language teachers and which can be measured against English language teachers' professional standards (ELTPSs) developed by Qiyas in 2016.

Perceptions: Perception in Cambridge Online Dictionary (2015) means a belief or an opinion based on how things seem. Accordingly, perception could be defined as a subjective belief based on what is thought. However, the perception in the current study refers to the student teachers' opinion on the extent to which they apply the teacher competencies included in the English language Teacher Professional Standards (ELTPSs).

Teacher Professional Standards (TPSs): refer to "the pedagogical and other professional knowledge and skills required of all teachers" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015, p. 1). They are a description of the knowledge, skills, and understanding expected of competent and effective teachers (Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards, 2014).

The current study is concerned with English language teachers' professional standards (ELTPSs) which are defined as "a description of the knowledge, skills, and understanding expected of competent and effective English language teachers developed by Qiyas in 2016". The English language teacher professional standards (ELTPSs) at the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia consist of five main domains including "language pedagogy", "curriculum design", "theoretical knowledge", "theoretical application," and "language proficiency".

Literature Review:

In recent years, several researchers, concerned with teaching and learning EFL have made it their priority to pursuit excellence in EFL teaching and learning. Most of the research conducted on the English language teachers' professional standards have mainly focused on either EFL competencies or EFL teacher preparation programs. The upcoming section will review in brief relevant studies conducted in the Asian context, where English is being taught as a foreign or a second language rather than a native language. Literature review will begin by the Asian non- Saudi studies and end with Saudi studies, taking chronological order into account.

The oldest available study was conducted in Turkey by Seferoglu (2005) to investigate the extent to which teacher candidates possess the teacher competencies specified by the Ministry of Education. The findings indicated that in most of the competency areas, students find themselves "good" or "excellent". Moreover, the participants' evaluation of their competencies showed significant differences based on gender and the department (Seferoglu, 2005). A similar study was also conducted by Seferoglu (2006) to explore the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards practice and methodology components of pre-service English teacher training program in Turkey. Findings showed that participants believed that the courses presented during the program were not useful in practice in real classroom situations. They also stated that the micro-teaching and practice teaching opportunities during the course were not sufficient (Seferoglu, 2006).

Two relevant available studies were conducted in Egypt. The first study was carried out by f El-Said (2009) aiming to design a comprehensive and objective evaluation tool based on Pharos standards in order to assess the in-service-teacher's performance, and determine the extent to which the Egyptian teacher's performance matches these standards. The results of the study indicated that EFL primary teacher's performance level is less than the required mean score (El-Said, 2009). More recent study in the Egyptian context was conducted by Hashem (2010) for the purpose of evaluating the preparatory stage Egyptian English language teachers' performance according to the quality standards of NAQAAE. Hashem's results showed that the performance level of Egyptian EFL student teachers was generally so low; especially the professionalism domain compared with other domains as classrooms management and evaluation (cited in Althomali, p. 36).

Philippines were also in line with the pursuit of excellence in EFL teaching. In 2012, a Philippine study was conducted by Salimi and Farsi to examine the effect of English Language Proficiency Program for Foreign graduate students (ELPPS) on the academic performance of foreign students. Several aspects of the program were evaluated including course syllabi, goals and objectives, program content, strategies and methodology of instruction, faculty profile and program duration. The results revealed that graduate students reported a significant positive change in their academic performance due to their enrollment in the program (Salimi & Farsi, 2012).

Iranian researchers were also concerned with excellence in EFL teaching and learning. Gholami and Qurbanzada (2016) conducted a study to investigate the attitudes of Iranian key stakeholders in a teacher education program held toward the appropriateness of TEFL teacher education programs at an Iranian teacher education university and their relevance to and sustainable impact in the real teaching context. The results indicated that the participants found courses with literary strands less empowering, and less relevant to English language

teaching. Participants believed that those courses should be modified or replaced by more knowledge-building or knowledge-applying subjects such as teaching methodology (Gholami & Qurbanzada, 2016).

In Indonesia, Ragawanti (2016) carried out a study to evaluate the competency of EFL student teachers at (Satya Wacana Christian University) in the light of Indonesian EFL teacher qualification standard. The findings revealed that the student teachers are viewed to be good in performing pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical skills, personality, social and professional competence.

Since ELTPSs are recently released in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, no available research has used them as criteria to evaluate EFL teachers, or to evaluate student teachers performance or perceptions. However, prior to the release of English language teacher professional standards (ELTPSs) in 2016, Saudi researchers had called for standards of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and had conducted studies to evaluate EFL teachers' performance in the light of some available standards of quality teaching. In 2011, a study was conducted to evaluate EFL intermediate teachers' performance in the light of quality standards in Saudi Arabia. Three quality standards were selected: language proficiency, planning and management of learning, and assessment and evaluation. Results revealed that teachers' performance was good and that Planning and management of learning standard came at the first rank, followed by Language proficiency, while Assessment and evaluation had the third position (Al-Thumali, 2011). Another relevant study was conducted on 2012 to evaluate female English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' performance at secondary schools in Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah in light of Quality Standards. The evaluation based on seven international quality standards. Results revealed that EFL teachers' performance in general "needed to be improved in all seven major domains that were selected, and that the lowest teachers' performance was a characteristic of language practice followed by lesson planning and time management. Classroom Management came as the fourth lowest domain in EFL teacher performance" (Ban, 2012, p. XII). Recently, Alfahadi, Qradi and Asiri conducted a study in 2016 to evaluate the performance of EFL teachers in Tabuk intermediate schools using comprehensive quality standards. Outcomes illustrate that teachers apply the domains of quality standards, but are weak, to some extent, in some of them. Results also showed that the least common domain of quality standards among Saudi teachers was about learning community and environment followed by planning and management of learning (Alfahadi, Qradi, & Asiri, 2016).

In addition to studies conducted to evaluate EFL teachers' performance according to quality teaching standards, another group of studies was also conducted to evaluate EFL teacher preparation programs and training needs. Al-Hazmi (2003) conducted a study to evaluate EFL teacher preparation program in Saudi Arabia in the light of current Trend and identify challenges facing these programs.

Outcomes of Al-Hazmi' study revealed the inadequacy of EFL teacher preparation programs in foreign language teaching methodology and asserted the existence of a gap between EFL teacher preparation programs and teachers' actual needs in classrooms environment. consequent studies of Al-Saadat (2004), Al-Harbi (2006), Albedaiwi (2014), Al-Seghaye (2014), Althobaiti (2014), Mitchell and Alfuraih (2017) asserted the inadequacy of EFL teacher preparation programs regarding pedagogical knowledge aspects such as classroom management, use of teaching aids and resources. Unfortunately, even more recent studies such as Al-Subaihy, Al-Rashidy, and Al-Najjar (2015), Al-Zahrani (2015) and Almomani (2016) revealed the shortage of the preparation programs and stated that pedagogical courses in these programs were theoretically oriented courses offering extinct, traditional, and old teaching methods that were used no more.

Methodology and Procedures:

Research Methodology:

The descriptive method was used to investigate the of female student teachers' perceptions of their Level of Competency at the Department of English at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh.

The instrument of the study is a questionnaire anchored on the standards and indicators included in the Professional Standards for English language teachers developed by the National Center for Assessment in Higher Education (Qiyas, 2016). The questionnaire was used to examine student teachers students' opinions on the extent to which they apply the Professional Standards for English language teachers specified by Qiyas in 2016.

Participants and Setting:

The population of the study is senior female student teachers who have just finished their teaching practicum that lasted for 16 weeks during the second semester 2016 /2017. The study was conducted at the end of the semester, so that participants could express their opinions about their competencies with more insightful views on their preparation program. At their last semester, senior students practice teaching in public schools four days a week, and prepare their graduation projects on the university campus on Wednesdays. Students' age range between 22 and 23 years. Total of (126) respondents were included in this study.

Instruments:

The current study used a researcher-prepared questionnaire as an instrument to collect data. The questionnaire was primarily anchored on the updated English language Teacher Professional Standards (ELTPSs) developed by Qiyas in 2016. The ELTPSs consists of five main domains including "language pedagogy", "curriculum design", "theoretical knowledge", "theoretical application", and

"language proficiency." These five main domains fall into 16 sub-categories with 56 competency items (Qiyas, 2016). The 56 competency items were worded into a questionnaire' Statements, and used as an instrument to collect the study data. The participants were asked to evaluate their competencies concerning the given items in the instrument using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1" to "5" "incompetent" to "highly competent".

The validity of the questionnaire was checked by five professors of the curriculum and instruction department and assured the appropriateness of the answer scale and the clarity and readability of the questionnaire's statements. No modifications of the questionnaire content were asked or accepted, since the questionnaire was meant to be identical with the (ELTPSs). Internal consistency was ensured using Pearson's coefficient. Pearson's coefficient calculations yield correlations ranging from r = (0.57) to r = (0.941) at (p <0.05). High correlation coefficients were attributed to the strict procedures undertaken by Qiyas in building the professional framework standards and assuring its validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. Calculations of Cronbach's Alpha yield values ranging from r = (0.84) to r = (0.94), while the overall Cronbach Alpha was (0.97), which indicated the consistency and reliability of the questionnaire and displayed Cronbach's Alpha values for the questionnaire categories and the entire questionnaire.

Data Collection and Analysis:

After the required permissions were obtained to conduct the study, the researcher explained the study purpose and details for the participants. Instructions on how to fill the questionnaire were also provided. Students were asked to evaluate their competencies concerning the given items in the instrument on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "incompetent" to "highly competent". After that, the researcher distributed the questionnaires to the target respondents on Wednesday (which is the scheduled day for the student teachers to be on the university campus). Questionnaires were collected back right after respondents have finished completing them.

To ensure a more accurate interpretation of results and facilitate data analysis, the five levels of Likert scales were identified through their means. Levels were differed by (0.80) points based on the following formula: Class interval= (Maximum score -Minimum score)/Class number = (5- 1) /5 =0.80 (Asthana & Bhushan, 2016). Score limits of each competency class were formed in the following manner:

(1 – 1.80) and less = incompetent.
(1.81 – 2.60) = somewhat incompetent.
(2.61 – 3.40) = uncertain.
(3.41 – 4.20) = competent.
(4.21 – 5.00) = highly competent.

Data were processed and analyzed by using the SPSS statistical package. Pearson's coefficient and Cronbach's Alpha calculations were run out to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument. For every teaching competency, in five competency categories, means and standard deviations were calculated to identify the student teachers' level of competency based on the English language Teacher Professional Standards (ELTPSs).

Results:

English language Teacher Professional Standards (ELTPSs) questionnaire was used to assess the level of English language student teachers' level of competencies from the perspective of themselves. After collecting and analyzing data, means and standard deviations were calculated. Results regarding the major question are displayed first, followed by results associated with the sub questions. Lastly, the findings are discussed and interpreted.

Results Related to the Major Question:

To what extent do English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency according to English language teachers' professional standards (ELTPS)?

Table (1) displays outcomes related to English language student teachers' evaluation of their Level of Competency According to English language teachers' professional standards (ELTPSs).

Table (1): The Participants' Level of Competency According to the Major Domains of English Language Teachers' Professional Standards (ELTPSs)

ELTPSs Main domains	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Competency	Rank
language pedagogy	2.81	0.85	Uncertain	5
curriculum design	3.14	0.79	Uncertain	4
theoretical knowledge	4.27	0.63	Highly Competent	2
theoretical application	3.37	0.71	Uncertain	3
language proficiency	4.68	0.55	Highly Competent	1
Total	**3.65**	**0.62**	**Competent**	

Table (1) shows that the total mean of English language student teachers' evaluation of their level of competency is (3.65). Referring to the score limits of competency levels which are designated in the data analysis section, the mean score (3.65) falls in the class (3.414.20- = competent). Therefore, English language student teachers rated themselves according to English language teachers' professional standards (ELTPSs) as competent.

Based on the rating of their competencies according to the five major domains of (ELTPSs), "language proficiency" had the highest score with a mean score of (4.68) which is interpreted as highly competent, followed by" theoretical knowledge" with a mean score of (4.27) which is interpreted as highly competent. "Theoretical application" came at the third rank with a mean score of (3.37) which is interpreted as uncertain of competency, fourthly came" curriculum design" with a mean score of (3.14) which is interpreted as uncertain", and finally language pedagogy" came at the last rank with the lowest mean score (2.81) which is interpreted as uncertain.

To sum up, the participants evaluated themselves as highly competent in "language proficiency" and "theoretical knowledge" domains, while they are uncertain of their level of competency in "Theoretical application," "curriculum design," and language pedagogy" domains. Although there are some variations, the participants evaluated themselves in general as "highly competent" or "uncertain" for the main competency domains, it was a positive finding that participants do not evaluate themselves as "very incompetent" or "incompetent" in any major competency domain.

Results Related to the Answer of Sub-Question (1):

To what extent do English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency in the "language pedagogy" domain?

When the participants rated their level of competency against English Language Teacher Professional Standards (ELTPSs), language pedagogy came at the last rank with a mean score of (2.81) which is interpreted as uncertain. Language pedagogy domain is represented by (13) items in the English language Teacher Professional Standards (ELTPSs), which are items (1- 13), as it is clarified in Table (2).

Table (2): The Participants' Level of Competency Related to Items of Language Pedagogy

No	Items	Mean	Std. deviation
1	I know about current trends in research on language teaching pedagogy relative to L2 speaking and listening.	3.38	0.83
2	I know about effective teaching strategies relative to L2 speaking and listening	3.12	0.79
3	I know about current trends in research on reading pedagogy relative to L2 reading.	3.37	0.66
4	I know about effective teachings strategies relative to L2 reading comprehension.	2.74	0.92
5	I know about current trends in research on reading pedagogy relative to L2 vocabulary development and measurement.	3.31	0.76
6	I know about current trends in research on writing pedagogy relative to L2 English composition.	2.94	0.76
7	I understand the writing as a process.	3.37	0.58
8	I am able to use Web 2.0 tools and stand-alone computer applications to support instruction in EFL writing.	1.14	0.94
9	I know effective teaching strategies relative to L2 writing.	3.36	0.92
10	I know how to plan varied, flexible, and coherent learning activities and lessons.	3.32	0.84
11	I am able to sequence instruction to achieve module, lesson, and course level learning objectives.	3.31	0.56
12	I know how to design assignments that are linked to learning goals and content.	1.62	0.72
13	I know how to select assessment criteria that measure the achievement of learning goals.	1.67	0.97
	Average	**2.81**	**0.85**

Table (2) shows that the item "Know about current trends in research on reading pedagogy relative to L2 vocabulary development and measurement" had the highest mean score of (3.38). All responses within this domain were interpreted as uncertain except to three items; "Know how to select assessment criteria that measure the achievement of learning goals", with a mean score of (1.76). Followed by "Know how to design assignments that are linked to learning goals

and content" with a mean score of (1.62), then "Able to use Web 2.0 tools and stand-alone computer applications to support instruction in EFL writing" with a mean score of (1.14) which were interpreted as incompetent.

Results Related to the Answer of Sub Question (2):

To what extent do English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency in the "curriculum design" domain?

When the participants rated their level of competency against (ELTPSs), curriculum design came at the fourth rank with a mean score of (3.14), which is interpreted as uncertain. Curriculum design is represented by (15) items in the English language Teacher Professional Standards (ELTPSs) which are items (1428-), as it is clarified in Table (3).

Table (3): The Participants' Level of Competency Related to Items of Curriculum Design

No	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
14	I am familiare with a wide variety of print and electronic learning resources related to the curriculum I teach.	3.38	0.58
15	I know how to access, select and adapt learning resources based on learning goals and outcomes.	3.35	0.65
16	I know how to integrate electronic/digital learning resources in teaching.	1.64	0.91
17	I know how to motivate and train students to use a variety of learning resources and become independent learners.	3.37	0.74
18	I know how to develop clearly defined, achievable, and measurable learning objectives at course, module, and lesson level.	3.40	0.62
19	I know how to communicate learning goals to students clearly, both verbally and in writing.	3.39	0.94
20	I am able to recognize students' unique academic and intellectual abilities.	3.35	0.61
21	I am able to design language lessons that take into consideration unique academic and intellectual abilities of all students.	3.38	0.74
22	I am able to adapt language lessons to accommodate students' personal interests and abilities.	3.37	0.58

Table (3): Continued

No	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
23	I am able to design language lessons that are appropriate to students' cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.	3.27	0.53
24	I am able to use innovative teaching strategies that enhance student language learning motivation.	1.79	0.71
25	I am able to create a positive classroom environment that encourages creativity and autonomous learning.	3.38	0.92
26	I am able to use teaching methods that develop critical thinking and problem solving skills.	3.37	0.72
27	I am able to use teaching techniques that link student personal experiences and contemporary issues to language learning.	3.35	0.94
28	I am able to use teaching strategies and media that help students appreciate and enjoy language learning.	3.39	0.53
	Average	**3.14**	**0.79**

Table (3) shows the mean and standard deviation of items within curriculum design domain. Item" Know how to develop defined, achievable, and measurable learning objectives at course, module, and lesson level "had the highest mean score of (3.40).

The majority of responses within this domain were interpreted as uncertain while two responses were interpreted as "incompetent", such as "Know how to integrate electronic/digital learning resources in teaching" with a mean score of (1.64) and "Use innovative teaching strategies that enhance student language learning motivation" with a mean score of (1.79).

Results Related to the Answer of Sub-Question (3):

To what extent do English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency in the "theoretical knowledge" domain?

When the participants rated their level of competency against English language teachers' professional standards (ELTPSs), theoretical knowledge "came at the second rank with a mean of (4.27) which is interpreted as highly competent ". Theoretical knowledge "is represented by 15 items in the English language teachers' professional standards (ELTPSs), which are items (29- 43), as it is displayed in Table (4).

Table (4): The Participants' Level of Competency Related to Items of Theoretical Knowledge

No	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
29	I understand theories of cognitive development and how they relate to language learning and literacy.	4.30	0.83
30	I understand theories of second language acquisition.	4.21	0.79
31	I understand the stages and obstacles of second language acquisition.	4.33	0.66
32	I know the major conceptions and definitions of language.	4.26	0.92
33	I am familiar with the origin and history of English and its relation to other languages.	4.22	0.76
34	I know the difference between competence and performance.	4.23	0.58
35	I know the parts of speech including word categories, nouns, verbs and their tenses, adjectives, adverbs, function words, pronouns, articles, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, intensifiers, conjunctions, and the characteristics and usages of each.	4.40	0.70
36	I know phrases and phrase types including g prepositional phrase, adjective phrase, adverb phrase, noun phrase, and verb phrase.	4.36	0.94
37	I know clauses, clause types and patterns including finite and nonfinite clauses, main and subordinate clauses, and coordination between clauses.	4.37	0.51
38	I am able to use basic knowledge of English syntax to support instruction in L2 reading and writing.	4.21	0.57
39	I am able to use basic knowledge of compositional and lexical semantics (semantic rules, theories of word meaning, lexical relations, and semantic features) to support instruction in L2 reading and writing.	4.23	0.91
40	I am able to use articulatory phonetics (the production of sounds, consonants, and vowels) to support instruction in L2 English speaking and listening.	4.31	0.67
41	I can describe the major varieties of English with special attention to grammatical and orthographic differences between British and North American English.	4.22	4.22

Table (4): Continued

No	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
42	I am able to use basic knowledge of inflectional morphology and word formation processes (derivations and compounding) to support instruction in L2 English reading and writing.	4.20	0.59
43	I am able to use basic knowledge of discourse analysis to support instruction in L2 English reading and writing.	4.32	0.83
	Average	**4.27**	**0.63**

Table (4) shows the mean and standard deviation of items within theoretical knowledge domain. The item "Know the parts of speech including word categories, nouns, verbs and their tenses, adjectives, adverbs, function words, pronouns, articles, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, intensifiers, conjunctions, and the characteristics and usages of each" had the highest mean score of (4.40). Secondly came the item "Know clauses, clause types and patterns including finite and nonfinite clauses, main and subordinate clauses, and coordination between clauses" with a mean score of (4.37), then "Know phrases and phrase types including prepositional phrase, adjective phrase, adverb phrase, noun phrase, and verb phrase" with a mean score of (4.36).

Results Related to the Answer of Sub-Question (4):

To what extent do English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency in the "theoretical application" domain?

When the participants rated their level of competency against (ELTPSs), theoretical application domain came at the third rank with a mean score of (3.37) which is interpreted as uncertain.

Theoretical application "is represented by (7) items in the English language teachers' professional standards (ELTPSs) which are items (44- 50), as it is shown in Table (5).

Table (5): The Participants' Level of Competency Related to Items of Theoretical Application

No	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
44	I can demonstrate familiarity with current theories of second language acquisition relevant to ESL instruction.	3.29	0.57
45	I know the interrelatedness of first and second language acquisition and ways in which L1 affects the development of L2.	3.37	0.86
46	I am familiar with the common challenges experienced by EFL students learning English and with strategies for overcoming these challenges, particularly those challenges faced by Arabic L1 learners.	3.38	0.63
47	I am familiar with the historical developments of TESOL.	3.40	0.75
48	I am familiar with the major theories and recent trends of TESOL and their applications.	3.39	0.61
49	I am familiar with the connections between TESOL and other related disciplines.	3.37	0.88
50	I am aware of the issues related to the relation between language teaching/learning and culture.	3.39.	67
Average		**3.37**	**0.71**

Table (5) shows the mean and standard deviation of items within language application domain. The item "I am familiar with the historical developments of TESOL" had the highest mean score (3.40), while the item "I Demonstrate familiarity with current theories of second language acquisition relevant to ESL instruction" had the lowest mean score in this domain which is (3.29). All responses within this domain were interpreted as uncertain.

Results Related to the Answer of Sub-Question (5):

To what extent do English language female student teachers at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University evaluate their level of competency in the "language proficiency" domain?

When the participants rated their level of competency against English language teachers' professional standards (ELTPSs), language proficiency "came at the first rank with a mean score of (4.64), which is interpreted as highly competent". Language proficiency "is represented by six items in the English language teachers' professional standards (ELTPSs) which are items (51- 56), as it is shown in Table (6).

Table (6): The Participants' Level of Competency Related to Items of Language Proficiency

No	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
51	I know how to find explicit and implicit information.	4.77	0.60
52	I know how to establish logical relations between sentences and paragraphs.	4.69	0.71
53	I know how to discriminate facts from points of view.	4.26	0.58
54	I know how to distinguish main and minor ideas.	4.73	0.67
55	I know how to interpret referential.	4.65	0.57
56	I know how to summarize texts.	4.75	0.65
	Average	**4.64**	**0.55**

Table (6) shows the mean and standard deviation of items within "language proficiency" domain. The item "Know how to find explicit and implicit information" had the highest mean score of (4.77), followed by "Know how to summarize texts" with a mean score of (4.75), then "Know how to distinguish main and minor ideas" with a mean score of (4.73). The statement "Know how to discriminate facts from points of view" had the lowest mean (4.26). However, all responses within this domain were interpreted as highly competent.

Discussion:

To sum up, the results indicated that the participants perceived themselves as highly competent in "language proficiency" and "theoretical knowledge" domains, while they are uncertain of their level of competency in "theoretical application," "curriculum design," and language pedagogy" domains.

"Language proficiency" and "theoretical knowledge" are language focused domains. The participants' perceptions of themselves as highly competent in these domains could be attributed to the nature of their preparation program, which gives a great emphasis to language competency. All candidates admitted to the department of English language and literature at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud University must obtain a minimum cumulative average of B in their secondary school study, and a minimum B+ grade in the English Language course.

After their preliminary admission, a written English language skills test is held, and accordingly candidates are to be admitted or rejected. Moreover, admitted students must first enroll in an intensive program for one or two semesters according to their grades in the language skills test. Courses in the intensive program concentrate on developing language skills, including listening comprehension, reading, writing, speaking, grammar and vocabulary". "Upon successful completion of this program, students are matriculated in the actual academic mainstream English program" (Al-Seghayer, 2014, pp. 144- 145).

An analytical and a close look at the program's plan provide evidence of its concentration on language related aspects (Department of English Language and Translation, 2015). Table (7) offers a brief description of categories and count of the program courses.

Table (7): Courses in the English Language Program

Categories and count of courses							
Levels	Language skills	Cultural preparation	Literature	Education	computer	Research methods	Other	Total
First	4	5	-	1	1	-		11
Second	4	5	-	1	-	-		10
Third	4	4	1	1	-	1		11
Fourth	4	3	3	-	-	-		10
Fifth	3	3	4	1	-	-		11
Sixth	3	1	4	3	-	-		11
Seventh	3	2	2	2	1	1		11
Eighth	-	1	-	-	-	-	+ teaching practicum & translation project	3
Total	25	24	14	9	2	2	2	78
Percent	32%	30%	17%	11%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	100%

It is noteworthy that a total of 25 courses (32%) of the courses offered by the department fall in the language skills category. Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud University English language department, as the case of English departments in other Saudi universities mainly focuses on developing skills in English language (Albedaiwi, 2014).

Participants' perceptions of themselves as highly competent in "language proficiency" and "theoretical knowledge" of language could be attributable to the emphasis offered by the program to language aspects that equip participants with strong confidence in their language competencies.

Though students' perception of their language competencies indicates a positive result that is consistent with the preparation program's focus, it is still a questionable result for three reasons. First, findings regarding language competencies in the current study depend on students' perceptions and their subjective evaluation rather than on an objective competency test. Second, being senior students in the English language department might affect participants' evaluation of their language competency, since transparency would injure their pride. Third, the current findings are inconsistent with previous literature.

Related studies reported that "English language teachers in Saudi Arabia lack subject knowledge, language proficiency and are weak in speaking the

language" (Al-Hazmi, 2003, p. 342; Alresheed, 2008, p. 15; Althobaiti, 2017, p. 21). Further research is needed to investigate Saudi EFL teachers and student teachers' current level of competency in language.

Findings related to the participants' practical and pedagogical competencies revealed that " theoretical application " came at the third rank, " curriculum design " came at the fourth rank, while " language pedagogy "had the lowest rank. Although they had different ranks, the three domains showed the participants' uncertainty of their pedagogical competencies.

Items' ranks within "theoretical application" domain showed that the participants' familiarity "with the historical developments of TESOL", though reflects participants' uncertainty, still had the highest mean score, while the item dealing with students' familiarity" with current theories of second language acquisition relevant to ESL instruction" had the lowest mean score, and indicated incompetency. In other words, participants' perception of their teaching competency meandering between uncertainty and incompetency.

Such findings go closer to the real situation in the preparation program and could be attributed to the quantity and quality of "teaching methods" courses offered to students. Table (7) showed that no more than nine educational courses representing 11% of the program courses were offered to students. Referring to the program plan stated in "the undergraduate program handbook" (Department of English Language and Translation, 2015), it could be concluded that only two teaching methods courses were presented to the students during their four years' study. Participants' uncertainty about their familiarity "with the historical developments of TESOL", and their feelings of incompetency in dealing with" the current theories of second language acquisition relevant to ESL instruction" might suggest that the syllabus of teaching methods courses is focusing on the historical and theoretical aspects rather than practical affairs and current trends in teaching.

Findings in this aspect are in line with those of Al-Hazmi (2003) which reported English teacher's lack of competence in second and foreign language teaching methodology, as well as those of Al-Saadat (2004), and Al-Harbi (2006) which denoted that many Saudi EFL teachers were in need of more training in teaching methods. In his analytical study of teacher engagement in designing learning experiences, Albedaiwi (2014) asserted that courses of EFL teaching methodology in teacher preparation programs are neither enough nor in line with the high needs and expectations of the EFL teachers. Al-Seghayer's results (2014) also affirmed the insufficiency of English teaching preparation programs regarding pedagogical content knowledge. In his study, Al-Zahrani (2015) stated that teacher education programs only offer student teachers with older and simpler instruction methods. Almomani (2016) on the other hand claimed that university teaching methodology courses focus on the theoretical side and

neglect the application and practice. Almomani's claims were reinforced by Althobaiti's conclusion (2017) that courses in English teaching methodology are not well represented at the university level.

While curriculum design competencies came at the fourth rank, participants responses to the items within curriculum design domain showed their uncertainty of their competence in planning learning experiences, that take into consideration diverse backgrounds, abilities, needs and interests of students. The majority of responses within this domain were interpreted as uncertain, while some responses were interpreted as "incompetent", such as those dealing with integrating electronical and digital learning resources in teaching and using innovative teaching strategies that enhance student language learning motivation.

The reason why participants perceived themselves as uncertain or incompetent in these competencies is probably that their preparation program simply did not offer them reliable preparation for dealing with those specific competencies. Table (7) showed that nine educational courses representing (11%) of the program courses were offered to students. According to the undergraduate program handbook (Department of English Language and Translation, 2015), education courses offered to the participants are: history of Islamic education, history and policy of Saudi education, fundamentals of curriculum, educational psychology, school administration, teaching methodology 1 and 2, educational evaluation and assessment, computer assisted language learning.

In the participants' preparation program, education' courses were introduced by experts in education rather than by experts in language teaching. Moreover, these courses were taught through the Arabic language, except for teaching methodology courses, and computer assisted language learning (CALL), which were taught through English by the faculty of English department.

Preview of syllabus of education courses as they were described in the undergraduate program handbook (Department of English Language and Translation, 2015) showed that they concentrated on definitions of educational and psychological concepts, differentiating between similar concepts, tracking historical development and growth of concepts. It can be concluded that syllabus of education courses are theoretical and lacking hands-on and practical experiences. As Gholami and Qurbanzada (2016) noted, teaching in educational courses is usually delivered through classroom lectures and formal speeches.

Gholami and Qurbanzada (2016) argued that educational courses in EFL preparation programs are of no immediate use in the classroom, because most of the teaching time is spent in talking about concepts, instead of availing students of hands on experiences by using live demonstrations, authentic examples, and practical applications (Gholami and Qurbanzada, 2016). The kind of syllabus and teaching methods used in education courses resulted in a wide gap between

the content of EFL teacher preparation programs and the needs of teachers in the classroom (Al-Hazmi, 2003). Studies investigating Saudi EFL teachers' performance and training needs revealed an alarming lack of competence in curriculum design aspects and showed that they were in great need of more training in classroom management, usage of teaching aids and technology (Al-Harbi, 2006). A study conducted by Ban (2012), revealed that the lowest teachers' performance was in lesson planning and time management. Albedaiwi (2014) found that Saudi EFL teachers did not have the knowledge related to the curriculum theory and materials because they did not receive reliable preparation for dealing with the perspectives of the textbooks and materials by their preparation program. Building on these results, the study concluded that EFL teachers' preparation programs had always introduced educational courses that did not meet the needs of a future EFL teacher (Albedaiwi, 2014).

Researchers such as Al-Subaihy et al. (2015), Al-Zahrani (2015) and Almomani (2016) reported that EFL teachers' preparation programs showed a weakness of linkage between theory and practice. Al-Seghayer (2014) was also on the same line when he argued that Saudi EFL teachers' preparation programs are inadequate, especially about technological pedagogical knowledge that involves the ability to effectively integrate the available technological resources into language teaching. The previous arguments were reinforced by the results of an unpublished study carried out by the Ministry of Education (2005) showing that EFL teachers' average competency in lesson planning was (60%), while it was (64%) for classroom management (Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 145).

EFL teachers' lack of "enough theoretical background knowledge pertaining to the main factors that affect second-language learning, such as motivation, attitudes, aptitude, and age", their insufficient knowledge, and use of educational aids and electrical learning resources employed in English classrooms, their limited experience in material design, were also documented by several Saudi researchers (Al-Seghayer, 2016; Althobaiti, 2017; Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2017).

Findings of the current study revealed participants' uncertainty of their competency level in language pedagogy domain. The language pedagogy domain had the lowest mean, therefore came at the last rank. All responses within this domain were interpreted as uncertain except to three items that deal with selecting and designing assessment criteria, using Web tools and computer applications to support instruction in which participants perceive themselves as incompetent. Language pedagogy competencies required students to know how to plan proper learning activities, and lessons, design assignment, and select assessment criteria relative to L2 speaking listening, reading comprehension, writing and composition, vocabulary development, and know about current trends in research on language teaching pedagogy. The totality of these specialized competencies could not be attained by receiving only three courses.

It could be argued that participants' feeling of incompetency is attributable to the limited number of teaching methods, assessment, and computer courses that they have received during their study. Referring to program plan stated in "the undergraduate program handbook" (2015), it is found that no more than two computer courses, two teaching methods courses, one assessment course, offered to the students during their four years study.

Computer training courses in EFL preparation programs were not enough to afford teachers the opportunity to "develop more confidence regarding the use of computers in the classroom" (Alshumaimeri, 2008, p. 40). It is ironic that despite the importance of technology in advancing the country at all levels including pre-service teachers' preparation, "pre-service teachers' curriculum severely lack the vision of the effective integration of digital technology" (Al-Zahrani, 2015, p. 151).

With the limited number of assessment courses in almost all EFL teacher preparation programs around KSA, it is logical to predict that the same problem is common among Saudi EFL teachers. This conclusion is reinforced by the results of Al-Saadat (2004) that asserted Saudi EFL teachers' insufficient knowledge of digital technology, language testing, and evaluation techniques. Al-Saadat (2004) claimed that "often EFL teacher preparation programs in the Saudi Arabia offer a course on language testing. However, personal observation has revealed that such a course is handled more theoretically. Student receives classroom instruction on principles of testing and leave the course full of information about testing" with no practical experiences of any kind (Al-Saadat, 2004). These results were also consistent with those of the Ministry of Education's study (2005) which showed that EFL teachers' competency in lesson planning was (60%), while it was (54%) for assessment, and (52%) for language teaching methods (Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 145). The study of Al-Subaihy et al. (2015) yielded similar results. In a more recent study conducted by Mitchell and Alfuraih (2017), it is also found that over (70%) of the EFL teachers, who completed the survey, deem themselves in need of training in testing and student feedback. In line with these results are those of Al-Harbi (2006) which revealed that EFL teachers were in need of more training in teaching methods, teaching the four language skills, teaching grammar, and utilizing teaching aids and technology.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations:

Based on the given findings, there are some important conclusions to be highlighted. First, while it is evident from the results that student teachers' of the department of English at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University were highly confident of their language skills competencies, it appears that they are uncertain of their teaching and pedagogical competencies. The second conclusion revolves around the small number of educational and technological courses offered to the participants by their preparation program. It is obvious that

there is a need to improve the student teachers' confidence in their pedagogical competence, and equip them with current issues of EFL teaching and learning theories, curriculum and material development, language assessment, technology skills, Psychology of Learning, and Classroom Management techniques.

In response to the findings of this study and to improve the student teachers' capacity to meet the English language teacher professional standards (ELTPSs), some leading issues need to be considered. First, the content of the preparation program should consider student teachers need to pass English language Teacher Professional Standards test (ELTPST), and it has to be revised and modified accordingly. It is more appropriate here to replicate Al-Hazmi's (2003) alarming statement that " there is an urgent need to improve Saudi EFL teachers' preparation programs and to deal with current weaknesses in these programs" (p. 343).

Previous studies have reported that EFL teacher preparation programs in Saudi Arabia prepare students to be English or English-Arabic translation specialists, not necessarily English teachers (Al-Hazmi, 2003, p. 341; Albedaiwi, 2014, p. 34). Secondly, the improvement of Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud University English language program might reduce the number of cultural preparation Classes to leave more room for educational and practical Content classes. Incorporating several pedagogical courses is crucial. It will be a practical idea if the program designers consider initiating four different majors; English literature, translation, linguistics, and teaching English as a foreign language. Having four majors would spare more time for specialized courses in the four majors, and would maintain these majors with more depth and accountability.

Moreover, the current theoretical methods of presenting pedagogical courses have to be altered. This call is echoed by several researchers in this field who emphasized the need to provide Saudi English teacher candidates with sound, professional training in the most practical and meaningful contexts using the most qualified professionals (Al-Saadat, 2004, p. 248; Hussain, 2013, p 17; Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 148). The researcher agrees with Gholami and Qurbanzada (2016) that developing "an internal evaluative system" within preparation programs would be a realistic and beneficial step to diagnose weaknesses and strengths, and lead to a more improved and effective educational program (Gholami & Qurbanzada, 2016).

Research Strengths and Limitations:

Strengths of the current research emerged from the new data which it has brought to light in the absence of data related to student teachers achievement in English Language Teacher Professional Standards tests (ELTPSTs). Although important data were gained, results of this study have to be interpreted with caution, because they rely on the participants' perceptions, which do not necessarily comport accurately with reality. A variety of instruments could add

further depth and nuance to the study results and discussion. It would be strength of the study if the male student teachers were also included. Limitations of the current study represent some gaps that could be bridged by future research.

Directions for Future Research:

Similar studies could be conducted in the same direction. A comparative content reviews of EFL teacher preparation programs across Saudi Arabia and syllabus' impact on student teachers' perceptions of their level of competency is a worth studying dimension. More insightful outcomes will be reached if the current study is replicated using qualitative or mixed method design and open-ended questions to provide a forum for explanations and interpretation. Further research is warranted regarding the relationship between student teachers scores in English language Teacher Professional Standards' test and teachers' efficacy in the classroom.

The era of investigating the relationship between graduates' perceptions of their level of competency and their level of competency as perceived by their supervisors is also a new era to be investigated. Surveying graduates' training needs after being exposed to English language Teacher Professional Standards' test would yield beneficial findings that would be of great value in evaluating the preparation program.

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