Teaching as an Act of Persuasion (Tap) and Attitudinal Responses of English Language Teachers: Saudi Schools as a Case Study

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INTORDUCTION

The educational area has always been characterized by changes and adjustments and the overall objective has been to provide suitable ways in which the learners can be actively involved in the process of learning and to assist them with tasks that are meaningful and interesting. Accordingly, the paradigm of teaching and learning has witnessed the emergence of a variety of methods; for instance, the transmission and scaffolding methods and the CLT approach. These methods brought many benefits to the teaching context. They were adapted to the teaching conditions that distinguished the periods when they emerge. However, they brought about considerable defects.

The TAP approach, however, comes as a metaphor that characterizes the time. As a result, many studies have been conducted to test the potential benefit of this metaphor. The aim has been to examine the suitability of this approach to teaching. A large body of work in persuasive teaching (especially Alexander, Buehl, Fives, Kardash, Murphy & Sinatra) has emphasized the effectiveness of the use of persuasion in the teaching and learning context. The TAP has put special emphasis on the learners and has taken advantages of the changes in them. TAP has dealt with learners' resistance by an attempt to make them convinced of the worth of the act of learning.

In this context, this research seeks to analyze the teaching-as-persuasion metaphor in a sample of Saudi schools. It investigates how teaching as persuasion relates to English language teaching and the effectiveness and viability of this metaphor as a teaching practice specifically in the Saudi educational context. Teaching as persuasion is a new pedagogical approach that is conducive to the requirements and challenges of the contemporary world and it traces its roots specifically from the changes that distinguish the current educational enterprise (Murphy, 2001, p.227). Generally, persuasion is a pragmatic concept through which individuals seek to stimulate a change in others by influencing their understanding and conceptions relative to several topics (Murphy, 2001, p.224). Persuasion, thus defined, is based on credible arguments and plausible evidence. Persuasion has also proven to have a role in meeting educational purposes. This role is advocated by many researchers including Murphy (2001) and it is shown in the instructor's focus on convincing learners of the worth of learning by stimulating them to change their understanding and beliefs of diverse concepts and assumptions (Murphy, 2001, p.224).

The tenets that undergird the teaching as persuasion framework and their practical application to classroom practices are closely scrutinized. Consistent with the teaching as persuasion framework, classroom is seen from a different perspective; classroom thrives on discussion and argumentation. Other concerns are addressed mainly the importance of the classroom

discussion mode and the promotion of learners' critical reasoning. These issues are further investigated and testified through the administration of a questionnaire to a sample of secondary school teachers.

The overall objective of this research project is to explore the potential effectiveness of the persuasive teaching metaphor in Saudi secondary schools and to test the teachers' motivational and attitudinal responses to the concept of teaching as persuasion. Another purpose of this research project is to investigate the role of persuasion in classroom. This project also aims to test the validity of the hypothesis which claims that Saudi teachers of English are not familiar with the concept of teaching as persuasion and that they rather employ persuasive strategies and techniques intuitively in the process of their teaching.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Action research is the methodology that will be employed to achieve the objectives of this work. It is a process of educational reform. It is defined as "the systematic study of attempts to improve educational practice by groups of participants by means of their own practical actions and by means of their own reflection upon the effects of those actions" (Hopkins, 1985, as cited in Gabel, 1995, para.6). It is the one which develops knowledge, performs changes and promotes discipline (Stringer, 1996, as cited in Donato, 2003, para.4).

The main objective behind conducting the action research is a thorough exploration of today's educational circle. It aims at promoting teaching and learning conditions, investigating the kind of problems that may impede the process of learning and accordingly providing ample solutions and appropriate alternatives to them. Action research investigates how best to teach and learn. In this context, Donato (2003) argues that "the information is gathered with the goal of gaining insights, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes" (p.4).

Consistent with the implementation of action research is the role of the teacher. The teacher is a researcher who explores the educational setting and tries his or her best to promote the learning process and bring about significant improvements to the learning atmosphere. The teacher's role is reflected and revealed through the steps that the action research follows. In fact, according to Harmer (2001), action research has a consecutive order; it addresses a specific matter or issue, proceeds with making inquiry and determining the kind of information to be obtained. After information is gathered and examined, decision is taken on coming action.
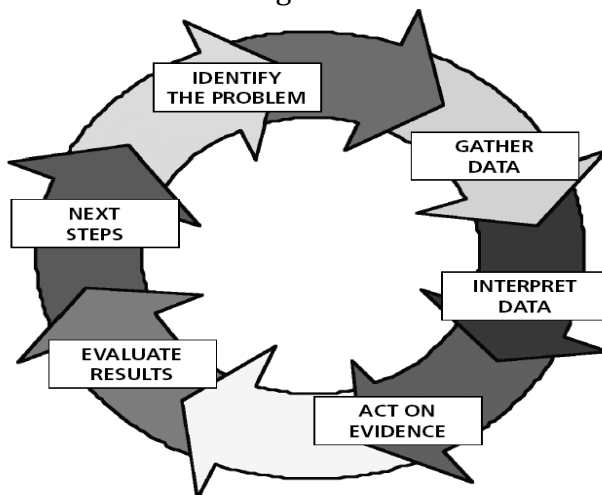
The action research steps are shown in this figure:

Figure 3.1: Action research process (Ferrance, 2000, p.9)

As it is highlighted in the figure, action research includes diverse steps; it starts with stating a problem clearly and specifying questions. It proceeds with a compilation of information that may be relevant and of importance in outlining the research. Then the information is interpreted and analyzed. Finally, the findings are checked and assessed.

The action research embraces a number of research methods including questionnaires, surveys and interviews. This research opts for the questionnaire as a data collection instrument for many reasons. First, the questionnaire is an objective mechanism and a useful tool for collecting information and spelling out the teachers' perceptions of the research covered. In this context, the teacher or respondents, generally speaking, are expected to be collaborators and help the researcher by giving trusted replies so that validated results can be extracted and worthy findings can be reached.

The questionnaire is administered to teachers working in a variety of secondary schools in Saudi Arabia, particularly in Majmaah. Thirty six questionnaires were distributed to teachers of English but only 28 were obtained and fully answered. The objective behind conducting this questionnaire is to determine the teachers' attitudes toward the persuasion approach to teaching. The questionnaire stresses the teacher's role, the objectives and teaching practices and whether what happens in classroom reflects some aspects of persuasion as a teaching strategy.

The questionnaire is composed of three parts. It starts with an inquiry about the general information related to the teachers. The second part is composed of yes/no as well as multiple choice questions about teachers' perceptions of persuasion and classroom management while the attitude scale is used in the third part of the questionnaire. Teachers are faced with a set of statements to which they are asked to respond accordingly. Attitude scale is meant to explore the teachers' attitudes and views which differ in their degrees of agreement and disagreement. More specifically, the first four questions are demographic. They present general information about the respondents in the study such as name, gender, age, carrier experience and place of work.

QUESTIONNAIRE: GRAPHIC ANALYSIS:

In response to the question inquiring teachers' attitudes and perceptions of the concept of persuasion in general and which aims to discern whether persuasion is to influence and convince or rather to manipulate, the majority of the teachers assume that persuasion is meant to convince and influence others. 90% of the teachers highlighted the positive image of persuasion as stated by Murphy (2001, p.224). The result implies that teachers are inclined to use persuasion. The following figure further makes obvious the views of teachers about the concept of persuasion in general.
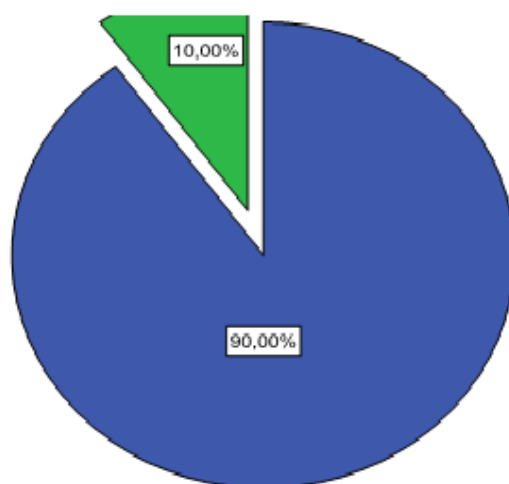
Figure 4.2: Teacher's perception of the persuasion concept.

The teachers surveyed were also asked to respond to the statement which claims that persuasion is a valuable tool for teachers. They responded positively. In fact those who agreed and strongly agreed with the worth of persuasion in the learning situation stand for the outstanding majority as they earned a score of 97.5%. The figure displays the teachers' varied opinions about the value of persuasion as a tool for teaching.
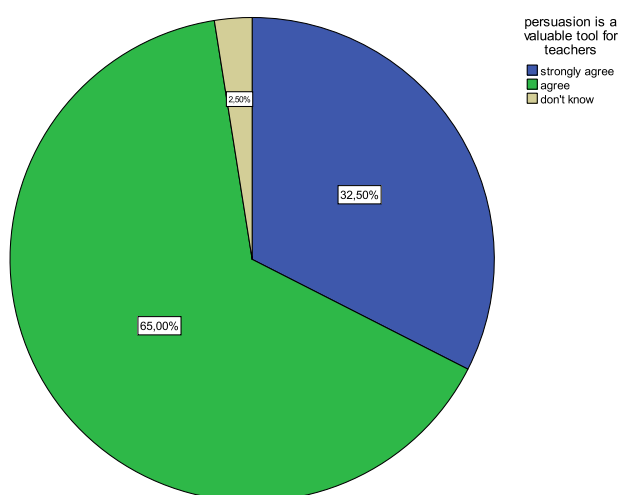

Figure 4.3: The value of persuasion in teaching

The importance of persuasion is further highlighted through the statement declaring that there is room for persuasion in classroom. The overall majority of the teachers surveyed place a premium on persuasion. They recognize the value and the significance of persuasion in the educational environment. The figure below covers the teachers' responses to the statement:
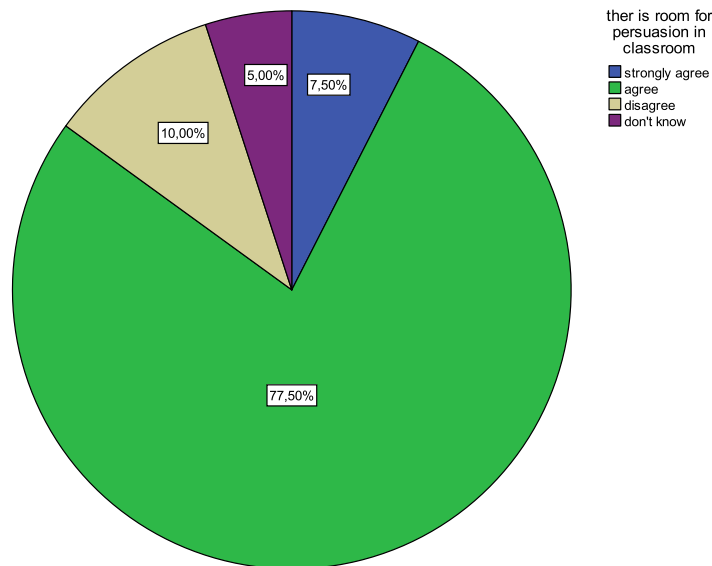
Figure 4.4: The scope of persuasion in classroom

The questionnaire proceeds with a statement that provides a plausible definition of persuasion. The definition is taken from Murphy (2001, p.224). The teachers are required to rate their degree of agreement or disagreement. 67.5% of the teachers agreed while 17.5% strongly agreed. This is in fact an acknowledgement of the importance of change in the persuasion operation. This is in line with the idea that "learning results from a change in students' knowledge and beliefs" (Murphy, 2001 as cited in Kardash & Sinatra, p.484).
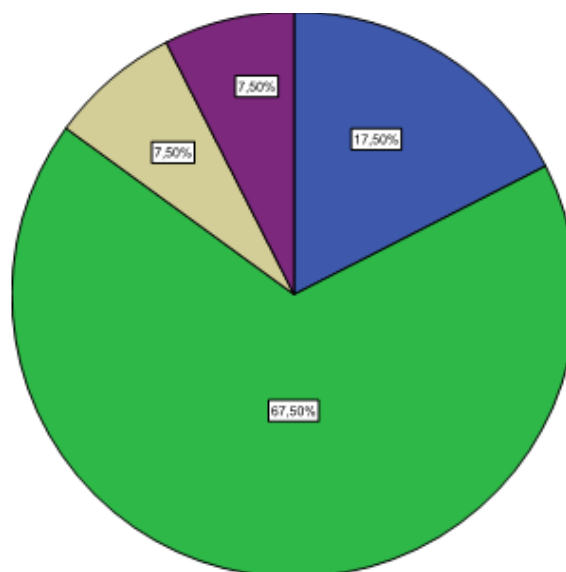

Figure 4.5: Persuasion definition.

Drawing more on the concept of change, one of the statements indicates that the Saudi teacher makes effort to enhance his/her students' learning which results in a change in their knowledge. In response to this statement 60% of the teachers surveyed agree, and 35% strongly agree. In fact, learning is a process of change and reconstruction of knowledge.
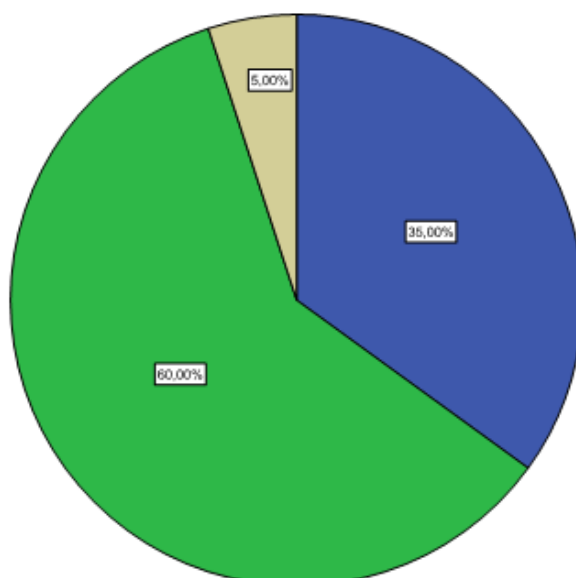
Figure 4.6: Learning as a process of change.

However, more than 72.5 % of the teachers surveyed were not very familiar with the teaching as persuasion metaphor. It is a new concept that is concurrent with the educational changes. This view backs the hypothesis of the study which claims that the vast majority of the instructors are not familiar with the concept of persuasion applied in the educational context. It is a new approach for the new millennium. Most interesting, those who know about the TAP metaphor are advocates of it. For instance, one teacher claimed that persuasion is a valuable tool for teachers. Another teacher stressed that teaching as persuasion is relevant and useful and that it helps make students acquire new input while being actively and critically involved in the process. Also, another teacher replied that TAP enables students to express freely their opinions and encourages classroom discussion. What follows from these views is that the majority of the teachers admit the potential effectiveness of TAP. The teachers' familiarity with persuasion is shown in the figure:

The teachers were asked about the role they perform in classroom. 86% of them replied that they are facilitators. This is too high a rate. It is not in conformity with the Communicative Language Approach to teaching adopted in the Saudi educational context. However, it is noticeable that only 14% of the respondents replied that they are persuaders. The role of persuader rates higher than that of transmitter which can be understood, for some teachers perceive themselves more as persuaders than as playing other roles. It further reinforces the principles of the TAP. This is obvious in the figure:

Another assumption of the TAP is that the teacher and the learner take part in the learning process. Learning can only proceed when both of them participate in the construction of knowledge. Knowledge evolves when a change is obtained as a result of the exchange of ideas and views between the teacher and learners. Furthermore, gone is the age when the teacher is considered as the bestower of knowledge and the active member in the classroom while the learners are considered as mere passive recipients. The figure sustains this view as 85% of the teachers maintain that teachers and students are part and parcel of the teaching task.
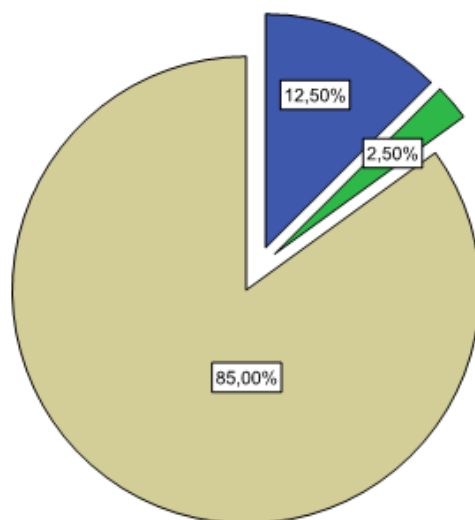
Figure 4.10: Contribution to the learning process.

Teachers of English were asked whether they take into account the learners' prior beliefs, attitudes and conceptions in the process of teaching. 80% of the teachers asked chose to take into consideration their learners' set of assumptions and their deeply held beliefs and feelings. In fact, they build on the knowledge of their respective students, adjusted and enriched it. This idea is reminiscent of one of the assets of the TAP which postulates that the TAP "acknowledges and values the ideas and feelings that learners bring to the classroom environment" (Murphy, 2001, p.224). The following figure further clarifies the idea:
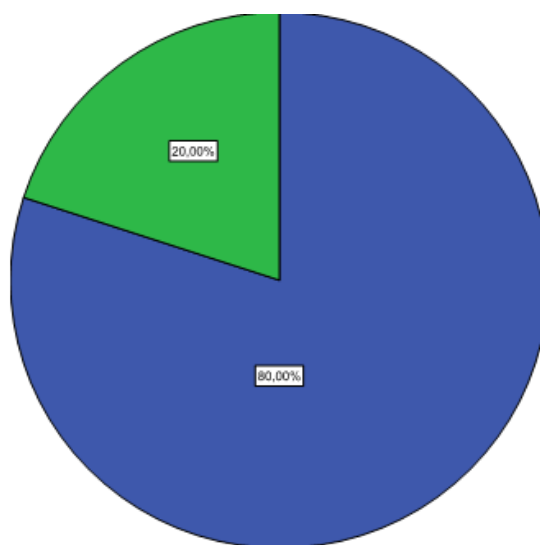
THE CLASSROOM UNDER THE TAP APPROACH

In response to the first research question which asks whether classroom applications reveal persuasion, it is to be admitted that classroom abounds with activities revealing persuasiveness. Brozak (n. d.) admits that "persuasion is one of the most critical skills you can teach in a classroom setting. It is also essential to developing critical thinking" (para.1). Persuasion takes many shapes and it is embedded in a variety of activities, such as writing activities, speaking activities, debates, role playing.

Writing activities:

Teaching as persuasion is best revealed through persuasive writing. Through the writing tasks, the teacher focuses on persuasive topics. However, before asking his or her students to write persuasive essays, the teacher should expose them to some examples of persuasive writings and explain to them thoroughly the process of argumentation; mainly what's an argument? How to distinguish the arguments that support or refute a given subject? (Brozak, n. d.).

Speaking activities
Persuasion thrives on speaking, and persuasive speaking is inextricably linked to both the teacher's and learners' inclination to communicate their own ideas and stimulate others to alternate their varied concepts and views accordingly. The teacher manages the classroom in a way that urges students to express themselves and deliver their own persuasive speeches. An important persuasive strategy that reinforces the use of persuasion is to present famous speeches to the learners and ask them to dissect them by extracting the arguments the speaker uses to defend his or her position (Brozak, n. d., para.4). They are also allowed to watch the videos reporting the speeches and then compare between them and explain which mode is more persuasive (Brozak, n. d., para.4). Correspondingly, the teacher affords an environment of discussion and critical reasoning to the learners so that they can best assimilate persuasive speaking principles and be also able to comment on persuasive speeches (Rudnick, n. d., p.2).

Listening activities
The application of a listening task includes persuasion as well. As a matter of fact, listening activity consists of students listening to a recorded material and then try to answer the set of questions given to them. Persuasion occurs when the students engage in a discussion and come to compare their answers. Jones (2007) claims that when "students compare their answers, some they'll agree on, some neither of them will get, some answers they will disagree about and a short discussion" may be triggered.

Reading activities
The reading assignment fosters persuasion. In fact, reading assignment does not mean a simple practice of reading a text. It is followed by questions to be answered and more importantly to be discussed. Jones (2007) asserts that "it is more interesting for students to discuss their answers than to just be told the answers" (p.28). The discussion will create a persuasion atmosphere in which teacher and learners share their views of the issues tackled in the text and try to convince each other of the correctness of their answers and the validity of their claims.

Other persuasive techniques
Under the umbrella of persuasive techniques that were designed by Aristotle, namely ethos, pathos and logos, other persuasive techniques are illustrated respectively.

Repetition
Repetition can be defined as "the repeated use of the same word or word pattern as a rhetorical device" (Audio English.net). The power of repetition as a persuasive technique is apparent in its cognitive impact on the addressee. It is reminiscent to the principle of recall which stresses that the more an event or a speech is repeated the better it is entrenched in the mind. The teacher repeats a piece of information to lay emphasis on it and underscore its importance. The information will therefore be deeply-rooted in the mind of the learners which will be patterned due to repetition (Parker, 2010, para.1). In this context, Reyes, (2010) affirms that "used wisely, repetition has a strong persuasive value. We can repeat key words or key phrases in our message" (para.17).

Moreover, repetition evokes familiarity; the more an idea is repeated the more it evokes one's attention and the learner is likely to accept it (Parker, 2010, para.6). The aim of the teacher behind the use of repetition is to convince learners of the suggested ideas of the lesson and to stimulate them to change their minds accordingly. The idea is further elaborated by Cacioppo and Petty (1989). They stress that:

> It was further suggested that, for instance, moderate levels of repetition enhance people's ability to attend to the appeal; to access relevant associations, images and experiences from memory; to elaborate more about the externally provided message arguments in light of the associations from memory; to draw inferences about the merits of the arguments and consequently to consolidate their attitudes toward the recommendation (p.9).

Restatement
To restate is to say something again or differently, especially more clearly or convincingly (Oxford English dictionary). Restatement is defined as a positive means to make your message obvious and convincing and emphasize the information you want to convey (Shaddix & Vines, 1999, Emphatic language, para.3).

In the process of learning, the teacher always employs the technique of restatement to explain a given concept. It is meant to make complex ideas smoother and easier to grasp for the learners. The teacher chooses to paraphrase the essential words, phrases and ideas that are difficult. Furthermore, through restatement the students are able to act on the ideas of the lesson and express their varied beliefs as well.

Rhetorical questions
To stir others' thinking and emotions the addresser often asks questions that do not need an answer. It has an answer that is clear and embedded in the question. This is called rhetorical question. By using it, the addresser aims at establishing a desired impact on the addressees. At the surface, rhetorical questions look pure but they "work very persuasively to involve the reader quickly within the world of the text. The effect is to engage the reader's attention persuasively" (Rhetoric, rhetorical devices & rhetorical questions, n. d., p.1).

Parallelism
As a persuasive technique, parallelism is based on the creation of balanced phrases or sentences to establish a desired emphasis on the addressees. Harris (2010) defines parallelism as "a recurrent syntactical similarity in which several parts of a sentence or several sentences are expressed similarly to show that the ideas in the parts or sentences are equal in importance" (p.2). He argues that parallelism improves the structure of sentences and makes them clearer and more comprehensible and attractive than simple sentences. The sentences based on parallel structure evoke the interest of the addressees and therefore increase the potential of their being persuaded. People tend to believe a message that is clear and logical.

The use of evidence
A speech that is not backed up with evidence cannot foster one's interest. In fact, the use of evidence helps the addresser to convince the learner of the strength of his or her argumentation. Saxena (1998, October) argues that "the key is to use enough supporting evidence to make a powerful and convincing case" (para.8).The addresser should provide clear and convincing evidence to make his/her argument more effective and reasonable (Rockler-

Gladen, 2008). The evidence is associated with the elements used by the addresser to sustain and make his assertion more convincing and valid (Saxena, 2008, October). Similarly, in the teaching context the instructor provides logical evidence to point up the concepts mentioned in the text. Evidence facilitates the learners' understanding especially that it taps into their thinking. The learners tend to more understand and accept ideas when they are supported with evidence rather than when mere claims are offered to them.

The teacher can employ many types of evidence. The evidence can be employed not only by the teacher in his explanation of the lesson but also by the learners in oral and writing assignments. Furthermore, it is apt to the teacher and learner to use one or more types of evidence. Similarly, the argument directs the teacher to the use specific types of evidence.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

It is significant to have considerable focus on training aspiring new teachers or pre service teachers the tips and strategies that form the foundation of the TAP approach. In fact, framing teachers with persuasion should be emphasized and recognized in the development of effective teachers. It is also recommended that the teaching as persuasion metaphor be included within TEFL courses so that future English teachers will be familiar with such a concept.

The findings of this research are of paramount importance, as they have informed us about English secondary school teachers' views about TAP. Further, the current study has provided additional endorsement of the TAP approach. However, some limitations of the present work should be addressed.

First, the overall number of teachers who contribute to this study is 28 teachers. It seems to be low in comparison with the target population (i.e. the teachers of English language in the Majmaah area). Correspondingly, a generalization of the current study should be limited. Furthermore, the chosen samples are not representative of the overall teacher community.

Another limitation that should be noted is the use of closed-ended questionnaire (only one open-ended question is included). The use of such kind of questionnaires restricts the respondents to a particular set of alternatives that they have to choose from. Thus, the respondents may be oriented to specific answers and may not feel free to add information that may be relevant and appropriate.

CONCLUSION

This research has sought to analyze the teaching-as-persuasion metaphor in a sample of Saudi schools, especially the Majmaah area. It has investigated how teaching as persuasion relates to English language teaching and the effectiveness and viability of this metaphor as a teaching practice specifically in the Saudi educational context.

The overall objective of this research project is to explore the potential effectiveness of the persuasive teaching metaphor in Saudi secondary schools and to test the teachers' motivational and attitudinal responses to the concept of teaching as persuasion. Another purpose of this research project is to investigate the role of persuasion in classroom.

The methodology adopted here is a questionnaire composed of three parts. It starts with an inquiry about the general information related to the teachers. The second part is composed of yes/no as well as multiple choice questions about teachers' perceptions of persuasion and classroom management while the attitude scale is used in the third part of the questionnaire.

The analysis of data reveals that most of the respondents support the persuasion metaphor and recognize its importance in the operations of teaching and learning. The study has some other findings. It reveals that the teaching process and classroom teachers reflect intuitively persuasion practices. It also confirms the hypothesis that persuasion is part and parcel of classroom setting. However, it is shown that the teachers' views of the teaching as persuasion approach are inextricably linked to their perceptions of persuasion itself.

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