Quality Teaching: The Perspectives of the Jordanian Inclusive Primary School Stakeholders and the Ministry of Education

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to compare and contrast the Jordanian school stakeholders' perspectives of quality teaching with the Ministry of Education's perception looking particularly at potential differences in interpretation. Interview and documents analysis techniques were used. The sample of the study was seven primary school teachers and their six principals. Each perspective has been presented. Comparison and contrast has been made to highlight the similarities and differences between the two perspectives. The results showed that inclusive primary school stakeholders reported 10 elements could make for quality teaching. These elements can be functioned within 7 categories of contextual factors. Furthermore, the MOE's perceptive has a constructivist approach orientation which contradicted in some elements by the school stakeholders' perspectives.

Keywords: quality teaching, inclusive education, primary school, education reform, Jordanian Ministry of Education

1. Introduction

The education system in Jordan, as in many other countries, has undergone significant change in all aspects, including curriculum and textbooks, length of schooling, and teaching practices to cope with the structural problems of a country facing serious problems filling professions and creating employment (Alshurfat, 2003). The Jordanian Government has observed the exogenous initiatives and shifts forcing policymakers to focus on providing education systems that can meet the needs and demands of globalisation and provide labour markets with a skilled labour force (Alshurfat, 2003; Massaad et al., 1999; Ministry of Education, 2004b, 2006b).

The first serious attempt by the Government of Jordan to meet the country's needs was in 1987 when the late King Hussein launched the National Conference for Education Reform (Ministry of Education, 1988, 2001). The result of the conference was a comprehensive education reform program to be implemented over the following 20 years (Alshurfat, 2003). Its purpose was to improve the quality of educational outcomes (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1988, 1996). In 2002 the Jordanian national education vision and mission were developed and endorsed (Ministry of Education, 2006b). This was the outcome of a forum on the future of education in Jordan held in Amman during September 2002, with participants from around the world (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2006b). According to the MOE, three relevant blueprints were established. First is "the general education plan (2003-8) that translates all of the governing vision statements and planning documents into a Ministry-wide five-year plan". Second is: "the Education Reform for Knowledge Economy (ERfKE) program, currently being implemented by the Ministry with support from the World Bank and a consortium of other donor agencies" and, third is "the Jordan Education Initiative (JEI), a public-private partnership under the leadership of the World Economic Forum, that aims to provide Jordan with a model for developing e-learning resources and ICT deployment that supports education reform" (Ministry of Education, 2006b, p. 13).

Such a comprehensive but staggered reform movement in the Jordanian education system is desirable since it implies that articulation in general terms precludes development of a comprehensive package. The MOE, however, consistently considered teachers' roles in rhetorical rather than practical terms. For example, MOE (2006b, p. 17) stated that "Those who are most affected by decisions are the best placed to make those decisions". In reality, teachers were neither consulted in regards to educational reform (Alshurfat, 2003) nor did they receive

any real guidance on conceptualising or implementing quality teaching. So, despite the Government's move to reform the education system in Jordan, studies conducted to evaluate the results of the reforms have shown that students still demonstrate low skills in relation to critical thinking. Furthermore, since the reforms began, students' basic skills and concepts in mathematics and science and performance in Arabic have not improved (Anani & Al-Qaisee, 1994). Also, some studies of fourth grade students showed that they were failing to implement into their daily lives what they had supposedly learnt in school, and that in schools there was violence, absenteeism, smoking, and attacks on teachers (Oweidat & Hamdi, 1997). Another study showed that teachers still dominated most lesson time and did not give their students an opportunity to express and/or direct themselves nor direct their own learning activities. Most of the questions asked by these teachers were based on the memorisation of fixed facts. The study also showed that these teachers did not allow any positive interaction in the classroom and that behavioural problems were dominant in the classroom (Alnahar & Kishik, 1994). Because of research findings such as these, the education system in Jordan has faced significant criticism and has been accused of graduating unskilled people who cannot be competitive and meet the economic, social, cultural, political and national challenges and problems (Massaad et al., 1999; Oweidat, 1997). Since the Jordanian Ministry of Education (MOE) is a legislative body of educational reform then it is necessarily to provide school stakeholders with blueprint for quality teaching and learning if they (MOE) want their vision to be implemented. School stakeholders cannot guess what is in the MEO back mind. The relationships between both parties are supposed to be built on trust and transparency as it has been addressed in some literature (Dewey, 1916; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1994).

If any education reform is to be successful, the dimensions of quality teaching should be included, taught, trained and implemented to meet the aims of that reform. In the experience of Jordanian education reform, these elements are ambiguous; desired teaching practices neither explained clearly nor adequately. To prevent this reform from failing, a congruent understanding of what is quality teaching should be clarified. The Jordanian Government has done so after it has assessed its own needs, one of which is to move towards providing quality education. It is recognised that it is important to understand what makes for quality teaching and learning in inclusive primary schools. Furthermore, it is not satisfactory simply to assume that there is a congruent between the MOE's perceptive with the school stakeholders' perceptive; it is important to explore the differences and similarities of the two perspectives. In part, since reformers have given some recognition to a constructivist approach being appropriate for developing the education systems' potential, there have been calls for research into quality teaching in its context. In responding to these demands; comparing and contrasting should be done to explore the gap –if there is any-between the two perspectives to make sure that the mission and vision of the MOE has been understood and implemented. This study was conducted to fill the growing gap between the policy and the practices of the education reform movement in Jordan.

2. Objectives

The aim of this study was to compare and contrast the Jordanian school stakeholders' perspectives of quality teaching with the MOE's perception looking particularly at potential differences in interpretation. To explore the gap-if there is any—it was necessary to analysis the MOE official documents and to interview the targeted inclusive primary school stakeholders

3. Research Questions

In order to achieve this overarching aim and the objectives outlined above, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1) How is quality teaching described officially in Jordan?

2) What are the perspectives of selected Jordanian primary schools' stakeholders of quality teaching?

4. Literature Review

4.1 Teaching Presentation and Teacher's Task Orientation

The current debate within education systems is over the call for teaching to focus more on student reception than teacher transmission, which is teaching that encourages students to use their minds rather than treating them as passive receivers. This is then about creating a method for teaching that allows students to use their intellectual abilities to reach a high standard. To achieve acceptance for this view/concept, educators need to show the "new approaches to pedagogy are grounded in high intellectual standards" (Newmann et al., 1996, p. 282) and adherence to those standards enhances students' achievement. A quality teacher uses the students' prior knowledge, giving the students the opportunity to be thinkers and for them to gain a deep understanding of the information they have been taught. Teaching approaches have been developed or explored progressively by

researchers through history. Newmann and Associates (1996) define authentic pedagogy or authentic academic achievement through three criteria: "construction of knowledge", "disciplined inquiry" and "value beyond school" (p. 33). Newmann, Marks and Garmoron (1996) studied 24 schools intensively, observing mathematics and social studies teachers. They found that across elementary, middle and high schools there was a strong relationship between authentic pedagogy and authentic academic performance.

Including students with disabilities in the mainstream has made it essential to look at the context of the teaching practices. In such context, students with disabilities are able to find an accepting and welcoming environment; inclusive education based on professional knowledge is an important characteristic. Ainscow (1991) regards the context of quality teaching as having teachers challenge the students' abilities by setting good quality tasks, providing students with opportunities to choose their tasks, varying learning strategies, and providing facilities that contribute to student learning (Ainscow, 1991). The trend of inclusion raises significant considerations about the characteristics of teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms. Research in this area suggests the effective teacher's characteristics in the inclusive classroom as: efficient use of time, good relationships with students, providing positive feedback, having a high student success rate, and, in general, providing support for the students with and without disabilities (Larrivee, 1985). Larrivee (1985) reported that students with special needs demonstrated a greater level of achievement in the mainstream classrooms when the teacher: used the time efficiently, had a good relationship with the students, gave the students positive feedback, established a high rate of success for learning tasks, and responded to all students positively. King, Schroeder and Chawszczewski (2001) found that students with disabilities taught by teachers using a high level of authentic pedagogy performed at the same levels as students without disabilities whom receiving a lower level of authentic pedagogy.

To further address issues around students with low prior achievement and displaying work with low intellectual quality, Newmann et al. (2001) re-examined students' work from previous studies, especially from students who had low prior achievement. They compared classrooms displaying high intellectual quality with those displaying low intellectual quality. They found that both high and low achievers benefited significantly from high intellectual quality teaching. This means that authentic intellectual tasks are useful and productive not only for special groups of students, but also for all student groups and abilities in the classroom. It is clear that the interaction process between teachers and students needs basic communication skills, relying fundamentally on all uses of language: writing, reading, speaking and listening "to enable students to "name", deconstruct and critique forms of spoken language" (University of Queensland, 2001, p. 7). Such a method gives students the ability to vocalise and investigate dilemmas both within and outside the classroom.

4.2 Students' Self-Regulation, Direction, Knowledge and Instructional Variety

Some scholars believe that students have both the ability and willingness to control their behaviour and that the teacher's role is to have students gain satisfaction from regulating their behaviour when performing their learning tasks (Glasser, 1986; Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998). Therefore, the teacher's role is to make the tasks interesting, enjoyable and engaging so they meet students' internal demands. The teacher-cantered approach of teaching remained a common way of teaching, as mentioned by most teaching studies (Goodlad, 1984). Growing opposition to this meant that a new perspective came to dominate teaching studies: that the students as learners should have the responsibility to determine their own learning (Biggs, 1991). One of the aims of the educational process is to connect the students' background knowledge with new knowledge or information (Bruner, 1960). From a cognitive point of view, quality teaching and learning occurs when the teacher uses and highlights students' background knowledge as a basis for teaching new knowledge. This is called "scaffolding" (Rosenshine & Meister, 1992, p. 26). In any teaching-learning process the knowledge across subject areas should be integrated to make learning meaningful for students. A quality teacher makes sure that whatever they teach is integrated into a bigger picture and helps students to connect what they learn with other subject areas or aspects of their lives (Beane, 1993, 1995).

Connectedness runs in concert with inclusiveness, focusing on how the students' knowledge acquired in the classroom is connected to the world beyond the classroom and with the utility of this knowledge for the students in their present and future pursuits. Such teaching strategies have been emphasised in Dewey's and Bruner's work (Bruner, 1960; Dewey, 1916). Smith, Lee and Newmann (2001) also found that interactive teaching methods that include connectedness, along with other intellectual factors, have a significant correlation with learning in mathematics and reading. Also Narrative can play the central role in teaching. For example, indigenous children are thought to learn better through storytelling, especially when the narratives have connections to their communities and their moral and oral traditions (Christie, 1985). Therefore, to make teaching more interesting and enjoyable, quality teachers need to teach knowledge and skills simply and

effectively, and approach this as a contextualised form of storytelling that connects closely with and is familiar to students' daily lives and experiences.

4.3 Evaluation

There is no doubt about the important role of assessment or evaluation in the teaching-learning process. But there is debate and the controversy is about what sort of assessment. The considerable debate about assessment developed from the work of Nemmann and others; they called for "authentic assessment" (Killen, 2005; King et al., 2001, p.1; Newmann et al., 2001). Authentic assessment requires deep knowledge rather than using superficial assessment, such as "true-false, multiple choice, or short answers" (King et al., 2001, p. 3). Newmann and Associates (1996), in their research on mathematics and social studies teaching, called for assessment tasks from teachers to determine students' understanding and mastering of the subjects being taught. They asked for the assessment tasks to be written work and "teachers provided tasks that asked students to write opinion essays, explain solutions to mathematics problems, synthesize research data, draw maps and mathematical diagrams, and complete short-answer tests" (Newmann & Associates, 1996, p. 28).

5. Research Method

5.1 Participants

Sample size in qualitative research is relatively small. Therefore, because of the nature of the study, specific participants with known characteristics needed to be selected (May, 2001). The participants included seven quality teachers in inclusive primary schools and six principals of the selected teachers. The researcher used four criteria to identify the quality teachers which were: Supervisors' Recommendations, Principals' Confirmations, Colleagues' Confirmations and Parents' Confirmations.

5.2 Documents

Official and published documents from the Jordanian MOE were collected and examined. These documents are a fertile ground base to develop the national education strategy in Jordan, and a reference framework for wording the general education plan and sub-plans which are being prepared by the Ministry. Therefore, these documents are meant to be a valuable reference for researchers. People in the field and in administrative positions in Jordan were consulted about the significance of the selected documents and whether more documents needed to be examined.

5.3 Method

Interview technique was used in this study. The interview is a common technique in the qualitative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002). The aim of any type of interview is to let the people talk about their perspectives regarding issues related to the subject of the study (Kellehear, 1993); they are in central to the context, they live it day after day. The interviews enabled him to answer the following research questions: How do quality teachers describe quality teaching? How do schools' principals describe quality teaching? Each participant was interviewed once and each interview lasted 30 to 40 minutes. The participants interviewed were the six principals and seven teachers. The questions asked by the researcher in this study sought to explore particular issues. The questions, for both interviews, were developed by reviewing the literature related to quality teaching and some of them were adapted from other researchers who conducted research in the same field (NSW Ministry for Education and Training & Australian College of Educators, 2004). Some examples of interview questions (for teachers) are: How did you go about formulating your lesson plans? How does the presence of specific group of students (with learning disabilities) affect the formulation of these plans? How and in what ways do you know that learning has been achieved? In what ways do you maintain an informed understanding of the content of your teaching areas? How much do you know about the students in your class? How well do you know their ability? Some examples of interview questions (for principals) are: Would you like to begin by telling me how and in what ways Mrs X or Mr Y has helped the learning of others in the school/workplace (e.g teachers, students…etc)? What do you think are the main factors, which may make teaching successful in an inclusive classroom? To what extent do you believe that Mrs X's or Ms Y's effectiveness is related to the context in which he/she is teaching?

5.4 Data Analysis

In this investigation, the researcher had to explore the description of quality teaching according to the perspectives of the Jordanian primary school stakeholders. However, in qualitative paradigm, there is no common formula or recipe for data analysis, each researcher analyzing their data in a unique pattern (Patton, 2002). After translating and transacting the interviews, the researcher treated them as a whole body of text. The interviews were analyzed in this way because there were few transcripts and so the researcher had to read and

analyze these interviews thoroughly. In analyzing such transcripts the obvious interview analysis techniques, such as electronic or computer programs, were very difficult to apply. The researcher, therefore, treated these transcripts and the documents as texts together and analyzed them by developing a category system. The first aspect to the analysis was the search for the dimensions of quality teaching. The researcher then considered the newly merged patterns, themes, and categories. Interviews were analyzed to identify recurring themes, "developing concepts, and developing a story line" (Anderson & Burns, 1989, p.201). In this analysis, similar issues were categorized under tentative headings by continual reference to the text until all the data were realistically, described and fitted in themes. The researcher confirmed the contextual factors and the elements of quality teaching.

6. Results

6.1 The Jordanian MOE's Conception of Quality Teaching

From the MOE's perspective, the following principles of teaching and learning reflect current best educational practices and take into consideration psychological, environmental, developmental, and cognitive factors that can affect the student's ability to learn (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004b, 2006a).

6.1.1 Planning Based on Outcomes

The present curriculum in Jordan provides teachers with detailed "units" which outline objectives and teaching methods in a very structured way. When teachers use an outcomes-based curriculum, they do not usually begin their planning with instructional strategies or learning activities (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a). According to the MOE, they start with the learning outcomes because the outcomes are most central to student learning (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a).

6.1.2 Quality Teaching and Learning Leads to Deep Understanding

Because learning is not passive, students are supposed to actively participate in learning. Quality learning tasks have a clear purpose and require students to create knowledge from new experiences that make connections to their prior knowledge (Jaradat et al., 1983; Ministry of Education, 2002, 2003b, 2006a).

6.1.3 Variation of Teaching Methods

According to the MOE, a variety of teaching methods is required to address different learning approaches and to allow students to benefit from exposure to their preferred and non-preferred learning styles (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a).

6.1.4 Student-Centred Activities Enable Students to Apply Their Learning to Life

According to the MOE, a curriculum or classroom that is learner-centred allows consideration to be given to individual students as needed. Teachers do not judge their own success exclusively by whether they have presented all the subject material. They focus on maximizing learning for their students and following the interests and abilities of the students (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006 a).

6.1.5 Significance of Teaching and Learning

Real-life activities are those that relate to the world of the student outside of school. The use of real-life activities motivates students to learn, helps to illustrate new concepts, and helps students' knowledge. Lessons that involve topics of interest help students to make connections to what they already know and to develop new concepts with connections to the world outside of the school (Jaradat et al., 1983; Ministry of Education, 2003a, 2003b, 2006a).

6.1.6 Teaching and Learning Strategies that Meet Quality Teaching Practices

The MOE deigned a range of strategies for teachers to choose from to achieve the desired learning, but the teaching and learning strategies need to be those with which the teachers are comfortable. It is important that a teaching strategy is selected with an underlying rationale. For example, for a teacher to say: "Today, we're going to do group work", they have to know why working in groups is the best way to achieve a particular knowledge. The teaching strategies included are grouped as: direct instruction, problem solving and investigation, group learning, and activity-based learning (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a). In the following section, the researcher illustrates one teaching strategy that is mentioned in the MOE' Framework for Curriculum and Assessment.

6.1.7 Learning Strategy: Using Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the use of analysis, evaluation and reflection. It requires creativity and independence. Critical thinking involves: metacognition, visual organisers and analysis (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a).

6.1.8 Teaching and Learning Environment

Jordan's new curriculum provides all students with an opportunity to learn. According to the MOE, student learning is influenced by a number of factors, including the student's learning needs, gender, geographical location, and social background. Quality teachers understand the importance of creating classrooms that are equitable and safe for all students and accommodate a diversity of student needs (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a). The following sections will describe the desired elements of the quality learning environment from the MOE's perspective.

6.1.9 Equity and Safety

Successful classrooms do more than provide students with basic competencies. They promote Arabic and Islamic values, beliefs and traditions, and foster positive social development. It is important that the curriculum in Jordan reflects the wide range of behaviours and attitudes available to all citizens (Jaradat et al., 1983; Ministry of Education, 2002, 2003b, 2004b, 2006a).

6.1.10 Accommodating Student's Needs

According to the MOE, quality teachers should also take into account those students who have been identified with specific learning disabilities, or who are gifted learners. Quality teachers choose instructional strategies and learning resources that accommodate the needs of all their students, using different strategies to assist them to meet these needs (Jaradat et al., 1983; Ministry of Education, 1996, 2003b, 2006a).

6.1.11 Use Information and Communication Technology

Teachers preparing students for the knowledge economy keep pace with cutting edge technologies and integrate this technology into their classrooms as individual and group learning tools. The effectiveness of technologies is evaluated and refinements are made for the best use of ICT for supporting teachers' work and student learning (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2003b, 2006a).

6.1.12 Assessment and Evaluation of Learner Outcomes

Assessment is an on-going process aimed at improving both student learning and the instruction provided by teachers. Quality assessment builds skills on self-assessment and reflection both for the student and for the teacher. According to the MOE, a good system of assessment, evaluation and reporting should be based on clearly-stated student outcomes (Jaradat et al., 1983; Ministry of Education, 2002, 2003b, 2006a).

6.2 Section One: School Stakeholders' Perspectives of Quality Teaching

The analysis of the teachers' and principals' interviews shows that their perspectives of quality teaching revolved around the elements and themes discussed below.

6.2.1 Instructional Objectives and Variety

The most common response of school stakeholders was that quality teachers who implement quality teaching determine their instructional objectives before beginning a lesson. The school stakeholders believed these objectives should be comprehended, clear, varied, timely and applicable. Quality teachers should establish sophisticated semester and lesson plans that include instructional objectives. One teacher said: "The effective teacher is the teacher who able to determine her objectives so that these objectives are clear and varied. An effective teacher is able to vary their lesson activities so that the activities are suitable for all student levels" (Maha, February 16, 2013). The schools' stakeholders agreed on the need for variety in a teacher's approach, aided by varied and interesting teaching materials, equipment use and teaching techniques.

6.2.2 Skills Acquisition and Implementation

Schools' stakeholders agreed that quality teaching makes a difference to the degree of students' acquired skills. The interviews confirmed that stakeholders were vitally concerned about the acquisition of skills. They celebrated teaching that led to the desired outcomes and also improvements in students' skills. One teacher said: "So when they achieve something I am more than happy and I keep telling my friends and my husband about it" (Samar, February 22, 2013). Another teacher described his teaching skills and then distinguished between teaching and learning strategies for acquiring skills. He commented: "In mathematics, the students in my class are not dependent on written work [to solve problems]; instead they use thinking and induction – mental processes" (Jamal, February 20, 2013).

Having students implement what had been taught was seen as fundamental to quality teaching from both the teachers' and principals' perspectives, and as a significant indicator of quality teaching. One teacher said: "They

read everything written in the street signs, send messages to their parents using mobiles. In mathematics it's the same, [the students are] adding and subtracting" (Samar, February 22, 2013).

6.2.3 The Physical and Social Environment of the Classroom

Part of the physical environment is teaching aids. Teaching aids were seen by the school stakeholders as an essential element in the quality teaching process. Schools' stakeholders commented that a quality teacher was able to implement their objectives successfully by using the available teaching aids effectively. This effectiveness was judged as having students grasp the desired knowledge regardless of the quality of the aids or their source. One teacher said: "If they provided us with teaching materials it would make teaching easier, sometimes I buy these things from my own money" (Maha, February 16, 2013).

At one of the schools visited, the researcher noted the poor condition of three classrooms in an annexe. The annexe had no teachers' room, no students' canteen and no storage room. However, the teachers were comfortable and had adapted well to this environment as had their students. One of the teachers said: "As you can see we have nothing, but we are happy because we know each other and we work solidly and cooperatively; sometimes we even help our students with their pocket money, we feel that we are one family" (Samar, February 22, 2013). One principal described one of the participating teacher's relationships with her students as a relationship that continues to grow and this relationship eventually takes the form of friendship (a principal, February 23, 2013).

6.2.4 Conscience and Honesty

From the participants' interviews, it can be concluded that conscience and honesty were a great concern in the quality teachers' work. They believed that quality teaching is implemented by a quality teacher who fears God and appeals to God to be satisfied with that individual's performance. One teacher said: "… I am responsible for those students. When He (God) lines them up [at doomsday] and one by one ask me for their rights they will take their rights from me. So how I am going to face that"?! (Samar, February 22, 2013). Another teacher believed that the students' abilities are a gift from God. Teachers should respect and accept that, and help students to achieve the desired level of knowledge. She said of students with learning difficulties: "I consider those students as my daughters. I take into account their circumstances" (Maha, February 16, 2013). One teacher found it "unacceptable" that any teacher would regard teaching as "just a job" working to earn a wage and doing nothing more. He felt "every teacher should be committed to his job, not just looking for the wage" (Jamal, February 20, 2013). Another teacher commented: "Teaching…has a holistic message and every teacher should carry that with honesty and believe in their message" (Mahmmoud, February 21, 2013). Conscious and honesty regarded as moral characteristics of quality teacher and quality teaching process can be enhanced by these characteristics.

6.2.5 Collaboration with Colleagues and Parents

Teachers and principals agreed that quality teaching is easy if a cooperative relationship is established among school stakeholders and between teacher and parents. One teacher said: "If a child has a problem, I try to make contact with his sister or brother in the school. Also we always send a letter home or call the parents" (Hassnah, February 23, 2013). One principal commented: "The parents' council has contributed to Maha's success. She always meets with parents and discusses with them their children's behaviour and academic issues" (a principal, February 16, 2013). Another added: "Of course if any teacher asks me for help I must help them … also sometimes I ask Faiza [another teacher] to help me, especially in mathematics" (Hassnah, February 23, 2013).

6.2.6 High Expectations

The interviewed teachers expressed their satisfaction when their students achieved as expected. They demonstrated their satisfaction as they saw themselves through their students' achievement. One teacher said: "In the first grade I expect the students to read and write" (Sharefah, February 27, 2013). In the first grade, quality teaching can be more visible and measurable because students come to the school without knowledge of literacy and numeracy and start to construct that knowledge. That can give teachers self-confidence and satisfaction in their abilities in teaching. School stakeholders, in particular teachers, regard that quality teaching can be implemented effectively by teachers who have high expectations of their students and are happy in their teaching profession.

6.2.7 Professional Growth

The school-based stakeholders in this study agreed that quality teaching comes from teachers who are eager and enthusiastic to develop professionally in all teaching aspects and be role models for teaching. Based on the teachers' comments, professional growth and development can be gained in different ways. These ways were expressed by one of those teachers as she talked about ways to develop her professionalism. She said: "I think

part of my self-improvement came from the courses and the workshops that we undertook" (Maha, February 16, 2013). From the school stakeholders' perspectives, quality teaching is practised by teachers who are able to be models for quality teaching practices. They take initiatives and are involved in teaching and learning courses and workshops. Furthermore, they reflect what they have learnt in their teaching practices, helping other colleagues to gain and implement the same skills and knowledge.

6.2.8 Content Knowledge

While the participating teachers mentioned several approaches to mastering the content of their subjects, they still relied on study guides and textbooks. One teacher said: "I have to know the guide, textbook and the subject content, as well as preparing teaching materials, teaching methods and activities to deliver the information to the student" (Sharefah, February 27, 2013).

6.2.9 Knowledge of Students and Their Abilities

The stakeholders in this study considered that every teacher should have a good knowledge of their students and their backgrounds, abilities and circumstances. They linked the quality of the teacher with knowledge of the students in the classroom. One teacher said: "at the beginning of the school year … I give every student a card to [complete] this card includes information about every student" (Jamal, February 20, 2013). Having this information allows the teacher to deal with personal issues that may affect the learning of a particular student. The cards allow the teacher to be ready for situations such as students with learning difficulties. Another teacher commented that knowing students was not a superficial process; it required the teacher to connect with students. The failure of a student could be due to some reason, such as mental, psychological or social problems, preventing the student from working to their ability. A deep knowledge of students and their abilities is a crucial element in the quality teaching and learning process. Therefore, knowledge, that is, content knowledge and knowledge of students and their abilities, is considered as an important part of the quality teaching and learning process from the school stakeholders' perspectives.

6.2.10 Ongoing Assessment

The school stakeholders agreed that quality teaching is strongly correlated with ongoing assessment. Using appropriate formative and summative assessments and providing students with the proper feedback are fundamental issues in terms of quality teaching and learning, as well as encouraging student self-assessment and giving students opportunities to assess themselves. One teacher commented: "I evaluate the students continually. Do you want the truth? I give evaluation [tasks] all the time; I give exercises as homework, and I have to know if somebody is helping them at home …I can't wait until the end of the month to do exams to evaluate the students" (Hassnah, February 23, 2013). Assessment was seen by the school stakeholders as an essential element in quality teaching and learning practices. They considered it as the core of the day-to-day teaching and learning activities.

7. Discussion

In Jordan, there are two authorities central to the preparation and propagation of a consistent understanding of quality teaching: the MOE as a legislative and policy body, and the school stakeholders (principals and teachers) as implementers. It would be expected that the two parties have a common understanding of quality teaching; otherwise the differences may undermine attempts to apply a certain conception of quality teaching. For example, if the school stakeholders understand quality teaching to be based on the transmission approach in teaching or lodged in unique unreplicable personal characteristics, while the MOE understands it as based on a technical, transferable and functional constructivist approach, then the differences may undermine attempts to realise a certain concept of quality teaching in practice.

7.1 Intellectual Quality

The MOE described a quality teacher as a teacher who encourages students to be active learners, with the teacher constantly asking questions and providing activities requiring higher-order thinking by students. Furthermore, whole class discussions (whether in the form of open discussions, round-robin lectures, brainstorming, and/or question and answer sessions) are seen by the MOE to be the most effective and efficient ways of activating the intellectual component of the quality teaching process.

The school stakeholders talked about transmission techniques for teaching and learning, such as quality teaching being about acquiring knowledge, but even more to the point they did not explain how and by which method. As much as there was incongruence between what the school stakeholders said and what the MOE suggest. Perhaps the MOE has not provided detailed-enough directions about the basics of constructivism and the constructivist-based elements of its version of quality teaching. This could be because the MOE's focus has

mainly been on formulating and imposing document-based frameworks for the curriculum and for assessment, rather than providing the philosophical-practical in-servicing needed to advance an appreciation of constructivist methods. At the same time, the school stakeholders' attitude toward the MOE showed some resistance to a new, MOE-defined understanding of how teachers should teach. The school stakeholders viewed the MOE as arbitrarily imposing a conceptualisation of teaching and learning without consultation (e.g. curriculum quantity). Al-Daami and Wallace (2007) attribute the failing in curriculum reform in Jordan to the fact that central educational authorities insist on having control and domination over the school stakeholders and ignore the involvement of those stakeholders in such reform. Such pattern of relationship created division and subsequently MOE lost the school stakeholders' allegiance to the education reform in total.

The elements of problematic knowledge and higher-order thinking were absent from the school stakeholders' articulations. The school stakeholders did not mention these elements explicitly. The reason behind this incongruence might be that these teachers were wary of a concept such as 'problematic knowledge' when their traditional approach accepted that knowledge is 'truth' that cannot be questioned (a teacher-centred approach). According to the school stakeholders' interviews, the teacher is the only source of knowledge and that knowledge is presented as factual and as a fixed body of truth not open to question.

The MOE mentions aspects of teaching and learning and when asking for improving the students' ability to connect lesson ideas and concepts. The Jordanian school stakeholders did not explicitly refer to these aspects. The school stakeholders may not have been aware of these as important elements in the quality teaching and learning process. Alternatively, the school stakeholders, conceptually, may still believe in the transmission approach to teaching. However, this finding is contradicting some literature (Eisenhart et al., 1988; Green, 1971; Harvey et al., 1968; Hollingsworth, 1989) that argue that teachers' belief plays an important role in implementing elements of quality teaching. Further, belief and action are supposed to work altogether and in a complemented manner. Teachers' beliefs and their connections with what they do inside the classroom is an important factor that can influence quality teaching when it is comes to students' learning (Calderhead & Robson, 1991). That influences not only the teaching and learning activities but also their attitudes toward the whole educational process including teacher education pre-service or in-service programmes. However, some studies showed that through effective professional development programmes, teachers' beliefs can be changed towards the requirements of education reform (Richardson, 1994).

There is a transition process in the MOE policy in terms of the desired teaching and learning skills from the traditional quality teaching criteria to a new criteria based on its new vision for quality education. For example, the new framework for curriculum and assessment was at the beginning of its way to schools. This framework consisted of the new desired skills in teaching and learning based on the MOE vision. The school stakeholders have a superficial knowledge in regards to this framework and they still believe in the traditional way in teaching. Although the school' stakeholders' belief of quality teaching and learning was consistent with the MOE's old checklist of quality teaching criteria, it contradicted some literature (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Glasser, 1986; Killen, 1998, 2003, 2005; Newmann et al., 2001; Newmann et al., 1996; Newmann & Associates, 1996) that argued that teaching and learning is a construction process. The teacher in this process is a facilitator and the student is responsible for constructing his/her own knowledge.

7.2 Quality Learning Environment

Despite the Jordanian MOE's framework attempting to introduce what it believed are asserted to be "best practice" into schools in the form of quality teaching and learning there is some incongruity between the MOE' perception and the school stakeholders'' perception. The Jordanian school stakeholders did not use particular conceptions of quality teaching explicitly as they were suggested in the MOE's framework. When the school stakeholders were asked to articulate their understanding of quality teaching, they still privileged the transmission approach to teaching. That is, they appear to believe that the teacher is the only 'legitimate' source of information, that a quality teacher has a strong reliance on verbal direction and instruction, and that they are the sole classroom manager and only source of authority. They did not overtly express the teacher's role as a constructivist one in the era of the MOE's 'Knowledge Economy'. They talked about transmission elements of quality teaching, such as controlling the pace, timing, parameters and choices in the classroom and effective ways of dictating the curriculum content. This perspective contradicts the MOE's suggestion of giving students choice over their learning activities and of shifting the instructional role to the student (from teacher-centred to student-centred). The element of student self-regulation as promoted by the MOE' Framework can be difficult to apply when the school stakeholders still perceive student regulation as the teacher's responsibility. This perception has become associated, probably erroneously, in these teachers' articulations with other elements expected of the transmission approach to teaching and learning. This has meant that these articulations, at a

quasi-theoretical level, all revolve around understanding the teaching-learning process as teacher-centred rather than student-centred. These findings contradict some literature (Glasser, 1986; Groundwater-Smith et al., 1998; Killen, 2005; Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998; Zimmerman, 1989) that argues that giving students opportunities to regulate their behaviours provides them with a sense of responsibility for their behaviours, rather than letting all responsibility rest with the teacher. The teacher's role is to have students feel satisfaction for regulating their behaviour when performing their learning tasks.

One explanation for this incongruence might be the lack of retraining programmes for stakeholders on the MOE's policy changes, so teachers still regard quality teaching as based on a transmission approach. It may also be the case that even with teacher retraining their orientation towards a constructivist approach remains at a vague theoretical level and not at a practical level. Another explanation may be that the education reform was formulated without consultation with those school stakeholders who were meant to implement the reforms (i.e., it was top-down rather than bottom-up) (Al-Daami & Wallance, 2007; Alshurfat, 2003; Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997).

The MOE's framework emphasise that teachers need to recognise that students need social support. It mention techniques for this support, namely that quality teaching creates a classroom culture of learning with high expectations of all students. A quality learning environment was a major concern of the interviewed school stakeholders in the facilitation of quality teaching and learning. These findings are supported by the previous literature by (Ainscow, 1991; Clark, Dyson, & Millward, 1995; Fraser, 1994, 2002; Kaplan & Owings, 2001; Killen, 2005; Lane & Walberg, 1987; Reynolds et al., 2003; Teddlie, Kirby, & Strinfield, 1989; Walker & Murphy, 1986) that argue that the teaching and learning environment, whether at the classroom level or at the whole school level, plays an important role in quality teaching and learning. The Jordanian school stakeholders mentioned social support as a fundamental element in the teaching and learning process.

There are some issues raised in the interviews with the school stakeholders that are not mentioned in the MOE's framework but which still seem related to the dimension of the quality learning environment. Characteristics such as conscientiousness, honesty, passion, patience and loyalty are considered to be vital personal characteristics for teachers wishing to implement quality teaching practices. These characteristics are seen as guiding the teacher and the teaching process. The explanation for this emphasis on personal qualities and personal responsibility by the teachers interviewed may be because they were committed to Islamic obligations and principles. They felt that doing their job appropriately and using self-monitoring techniques, such as supervision, investigation and evaluation, would be rewarded. Quality teaching was believed to be implemented by a quality teacher who fears God and appeals to God to approve the individual's performance. Teachers who display the personal characteristics listed above are believed to have the capacity to develop professionally because they are personally dedicated to sacrificing their time and making the effort willingly to improving their students' achievements and to making learning meaningful for them. The opposite is believed to apply to teachers who lack these characteristics.

From the interviewed school stakeholders, the element of student-direction was incongruent with the MOE's framework requirements. School stakeholders believe and accept authorities, such as parents and students. Students generally comply willingly with teachers' direction. Students in Jordanian schools generally come from extended families and from a generally "collectivist culture"; this may explain this incongruence (Rudy, Grusec, & Wolfe, 1999, p.299). This contrasts with western culture in which student self-direction is valued. In western culture, as an "individualistic culture", children are taught to be autonomous and self-directed and children, ideally, are treated in an "authoritative" not "authoritarian" manner (Rudy et al., 1999, p.299).

7.3 Significance

The MOE's framework dimension of significance and some of its elements are incongruent with the responses of the school stakeholders. The Jordanian framework and the school stakeholders are both imprecise about asking teachers to acknowledge the existence and impact of cultural knowledge or social background on learning and to integrate this into their teaching. However, there are implicit guidelines provided to teachers by the MOE about dealing with students from different cultures and social backgrounds. There is a common perception in Jordanian society that there is no significant diversity in the Jordanian community in terms of religions, customs and ethnicities. The society is Arabic in nationality and language, Islamic in religion, and has common customs and ethnicities. Nevertheless, there can be socio-economic and political differences within Jordanian society and this is acknowledged by the MOE. The school stakeholders did not mention cultural knowledge. Political and social demographic changes in the region (Al-Daami & Wallance, 2007) may make cultural knowledge more of an issue for Jordanian teachers in the future. The findings of the present study seem to contradict some literature as

to the real centrality of cultural facility for quality teaching (Biggs, 1991; Borich, 1999; Christie, 1985; Connell, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1996; Egan, 1988, 1997; Glasser, 1986; Groundwater-Smith et al., 1998; Hymes, 1996; Killen, 1998; Luke, 1988; Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998; Nakata, 1995; Zimmerman, 1989).

The views expressed by the teachers about quality teaching are consistent with some of the literature's understandings of quality teaching. Kaplan and Owings (2001) distinguish between teacher quality (the professional characteristics that a teacher brings to the classroom) and teaching quality (the teaching and learning process involving the students, teachers and learning environment). The Jordanian stakeholders seemed able to articulate the first better than the second, while the MOE's framework placed most emphasis (in fact, almost total emphasis) on the latter. In other words, the technical approach to and appreciation of quality teaching favoured by the MOE stood at some distance from the stakeholders' need in their articulations to emphasise personal qualities as the key to successful teaching. Despite that the beginning point for the conceptualisation of the elements of quality teaching, whether personal characteristics or technical facility, the research findings are consistent in the broadest sense with Downey et al.'s (1994) definition of the purpose of teaching, which is to produce excellent outcomes for the students and for the school in allowing them to meet future challenges and demands.

The MOE framework emphasised that the quality teacher is expected to provide opportunities for students to make connections to real life, to other subjects and to prior learning and knowledge. The MOE calls for teachers who understand the importance of creating classrooms that are equitable and safe for all students and accommodate a diversity of student needs. The MOE's framework requires knowledge that can contribute to the social progress of Jordanian society. Furthermore, the framework asks Jordanian educators to be sensitive to a commitment to provide support for all students, regardless of background, so they can benefit equally from learning. Quality teaching and learning, according to the MOE framework, should represent both sexes and also represent, in a positive and accurate way, Jordanians from various geographical, cultural and social backgrounds. In a quality learning environment that has regard for significance, the learning activities should be designed to interest and motivate males and females in a wide choice of potential career opportunities beyond the school context, and motivate students to recognize and enhance positive social developments in Jordan, to identify inequities that still remain, and to develop possible solutions (Ministry of Education, 2006a). These findings are consistent with the research by Biggs (1991); Borich (1999, 2000); Bruner (1960); Christie (1985); Connell (1993); Darling-Hammond (1997); Dewey (1916); Newmann & Associates (1996); Glasser (1986); Kaplan & Owings (2001); Killen (2005); Meier (1995) that argue that a quality teaching process involves successful knowledge-gaining and the implementation of knowledge into the real life.

However, there is incongruent with some of the comments made by the school stakeholders. For example, the stakeholders did not mention the element of knowledge integration as an important aspect of quality teaching. It may be that these elements were taken so much for granted that the interviewees did not think to mention them explicitly.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, the Ministry Of Education aims to develop an education system able to meet national and international labour market needs by preparing teachers and students with the attributes required by a knowledge economy that recognizes and meets global requirements and challenges. To achieve that vision, the dimensions of quality teaching should be included, taught, trained and implemented. In more precise terms, the school stakeholders and the Ministry of Education are expected to have a shared understanding of the concept of quality teaching and learning. From the current study, results showed that there is a gap between the Ministry of Education's perception of quality teaching and the inclusive primary school stakeholders' perception. The school stakeholders, to some extent, still believe in the transmission approach to teaching; they did not mention the concepts of the constructivist approach in teaching and learning in the way these concepts are presented by the Ministry of Education's framework.

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