

English Teaching and Learning in Saudi Arabia: Emerging Practices and Strategies for Achieving the Educational Objectives of the Saudi Vision 2030

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Abstract—The purpose of this paper is to highlight the key elements of English teaching and learning related to Saudi Vision 2030. The paper aimed to develop a conceptual framework that guides the way for more teaching and learning practices that are aligned with the educational goals of Saudi Vision 2030. The theoretical framework of this research paper was informed by two bodies of literature: literature on second and foreign language methodologies and literature on teaching English in Saudi Arabia. Two types of information were needed for this study: perceptual and theoretical information. Perceptual information was obtained via interviews with 15 language educators from Saudi Arabia. Theoretical information was obtained through an extensive review of the current literature on English teaching and learning. The findings of this research indicate that the educational objectives of the Vision can be achieved by replacing traditional language curriculum with authentic materials and resources, integrating more technology in language classes, incorporating cooperative learning strategies, increasing the sense of openness and tolerance among language learners, and using language instructions that prepare students for the labor market.

Index Terms—Saudi Vision 2030, English teaching, English learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Saudi Vision 2030 is an ambitious, yet achievable plan led by the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Muhammed bin Salman, as of 25 April 2016 to develop the country's different sectors and make the country the "heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds". It is a blueprint that includes short- and long-term goals that reflect and represent the nation's strengths and capabilities. The Vision was built around three main themes: a vibrant and healthy society, a thriving and competitive economy, and an ambitious and aspiring nation (Saudi Vision 2030, 2021). Saudi Vision 2030 mainly focuses on economic, business, and cultural reforms. However, quality education is a fundamental part of the Vision, as it includes several goals and objectives related to developing all types of education in the country. The Vision proposed strategies to develop enhanced methods to recruit and train teachers at all educational levels. It also provides opportunities for improving the learning environment and educational outcomes for both teachers and students.

Accordingly, the analysis of the Vision 2030 blueprint revealed six overlapping educational objectives that need to be addressed by the year 2030. These include working to (a) enhance the learning environment to promote creativity and innovation, (b) improve curricula and teaching approaches, (c) shift to more digital education to support teacher and student progress, (d) prepare students for labor market demands, (e) develop students' values and social and core skills, and (f) provide opportunities for students to address national development requirements.

Historically, teaching English in Saudi Arabia has changed during the last two decades. These changes have reached all aspects of the educational system, including the number of teachers in schools, the training they receive, and the English curricula (Al-Seghayer, 2014). These changes were moved in several directions, including but not limited to implementing new English teaching programs in many universities and colleges around the country, increasing the interest in teaching and learning English in Saudi society, and developing an educational reform plan to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning English (Moskovsky & Picard, 2018). English is taught as a foreign language in all educational stages starting from elementary to higher education. Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013) affirmed that due to the global demand of communication, English has become the language of technology, business, and commerce. That is why emphasis was placed on improving the teaching and learning practices across the nation.

Purpose and Significance

Therefore, it is believed that Saudi Vision 2030 is a critical opportunity that should be used to improve the teaching practices among English language instructors and learners. Yusuf (2017) pointed out that, "The effective implementation of vision 2030 depends on effective training of different educational cadres, which are required for teaching English language" (p. 111). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to understand English language instructors' perceptions regarding achieving the educational goals of the Vision. It is hoped that this piece of research will highlight the key elements of English teaching and learning related to Saudi Vision 2030. The paper aimed to develop a

framework that guides the way for more English teaching and learning practices that are aligned with the educational goals of Saudi Vision 2030. The following research question was proposed:

RQ: In what ways can the Saudi Vision 2030 educational objectives be achieved in terms of teaching and learning English?

II. THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The present study employed qualitative research methodology in the data collection and analysis processes. The qualitative nature of the research allows for greater understanding of the educators' opinions and thoughts regarding achieving the educational goals of the Vision in terms of English teaching and learning. Silverman (2020) mentioned that qualitative research provides in-depth evaluation of the phenomenon under study and allows for more complex and thoughtful understanding of the experiences. Moreover, the study used a case study design in the data collection and analysis process. Creswell (2016) mentioned that in a case study design, "the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (p. 96). This research design allows the researcher to deeply explore the participants' perceptions of and experiences with the Vision and language teaching in the country.

Furthermore, in this study two types of information were collected: perceptual and theoretical information. First, perceptual information was collected through online interviews with language educators from Saudi Arabia. Galletta (2013) mentioned that interviews are used to gather deeper understanding of the participants' opinions and thoughts and "offers great potential to attend to the complexity" of the research topics (p. 24). Specifically, 15 pre-service and in-service foreign language educators participated in the study. The educational backgrounds of the participants differed, as nine of them held a master's in English teaching whereas six of them held doctoral degree in the same area. This group of participants were mixed in gender with nine males and six females. The participants were asked about how we could achieve the educational objectives of the Vision in terms of language teaching and learning. Their recommendations were coded into themes that answered the research questions. Table 1 illustrates the participating educators.

TABLE 1
THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Participants	Gender	Years of Teaching	Education
1	Female	6	Master
2	Male	3	Master
3	Female	4	Ph.D.
4	Female	2	Ph.D.
5	Male	6	Master
6	Female	2	Ph.D.
7	Male	4	Master
8	Male	11	Master
9	Female	3	Ph.D.
10	Male	1	Master
11	Female	5	Ph.D.
12	Male	5	Ph.D.
13	---	4	Master
14	---	7	Master
15	---	3	Master

Second, theoretical information was collected through extensive review of the current literature regarding the teaching and learning of English. Specifically, this review includes literature on the teaching and learning of English in Saudi Arabia, literature surrounding Vision 2030, and literature on effective and most recent ESL and EFL teaching approaches. Figure 1 illustrates the types of information needed in the study.

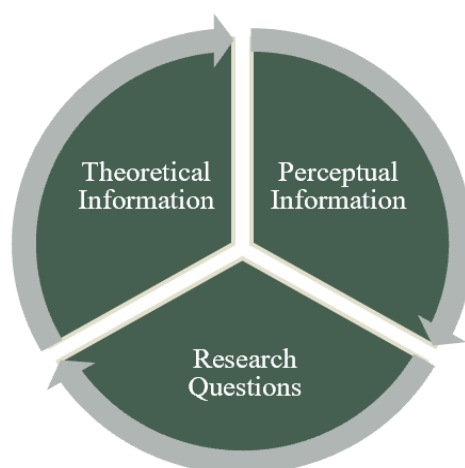


Figure 1. Types of Information Needed in the Study.

Finally, the data analysis process (see Figure 2) employed thematic analysis to find an answer to the proposed research question. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to identify themes in the educators' responses and linked these to the literature review (Saldaña, 2016). Also, the researcher used multiple cycles of coding which included initial, first, and second cycle coding. Initial cycle coding involved reading through the literature and the participants' responses and assigning codes. In first cycle coding, in vivo and descriptive coding strategies were used (Saldaña, 2016). In vivo coding allows the researcher to use the participants' own words to assign codes. Descriptive coding is a strategy that provides a brief description or summary of the basic topics or passages included in the participants' responses (Saldana, 2015). In second cycle coding, focused coding served as the primary coding strategy. Focused coding allows researchers to narrow the findings into fewer and more inclusive categorical codes. These categories then merged into overarching themes that answer the research questions. It is worth mentioning that Dedoose software (Dedoose.com) was used for analyzing the qualitative data. Dedoose is an online-based software that helps qualitative researchers in the process of assigning code and organizing and analyzing the collected data.

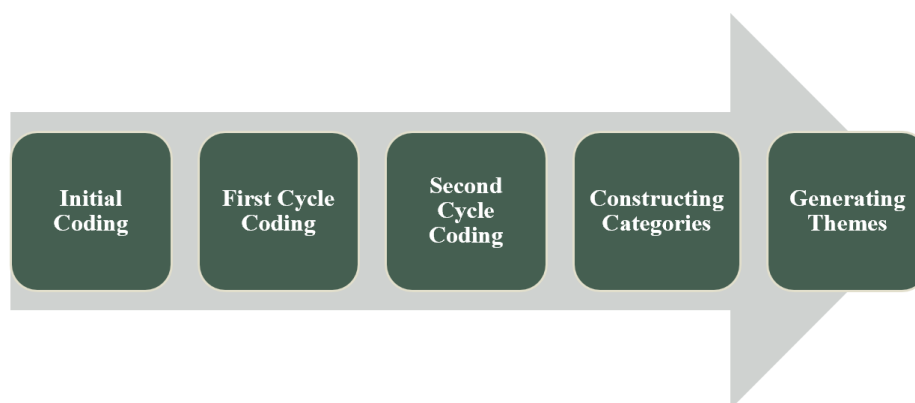


Figure 2. The Data Analysis Process.

III. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

As mentioned previously, the analysis of the vision 2030 blueprint revealed six overlapping educational goals. The plan is to achieve these goals by 2030. These objectives are:

- Enhancing the learning environment to promote creativity and innovation.
- Improving curricula and teaching approaches.
- Shifting to more digital education support teacher and student progress
- Preparing students to labor market demands.
- Developing students' values and social and core skills.
- Providing opportunities for students to address national development requirements.

Analysis of the perceptual and theoretical data revealed five themes about the teaching and learning strategies that allow language instructors to achieve these goals and objectives (see Figure 3). This includes using authentic materials to teach English, integrating more technology-based instruction, incorporating cooperative learning in English courses,

increasing the sense of openness and tolerance among language learners, and providing language instruction that prepares students for the labor market.

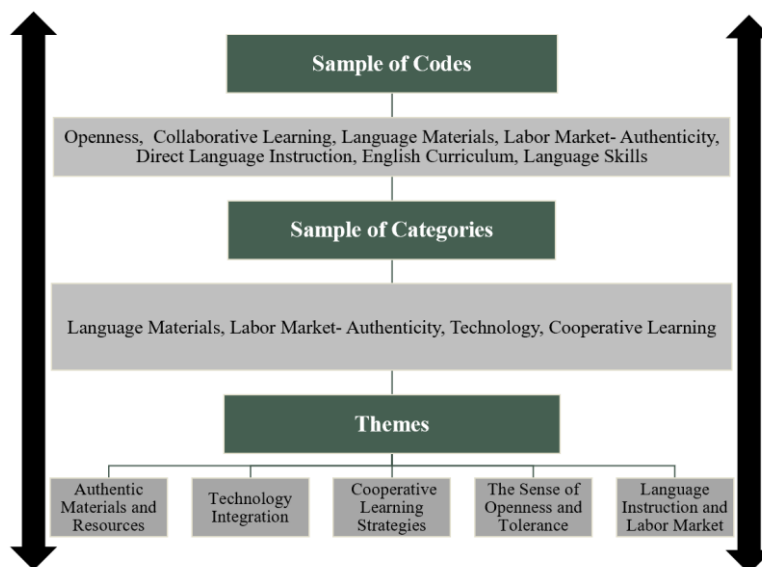


Figure 3. Sample of Codes, Categories, and Themes

A. Theme 1: The Use of Authentic Materials

Saudi Vision 2030 emphasizes the importance of enhancing the learning environment and improving teaching methods to stimulate creativity and innovation. The analysis of the interview data and the review of the literature indicate that the first step toward achieving these educational goals of the Vision is by integrating more authentic materials along with traditional and constructed resources. The use of “authentic materials” was consistently mentioned in the participants’ responses and, thus, was present as a theme. This theme refers to the materials, natural resources, and texts that are used by the speakers of the target language on a daily basis and are not designed for language learning. This includes newspapers, magazines, restaurant menus, brochures, and interviews all written in the target language. The use of authentic materials and resources was mentioned by the participants consistently, as shown in these statements by these four language instructors:

It's about what we teach in the classes. Most of the textbooks we use now are outdated and not interesting in many ways. If we want to achieve the Vision, we need to update our curriculum and use more real language materials... I mean materials that reflect what the native speakers read and write.

The Vision is an opportunity for us to update and change what we teach in the English courses. We are in dire need of materials that are authentic and real. I can say that there is a gap between what we teach and what students need. This gap can be filled with a good and effective curriculum.

The books that we teach are the answer. To get to the Vision's objective, that first thing we need to do is to update our curriculum and use more real books that represent the real language spoken by real people. Sometimes, our book don't reflect how native speakers speak and write. We have to fill this gap.

We need to update the curriculum to match the more interesting and more real language... If you ask me, I will say our books are far from reality. There is a gap between what students learn and the language of the native speakers. We need to fill this gap.

This finding resonates with research (e.g., Akbari & Razavi, 2016; Albiladi et al., 2018; Chamba et al., 2019; Rao, 2019; Tomlinson, 2011) that emphasizes the use of authentic materials to enhance the learning environment and improve the teaching methods to stimulate creativity and innovation. Research indicates that one of the effective ways to improve language teaching practices and to ensure more creative and innovative language instruction is the use of authentic materials. Language teachers use these materials as tools, it provides them with opportunities to practice “real” language spoken and written for real audiences (Akbari & Razavi, 2016). Similarly, Guo (2012) mentioned that the use of these texts and materials provides meaningful and effective language lessons that improve the teaching practices and students' learning experiences.

Rao (2019) listed several academic and social benefits of using authentic materials in ELT classrooms, such as developing students' social language skills, enhancing learners' critical thinking, developing creativity among the learners and the teachers, and promoting greater motivation among language learners (p. 3). Another authentic material that can be used in English teaching and learning is movies. In fact, Albiladi et al. (2018) pointed out that when using movies to teach and learn English, this will increase the authenticity of the language classes and make the learning process more enjoyable and motivating.

B. Theme 2: Integrating Technology as a Medium for English Teaching and Learning

One of the educational goals of the Vision is to shift to more digital education to support both teacher practice and student progress. The proposed theme toward achieving this goal is increasing the technology integration in language courses. Technology integration represents the second theme regarding the participants' shared perception about ways to achieve the Vision in language classes. The participants mentioned many instructional and social benefits of relying on technology when teaching English. This includes bridging the gap between traditional classrooms and language beyond classrooms, improving students' social and communication skills, increasing the flexibility and possibility of language instruction, and allowing for a more innovative and creative teaching environment. For example, on this topic some teachers shared that:

With what we saw during the pandemic, technology is the key element in these changes. So, your question is about how we, as language teachers, can meet the expectations of the Vision. Simply, I would say technology. We are in the middle of a technological revolution and every day there is something new. If we find new ways to use technology, we could achieve the educational goals of the Vision.

Saudi Vision 2030 is great in helping us see what is important. The focus is on the use of new advancements and new technology to make creative language courses. We have to keep this in mind when we teach English or any new language... through technology, we can bridge the gap between us and our students; we can prepare them to not only learn the language but also love the learning.

Nowadays, our students love technology and anything technology-related. I agree with them on that. Technology opens the door to possibilities for us and also for them. It also can be a tool to develop students' skills. They can interact with language learners across the world through many applications and websites. Technology helps students cross the borders.

I believe technology is the key. However, we have to be careful. It's a tool with two sides. But I believe more technology use is beneficial for all students. Technology allows us to be flexible in how we can deliver our lessons.

This finding is also supported by research studies (e.g., Abunowara, 2016; Albiladi, 2019; Chen, 2014; Halim & Hashim, 2019; Khadimally, 2018; Pérez Cañado, 2018) that emphasize the importance of using technology to teach English as a second/foreign language. Research has shown that the target language should be acquired through interesting and enjoyable comprehensive input in a meaningful context (Chen, 2014). Technology integration is a way to achieve this goal by enhancing the learning environment (Khadimally, 2018). In fact, research on educational technology and distance learning has grown in the last decade as the world heads toward more digital learning. The research helps in creating numerous educational models and platforms that use and benefit from technology in different educational settings. The idea behind merging technology into classrooms has attracted researchers and educators for decades.

In terms of language teaching and learning, technology has been a critical part of the research surrounding ESL and EFL pedagogy. In fact, technology integration was one of the most researched topics in the last decade (Abunowara, 2016; Albiladi, 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2018). With adequate exposure to new teaching methodologies and the use of technology in classrooms, language teachers will be serving the needs of language learners and conducting successful language classes (Alhaisoni, 2013). Anggeraini (2018) noted that technology is a tool that can be used to improve the teaching practices and allow for more authentic learning experiences.

In the Saudi context, research has indicated a gap between teachers' digital knowledge and how students interact and use current digital applications, programs, or websites (Khan, 2011). Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013) claimed that teachers in Saudi Arabia lack adequate training that enables them to interact and deal with the current digital revolution. Likewise, Bingimlas (2009) argued that most teachers in Saudi Arabia lack the skills and knowledge that enables them to integrate technology, digital programs, and websites into their teaching practices and, further, that this might be a global phenomenon.

However, when COVID-19 hit globally, many schools and educational institutions were closed across the world. It was reported that over 1.2 billion students were out of schools and universities (Oraif & Elyas, 2021). As a result, many countries around the world switched to online learning, including Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Education established the "Madrassati" platform as a learning management system to overcome educational challenges in the global pandemic. The "Madrassati" platform provides over 45 thousand educational resources that take into account individual differences

(Madrasati, 2020). Moreover, the “Madrasati” platform is structured to enhance the learning environment by providing tools that allow students to interact with the curriculum, other students, and the teacher.

C. Theme 3: Incorporating Cooperative Learning Strategies into Language Classes

Another educational goal of Saudi Vision 2030 is to develop students’ social and communication skills and prepare them for the labor market. The third theme to emerge from the data is incorporating cooperative learning. This theme reflects the study finding which indicates that one way to achieve this goal is to incorporate more cooperative learning strategies in language classes. Almost all the participants believed that incorporating more cooperative learning strategies into language courses improved students’ communication skills and prepared them for the labor market. This can be seen in these teachers’ own words:

The Vision itself encourages training students to work in the work field. To do that, in my opinion, we need to train them to work collaboratively with each other. Collaborative and cooperative learning is an effective way to ensure that all students work and communicate successfully. Language classes should be a place where students can practice their communication skills.

I would say we, as language instructors, need to place more emphasis on cooperative learning techniques. I believe it is a way to ensure that our language learners practice their language and communication skills, which is one of the objectives of the Vision. We need to prepare students to share their ideas and opinions inside and outside classrooms. Cooperative learning is a way to achieve this goal.

Many language courses don’t prepare students for the labor market by enhancing their ability to communicate and share their ideas openly. There is a gap between what they have in the classes and the world out there. I think cooperative learning is the answer to this problem.

More collaborative learning will lead to enhanced social and communication skills. This is what the country needs and what we need to do as language teachers: students who can communicate and negotiate meaning with others. I think we fall behind in terms of collaborative learning in English courses.

This finding is consistent with research around cooperative learning. Research indicates that cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that provides opportunities for learners to establish and develop their social and communication skills (Gillies, 2016; Johnson & Johnson, 2018). It includes social interactions with each other to finish the given task. Such strategies prepare the students for future career paths which sometimes require the students to work with others who have different ethnicities and backgrounds (Slavin, 2011). Likewise, Sharan (2010) argued that cooperative learning improves students’ thinking skills and develops their social, communication, and interpersonal skills, which leads to better achievement and readiness for their social lives.

In terms of English teaching, Zhang (2018) mentions that using cooperative learning techniques in English language classes “create an environment for students to build knowledge, so that they can get psychological and emotional support, thus actively invest in learning, build knowledge and achieve learning objectives” (p. 3661). In other words, learning language is a skill acquired through experience and practice: cooperative learning strategies are effective in allowing students to practice the language inside classrooms (Chen, 2021; Tuan, 2010). With cooperative strategies, language learners can practice their skills in an authentic environment in which they ask and answer questions, make suggestions, agree and disagree, negotiate meanings, and exchange conversation, all of which will enhance their social and academic skills (Yavuz & Arslan, 2018).

D. Theme 4: Increase the Sense of Openness and Tolerance among Language Learners

Saudi Vision 2030 emphasizes the importance of spreading the values of openness, tolerance, and accepting and appreciating cultural and social differences; language learning can be the gate that opens learners to the world. One of the themes that emerged as a response to this goal is increasing the sense of openness and tolerance. The study findings indicate that one way to achieve this goal is by providing more culturally specific instruction in language classes. This means giving students more instruction and activities that promote and highlight accepting and appreciating cultural awareness. The participants provided many examples of this types of instruction, such as learning about other cultures, diversity, similarities and differences among people, and disagreement before agreement. Accordingly, this theme was exemplified in the following participants’ responses:

For years, learning a new language was in the trenches. As society, we’ve changed and we need more of that. I think language can be the bridge that increases the openness among learners, especially young learners. With language, they can communicate, learn, and appreciate new cultures and others. The Vision focuses on changing how we look at others and how others should see us. We have to provide lessons that help students see and respect others regardless of if they disagree or agree with them.

I am an advocate for learning English for the early year classes. I think it allows students to be open to others. I mean, when they learn a new language, they are likely to accept and appreciate the differences and

similarities between them and others. I think this is one of the goals of the Vision. Is to be open to the world around us. I think learning English or Chinese is a great way to achieve this goal.

The Vision itself is a great opportunity to show who we are as a nation... I mean, for years, many nations have had a wrong vision about us. It's time to show the opposite by communicating with others across the globe. That's why I believe language classes show focus on increasing the openness among learners. This is the importance of learning a new language.

This finding resonates with research (Liton & Madanat, 2013; Purba, 2011) which indicates that English classes bridge this gap and allow for more openness and perseverance among students. When learning a new language, students will also be introduced to the culture of this language. Research shows that foreign language learning increases cultural awareness among students and results in more unique insights into other cultures (Fleet, 2004). In our multicultural and multiethnic world, it is important for students to be exposed to different cultures in order to understand and be aware of the cultural differences between people. Understanding these differences will help students expand their world view, improve socialization behaviors, and avoid offending others. In fact, foreign language learners are more tolerant of the cultural and social differences among people (Liu & Lin, 2017). Through foreign language classes, students can experience involvement with other cultures and traditions, which will broaden their understanding of other races and cultures.

E. Theme 5: Preparing Language Learners for the Labor Market

One of the educational objectives of Vision 2030 is to develop students' various skills and prepare them for the future labor market and improve their ability to serve the country. One of the emerging themes is specifying language instruction to prepare students for the labor market. The participants provided many examples of how to prepare language learners for the world beyond classrooms. This includes focusing language instruction around 21st century skills, developing students' social and communication skills, and allowing them to practice the language in more interactive and engaging environments.

It's an important question. The first thing that came to mind is teaching what students need to succeed in the labor market. Schools and even language courses should be the place to do this mission. We need to find ways to equip our students with the skills needed in this century.

For me, focusing on the skills needed out there. Skills like social and communication skills which allow students to talk and have healthy conversations with their peers. This, in my opinion, will prepare them for the world. I had students who have studied for more than three years and cannot form a correct sentence. This is a problem because they used to memorize everything.

I believe there is a gap between what we teach and what students need. In other words, if the market needs students with business backgrounds, we have to teach that. If the market needs students with technical backgrounds, we have to be prepared to teach that as well. We have to be flexible and teach what's better for language learners and their future careers.

This finding is supported by research (e.g., ACTFL, 2015; Mbumina, 2014) which indicates that learning a foreign language improves students' skills and allows them to succeed in their future career prospects (ACTFL, 2015). In today's business dominated society, bilingualism is a critical factor to be considered when searching for employees. Mbumina (2014) argued that bilingualism is a sign of intelligence, flexibility, openness to diverse people, and high working skills. Mbumina added that there is a direct correlation between foreign language competency and employability. Moreover, Dovhan (2021) pointed out that learning English has the potential for the formation of "soft skills" needed for the world beyond classrooms. According to Dovhan, soft skills allow language learners to effectively participate in intercultural professional communication and personal development.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Saudi Vision 2030 is an ambitious yet achievable plan to develop and change the skin of Saudi Arabia. It is a blueprint that includes short- and long-term goals that reflect and represent the nation's strengths and capabilities (Saudi Vision 2030, 2021). Education has been at the center of this vision and many educational objectives were identified. This study included discourse analysis of the plan and investigation of the perceptions of many Saudi language instructors about ways to achieve the Vision's objectives in terms of teaching and learning English. These findings were also linked to the current literature on teaching and learning English. The ultimate goal of the study was finding ways to achieve the educational objectives of the Vision regarding English teaching and learning.

Findings from data and the literature suggest that the educational objectives could be achieved in language classes by using more authentic materials and resources to teach English. Authentic materials allow learners to practice the "real" language spoken and written by native speakers. This will bridge the gap between the language spoken in classes and the language spoken and written in real life. Prošić-Santovac and Popović (2021) indicated that exposing students to "real" language through authentic materials increases their learning motivation. They added that "Authentic materials

have a greater potential in developing students' communicative competence than traditional textbooks" (p. 142). Another approach to achieve the educational goals of the Vision is integrating more technology-mediated language practices. This includes using technology as a tool to deliver instruction, provide immediate feedback, assess students' progress, and observe students learning inside and outside classrooms. Chun et al. (2016) reminded us that "Technology provides new ways for languages, cultures, and the world to be represented, expressed, and understood" (p. 76). Similarly, Grabill and Hicks (2005) emphasized the importance of using technology when teaching English writing by stating "If we want to teach writing or help students learn how to write more effectively, then we have to see writing in the same ways that they do and be with them where they write. Networks are classrooms. Digital writing is socially situated in a collaborative, recursive and responsive space in which teachers must participate with their students" (p. 306).

Furthermore, the findings also suggest using more cooperative learning strategies will equip students with the necessary skills (e.g., social, communication, motivational skills) for language learners. Cooperative learning is a way that can allow students to practice different skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and negotiating meaning (Astuti & Barratt, 2018). The study also reported that providing students with more specific cultural instruction will increase openness and tolerance among them, which is one of the educational goals of Saudi Vision 2030. Language learning includes the learning of a new culture and students need to learn the target culture in order to acquire the target language. In other words, "language is a part of a culture, and culture is a part of the language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture... the acquisition of a new or a second language is also the acquisition of a second culture" (Brown, 2007, pp. 189-190). The study also reported that language courses should be the place to prepare students for the labor market. Language learners should be taught and practice the language in a way that prepares for success in their future careers.

Accordingly, the study included some limitations. The perceptual data was limited to pre-service and in-service Saudi English language professors and instructors. Also, the study included one data collection strategy (interview) and used one research design approach (qualitative) for the data collection and analysis process. The limited sample size and the qualitative nature of the study limited the generalization of the findings.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study explored Saudi language instructors' perceptions regarding achieving the educational objectives of the proposed Vision 2030. The study included the perceptions of only 15 pre-service and in-service language instructors. The results reported in this study provided a partial insight into how we can achieve the educational goals of the Vision. Hence, future research should include a larger number of language teachers from different educational levels in Saudi Arabia. Future research should also include the perceptions of not only language instructors but of researchers, educators, schoolteachers, principals, and foreign language program directors. In other words, future research should incorporate a larger number of participants. More participants would have resulted in a clearer picture and a better understanding of ways to achieve the Vision's objectives in terms of English teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia

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