

# EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Reflections on Different Aspects of Teaching in Saudi Arabia: A Preliminary Qualitative Case Study

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**Abstract**—This qualitative investigation addresses the following aspects of Saudi pre-service English as a foreign language teachers: their perceptions of and attitudes toward their English proficiency and teaching competence; their teaching approaches; the motivating and deterring factors when choosing a teaching career; the problems they encountered; and suggestions to improve the English teaching profession. Eight participants who registered for a teaching practicum course at the university and met particular grade point average thresholds (from “passable” to “excellent”) were recruited. After the semester, the participants were asked four questions addressing the aspects mentioned earlier. The results indicate that regardless of gender, the higher participants' grade point average, the more negative their perceptions and attitudes and, therefore, the greater their determination to avoid the profession. This study provides numerous suggestions for researchers on how to address these limitations and expand the investigation of this topic.

**Index Terms**—pre-service teachers, teaching profession, English as a foreign language, Saudi Arabia

## I. INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia has 64 registered state and private universities (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2021). Each offers an English major—with a specialization in English Language; Literature; Translation; Linguistics (Applied or Theoretical); Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages—or non-English majors with English as the medium of instruction, such as Medicine, Sciences, Computer Sciences, Accounting, and Marketing. However, the number of English major graduates has increased rapidly. According to the annual report for the 2019–2020 academic year by Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, 696 undergraduates received degrees from the College of Languages and Translation's Department of English Language and Literature. Many of these graduates will become English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors, either by choice or by coincidence (Albalawi, 2016). However, only a few of these prospective Saudi EFL instructors can be characterized as having high English proficiency or the ability to teach at the pre-university level.

In 2004, the MoE determined that intermediate and high school Saudi EFL teachers were “neither competent in [the language] nor in the affair of teaching it” (Al-Seghayer, 2011, p. 23). In fact, among the 100 countries and regions represented in the Education First English Proficiency Index (2020), Saudi Arabia ranked 97<sup>th</sup>; hence, its people exhibit low levels of English proficiency. All the following factors lead to unsatisfactory results among English-language learners: the (sometimes complete) lack of sufficiently equipped instructors and support systems; outdated curricula and teaching methodologies; learners' gradual loss of motivation and aptitude; learners' underachievement, poor literacy, and dependence on memorization; rote learning; high-stakes testing (Syed, 2003).

### Statement of the problem

Researchers and educators have made tremendous efforts and conducted studies to help Saudi EFL students overcome their problems in four English skill areas—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—develop their English proficiency, and increase their motivation to learn the language. Although several recommendations provided by those investigators have been adopted by the MoE, there is a need to shift focus to the prospective Saudi EFL instructors themselves. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has investigated Saudi EFL instructors' attitudes toward and perceptions of English and teaching before and after becoming teachers. Further, no study has explored the problems they encountered during their temporary student-teaching experiment and the reasons for becoming EFL instructors at the pre-university level. A greater understanding of these areas can inform prospective interventions or educational programs to increase the efficacy of EFL education, both in Saudi Arabia and globally.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Saudi EFL Teachers' English Proficiency, Teaching Competence, and Teaching Approaches

Both McMullen (2009) and Ashraf (2018) agree that teaching English in Saudi Arabia is still a major challenge for Saudi EFL teachers. These teachers have low English-language proficiency and lack appropriate training programs. This results in the following: a reliance on ineffective teaching approaches; an inability to incorporate textbooks,

technology, or additional materials (Al-Seghayer, 2011, 2014a, 2014b; Alghizzi, 2011, 2012, 2017); difficulties in handling the social and cultural issues related to teaching English (Shah et al., 2013).

For example, English classes at the intermediate and secondary levels in Saudi Arabia can have up to 50 students per class (Elyas & Al Grigri, 2014). Further, the classroom instruction is teacher-centered (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015) because—as justified by Al-Seghayer (2014a)—students perceive teachers as directors, controllers, or merely vehicles of knowledge transmission. In addition to difficulties in both class and time management, the teaching approaches of teachers do not provide equal opportunities for all students to practice English sufficiently (Shah et al., 2013). Alghizzi (2011, 2012) confirms that some Saudi teachers do not adhere to a specific teaching approach but instead combine elements from various approaches. Alqahtani (2018) and Al-Seghayer (2014a) find that the most commonly used teaching methodologies in Saudi Arabia are the grammar-translation method, the audio-lingual method, and communicative language teaching. While the former method focuses on memorization and translation into Arabic, Al-Mohanna (2010) notes that the latter centers on two elements—habit formation and drilling—in which teachers frequently combine repetition and grammatical rules. Alghizzi (2011, 2012) emphasizes that Saudi EFL teachers also offer their students model texts, either to memorize or to make simple changes. Elyas and Picard (2010) add that such techniques aim to help students pass their final exam, which results in students aiming for grades rather than acquiring another language or improving their language skills.

Insufficiently trained Saudi EFL teachers have attempted to provide resources and learning aids to students to accelerate their English learning (Fareh, 2010). However, they have found their schools to be ill-equipped and have incorrectly assumed that the supplementary materials would benefit all students regardless of their proficiency and individual differences (Al-Seghayer, 2014a, 2014b).

Saudi EFL teachers' low competence levels and their unsuitable teaching approaches and techniques could be attributed to their low proficiency levels, lack of confidence and training, or desire to create a faster and easier learning process (Alhawsawi, 2013; Rabab'ah, 2005). However, these issues have led to unsatisfactory English-learning outcomes for Saudi students. Moreover, the outcomes are likely to be carried forward, as these students may become EFL instructors in the future (Alshumaimeri, 2003).

Saudi English teachers could improve their proficiency by engaging in pre-service and in-service training, improving teaching methodologies, and implementing classroom controls. Al-Hazmi (2003) and Al-Seghayer (2014a) suggest that pre-service and in-service preparation programs should be updated to train EFL Saudi teachers on how to design lesson plans and activities, adopt teaching methodologies and technologies, implement appropriate student evaluation methods, and manage their time in teaching each language skill.

### *B. Saudi EFL Teachers' Perceptions of and Attitudes Toward the Teaching Profession and Reasons for Becoming Teachers*

According to Brown (2007), the quality of teaching can be enhanced if teachers understand their roles, accumulate teaching knowledge through trial and error, and have high motivation and positive attitudes toward the profession. This combination would enable teachers to create positive, stimulating, and energizing classrooms and guide students through their learning processes. The Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (2007) project developed by Watt and Richardson, termed FIT-Choice, has since 2001 aimed to unify, develop, and increase the validity and reliability of the motivating factors presented in the literature to help determine how teachers perceive their profession and the factors influencing their career choice. Richardson and Watt (2006, 2010, 2018) and Watt and Richardson (2007, 2008, 2012) attribute the inconsistency of studies addressing teaching motivations to the following: absence of a common theoretical and analytical framework; invalid and unreliable instruments; varied methods of analyzing and reporting results; the lack of accurate definitions, leading to overlapping categorizations of motivating factors. Therefore, these researchers proposed the FIT-Choice questionnaire in which motivating factors are classified as follows: altruistic, intrinsic, extrinsic, or ability-related beliefs; personal and social utilities; the perception and satisfaction of the profession, including job security, time for family, job transferability, the ability to shape the future or work with children or adolescents, enhance social equity, make social contributions, the demands of perceived tasks (difficulty and expertise), and returns (social status and salary). The questionnaire also includes negative motivations such as teaching being a “fallback” career option (Watt & Richardson, 2012).

Nevertheless, EFL researchers have expanded their investigations to include EFL instructors' perspectives of the profession and the effects of other variables. For example, Agcam and Babanoglu (2016) investigate the attitudes of Turkish EFL instructors toward their profession. Their results reveal that the majority have positive attitudes regardless of the problems they encounter. Kamran and Shahbaz (2018) demonstrate that among Pakistani secondary EFL teachers, positive perceptions of teaching are driven by altruistic reasons (e.g., conveying knowledge, satisfying research opportunities, making English easier for students) and intrinsic reasons (e.g., teaching being their favorite profession and a logical choice given their interest in languages and women being instinctively equipped to teach). For female participants, teaching is a secure and safe career. Similarly, Yasan-Ak and Yilmaz-Yendi (2020) research pre-service teachers' attitudes toward teaching based on their gender, age, grade point average (GPA), department, motives for selecting the teaching profession, and parents' educational levels. The results reveal significant differences in participants' attitudes toward the profession by GPA, motives, gender, and department but not age or parents' educational levels. Most importantly, female participants and those with a higher GPA express more positive attitudes

than men and those with a low GPA. Participants who view the teaching profession as a “dream job” have more positive attitudes than those who join the profession for other reasons such as the employment opportunity and conditions, the dominance of the profession, desire or pressure from family, and university entrance exam scores.

Sharbain and Tan (2012) find a strong correlation between teaching competence and attitudes toward the teaching profession among Palestinian pre-service EFL teachers. Participants develop strong, positive attitudes toward the profession as a result of the teaching competence acquired from the training program. Sharbain and Tan (2013) show that 50 of their sample’s female primary EFL teachers have more significantly positive attitudes toward the teaching profession than their male counterparts. Further, Ertasoglu and Gursoy (2019) examine primary and high school English teachers’ attitudes toward the teaching profession, social status, motivation, and (dis)contentment factors in their career choice. They find that regardless of the participants’ gender, age, work experience, and school type, those respondents have positive perceptions of teaching, even with the majority experiencing dissatisfaction with their working conditions and a general undervaluing of the profession by society. Half of their participants became teachers because they wanted to contribute to society, seek social justice, and build the future by working with children. This factor is followed by self-perceptions such as one’s security, free time with family, and job transferability. Overall, the respondents seem content with their job choice.

### C. Saudi EFL Teachers’ Obstacles

Saudi EFL teachers often face difficulties that prevent them from providing an optimal environment for EFL learners. In particular, they must manage students with mixed abilities, insufficient classroom hours, and varying cultures (Orafi & Borg, 2009). Moreover, teachers lack access to suitable training programs and often graduate from college without the appropriate training (Al-Seghayer, 2014a). Additionally, the English-language textbooks used in the Saudi Arabian educational system have been criticized for their focus on declarative knowledge rather than improving students’ English communication skills. This is reflected in teachers’ employment of grammar and vocabulary in their lessons, with little emphasis on communicative tasks (Al-Seghayer, 2014a; Ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013).

Fareh (2010) notes that EFL programs in the Arab world are negatively influenced by inappropriately trained teachers, the absence of technology, students’ lack of motivation, rote learning, inappropriate teaching materials and assessment methods, and infrequent exposure to English. Ur Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013) stipulate that training teachers, choosing appropriate methodologies, and motivating students are all necessary to improve EFL education in Saudi Arabia. Thus, offering pre- and in-service teacher training programs is crucial to improving the performance of novice teachers.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Design

The adopted design for this research is both descriptive and qualitative.

### B. Setting and Participants

This study was conducted during the first semester of the 2018–2019 academic year at a college that offers a four-year bachelor’s degree in English Language. At the time, the study was already officially approved by the college dean’s office. According to the Students’ Academic Affairs Office, 280 male and female undergraduates registered for a teaching practicum course. The college mandates that these undergraduates must form groups of four supervised by one instructor. Of the teaching fellows assigned to the supervision, only one male and one female instructor decided to participate voluntarily in the research. The Students’ Academic Affairs Office was then required to provide a computer-generated randomized list of two gender-based groups of eight participants (four each), representing four GPA levels: “passable,” “good,” “very good,” and “excellent.” Each participant was contacted to obtain their approval of their voluntary participation. The office was also requested to provide a list of alternative prospective participants with appropriate GPA levels if one of the research participants decided not to participate or to withdraw. Table 1 presents the participants’ demographic information.

The second semester of the academic year was overlooked in this study because of the drastic changes to the course specification as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown regulations that applied to all pre-university and university-level schools. Instead of EFL pre-service teachers visiting pre-university schools to practice teaching, they were obligated to work on lesson preparations, exams, presentations, and reflections to present to their supervisors through virtual classes.

TABLE 1  
PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Participants' Alias	Gender	Age Range	Range of English Exposure	GPA	Educational Level	Teaching Hours
MP	Male	22–26	14–17	2.45	High School	8
MG				3.15		
MGG				3.87		
ME				4.76		
FP	Female	22–24	14–16	2.60		
FG				3.54		
FGG				3.98		
FE				4.84		

C. Procedures

At the beginning of the semester, the researcher met with the male supervisor and his participants and used the online meeting platform Zoom to broadcast the meeting with the female supervisor and her participants. All were provided with detailed information about their designated schools, procedures, and requirements and were told to journal their teaching experience, addressing the same research questions. They were also instructed to record their lesson plans, teaching approaches, and any problems they encountered. Every two weeks, the two supervisors attended the participants' classes and provided them with feedback on their strengths and weaknesses, as observed during the lessons. The participants were told that their supervisors were not the only source of information; they had to rely on themselves while keeping records of the problems they encountered and the solutions found for these problems. At the end of the semester, and after the participants received their teaching practicum course scores, they were required to read their diaries and answer four questions—modified from the research questions—along with any other information they would like to share with the researcher, with no word count restrictions.

D. Research Questions

1. What are the Saudi EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of their English proficiency, teaching competence, and teaching approaches they used before and after registering in the teaching practicum course? Why?
2. What are the Saudi EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of and attitudes toward the teaching profession before and after the teaching practicum and their motivating or deterring factors to continue in such a career?
3. What are the problems encountered during teaching, and how did they overcome them?
4. What do the Saudi EFL pre-service teachers suggest to improve the profession and its outcomes?

E. Data Collection and Analysis

The participants' responses were e-mailed to the researcher, with word counts ranging from 84 to 760 words. The questions generated were thematically categorized and reported, as discussed in the following section. Any mistakes in grammar, spelling, and clarity were amended as indicated in brackets.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicated that for the first research question that addresses the participants' perceptions of their English proficiency and teaching competence as well as the justifications of their teaching approaches, the answers were somewhat similar, with minor differences. For example, the "passable" GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers both stated the following:

"My English language [is] good, but my teaching, I think, is very good. I translate words and sentences in[to] Arabic and ask students to memorize them" (MP).

I'm sure my English and teaching [are] very good because some students told me that. I like to write and say the meaning[s] of words and sentences in Arabic. I [...] exercise [...] with students and [tell] the meaning in Arabic. Students must memorize everything in the book (FP).

Similarly, the "good" GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers stated the following:

"I think my English is very good because I can talk [speak] and write. My teaching is [...] excellent. When I teach, I translate everything into the book in Arabic. I ask my students to memorize words and rules, and sometimes I g[i]ve them some texts to memorize" (MG).

"My English proficiency is good and nice, especially [in comparison to] students in high schools. My teaching competence is also very good because I prepare the lessons very carefully. I translate everything for my students in[to] Arabic, even the English rules, and they [have] to memoriz[e] the words and passages" (FG).

The "very good" GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers noted the following:

"My English and my teaching are very good and this is what my professors and students [have] told me. I am a big fan of the grammar-translation method because I learned English during my intermediate and high school [years] using it. I think it is beneficial and easy to apply. Students love it because they will be able to understand everything in the textbook" (MGG).

“I [...scored] 6 in IELTS [International English Language Testing System], so this means my English is very good. In addition, my teaching is excellent because I know all the teaching approaches I studied at college. My mark [on] the course is 90. When I teach, I sometimes use English to give basic instructions, greet, or ask the students. However, I have to translate so that students can understand them. Sometimes, students translate their homework and write [their] answers without help. I want them to depend on themselves” (FGG).

Next, the “excellent” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers maintained the following:

“I’m not trying to show off when saying that I’m a native speaker of English as I spent more than 15 years abroad. Having said that, I feel that my teaching competence is somehow not great! This does not mean that I do not know how to teach students, [...] I feel that we as undergraduates were not taught as we should in terms of the teaching approaches and assessments. We studied only two theoretical courses on teaching approaches. Although I tried to apply different teaching approaches, such as ‘suggestopedia’ [or a] ‘communicative approach’, [...] students were not intrigued or seemed motivated for me to continue. Eventually, I used the grammar-translation method because students are used to such. However, I tried to effectively apply this method to [...] us[e] only English in class by endorsing different teaching techniques.

First, I chose to use the electronic version of the textbook designed by the [MoE], in which students can study and answer questions online. The electronic textbook includes [...] audio for many things. Second, I provided students with supplementary materials on the topics covered [in] the textbook explained in Arabic and English to help them understand why, where, and when to use a rule/word. Students were asked to read and write every lesson in their notebooks. In every class, students were divided into groups and were given 10 [to] 15 minutes to talk in English. They have to prepare and write what they want to say in class at home using the online dictionaries I provided. To increase their motivation, I brought my laptop and PlayStation 4 to class to play online with the groups who scored more [...] I also invited my friends whose English [was] very good to be interviewed by students who were told to prepare questions and translated their answers [to] the questions. Finally, I taught students how to read test questions and study before the exams, and it was effective because none of the students scored less than 13 out of 15 in the mid-term or quizzes, although the proficiency levels of most of them were very low” (ME).

“Both my English proficiency and teaching competence are excellent. At first, my students were afraid of English and [were] not motivated to learn it. So I started with the grammar-translation method and slowly [...] taught students how to effectively use English and Arabic dictionaries. I asked them to translate every word in the textbook before they [came] to class; then, we discussed their translations. I told them that memorization is a very effective method [for] learn[ing] English if they apply it correctly and repetitive[ly]. I showed them how to look for short stories and analyze them to be able to write their own stories. We wrote short stories together, and it was fun. I also incorporated video games and mobile apps and showed them how to use them at home. [...]. Finally, I taught them how to study [...] English by giving them sample tests” (FE).

These answers indicate that regardless of the participants’ GPA and gender, they all believed that their language proficiency and teaching competence were good, very good, or excellent, except for one male participant with an “excellent” GPA who believed his teaching ability was subpar. The “passable” and “good” GPA participants’ belief in their English proficiency and teaching competence did not support the findings of Al-Seghayer’s (2011) report. However, the current results could be driven by a poor understanding of how proficiency is measured, depending on their own impressions, words from their students or supervisors, or comparison to their students’ proficiency. Nonetheless, they all applied the same teaching approaches regardless of their GPA and gender, except the high-GPA participants. The participants incorporated the grammar-translation method when teaching, which relies heavily on the memorization of words, rules, and/or passages (Al-Mohanna, 2010; Alqahtani, 2018; Al-Seghayer, 2014a, 2015; Elyas & Picard, 2010). Nevertheless, the class instruction among the “passable,” “good,” and “very good” Saudi male and female EFL pre-service teachers seemed to be teacher-centered, as criticized by Alrashidi and Phan (2015) and Fareh (2010).

Moreover, both Alhawsawi (2013) and Rabab’ah (2005) maintain that reliance on such teaching approaches, which center on Arabic as a means of instruction, could be attributed to their low proficiency, lack of confidence, and/or aim to accelerate the learning process. Other researchers have indicated that pre-service teachers are ill-equipped (Alghizzi, 2011, 2012; Al-Seghayer, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Shah et al., 2013) because they only studied two theoretical courses on teaching approaches and use the same methods they learned when they were students (Albalawi, 2016; Alshumaimeri, 2003; Goodlad, 1990). Arabic has been appreciated by teachers and students in both the current research and prior studies (AlHarbi, 2018; Al-Nofaie, 2010). Further, Saudi male and female pre-service teachers with an “excellent” GPA provided supplementary materials, which do not support Fareh’s (2010) findings, including the incorporation of technologies and instruction focused on self-autonomy and final exams (Al-Seghayer, 2014a; Fareh, 2010). However, such improvised and vague teaching approaches and strategies are not based on solid teaching theories; they are difficult to assess by other means than students’ performance in class or on exams (Alghizzi, 2011, 2012).

Regarding the second research question, which addressed the participants’ perceptions of teaching before and after registering for the teaching practicum course and their motivating or deterring factors to continue in the profession, the

results revealed similar, different, and paradoxical answers among all the participants in terms of their GPA and gender. For instance, the “passable” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers stated the following:

“I want to become a teacher [of] English for many reasons. First, I will have a good salary, [...a] long holiday, and I will teach English because it is an international language, and I want students to learn it” (MP).

“[The] teaching profession is very important and very prophetic. I want to become a teacher for many reasons, such as [the] salary, long vacation, and beautiful environment. My parents and most [of my] extended family [are] teachers, so I want to be like them. [However, ...] one problem with teaching is that [once the MoE accepts...] me as a teacher, they will send me [to] far cities or villages” (FP).

Similarly, the “good” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers mentioned the following:

“I love teaching because I think I like teaching children and young people. In teaching, you will have long holidays and high salary[ies]. I always teach my brothers and sisters English. My dad is also a teacher” (MG).

“Teaching is [a] relaxing job. It is good and provide[s] you with [a monthly] salary. If you are a teacher, you have short working hours and long holidays. I want to become a teacher because of [these] reasons and because my father want[s] me to, and I do not want [to] because the Ministry will ask me to teach first in far[-]away villages” (FG).

The “very good” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers noted the following:

“Teaching English is not a bad career because of the high salaries and long holidays. If I do not get any other job, I will be a teacher because I can easily obtain the requirements to become a teacher. [In addition], teachers work shorter hours than other jobs, so I can work in another job as a part-time [job] after I finish my teaching hours at school. The only issues with teaching are the annual tests that you have to pass to obtain your job and the fact that I will not be allowed to work in Riyadh in my first year [...]” (MGG).

“I honestly think teaching is not a bad job at all and maybe a second choice. My father and my older brother are teachers, and I think I did and still can do better in teaching or any other job [...]. Teaching is a noble occupation with good salary[ies] and holidays, but I am afraid if the [MoE] accept[s] my application, it will send me to places I have never been to before” (FGG).

The “excellent” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers maintained the following:

“My perception of teaching as a profession has not changed before and after enrolling in the teaching practicum course. I do not really see any advantages in teaching, not a single one. [...In...] fact, the profession has several disadvantages. The reputation of such a career is not great. I have always laughed at the jokes made at teachers’ expense. Lazy, unmotivated, long-holiday-seekers, unambitious, the list goes on. The salary is not sufficient and not fair because I will most likely [...] double the salary if I work in the private sector. Teachers, strangely, are not allowed to pursue their Masters and PhDs unless they have a sponsor. They will mostly lose their English proficiency [due to] repeating the same texts to students whose English proficiency levels are low and the lack of a reading habit. The last disadvantage is related to the fact that none of the new teachers will be assigned [to] the schools of their choice. They will be sent to teach in remote villages and towns for years before they will be reassigned to locations of their choice” (ME).

“The profession of teaching is the most unappreciated type of job [...] in Saudi Arabia. I [...] find it degrading to work as a teacher after all the hard work I have put to have an excellent GPA. My feeling[s] are based on different reasons: teachers are always criticized and mocked [...], the salary is not that high, not all teachers are allowed to pursue their postgraduate studies, and finally, the locations of their assignment will most likely be other than what they want” (FE).

We can draw different conclusions from these responses. First, none of the participants except one “excellent” GPA student indicated whether their perspective of the teaching profession had changed after the teaching practicum course. Thus, they had predetermined perceptions of and attitudes toward choosing a teaching career. Regardless of the participants’ gender, the answers showed that the higher their GPA, the more negative was their perception and attitude and the more determined they were to avoid the profession. The “passable” and “good” GPA participants demonstrated positive attitudes toward teaching and wanted to become teachers. Further, the “very good” GPA participants indicated they would become teachers if they did not find other opportunities. However, the “excellent” GPA participants exhibited negative attitudes and stated they would not become teachers because of career-related issues and because they were convinced that they would find better opportunities.

Van Damme (2017) notes that in many Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development member nations, the teaching profession is primarily occupied by women. Kamran and Shahbaz (2018) provide possible justifications for this demographic imbalance, emphasizing that women are instinctively equipped to teach and perceive the profession as both safe and secure. This could be observed as true for Saudis before the launch of the Saudi government’s Vision 2030 plan, which established equal employment opportunities for both genders. This does not indicate that all Saudi EFL graduates view their teaching career as a last resort, as the results here refute this. However, regardless of gender, the higher the student’s GPA, the less likely they are to become teachers. These results do not support those of Sharbain and Tan (2013) and Şener (2015), who find that female EFL teachers have more positive attitudes toward the profession than men. The results also do not align with those of Yasan-Ak and Yilmaz-Yendi (2020), who conclude that female

pre-service teachers and those with higher GPAs have more positive attitudes toward their teaching career than their male and low-GPA counterparts.

In terms of the factors that motivate students toward the teaching profession or deter them from it (Richardson & Watt, 2006, 2010, 2018; Watt & Richardson, 2007, 2008, 2012), the results revealed various motivators. For example, the “passable,” “good,” and “very good” GPA participants indicated similar intrinsic reasons (working with children; teaching them an international language; beautiful environment; perceptions of a relaxing, noble, or prophetic job) and extrinsic reasons (salary, long holidays, short working hours, family encouragement or influence, easy recruitment requirements, and opportunities to work two jobs) to join the teaching profession. However, the “very good” participants mentioned a negative altruistic reason—teaching was their second or “last resort” career option.

The “passable” and “good” GPA female participants and “very good” GPA male and female participants provided another factor deterring them from a teaching career: assignment to teaching locations far from where they would prefer. The “very good” GPA male participants expressed their reservations toward the annual test teachers must take to obtain a salary increase. Conversely, the MoE’s assignment of new teachers’ locations was not cited by the “excellent” GPA participants as a reason for joining teaching. They revealed such intrinsic reasons as the fact that teaching careers have no advantages and are still unappreciated. They also believed teachers would eventually lose their English proficiency from repeatedly teaching from the same textbooks, thereby passing their low proficiency and poor reading habits onto their students. The participants also provided some extrinsic reasons such as the salary, long vacation, and heightened reputation, as well as altruistic reasons such as teachers not being able to pursue postgraduate studies. Finally, the differences found between the participants who had successfully finished two teaching courses and registered for the teaching practicum course were not in line with other results in the literature. Sharbain and Tan (2012) emphasize that the positive attitudes of pre-service male and female teachers increase after they enroll in a teaching training course.

Regarding the third research question, which addressed the problems the participants encountered while teaching, the answers appeared to depend on their GPA. For example, the “passable” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers stated the following:

“I didn’t face [...] any problems” (MP).

“Honestly, I have nothing to say about problems [because] everything was good” (FP).

Moreover, the “good” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers mentioned the following:

“I only faced one problem relat[ed] to students’ many numbers [i.e., the number of students in the classroom], [and] that is all. I tried to ask the princip[al] to divide the students, but he refused” (MG).

“I had a problem with class time. It is not enough to teach, so I took other waiting classes to fix this” (FG).

The “very good” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers said the following:

“[...] I have to admit that they were many. I had a problem with students['] numbers and time and class management because you need to explain, for example, a rule and do exercises with student[s] in 45 minutes only. I decided to only give one example and answer one or two questions in class, and the rest must be [done at] home. I check the homework in my free time and write comments if need[ed]” (MGG).

“My biggest problem was the EFL teacher who is supposed to be my mentor inside the school. One time, I wrote a test that was difficult for students, and although she saw it before the time of the test, she did not say anything. My students were complaining, so I wrote another one and showed it to my supervisor. She provided me with magnificent comments and corrected my second test based on them. My students were happy because most of them could understand what is [being] asked” (FGG).

Finally, the “excellent” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers maintained the following:

“I’ve encountered many problems during my field experience as a teacher. I’ve already explained in detail in [Q]uestion 1 the diversified teaching approach I used to increase students’ awareness of their low English proficiency, motivat[e their] attachment to the subject, and [address] their ineffective studying techniques. None of the things I did, however, were introduced to me in college [...] They were improvised, and although I feel that they were working, I would really be satisfied more if I were taught the best assessment methods by which I could measure the positive effectiveness of the things I did” (ME).

“The problems I encounter[ed] while teaching can be attributed to students’ attitudes toward English, [their] experiences in and motivation to learn the language, and test anxiety. Students told me that they kn[e]w how important the language [was], but they [...] always found it difficult to learn. Teachers, in many cases and across different levels, taught them to memorize things for the final exam and forget them later on. The memorization technique is a good method [for] learn[ing] the language, but it must be applied correctly. [...] Some of the things I did to solve these issues were [the] incorporati[on of] video games and mobile apps to help them practice English. I also taught them how to use online Arabic English dictionaries to help them understand the English gaming tasks I assigned to them. I have also taught them how to study for the exam by explaining the formats of the questions and how to answer them accurately” (FE).

These responses demonstrated that the higher the GPA of Saudi EFL pre-service teachers, the greater their observations and analyses in specifying problem(s) and the greater their creativity and determination in finding solutions. On the one hand, the “passable” GPA participants stated that they did not encounter any problems. This could be attributed to those participants’ low proficiency. On the other hand, the “good” GPA participants mentioned

problems such as the large number of students and time management. However, and possibly based on their previous experience as students, these participants appeared to endorse typically ineffective solutions. They either asked the principal to divide students into smaller groups or incorporated “waiting” classes, named as such because they are assigned to other teachers when those designated to these classes are absent. These respondents also appeared to restrict the learning processes within the school, as implicitly stressed by Al-Seghayer (2014a, 2015), Elyas and Picard (2010), and Elyas and Grigri (2014), and not outside school, as with the “very good” GPA participants. The “very good” GPA participants admitted encountering problems with student numbers, time management, and test proficiency and consulted their supervisors who were experts in the field for guidance. Nevertheless, only one “very good” GPA male participant—perhaps unintentionally—expanded the learning process to include their homes by asking them to perform exercises and commenting on their work if needed.

Additionally, and in parallel with the prior literature, the “excellent” GPA participants revealed that they encountered many problems: students’ low proficiency, motivation, experience in their learning and attitudes toward English, ineffective studying techniques, and test anxiety (Elyas & Al Grigri, 2014; Khan, 2011; Khankar, 2001; Ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). The “excellent” GPA male participant acknowledged not being introduced to such problems in college and therefore not having been taught how to address them. This lack of training confirms the findings of Al-Seghayer (2014a, 2014b, 2015), Al-Hazmi (2003), Alghizzi (2011, 2012), and Ibn Talib (2003). However, both “excellent” GPA participants admitted to improvising in their applied solutions here and those mentioned in the first question regarding the use of technologies, group work, analyses of stories, explaining the final exam format, discussions, translation tasks, and studying techniques, among others. This did not support Fareh’s (2010) findings. Simultaneously, such informative answers could mean the following. First, the “excellent” GPA participants were more independent. Second, they attempted to expand students’ proficiency and attachment to the language and allotted time to practice the language by including work outside the classroom. Third, they applied a communicative approach that AlHarbi (2018) finds is effective in decreasing anxiety and increasing motivation.

Finally, the results for the last research question, which aimed to gather suggestions to improve the profession and its outcomes, revealed both similar and different answers. For instance, the “passable” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers stated the following:

“Teaching English does not [require] anything. It is good [as it is]” (MP).

“There is nothing to suggest [...] here” (FP).

Similarly, the “good” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers mentioned the following:

“I don’t have any suggestions because I am not [an] expert” (MG).

“Nothing to say as I think our education[al] system is good” (FG).

The “very good” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers noted the following:

“I suggest hav[ing] many training courses for amateur and professional teachers in teaching and evaluation. I think that the [MoE] should develop English textbooks and prepare [...] schools for teaching English, that is to say, labs” (MGG).

“I think the most important two things to develop English teaching is to have new textbooks every now and then and train teacher[s] on how to use them perfectly” (FGG).

Finally, the “excellent” GPA pre-service male and female EFL teachers maintained the following:

“For the [MoE] to develop the teaching of English in Saudi Arabia, some stringent decisions have to be [made]. The first [...] is not to allow graduates [with a] low English proficiency and GPA become EFL teachers. In many cases, these can become teachers because they do not have any other alternatives, and it is easy for them to fulfill their employment requirements. Therefore, the [MoE] must increase [its] profession[al] employment requirements by increasing the minimum GPA score and total score [from the] STEP test [i.e., Standardized Test of English Proficiency] and require a sample teaching presentation undertaken by these prospective teachers. The second [...] is to determine the motivation and reasons why an applicant wants to become a teacher” (ME).

“Increasing the salary, decreasing the number of students in classrooms, and having flexible working hours are very important, but there are other things that need to be considered, such as assigning [a] mentor for amateur teachers, allowing them to experiment on students by applying new teaching approaches such as drama or role[-]play, establish[ing] English clubs and magazines to allow students write and use the language, and help[ing teachers] understand the essence and elements of self-autonomy so they can become independent and pass their knowledge to their students” (FE).

The “passable” and “good” GPA participants seemed satisfied with their current status and the outcomes from teaching English, lacked experience, or were ill-equipped to determine and write about what is needed to develop it. According to Firkins et al. (2007), their low-proficiency EFL participants were similar to those with learning disabilities in terms of the following: producing less coherent, less refined, and shorter written samples; experiencing difficulties in producing organized samples; generating ideas; applying metacognitive skills. For the “very good” GPA participants, the profession only needs training courses, preparation among schools, and new textbooks. Such suggestions partially confirm the findings of many studies that highlight the reasons for EFL teachers’ limitations and/or emphasize the

suggestions by which teachers can improve (Al-Hazmi, 2003; Al-Seghayer, 2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Ashraf, 2018; Syed, 2003).

The MoE has signed agreements with organizations to provide training courses and teaching materials for EFL teachers, as reported by Alghamidi (2015), Alhumaidi (2013), and Cengage (2016). However, these agreements would indicate that the Saudi male and female EFL pre-service teachers either have no information on such matters or simply believe that such things are still insufficient (Alghizzi, 2017). Finally, the “excellent” GPA participants’ answers were direct and precise, demonstrating that although they ultimately did not want to become teachers, some factors could motivate other high-GPA graduates to join the teaching profession. These factors or suggestions included increasing employment requirements, assigning mentors to new teachers, allowing teachers to experiment with new teaching approaches, applying self-autonomy, and decreasing the number of students in classrooms. These answers support the suggestions highlighted by some specialists (Albalawi, 2016; Al-Seghayer, 2015). However, other suggestions such as determining the motivating or deterring factors to join the profession, increasing salaries, defining more flexible work hours, and establishing English clubs, labs, and/or journals remain unaddressed.

## V. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study provides important findings on Saudi male and female EFL pre-service teachers’ perceptions of and attitudes toward their English proficiency levels and teaching competence. It throws light on the teaching approaches used, the motivating and deterring factors in whether to choose a teaching career, the problems encountered, and their suggestions for improving the English teaching profession. Future researchers should accumulate information on and hone the areas discussed here by expanding the scope to include supervisors’ and mentors’ perspectives as well as other universities and school levels such as the primary and intermediate levels.

Another limitation of this research relates to the participants’ number and succinct answers, which is possibly due to their inability to generate and discuss ideas in English. Some methods to address this could involve stipulating a minimum word count for the questions given to participants, analyzing their supervisor’s and mentor’s comments written after observing their classes, and conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants. If the collected data still have a low word count, researchers could allow students, especially those with low and intermediate English proficiency, to answer in Arabic.

Finally, incorporating the proposed FIT-Choice questionnaire can help future research. However, the questionnaire has certain limitations in not addressing the teaching profession-related factors found in this research (e.g., proficiency levels, teaching abilities, salary, holidays, work location assignments). Through the consistent development of the questionnaire by including the results of local and international studies investigating the teaching profession in general and English in particular, future research can provide knowledge by which education policies, textbooks, and training courses can be improved.

## VI. PEDAGOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

To a large extent, English remains the only second language taught at pre-university (primary, intermediate, and secondary) levels in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries; however, Saudi EFL learners’ outcomes remain unsatisfactory. Therefore, some stringent recommendations for the Saudi MoE must be considered. First, the MoE should determine the motivating and deterring factors among current EFL teachers and those specializing in English in general or its sub-fields (e.g., literature, translation, linguistics, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) regarding their choice of teaching as a career and adjust and improve its educational policy accordingly. Second, it should require universities to increase theoretical and practical training courses within their curricula or provide additional graduate diplomas in teaching. Third, it should increase educator employment requirements to include high minimum score thresholds on English proficiency tests and GPAs and extra teaching qualifications. Finally, the MoE should sign agreements with professional international educational organizations to provide current and prospective EFL instructors with intensive training courses on English-language skills, teaching methodologies, the incorporation of technology, assessments, and writing research. Thus, this educational cycle—a cycle of poor Saudi English learners becoming EFL instructors—that has been perpetuated in research and literature will be redirected to result in more satisfactory outcomes.

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