

Unlocking the Potential: Exploring EFL Instructors' Perception in Enhancing Oral Proficiency of Saudi EFL Learners

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Abstract—This study examines English language teachers' perceptions of their instructional strategies in daily English as a Foreign Language classroom instruction in Saudi Arabia. The study focuses on three aspects of second language learning: lesson planning, classroom management, and external pressures from tests and assessments. Ten EFL teachers were chosen randomly based on specific criteria such as having at least three years of teaching experience, no familiarity with the research, and currently engaged in full-time EFL instruction for Saudi students. Semi-structured interviews were used in the study, each lasting approximately 55 minutes. The information was gathered in three stages: deconstruction, coding, and incorporation into the larger dataset. The study concluded that teachers play a vital role in the language classroom, implementing instructional practices to prepare students for exams and other academic demands. In conclusion, improving English speaking skills is essential for success in today's competitive global world. Teachers should embrace pedagogical approaches, prioritizing learning and incorporating diverse activities to engage students and foster creativity.

Index Terms—EFL, ELLs, oral communication, speaking skill, instructors

I. INTRODUCTION

Greater global interconnectedness has resulted from the increasing use of English as a language of international communication. Due to its widespread use across diverse regions worldwide, English has been designated as a global language. Business, education, technology, tourism, science, and entertainment are just a few of the many fields that extensively use the English language. Wang (2019) asserts that English is utilized extensively across numerous fields, including politics, business, and education on a worldwide basis. According to Rost (2015), more than 85 percent of all research papers are published in English, making it the language of choice for scientific research publications. Furthermore, it should be noted that most scholarly works on universities are written in English (Rost, 2015).

Globalization has also increased the emphasis on acquiring English language proficiency among young learners (He & Chen, 2017; Wolf & Butler, 2017). Accordingly, many English language learning programs and institutions have been established worldwide. Furthermore, the global need for English language teachers has increased as the population of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners has grown (Tsang, 2017). These programs have gone beyond simply providing English language instruction to learners (Wang, 2019). Thus, the domain of language instruction, language acquisition, and related evaluations has experienced notable growth, extending beyond European countries (He & Chen, 2017). Therefore, English language classes have become a fundamental component of the curriculum in middle and high schools in countries where English is not the first language. Additionally, certain academic institutions have even implemented English classes at elementary schools (Wolf & Butler, 2017).

The increasing attention to EFL instruction in Saudi Arabia (SA) may be attributed, in part, to the shifting dynamics within the broader global economy. In addition, the current situation has created a need for educational systems to enhance the quality of EFL programs, which in turn facilitate the learners' acquisition and proficiency, enabling them to communicate effectively within a condensed timeframe (Wang, 2019). Therefore, educators specializing in foreign language instruction and researchers in applied linguistics endeavor to identify the most optimal and efficacious methodologies for imparting foreign language skills. Specifically, the primary objective of foreign language instruction is to facilitate the learners' acquisition of the chosen language and enable them effective communication within a condensed timeframe (Wang, 2019).

Research Objective

The existing body of literature has provided limited coverage on the subject of EFL teachers and the instructional strategies employed to enhance oral English language acquisition (Ming & Wang, 2017). The research problem pertains to previous studies that suggest a limited understanding of effective instructional practices and barriers to their implementation in real-world EFL contexts. These factors may contribute to the inadequate development of oral proficiency among Saudi EFL students. The investigation of how EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia employ instructional strategies via lesson plans, classroom management, and addressing external pressures stemming from tests and assessments could yield significant insights into effective teaching methods and the resolution of challenges associated

with fostering oral proficiency in EFL learners. Examining these domains through the lens of educators may yield valuable insights into the various interpretations of these issues.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the contemporary era of the global economy, the ability to effectively engage in cross-cultural communication holds paramount significance. Language is essential for facilitating communication among individuals from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds. Ineffective communication has been identified as a major hindrance to achieving objectives and aspirations in this developing era (Richards & Richards, 1990). English is widely acknowledged as a global language, enabling effective communication among individuals from diverse geographical locations, encompassing countries, states, nations, and continents.

A. *The Art of Oral Communication*

One of the most notable competencies that can be acquired through participation in language training is the aptitude to engage in communication within a foreign linguistic context effectively. Oral proficiency in a foreign language is commonly considered to be the most crucial skill among the four fundamental language skills. According to Brown and Yule (1983), effectively speaking is the primary skill students are assessed in real-world situations. However, oral communication poses significant challenges for individuals learning a new language. It seems to present the greatest difficulty among the four essential skills in the English language (Robert & Meenakshi, 2022). Despite its significance, EFL students' instruction of speaking skills continues to rely heavily on methods such as dialogue memorization and drill repetition.

According to Khamkhien (2010), in order to ensure the success of students in the modern world, English teachers must instruct English Language Learners (ELLs) in the essential skills required for enhancing their oral communication abilities and effectively navigating real-life situations (Khamkhien, 2010). Moreover, Chaney and Burk (1998) emphasize that to facilitate students in completing their education and achieving success in their respective fields, there should be a growing emphasis on enhancing their oral communication skills (Chaney & Burk, 1998).

The study conducted by Robert and Meenakshi (2022) revealed that, despite undergoing extensive periods of instruction, students encounter persistent difficulties in effectively expressing themselves in English within ordinary situations. Hence, it is imperative for ELLs to realize the importance of their oral communication skills and strive to improve them as an initial step. Incorporating conversational skills in EFL classes can help students acquire these skills, leading to enhanced performance and success in extracurricular pursuits. The importance of incorporating oral communication abilities within English language instruction cannot be overstated (Robert & Meenakshi, 2022).

B. *Significance of English-Speaking Skill*

In order to actualize the aspirations and behaviors within the context of a globalized society, language instructors must engage in the exchange of ideas and perspectives with people from diverse geographical locations. In today's highly competitive global world, EFL/ESL learners aspire to enhance their oral communication abilities to succeed. Furthermore, it has been asserted that a significant proportion of employment decisions rely on persons' communication abilities, specifically their proficiency in oral expression (Beltrán, 2000). Moreover, acquiring these speaking skills can significantly contribute to professional advancement. Moreover, the acquisition of effective speaking skills confers greater benefits to business professionals seeking to promote their organizations (Robert & Meenakshi, 2022).

According to Robert and Meenakshi (2022), speakers with exceptional motivation and inspiration skills are frequently celebrated for their remarkable aptitude for enhancing and stimulating their listeners. It is essential for students studying EFL to prioritize the development of their speaking abilities, given the significant role these skills play across various professional domains. Furthermore, educators are strongly encouraged to implement a variety of effective methodologies within the educational setting to foster student engagement and enhance their proficiency in oral communication in English classes (Nunan, 1989).

Robert and Meenakshi (2022) stated that there is minimal uncertainty regarding the potential for ELLs to significantly improve their oral communication abilities through regular and persistent practice. Subsequently, individuals can effectively participate in academic discourse and deliberations within the classroom setting, thereby perpetually refining their oratory aptitude. According to Robert and Meenakshi (2022), ELLs can deliver presentations without the anxiety they might have previously encountered if they meticulously practice these skills. Furthermore, ELLs develop self-confidence and improve their skills in decision-making and problem-solving. In addition, ELLs exhibit enhanced performance during job interviews, ensuring their access to optimal prospects for professional establishment. Individuals can foster positive relationships with their colleagues and actively pursue opportunities for professional growth. Hence, the development of speaking abilities plays a pivotal role in fostering the overall academic progress of ELLs (Robert & Meenakshi, 2022).

C. *Teacher's Role in Teaching Oral Skills*

Proficiency in oral communication is a must in various contexts, as it plays a crucial role in captivating and inspiring students. Hence, EFL/ESL instructors must understand the prevailing social atmosphere and actively incorporate these

oral communication abilities in their ELLs by employing the latest pedagogical approaches for teaching speaking skills (Jackson, 2018). This highlights educators' need to relinquish antiquated methodologies in favor of innovative approaches that hold students' attention and inspire their active engagement in the various activities conducted within conventional English classrooms.

According to Rao (2019), English teachers must utilize various strategies to facilitate the development of speaking skills among EFL/ESL learners. There is a high likelihood that students' speaking skills will experience significant growth when they engage in tasks within an enjoyable setting. In addition, to ensure that ELLs have sufficient opportunities to engage in the instructional activities that occur in English classrooms, teachers need to adopt a learner-centered approach, moving away from a traditional teacher-centered approach (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). Providing tasks to students facilitates their achievement and fosters the development of critical thinking skills and the ability to work autonomously.

In the context of EFL instruction, educators often utilize brainstorming techniques as a means to inspire ELLs to generate a greater number of sentences and engage in self-reflection, thereby fostering the development of original ideas. By employing this approach, students are afforded unrestricted autonomy to present arguments about any topic of relevance. According to McLaren et al. (2005), learners are intrinsically motivated to generate many ideas due to the absence of rigid guidelines dictating how their ideas should be expressed. In order to improve the involvement of ELLs in different activities and strengthen their oral communication skills, ESL/EFL instructors should integrate the brainstorming technique into their instructional sessions (Robert & Meenakshi, 2022).

English teachers should consider the needs and preferences of students when choosing themes for these activities. It is noteworthy to acknowledge the statement made by Rao (2018) regarding the significance of considering learners' needs and interests in the selection of themes. This approach fosters a higher level of engagement and enthusiasm among students, leading them to invest greater effort and dedication toward the assigned subjects (Rao, 2018). Consequently, educators must embrace pedagogical approaches that prioritize learner-centered methodologies, with greater emphasis on fostering speaking skills and employing diverse activities to involve students actively.

Storytelling is another technique where listening to expressions and ideas helps develop speaking skills. According to Brown (2004), it is argued that due to these stories' fictional and fabricated nature, no established criterion exists for penalizing children by deducting points. To effectively complete the narrative, this approach promotes the active participation of all ELLs by encouraging them to contribute one minimum sentence. Consequently, educators should actively promote using a wide range of phrases among students, aiming to significantly enhance their proficiency in oral communication and foster their creativity within a stimulating and pleasurable environment. It is essential to facilitate the development of speaking skills among EFL learners, so it is recommended that teachers incorporate the utilization of stories, songs, and movies in their instructional approach. This is supported by research conducted by Wallace et al. (2010), which suggests that integrating songs and movies in language learning can effectively enhance learners' communication abilities.

III. METHODS

This study aimed to investigate the perspectives of language educators in Saudi Arabia regarding their utilization of pedagogical approaches to facilitate the acquisition of oral English language skills among Saudi students. The present study encompassed three dimensions of second language acquisition as perceived by a group of ten educators, specifically examining (a) pedagogical strategies on lesson planning, (b) pedagogical strategies about classroom management, and (c) pedagogical strategies of external pressures stemming from tests and assessments.

A. Research Questions

The research questions that will be addressed in this study are as follows:

- What are the perceptions of English language teachers in Saudi Arabia regarding their instructional strategies in their daily English as a Foreign Language classroom instruction?
 1. What are the perspectives of English language educators regarding how to incorporate instructional strategies in response to external pressures stemming from tests and assessments?
 2. What are English language teachers' perceptions regarding implementing instructional practices for classroom management?
 3. What are English language teachers' perceptions regarding implementing instructional practices of lesson plans to support students' acquisition of oral English skills?

B. Participants

A total of ten EFL teachers were randomly chosen for the research. In order to qualify for inclusion in the study, instructors had to meet specific criteria, including having at least three years of teaching experience, holding a Master's degree or higher in language teaching, having no prior knowledge of the research, and currently being fully committed to teaching EFL to Saudi students on a full-time basis.

C. Instrument

The present study employed semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) as a methodological approach to investigate the perspectives of language teachers in Saudi Arabia regarding the instructional strategies they employ in their daily EFL instruction.

D. Data Collection

A total of ten semi-structured interviews were carried out. Each interview had a duration of approximately 55 minutes. The author employed three principal methodologies for data collection, following the recommendations of Cheung and Hennebry-Leung (2020). Initially, the researchers employed a journal as a means to document their observations and analyses on the progression of the study. This enabled the researchers to take into account cultural variables and the specific circumstances present within educational settings.

Additionally, the researcher was engaged in note-taking during the interview sessions, intending to utilize these notes to construct themes for data analysis subsequently. Furthermore, the interviews were audio-recorded after obtaining consent from every participant. Subsequently, the data was transcribed into a unified Microsoft Word document, encompassing participants' responses, field notes, and identified themes derived from the data. The present document was accessed and employed while conducting data analysis. The author employed manual transcription strategies throughout the entirety of the process.

E. Data Analysis

The data analysis process consisted of three distinct stages: firstly, the aggregate information was deconstructed into segmented components; secondly, the data was coded to establish descriptive and accessible categories; and finally, discrepant cases were incorporated into the larger dataset. The utilization of this approach ensured the integrity of the study's results. It upheld the ethical tenet of documenting all participant responses, irrespective of their conformity with overarching patterns observed in the interview data.

The data underwent a systematic deconstruction process consisting of nine operational steps. These steps encompassed various procedures such as segregating responses based on individual questions, categorizing the findings into thematic groups aligned with Sato and McNamara's (2019) theoretical framework, and cross-validating the emerging themes through triangulation of the collected data. The initial steps facilitated categorizing primary and secondary themes of the individual responses.

During the interview, the identified themes were organized into distinct categories as reported by participants and subsequently prepared for processing and classification using NVivo software. The sixth step entailed the presentation of sophisticated themes that arose from data analysis, both through manual examination and with the aid of NVivo software. The seventh step entailed examining and comparing emerging themes from the participants' responses with the predefined theme impressions documented. The eighth step involved excluding any primary or secondary findings that correlate with personal viewpoints.

The resulting themes obtained from these procedures encompassed data that were categorized into four main groups, each participant's answer being assigned a corresponding label based on their classification. The themes that emerged from this methodology were indicative of the participant's individual responses to the interview questions and the inconsistent data associated with each question.

The themes identified in this study encompassed the participants' overall observations, which revolved around various aspects such as class size, testing materials, classroom management, and the demanding nature of testing pressures. The aforementioned themes encapsulated the majority of respondents' viewpoints, with a small number of participants expressing contrasting opinions. The discrepant themes observed in the study were indicative of minority perspectives that deviated from the prevailing opinions held by the majority within the respective groups. It is important to note that these themes only represented the articulated beliefs of a limited number of participants.

IV. RESULTS

The research centered on the participants' viewpoints regarding the caliber of pedagogical training methods, the instructional strategies utilized in the classroom, and the effectiveness of these approaches in adequately equipping students for end-of-year assessments and other rigorous academic reasons. Acquiring a more thorough understanding of this subject is vital for the progress of Saudi educational institutions. The participants identified the benefits, drawbacks, and limitations associated with the current approaches.

The study's conceptual framework and research techniques closely emulated Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second language oral competence theory. The 12 interview questions were formulated to evaluate the following domains: (a) the pedagogical approaches employed by ESL instructors for classroom preparation, (b) the techniques utilized for classroom management to deliver information to students and enhance their linguistic abilities, and (c) the strategies employed to equip students for examinations and other academic demands. The main research question in this study was: "What are the perceptions of English language teachers in Saudi Arabia regarding their instructional strategies in their daily English as a Foreign Language classroom instruction?" Thus, the responses to the interview questions indicated a widespread belief that instructors' current instructional preparation methods were varied and very

effective. The participants noted that these tactics were likely to enhance the progress of EFL learners in several aspects of language acquisition abilities.

The participants' replies to the four questions 4-7 demonstrated a link with the themes addressed in the research question, "What are the perspectives held by English language educators regarding how to incorporate instructional strategies in response to external pressures stemming from tests and assessments?" Most participants indicated that they must utilize different strategies for prioritizing test preparation. One participant stated that teachers must "Understand the Source of Pressure, create a Supportive Classroom Environment, promote a Positive Mindset towards Assessments, and Incorporate Formative Assessment." Another participant suggested that teachers need to "focus on comprehensive grammar, vocabulary expansion, reading comprehension, and writing skills. Additionally, teachers need to offer tailored strategies specifically designed to address standardized test formats, question types, and time management, ensuring students are well-prepared for exams." The replies revealed that teachers recognize the need to implement focused interventions to support students in their preparation for demanding scenarios, such as formal tests. One of the participants insisted on the importance of motivating the students by saying, "The essential element here is the intrinsic motivation of the students themselves and the extent of practice they carry to familiarize themselves with these exams". The participants here acknowledged that EFL teachers are preparing their students for the standardized text by employing strategies that enhance their students' achievements. One participant stated, "My institution is aware of the factors of success in such tests and makes them available to the students by different means; that is why it is left to the student in this respect".

Analysis of the answers to the three questions 8-10 indicated that participants employed various methods to enhance the education and development of EFL students, both within and outside the classroom. The findings were consistent with the question, "What are the perceptions of English language teachers regarding implementing instructional practices for classroom management?". Responses revealed that teachers motivated students to improve their English outside the classroom by participating in activities such as watching movies, listening to music, and engaging in similar practices. Furthermore, the participants indicated that these strategies can enhance students' proficiency. For example, one participant stated, "Provide feedback that highlights what students are doing well while gently addressing errors. Encourage self-correction and offer guidance on improvement." In addition, participants demonstrated their utilization of many strategies to foster student motivation. One of the participants explained, "Ensure teachers are approachable and supportive, creating a safe space for students to seek guidance and clarification without hesitation. By fostering an environment that values effort, encourages participation, and supports learning from mistakes, EFL students can feel more confident and motivated to engage in English language practice".

The participants offered feedback on the two questions 11-12, designed to investigate the research question "What are the perceptions of English language teachers regarding implementing instructional practices of lesson plans to support students' acquisition of oral English skills?" One of the participants stated, "A teacher is a place where the two essential entities (the curriculum and students) get connected." Another participant explained, "Teachers play a vital role in curriculum development as they bring their expertise, experience, and knowledge of their students to shape the curriculum." The third participant illustrated, "The teacher's role is to understand and consider the immediate needs of the students during teaching, modify and adapt the material to suit the needs of the learners." The data showed that all participants agreed that the teacher plays a vital role in the language classroom.

The researcher noted that participants employed diverse ways to facilitate the advancement of EFL students, including direct instruction, demonstration, interactive teaching, cooperative Learning and peer teaching, and role-play. These activities were intended to motivate students to utilize their linguistic abilities outside the confines of the classroom. In the end, the participants firmly stated that the current EFL teaching techniques used to prepare students for their final exams and other requirements for achieving excellent performance. It was stated by one of the participants that "It is best advised to follow TTT (Test, Teach and test) and PPP (Present, Practice and produce) while presenting a lesson plan to the students. While using TTT, a teacher can be aware of the gaps in the knowledge and later teach and test again, which can be repeated. For lower levels, PPP is suggested where the teacher presents the material, allowing the opportunity for controlled practice. In the end, students can produce meaningful oral and written communication".

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The study emphasizes the prevailing patterns among EFL educators in enhancing students' proficiency in language learning. The researcher found that EFL educators are embracing more innovative approaches, such as communicative language teaching and using technology in the classroom. These educators understand the importance of creating an engaging and interactive learning environment to foster students' language acquisition. The study highlights the need for professional development opportunities and ongoing support for EFL educators to continuously improve their teaching practices and effectively enhance students' language proficiency. According to Sato and McNamara's (2019) theory, these schools positively affect on learner development in terms of classroom management. These topics could enhance other educational reform initiatives to resolve persistent issues in Saudi Arabia's university-level EFL education. The study's contribution is in line with the endeavors of other educators and has the potential to enhance EFL education in Saudi Arabia and beyond.

APPENDIX. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Kindly elaborate on the instructional strategies employed in EFL classrooms.
2. To what extent does your school's EFL model demonstrate efficacy in enhancing students' proficiency in English grammar and vocabulary in a formal context?
3. How do you perceive that these strengths contribute to enhancing the students' formal linguistic skills?
4. How do you utilize data to inform instructional decisions about extrinsic pressures arising from tests and assessments?
5. What strategies would you employ to effectively implement an instructional intervention in the classroom that addresses the impact of extrinsic pressures stemming from tests and assessments?
6. In what ways do you perceive the English language instruction program at your school to enhance students' preparation for standardized language exams?
7. What are the potential gaps, barriers, or limitations that hinder the progress of EFL students in acquiring the necessary skills to achieve passing scores in standardized language examinations successfully?
8. How do you foster a supportive environment for EFL students to engage in English language practice, even in the face of errors?
9. In what way do you anticipate that these methodologies will foster the cultivation of English-speaking skills among your students?
10. How do you actively facilitate the participation of EFL learners? Which strategies do you consider to be particularly advantageous?
11. How do you conceptualize the teacher's role in implementing curriculum, specifically in relation to the utilization of lesson plans designed to facilitate the development of oral English skills among EFL students?
12. Kindly elucidate the instructional methodologies employed in the presentation of lesson plans to students.

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