EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHER EXPERIENCE ON BELIEFS ABOUT READING INSTRUCTION IN SAUDI EFL CLASSROOMS

EXPLORANDO O IMPACTO DA EXPERIÊNCIA DO PROFESSOR NAS CRENÇAS SOBRE A INSTRUÇÃO DE LEITURA NAS SALAS DE AULA DE EFL DA SAUDITA

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Abstract. This study investigates how teaching experience influences Saudi EFL teachers' beliefs about reading instruction, focusing on skills-based, whole language, and metacognitive strategies. Using a quantitative survey design, 65 Saudi EFL teachers were categorized into novice, intermediate, and veteran groups based on their years of experience. The findings reveal significant differences in instructional preferences: novice teachers favored skills-based models, intermediate teachers exhibited balanced preferences for whole language and metacognitive approaches, and veteran teachers predominantly adopted metacognitive strategies emphasizing learner autonomy. Regression analysis identified professional development and higher qualifications as key factors shaping alignment with innovative teaching strategies. The study underscores the importance of tailored teacher training programs and institutional support in fostering effective instructional practices. Recommendations for future research include longitudinal studies and qualitative investigations to further explore the evolution of teacher beliefs and practices over time.

Keywords: College education; Reading instruction; EFL classroom

Resumo. Este estudo investiga como a experiência de ensino influencia as crenças dos professores sauditas de EFL sobre a instrução de leitura, com foco em estratégias baseadas em habilidades, linguagem integral e metacognitivas. Usando um modelo de pesquisa quantitativa, 65 professores sauditas de EFL foram categorizados em grupos novatos, intermediários e veteranos com base em seus anos de experiência. As descobertas revelam diferenças significativas nas preferências instrucionais: professores novatos favoreceram modelos baseados em habilidades, professores intermediários exibiram preferências equilibradas por abordagens de linguagem integral e metacognitivas, e professores veteranos adotaram predominantemente estratégias metacognitivas enfatizando a autonomia do aluno. A análise de regressão identificou o desenvolvimento profissional e as qualificações mais altas como fatores-chave que moldam o alinhamento com estratégias de ensino inovadoras. O estudo ressalta a importância de programas de treinamento de professores personalizados e suporte institucional para promover práticas instrucionais eficazes. As recomendações para pesquisas futuras incluem estudos longitudinais e investigações qualitativas para explorar mais a fundo a evolução das crenças e práticas dos professores ao longo do tempo.

Palavras-chave: Educação universitária; Instrução de leitura; Sala de aula de EFL

1.   INTRODUCTION

Reading instruction is fundamental to developing language proficiency among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in Saudi Arabia, where English serves as a key medium for academic and professional communication (Al-Seghayer, 2014). In Saudi EFL classrooms, traditional teacher-centered methods, often emphasizing rote memorization, remain prevalent despite the proven efficacy of innovative approaches such as metacognitive strategies (Al-Qahtani, 2020; Alsamadani, 2012). These strategies promote critical thinking, enhance reading comprehension, and foster learner autonomy.

Teacher beliefs about reading instruction significantly influence their instructional practices and classroom interactions. Borg (2003, 2006) emphasizes that these beliefs are shaped by various factors, including personal experiences, professional development, and years of teaching experience. Moreover, Khalifa et al. (2020) highlight that teaching experience is a

strong factor in shaping instructional preferences, with seasoned teachers often exhibiting a more nuanced understanding of pedagogical strategies.

1.1. Problem Statement

Despite extensive research on teacher beliefs and practices, limited attention has been paid to how teaching experience impacts these beliefs in Saudi EFL contexts. As noted by Bamanger and Gashan (2014), EFL teachers face challenges in integrating innovative reading instruction methods due to rigid curricula and a lack of professional development opportunities. Understanding whether experienced teachers are more inclined to adopt student-centered approaches, such as metacognitive strategies, or adhere to traditional skills-based models is crucial for bridging this research gap.

The absence of such insights hinders efforts to design effective teacher training programs tailored to the unique needs of Saudi EFL teachers. By exploring the relationship between teaching experience and instructional beliefs, this study aims to address this critical gap and contribute to the advancement of EFL pedagogy in Saudi Arabia.

1.2. Objectives

This study seeks to:

Examine the relationship between teaching experience and beliefs about reading instruction models in Saudi EFL classrooms.

Investigate differences in preferences for skills-based, whole language, and metacognitive strategies among teachers with varying levels of experience (Koda, 2005; Grabe, 2009).

Identify factors influencing the alignment (or lack thereof) between teaching experience and instructional practices (Ali & Razali, 2019; Kan et al., 2024).

1.3. Research Questions

The research is guided by the following questions:

How do teachers' years of experience influence their beliefs about reading instruction?

Do experienced teachers exhibit a preference for specific instructional models over others, such as skills-based, whole language, or metacognitive strategies?

What factors contribute to the alignment or misalignment between teaching experience and instructional practices in Saudi EFL classrooms?

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Teacher Beliefs and Reading Instruction

Teacher beliefs are integral to understanding instructional practices, as they influence how educators interpret curricula and interact with students. Borg (2003, 2006) provides a foundational framework for examining teacher cognition, emphasizing the interplay between beliefs, knowledge, and practices.

His work identifies teacher beliefs as deeply rooted constructs shaped by prior experiences as learners, professional development, and the sociocultural environment of teaching. Research by Bamanger and Gashan (2014) highlights the impact of teacher beliefs on the implementation of reading strategies in EFL contexts, noting a reliance on traditional methods despite awareness of innovative approaches.

This reliance is often linked to systemic factors such as rigid curricula and limited exposure to professional training on modern instructional strategies. Al-Seghayer (2014) further underscores that these beliefs are often constrained by institutional practices, such as standardized assessments and prescribed teaching materials, which may discourage experimentation with student-centered approaches.

Expanding on this, Kuzborska (2010) emphasizes the need for alignment between teacher beliefs and evidence-based practices, advocating for professional development initiatives that bridge this gap.

Additionally, Oraif (2024) highlights the transformative potential of metacognitive strategies in fostering both teacher confidence and student engagement, particularly in the Saudi context where traditional practices dominate.

Key models of reading instruction include:

Skills-Based Approach

Focuses on phonics, vocabulary, and decoding, promoting the foundational skills necessary for reading. Studies such as those by Grabe (2009) emphasize the role of this approach in early language acquisition.

Whole Language Approach

Encourages comprehension and meaning-making through exposure to authentic texts and holistic experiences. Koda (2005) underscores the value of this approach in fostering critical engagement with texts.

Metacognitive Strategies

Involve teaching learners to monitor, plan, and evaluate their reading processes. Research by Al-Qahtani (2020) demonstrates how these strategies enhance comprehension and foster autonomy, particularly in EFL contexts.

Comparative studies indicate that metacognitive strategies often outperform traditional methods in terms of student outcomes, especially for advanced learners. For example, a meta-analysis by Khalifa et al. (2020) suggests that teachers who integrate metacognitive techniques achieve greater student engagement and retention.

2.2. Influence of Experience on Pedagogical Beliefs

The relationship between teaching experience and pedagogical beliefs is well-documented, with studies showing that beliefs evolve over time. Ali and Razali (2019) found that experienced teachers are more likely to adopt student-centered approaches, incorporating strategies that promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and learner autonomy.

Similarly, Khalifa et al. (2020) observed that novice teachers often rely on prescribed curricula, potentially due to a lack of confidence and limited exposure to diverse instructional methods. Studies by Erkmen (2014) further highlight that novice teachers often focus on rule-based teaching and direct instruction, whereas experienced educators demonstrate greater adaptability, creativity, and an ability to integrate reflective practices.

These findings suggest that teaching experience plays a pivotal role in fostering pedagogical maturity, as teachers gradually align their instructional choices with the nuanced needs of their learners.

Kan et al. (2024) argue that professional development and exposure to diverse pedagogical strategies play a crucial role in shaping beliefs. Teachers with extensive experience are more likely to integrate metacognitive strategies, as these methods align with their deeper understanding of student needs and learning processes.

This alignment often results from reflective practices and participation in targeted training programs that emphasize learner autonomy and critical thinking. Longitudinal studies, such as those by Getaw et al. (2023), further highlight the gradual shift from rigid, curriculum-focused approaches to adaptive, student-centered methods among experienced teachers. These findings underscore the importance of sustained professional development and organizational encouragement in transforming teaching beliefs and practices over time.

2.3. The Saudi Context

Saudi EFL classrooms present unique challenges, including large class sizes, curriculum rigidity, and limited access to professional development opportunities (Al-Seghayer, 2014). These factors often hinder the adoption of innovative teaching methods, reinforcing traditional practices. Additionally, institutional reliance on standardized assessments and a lack of teacher autonomy further exacerbate these challenges, as highlighted by (Al-Khresheh & Al Basheer Ben Ali, 2023; Al-Seghayer, 2014).

However, metacognitive strategies have emerged as a promising solution to these systemic issues. Al-Qahtani (2020) underscores the potential of metacognitive strategies to address these challenges by fostering independent learning, improving reading comprehension, and encouraging students to take an active role in their learning process. Moreover, integrating professional development programs that emphasize these strategies can empower teachers to transition from rote learning to more student-centered approaches, as evidenced by recent findings in Saudi educational contexts (Al-Khresheh & Al Basheer Ben Ali, 2023).

Programs aimed at supporting teachers in adopting innovative strategies, such as professional learning communities and workshops, have shown promise. For instance, Al-Khresheh & Al Basheer Ben Ali (2023) and Ali & Razali (2019)stated that professional development initiatives significantly improved teachers' ability to implement metacognitive strategies effectively, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

These programs enable teachers to share best practices, collaboratively solve classroom challenges, and reflect on their teaching methods, which fosters a deeper commitment to innovative pedagogy. Furthermore, initiatives like the King Abdullah Project for Developing Education (Tatweer) aim to modernize teaching practices in Saudi Arabia by emphasizing skill-based and learner-centered approaches.

These initiatives provide comprehensive training in integrating technology, such as AI-based adaptive tools and virtual classrooms, and innovative strategies to overcome curriculum rigidity and improve classroom outcomes. Moreover, recent studies by Oraif (2024) indicate that such programs also play a critical role in addressing teacher resistance to change by equipping them with the confidence and skills to adopt modern instructional models, ultimately enhancing both teacher satisfaction and student achievement.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative survey design to explore the relationship between teaching experience and beliefs about reading instruction in Saudi EFL classrooms. The survey was adapted from Kuzborska (2010) to assess preferences for instructional models: skills-based, whole language, and metacognitive strategies. Items were refined to reflect the Saudi educational context.

3.2. Participants

The sample comprised 65 Saudi EFL teachers from universities across the Kingdom, stratified by years of teaching experience:

    Novice teachers: 0–5 years
    Intermediate teachers: 6–15 years
    Veteran teachers: 16+ years

Most participants held advanced degrees (75% master's, 20% bachelor's) and had attended professional development workshops, which influenced their pedagogical beliefs.

3.3. Data Collection

The survey included 25 Likert-scale items measuring agreement with statements about reading instruction. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Demographic data were also collected to contextualize responses.

3.4. Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using R software, including:

1. **Descriptive Statistics** to summarize agreement with each instructional model.
2. **Comparative Analysis** (ANOVA) to assess differences in beliefs across experience levels.
3. **Regression Analysis** to explore how professional development and experience predict alignment with metacognitive strategies.

4.   RESULTS

4.1. Research Question 1: Experience and Beliefs

Analysis revealed significant differences in beliefs across experience levels:

Novice teachers preferred skills-based models, emphasizing foundational skills.

Intermediate teachers showed a balanced preference for whole language and metacognitive approaches.

Veteran teachers strongly aligned with metacognitive strategies, emphasizing learner autonomy.

4.2. Research Question 2: Model Preferences

Experienced teachers preferred metacognitive strategies (77.7% agreement) over skills-based (63%) and whole language (70.6%) models. Statistical tests confirmed significant differences ($p < 0.05$).

4.3. Research Question 3: Factors Influencing Beliefs

Regression analysis indicated that:

Teachers who had attended at least three professional development workshops in the past three years were 62% more likely to align their beliefs with metacognitive strategies compared to those with fewer workshops ($p < 0.05$).

Higher academic qualifications also had a significant positive correlation with innovative instructional beliefs; teachers with master's degrees were 48% more likely to prefer metacognitive approaches than those with bachelor's degrees ($p < 0.01$).

Years of teaching experience had a moderate but meaningful influence, with veteran teachers (16+ years) showing a 35% higher preference for learner-centered models compared to novice teachers (0–5 years).

These numerical values reinforce the pivotal role of professional growth opportunities and academic qualifications in shaping instructional preferences, highlighting a clear trend toward metacognitive and student-centered approaches among more experienced educators.

Professional development was a strong predictor of alignment with innovative strategies.

Higher qualifications correlated with preference for metacognitive approaches.

These findings demonstrate how experience and professional growth shape instructional choices, highlighting the importance of targeted teacher training programs.

5.   DISCUSSION

5.1. Interpretation of Key Findings

The results of this study provide critical insights into the relationship between teaching experience and beliefs about reading instruction in Saudi EFL classrooms. Experienced teachers' preference for metacognitive strategies aligns with the broader literature, which emphasizes the role of experience in fostering learner autonomy, adaptive teaching methods, and reflective practices (Khalifa et al., 2020; Borg, 2006). This finding resonates with Erkmen (2014), who observed that seasoned educators are more likely to apply metacognitive techniques as they develop a deeper understanding of student needs. Novice teachers' reliance on skills-based models reflects their adherence to prescriptive methods and limited exposure to innovative strategies, which aligns with Thuy (2024) and her findings on the challenges faced by early-career educators in balancing theoretical and practical applications. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of structured mentorship programs and professional development workshops, such as those emphasized by Al-Qahtani (2020), to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and classroom practice. Enhanced opportunities for experiential learning, reflective exercises, and collaborative teaching could accelerate the adoption of effective, student-centered instructional models among less experienced teachers.

5.2. Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings align with previous studies that highlight the evolution of teacher beliefs over time. For instance, Borg (2003, 2006) and Getaw et al. (2023) emphasize that experienced teachers are more likely to adopt student-centered approaches. Similarly, Erkmen (2014) underscores that teaching experience fosters a deeper understanding of classroom dynamics, enabling educators to integrate reflective and adaptive strategies effectively. However, the study's identification of intermediate teachers' balanced preferences for whole language and metacognitive strategies adds nuance, suggesting a transitional phase where exposure to professional development programs and reflective practices plays a critical role (Thuy, 2024). This transitional phase reflects a shift from traditional, skills-based models towards methods that emphasize comprehension and learner autonomy, aligning with the findings of Khalifa et al. (2020) on the transformative impact of ongoing professional learning.

5.3. Implications for Practice

The study highlights the need for differentiated teacher training programs tailored to specific experience levels. Novice teachers should be introduced to innovative methods, such as metacognitive strategies, through immersive workshops, peer mentoring, and reflective teaching exercises, as these can build their confidence and practical skills in adopting student-centered approaches (Thuy, 2024). Intermediate teachers could benefit from targeted training that emphasizes the integration of whole language approaches and collaborative methods, which foster a balance between foundational and advanced reading instruction strategies. For veteran teachers, advanced programs focusing on cutting-edge technology, such as AI-driven adaptive learning tools, and cross-disciplinary teaching techniques could further enhance their practice, enabling them to lead as pedagogical innovators (Al-Qahtani, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2020). Policymakers should expand initiatives like the Tatweer program by incorporating feedback mechanisms and ongoing professional learning communities, ensuring sustained support and adaptability to emerging educational challenges.

5.4. Challenges and Limitations

The study's reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce bias, as teachers' responses might reflect socially desirable attitudes rather than actual practices. Additionally, the sample size, while representative, is limited to specific universities, which restricts the generalizability

of the findings to other contexts, including private institutions or regions with varying levels of resource availability. Incorporating classroom observations and interviews in future research could triangulate data and offer richer, context-specific insights into how teachers' beliefs translate into practices. Studies like Kuzborska (2010) and Al-Seghayer (2014) highlight the importance of mixed-method approaches in capturing the nuanced interplay between teacher cognition and instructional behavior. Furthermore, exploring the role of institutional support, such as the impact of Tatweer initiatives or targeted professional development programs, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing teaching practices. Adding longitudinal components to future studies could also help track changes in teacher beliefs over time, aligning with findings by Getaw et al. (2023) and Oraif (2024) on the evolving nature of pedagogical beliefs and their practical implications.

5.5. Future Research Directions

Longitudinal studies could explore how teachers' beliefs and practices evolve over their careers, as highlighted by Getaw et al. (2023), who documented the progressive shift from traditional to innovative instructional models with accumulated teaching experience.

Qualitative research focusing on the lived experiences of Saudi EFL teachers at different career stages could provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing their instructional choices, such as institutional support, access to resources, and cultural attitudes toward education (Al-Seghayer, 2014).

Further investigations into the impact of curriculum reforms and technological integration, such as AI-driven adaptive learning tools, on reading instruction beliefs would also be valuable (Al-Khresheh & Al Basheer Ben Ali, 2023).

Additionally, examining how national initiatives like the Tatweer program influence teacher beliefs and practices over time could provide actionable insights for policymakers and educational stakeholders aiming to foster innovation in Saudi classrooms (Oraif, 2024).

6.   CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the complex relationship between teaching experience and instructional beliefs in Saudi EFL classrooms, providing valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers. The findings demonstrate that:

Teaching Experience Shapes Instructional Preferences: Novice teachers rely on skills-based approaches, while experienced educators gravitate toward innovative methods, such as metacognitive strategies, which promote learner autonomy and critical thinking. These trends highlight the dynamic nature of teacher beliefs, shaped by accumulated experience and exposure to professional development opportunities.

Professional Development is Critical: Regression analysis revealed that professional development and advanced qualifications significantly influence teachers' adoption of innovative instructional models. Programs that focus on metacognitive strategies, collaborative learning, and technology integration are essential for enhancing teaching effectiveness at all experience levels.

Institutional and Policy Implications: The study emphasizes the need for differentiated training programs tailored to the specific needs of novice, intermediate, and veteran teachers. Expanding initiatives like the Tatweer program and fostering continuous learning communities can address challenges such as curriculum rigidity and limited access to resources. Addressing Limitations and Future Research: While the study provides a robust foundation, its reliance on self-reported survey data and a specific sample group limits generalizability. Future research should incorporate classroom observations, interviews, and longitudinal studies to capture a more comprehensive understanding of teacher beliefs and practices. Investigating the

impact of emerging technologies and curriculum reforms on reading instruction beliefs would also be valuable.

In conclusion, this research underscores the importance of experience, professional development, and institutional support in shaping effective reading instruction practices. By addressing these factors, Saudi EFL educators can better equip students with the skills needed for academic and professional success.

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