

Dr. Al-Mohanna, Ayedh Dhawi Mohammed
English Division
Department of Humanities
King Khalid Military Academy

The Reference to and Utilization of Research and Theory in English Language Teaching in Saudi Arabian Context

الرجوع إلى والانتفاع بالنظريات والأبحاث في مجال
تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في البيئة السعودية

Abstract

The main aim of the present study is to investigate the usage of research and theory in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Saudi boys secondary schools. The study follows the qualitative approach to the research, in which interview is employed as a technique for data collection. The focus of the study is on a group of teachers who teach English in Saudi boys secondary schools. The study reveals that EFL teachers rarely ever refer to language research and theory in their teaching. This is due to the unavailability of materials and resources, related to language learning and teaching, neither in the school libraries nor in the directorates of educational supervisory. The study also reveals that EFL teachers' teaching is essentially based on utilizing their teaching experience and creativity. In addition, it indicates that the resources that the EFL teachers rely on in their teaching are the prescribed textbooks and the teacher's guides as they are the only resources available for them.

ملخص البحث :

إن الهدف الرئيس من الدراسة الحالية هو البحث والتحقيق في مدى استخدام معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الثانوية السعودية: بنين و انتفاعهم بما هو مطروح من أبحاث ونظريات ذات علاقة بتعلم وتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في المصادر المختلفة، و ذلك أثناء تدريسهم للغة. تتبع هذه الدراسة المنهج النوعي الوصفي للبحث العلمي، حيث تم توظيف أسلوب المقابلة الشخصية كأداة لجمع البيانات و تركز هذه الدراسة على مجموعة من المعلمين الذين يقومون بتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الثانوية السعودية، بنين. و لقد أسفرت الدراسة عن أن معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية نادراً ما يرجعون إلى النظريات والأبحاث ذات العلاقة بتعلم وتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية والانتفاع بها في مجال تدريسهم للغة، و يعود السبب في ذلك إلى عدم توفر المصادر ذات العلاقة بتعلم وتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، سواء في مدارسهم أو في مراكز الأشراف التربوي. كما أظهرت الدراسة أن تدريس المعلمين للغة الإنجليزية في المدارس تحت الدراسة يعتمد بشكل أساسي على خبرات وإبداعات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك فإن معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية يعتمدون في تدريسهم للغة على الكتاب المدرسي و دليل المعلم بحكم أنهما المصدران الوحيدان المتوفران لهم في مدارسهم و أثناء تأديتهم للعملية التعليمية.

Introduction

In Saudi Arabia, the English language is considered the first foreign language after the mother tongue and official language 'Arabic'. It occupies a prominent position in Saudi Arabia in terms of its status as an expedient means of achieving academic, economic and social success. It is crucial to the continuous process of the country's progress. In the Saudi education system, it is considered a main and compulsory subject in state schools. In addition, at the academic level it is used as a medium of instruction for many subjects at the tertiary level, such as science, medicine, dentistry, engineering and computers and to a lesser extent in others. One of the conditions for acceptance into schools such as Medicine and Dentistry is English language proficiency. The need for the language is even greater at higher degree level; it is essential in most majors. In this respect, English language teaching is looked at as part of the development that took place in the educational system and policy in Saudi Arabia.

The majority of EFL teachers in Saudi state schools nowadays are Saudi. The rest are teachers who come from Arab countries; Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Palestine or Syria. The qualifications of those teachers range from Bachelor degree to Diploma, with only a small number of them having Master degree. The preparation of English language teachers in Saudi Arabia involves a four-year programme in either teaching English, English language and translation or English literature introduced in the departments of English in teachers colleges, in colleges of languages and translation, or in colleges of arts in the various universities in Saudi Arabia.

The government of Saudi Arabia appreciates the challenges of teaching and it is of the view that teaching is a dynamic field with new methods, techniques and curricula evolving all the time. Therefore, teachers need constant in-service training if they are to keep up with developments in education, in general, and language teaching, in particular. In Saudi Arabian educational system, in-service training is presently undertaken in two forms, one takes place at schools where EFL teachers often attend either model-teaching lessons or one-day workshops offered by more experienced members of staff or by educational supervisors. The

other form involves a full-time study at Centre of Educational Development which belongs to Department of Education in the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education.

Rationale behind the study

Teaching is a dynamic process requiring teachers to constantly review their practice. Specialized reading materials, such as language journals, periodicals and the like, and in-service training programmes have been suggested as some of the means through which teachers get the opportunity to examine their own classroom practices and enhance their professional growth ⁽¹⁾. Bell and Gilbert⁽²⁾ offer the following view that helps capture the professional life of teachers:

“Often on their own time, teachers seek new teaching ideas, new resources and equipment to improve the learning of their students. They seek to improve their teaching skills, their knowledge about the subjects they are teaching ... After completing the initial teacher education required in most societies, teachers continue to learn about teaching and learning throughout their professional lives.”

In this respect, Rivers⁽³⁾ also writes:

“There are many ... requirements for the language teacher in this modern age. Many need to improve their own skills in the language, others need opportunities to keep their communicative ability at a high level. As priorities or objectives change, so do techniques. New technological discoveries bring into the classroom new aids which the teacher must learn to use effectively. There may be new discoveries in linguistics or psychology which are relevant to language teaching. The teacher must keep abreast of developments and achievements in countries where the language is spoken. In some cases, important changes are taking place in the language itself ... The teacher should also be alert to re-evaluate techniques, even seemingly indispensable ones, and be ready to change and adapt them from year to year to increase their effectiveness.”

(1) Richards, J. (1998) *Beyond Training*, Cambridge: CUP.

(2) Bell, B. and Gilbert, J (1996) *Teacher Development*. London: Falmer Press. P 1.

(3) Rivers, W. (1981) *Teaching Foreign Language Skills*, 2nd edition. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press. P. 491.

Several researchers (e.g., Burns⁽¹⁾, Nunan⁽²⁾, Van Lier⁽³⁾) assert that research studies carried out in the second or foreign language classroom to answer questions about teaching and learning, play an increasingly important role in both initial preparation and ongoing teacher development. These research studies represent one means by which teachers can reconsider their assumptions and practices and enhance teacher professionalism. The publication of the results of such research in journals, periodicals and the like can provide opportunities for teachers to explore changes in their own practices⁽⁴⁾.

Every year, volumes of research studies are published on language learning and teaching issues. This information is disseminated through such media as journals, magazines, academic conferences and workshops and online databases. Such media have been suggested as some of the means that teachers use to keep up-to-date with developments in language learning and teaching and through which they obtain new ideas for language teaching. Furthermore, such media offer teachers the opportunity to find solutions to some of the classroom challenges that they encounter. It is also seen to involve attempts to change the way teachers undertake some tasks. Through such media teachers would increase their tolerance and understanding of diverse opinions and viewpoints. This, in turn, would help them to make the language classroom a more welcoming environment encompassing dignity and respect for both students and teachers alike⁽⁵⁾.

In-service training can also be seen as an important element in teachers' professional development and growth. New materials,

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- (1) Burns, A. (1995) **Collaborative Action Research for Language Teachers**. Cambridge: CUP.
 - (2) Nunan, D. (1989) **Understanding Language Classrooms: A guide for Teacher-Initiated Action**. London: Prentice Hall.
 - (3) Van Lier, S. (1988) **The Classroom and the Language Learner: Ethnography and Second Language Research**. London: Longman.
 - (4) Crandall, J. A. (2000) 'Language Teacher Education' **Annual Review of Applied Linguistics**, Vol. 20, pp. 34-55.
 - (5) Williams, M. and Burden, R. (1997) **Psychology for Language Teachers: A Social Constructivist Approach**. Cambridge: CUP.

curricula and techniques make an in-service training necessary⁽¹⁾. In-service training has a multitude of purposes that assist teachers in becoming aware of and gaining knowledge of different aspects of their professional environment. Britten⁽²⁾ advocates that the purposes of in-service teacher training are as follows: (1) to keep teachers up to date with subject knowledge; (2) to keep them abreast of changing teaching methods and techniques; (3) to keep them up-to-date with school organisation systems. Freeman⁽³⁾ and Widdowson⁽⁴⁾ also indicate that in-service training aims to helping teachers grow, develop and exploit new ideas.

Modern technology has also emerged as one of the possible tools that can be used to enhance language learning and teaching. One such tool is the Internet. The Internet has been described as "*dynamic, ever-changing source of ideas and materials for teachers and resources for use with pupils*"⁽⁵⁾. The Internet offers a new dimension in teaching that did not exist in preceding decades. Through the Internet, teachers are able to access ideas from fellow teachers from all over globe, as well as share ideas with them. This facility offers the teachers the opportunity to go beyond their local confines and interact with colleagues elsewhere. The Internet also offers them other resources such as online language courses, journals, dictionaries, thesauruses, discussion groups and many other resources which can help them in their profession. Lafford and Lafford⁽⁶⁾ point out that some of these online resources offer authentic materials which could be good for both communicative purposes and developing cultural awareness.

- (1) Allen, S. (1979) 'Guidelines for In-Service Programmes.' **Teacher Education**, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 86-90.
- (2) Britten, E. (1973) 'Teachers and In-Service Training' in Watkins, R. ed. **In-Service Training: Structure and Content**. London: Ward Lock Educational. P. 20.
- (3) Freeman, D. (1982) 'Observing Teachers: Three Approaches to In-Service Training and Development'. **TESOL Quarterly**, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 205-212.
- (4) Widdowson, H. (1990) **Aspects of Language Teaching**. Oxford: OUP.
- (5) Cajkler, W. and Addelman, R. (2000) **The Practice of Foreign Language Teaching**. London: David FuLton. P. 176.
- (6) Lafford, P. and Lafford, B. (1997) 'Learning and Culture with the Internet Technologies' in Bush, M. and Terry, R. ed. **Technology-Enhanced Language Learning**. Lincoln Wood, II., National Textbook Co.

How far do EFL teachers in Saudi boys secondary schools refer to such materials and utilize research and theory in their teaching? This is the concern of the present study.

The study questions

In order to achieve the aim mentioned above, the following questions are formulated:

1. To what extent do EFL teachers in Saudi Arabian boys secondary schools refer to and utilize research and theory related to language learning and teaching in their teaching?
2. Does EFL teachers' in-service training provide them with research and theories on language learning and teaching?
3. What kind of sources do EFL teachers rely on in their profession?

Methodology

The present study follows the qualitative approach to the research in which I employed interview as a technique for data collection in order to gain a deep understand of the situation through dense descriptive data. What follow is a description of the design and the methodology of the present study.

Site for conducting the study

The present study was conducted in nine secondary schools for boys in Riyadh city- the capital of Saudi Arabia. For the purpose of this study and to ensure that these schools were appropriate representatives of other boys secondary schools in Riyadh city, I randomly chose one school from each of the nine Directorates of Educational Supervisory that belong to the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education in Riyadh city.

This study is focused on Riyadh city because it is believed that educational conditions there are similar to those in other cities of the country. The practices in all Saudi schools are controlled by the Ministry of Education, which specifies one EFL programme for all state schools. It can be assumed that TEFL in the Riyadh area is highly

likely to be representative of TEFL in the other parts of the country. This assumption goes in line with Zaid's comments that "*Ministry of Education officials claimed that a single educational district would be representative of the rest of the educational districts in Saudi Arabia*"⁽¹⁾.

The study participants

The data for the present study derive mainly from three sources; EFL teachers, school head teachers and EFL educational supervisors. This is to ensure triangulation and validity⁽²⁾. It is assumed that the participants are capable of making reasonable, valid judgments concerning the issue we tackle in this study. This is justified because EFL teachers and educational supervisors are the people involved in teaching and learning English and they are in a better position than anyone else to diagnose the issue tackled by the present study.

The EFL teachers, participated in this study, varied in their country of origin; Saudi, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Their ages ranged between 25-48 years, and their experiences in teaching the language varied between 3-26 years. For the school head teachers and the EFL educational supervisors, they were all Saudi. Their ages ranged between 30-50 years. All the participants were Bachelor Degree holders. Table 1 shows the distribution of the study participants:

Table 1

	EFL Teachers	Head Teachers	EFL Edu. Supervisors	Total
NO. of Participants	36	9	9	54

(1) Zaid, M. (1993) *Comprehensive Analysis of the Current System of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in the Saudi Arabian intermediate schools*, unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Colorado. P. 25.

(2) Creswell, J. W. (1998) **Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Instruments of data collection

This study is a naturalistic inquiry. Therefore, qualitative method such as interview was used for collecting data. Merriam⁽¹⁾ writes:

“Naturalistic inquiry, which focuses on meaning in context, requires a data collection instrument sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data. Humans are best-suited for this task- and best when using methods that make use of human sensibilities such as interviewing ... and analyzing.”

Interview

"The interview is the main road to multiple realities."⁽²⁾ It helps in discovering and portraying the different views of the participants. The present study has depended heavily on interviews and the data generated from the technique. The interviews that I used in this study took different styles as they varied between semi-structured and structured ones⁽³⁾. When interviewing EFL teachers I used semi-structured interviews. This was to leave always a room for other questions to be asked as they emerged out based on the flow of the interview. When interviewing school head teachers and EFL educational supervisors, I relied on structured interviews as I took some issues raised by EFL teachers to them, as a kind of triangulation, seeking their points of view about these issues. All the interviews were conducted in a conversational style. They took the form of open conversations in which I tried to involve and allow the interviewees, especially EFL teachers, to talk freely on the subject initiated by me. During interviews, I used probing where interviewees were asked to explain, comment, elaborate their views, and provide new information relating to the questions or issues being raised. Moreover, I tried not to allow my own biases or opinions to affect my behavior. I tried to listen carefully, to talk only when necessary and to encourage the participants to speak freely.

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- (1) Merriam, S. (1988) **Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach**. San Francisco; London: Jossey-Bass. P. 3.
 (2) Stake, R. (1995) **The Art of Case Study Research**. London: SAGE. P. 64.
 (3) Merriam, S. (1988) **Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach**. San Francisco; London: Jossey-Bass.

The medium of communication in the interviews was Arabic (the participants' native language). This is to encourage interviewees, particularly EFL teachers, to express themselves naturally and without constraints, which might have been difficult for them had they been asked to speak in English.

Data recording

For the purpose of this study and in order to capture the details of the interviews, I relied extensively on a conveniently sized tape recorder. All the tape recordings of interviews were named and dated to facilitate subsequent organization and analysis of the data. None of the participants expressed any objection being tape-recorded. At the beginning of each interview, I emphasized that no one other than me would listen to the tapes, and the information provided would be used only for the purposes of the research.

Data analysis

The data collected from the three sources (EFL teachers, school head teachers and EFL educational supervisors) were analyzed following the Grounded Theory procedures to identify recurring and salient themes⁽¹⁾. What follow is a description of how the analysis was done.

Step I: First of all, I reviewed and transcribed all the recorded tapes in full. Then, I organized the data where I put all the interview data in a number of separate folders; all the data gathered from EFL teachers in one folder with a separate file for each teacher; all the data gathered from EFL educational supervisors in one folder with a separate file for each supervisor and all data gathered from head teachers in one folder with a separate file for each head teacher.

Step II: Upon completion of transcribing and revising the interview data, I read the transcripts a number of times. This is to stay 'close to the data'⁽²⁾. In order to make overwhelming data manageable, I started

(1) Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998) **Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory**, 2nd edition. Thousands Oaks; London: SAGE.

(2) Radnor, H. (2002) **Research Your Professional Practice: Doing Interpretive Research**. Buckingham: Open University Press. P. 70.

to reduce data as I reviewed data gathered from multiple sources. During this process, I discovered common themes and patterns. I listed the main issues that appeared on reading the whole text. I reread the transcripts carefully to make sure I drew out all the common issues (the main issues that were revisited several times by the participants) that emerged from the text. Once happy with the issues listed, I used a clean A4 sheet for each main issue. I wrote the issue name and an abbreviation (identifiable code) at the top of the page, e.g.:

Main issue: EFL teachers' reference to language learning and teaching resources; e.g. Language Journals and Periodicals.

Code: EFL Ts. Ref.

The main issue areas were 'holding forms'⁽¹⁾ that helped me to access the data in a manageable way. This process is at the heart of grounded theory⁽²⁾. Strauss⁽³⁾ expresses it saying "*The focus of analysis is not merely on collecting or ordering a mass of data, but on organising many ideas which have emerged from analysis of the data.*"

Step III: In this step, I started to code content to main issues. I went through the text and highlighted the main quotes that related to the main issues already listed in step II. I also wrote the issue code next to the quotes related to the issue. However, just in case there was another chunk of data that could go into that issue from the interview, the piece of text was also given a number (1, 2, 3, ...) to differentiate it from other pieces of text. This means it was possible to locate the quote in the original text easily and quickly. For example, if the text contained a statement about teachers' reference to language learning and teaching resources then that part of the text would be highlighted and in the margin **EFL Ts. Ref. 1** would be written. **EFL Ts. Ref.** is the code and 1 denotes that it is the first quotation under that issue.

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- (1) Radnor, H. (2002) **Research Your Professional Practice: Doing Interpretive Research**. Buckingham: Open University Press. P. 72.
 (2) Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967) **The Discovery of Grounded Theory**. Chicago: Aldine.
 (3) Strauss, A. (1987) **Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists**. Cambridge: CUP. P. 22-23.

Step IV: In this step, I began to insert the data under issues. To do so, I had to decide what constituted chunks of meaningful texts. After that, I focused on coherent and thematically related chunks that hang together as a text. In doing so, I reproduced the data chunks of each main issue for one interview in a master file for that main issue. When I analyzed other interviews using the same issue, I added the other data chunks to this master file. This gave me access to all data in one issue in the same place. Having chunks of data is important. They must make sense out of context or I would have no way of going on to the next stage and interpreting them.

Upon completing the fourth step, each main issue had a file. Each file had the issue as its heading. Within each file, there were data and quotes relating to the main issue (the heading of the file). All were saved and kept for final analysis and presentation. Upon completion of the initial analysis of the fieldwork data, I came up with four main issues where I, in this study, devoted one whole and separate section to discuss each main issue. What follow is a discussion of these four issues.

Results and discussion

The interviews with EFL teachers provided crucial insight into their experiences as teachers. The EFL teachers in the nine secondary schools had many views and complaints in common concerning the utilization of language learning and teaching research and theory in their teaching. The following are the main common issues that were repeatedly raised by EFL teachers:

- **EFL Teachers' reference to language learning and teaching resources; e.g. Language Journals and Periodicals.**
- **Introducing EFL teachers to language learning and teaching theory during their in-service training courses.**
- **The availability of academic conferences and in-service workshops for EFL teachers.**
- **EFL teachers' resources to obtain ideas on language teaching.**

These highlighted issues will be discussed in sections below.

Section One: EFL Teachers' reference to language learning and teaching resources; e.g. Language Journals and Periodicals

During interviews, EFL teachers were asked to give names of language teaching methods and approaches they knew or had come across. Some teachers named only two or three methods of teaching the language, while others could not name any. The EFL teachers were further asked to indicate whether they refer to language learning and teaching resources (e.g. Language Journals and Periodicals) in their teaching. Results for this further inquiry revealed that most, if not all, of the EFL teachers rarely ever referred to language journals or any resources of language learning and teaching. A follow up question asked the interviewees about the reasons behind not referring to or reading this kind of materials. The consensus among EFL teachers was that the reason why they failed to refer to or read language learning and teaching resources was because such materials were not available in their school libraries. In this regard, some comments of EFL teachers are quoted below:

A Saudi EFL teacher highlighted this issue, saying:

“... specialized reading materials such as references related to English language teaching, articles and the like are important for us as English language teachers. Unfortunately, we in this school lack such materials. As there is a library in this school, then there should be some reference materials for English language to which teachers and students as well can refer any time. ... I think, the provision of such specialized reading materials for each school is the responsibility of the Department of Education and the Directorate of Educational Supervision.”

Another Saudi EFL teacher commented:

“Unfortunately, we English teachers are not supplied either by school, our educational supervisor nor the Ministry of Education with English specialized reading materials. They only supply us with the English textbooks and say ‘teach them’. In my opinion, the specialized reading material related to English and its teaching methodology would help in enriching our knowledge on how to teach language effectively to our students. They would also keep us up-to-date with the latest improvement

and developments in the field of education in general and the field of English language teaching in particular.”

In the above comments, EFL teachers expressed willingness and desire to have specialized reading materials available for them as these kinds of materials are useful and important to keep them abreast of issues in language learning and teaching. They also indicated that they had no access to such specialized reading materials, and that their provision is the responsibility of the school and the Directorate of Educational Supervision. A follow up question asked the interviewed EFL teachers to indicate the type of materials available for them in their schools. Most of the interviewees acknowledged the availability of teachers' guides besides the prescribed textbooks.

Having looked at the EFL teachers' points of view regarding the availability of language learning and teaching materials for them to refer to and read, the issue was taken to the school head teachers and then to the EFL educational supervisors who were asked about the availability of such materials in schools or Supervisory Directorates. The interviews with the head teachers and the EFL educational supervisors revealed that there was a non-availability of such materials and the only reading materials available for EFL teachers are textbooks and teacher's guides. The following are extracts taken from interviews with the school head teachers and the EFL educational supervisors:

One of the head teachers commented:

“Schools are usually supplied with textbooks and some teaching aids. Regarding specialized reading materials, such as articles, periodicals and books and the like, the Department of Education occasionally supplies us with some reading materials for the Arabic language and Islamic culture, but as far as I know we never receive from them any specialized reading materials for English language and its teaching methods and applications.”

One of the EFL educational supervisors confirmed this, saying:

“... in the supervisory directorate that I work at, we usually receive some periodicals in education from the Department of Education, for instance, Al-maarifaa magazine and some magazines related to computer programmes and their applications. Other than these magazines we do not receive any from them.”

From the comments made by EFL teachers, school head teachers and EFL educational supervisors, it seems that journals and publications related to the teaching of English as a foreign language are not available in the Saudi Arabian context. The EFL teachers, the school head teachers and the EFL educational supervisors indicated that such materials were not available in the schools or in the Directorates of Educational Supervisory.

The above comments by the EFL teachers, the school head teachers and the EFL educational supervisors suggest that such resources are still not part of the resources that secondary school EFL teachers in Saudi Arabian context draw on in their teaching. Facing such a situation, there is an important question to be raised. Whose responsibility is it to supply EFL teachers with specialized reading materials or make it easy for them to access such materials? In the world of TEFL there are many new titles coming into the market every day, containing fresh ideas, techniques and research findings related to teaching English as a foreign language. The EFL teachers should be given access to these resources in order to develop their career. I believe that teachers as individuals cannot do a great deal in looking for resources. It is the Ministry of Education, which should have a role to play in providing the EFL teachers with the necessary resources connected with language teaching profession. This could be done through a central library with a good loan system, or even an up-to-date library in every directorate of educational supervisory and schools, provided these libraries are supplied regularly with materials related to the EFL teachers' profession.

Section Two: Introducing EFL teachers to language learning and teaching research and theory during their in-service training courses

The Saudi Center of Educational Development offers in-service training courses, most of which are in education. It offers specialized courses for educational supervisors, school head teachers, school

deputy heads, student advisors and teachers of most school subjects. Among these are courses specially designed for EFL teachers.

During interviews, EFL teachers were asked to indicate whether they were introduced to research and theoretical issues related to language learning and teaching during their in-service training courses. The question posed to EFL teachers was:

- Q. During your in-service training were you introduced to theoretical issues on the teaching of English as a foreign language at secondary school level? (For example, issues related to the stages and process by which a foreign language is acquired; the debate for and against teaching grammar; the theory and practice of the Grammar-Translation method, of the Direct Method, of the Audio-Lingual method, and of the Natural method; the argument for Communicative approach to English language teaching, etc).

The interview data, in this respect, showed that some EFL teachers had no opportunity to attend any in-service training course, some EFL teachers had attended either model-teaching lessons or workshops, some EFL teachers had attended general in-service training courses such as courses related to classroom management and the like, and other EFL teachers had the opportunity to attend only one or two specialized in-service training courses during their teaching career in Saudi Arabia.

The EFL teachers, who had the opportunities to attend specialized in-service training courses, all agreed that, there was a shortage of specialized in-service training courses for EFL teachers. They also indicated that, they were not introduced to the already-mentioned theoretical issues during their in-service training courses. This result suggests that components dealing with theoretical issues on language learning and teaching are not among those of the in-service training courses provided for EFL teachers. Below is an extract taken from an interview with a non-Saudi EFL teacher who stated:

"I attended only one in-service training course. It was titled "listening and speaking teaching skills". It lasted for three days. We were presented with some basics. It was good and I wish, as teachers we could be provided every now and then with advanced specialized training courses in our field, English teaching....there must be frequent in-service training specialized for English teachers. We teachers need to be updated with

what is now regarding teaching methods and even dealing with teaching aids and their appropriate use."

When I asked the school head teachers about in-service training courses for EFL teachers they all confirmed the EFL teachers' points view above, as one of them commented saying:

"... as a matter of fact, the Ministry of Education through the Centre of Educational Development offers a number of in-service training courses for all education staff; teachers, head teachers and even educational supervisors. Personally, I attended some courses in school management which were useful and helpful for me. As far as I know, this centre offers some training courses for EFL teachers but, if we compare them with other courses offered for teachers of other subjects, they are infrequent, a few in number and short in length "

When I took the issue to the EFL educational supervisors as a kind of triangulation, they made similar points of view regarding this issue. Bellow is a comment stated by one of the interviewed supervisors.

"The Ministry of Education has a Centre for Educational Development which offers in-service training courses for almost all educational fields of specialization. For English language and its teaching, the centre holds, from now and then, in-service training courses specialized for EFL teachers. These courses are of 3-day courses ... unfortunately, there are no follow up courses for EFL teachers to keep them up to date with the constant developments in the field of language and its teaching"

A follow up question asked the EFL teachers to indicate whether they had found the information acquired during their in-service training useful or not for teaching purposes. The results for this question showed that there was a feeling that such information continues to be useful for teaching purposes for new comers to the professional but they were basics as a Saudi EFL teacher expressed: "*... what was offered was the basics. I wish the centre was able to give more advanced and specialized training courses to help teachers handle more advanced topics and issues*". Another EFL teacher commented:

"... the course was more like a work shop or a seminar than a training course. It was like taking us back to university days. I think, it reminded us with what we studied and confirmed what we still remembered. I think that was all".

A non-Saudi EFL teacher talked about the content of the in-service training he attended. He said:

"I think that the content of the course was more beneficial to a teacher with a BA in English language and literature. But for a teacher who obtains a BA degree in English language and education the content was a repetition for undergraduate courses".

In general, the message is that the in-service training courses do not fulfill the EFL teachers' expectations and feed their curiosity to know more information. They felt that the courses were merely an opportunity to brush their memories with information most of which they have experienced as part of the methodology courses they had as student teachers, or from the pre-service practice they performed.

The interviewed EFL teachers added that these in-service training courses are poorly handled. They criticized the training methods used, particularly, the reliance on the lecture method and lack of opportunity for teacher participation. In this respect, a non-Saudi EFL teacher pictured his experience with the in-service training course that he attended:

"... the in-service training course, that I joined five years after commencing my teaching career, did not add much to my experience. I say so because the course trainers were themselves in need of a course on how to train. They, during the course, followed the lecturing style where each trainer came with certain information on a topic, which he wanted to pass on to us and that was all. Each one of those trainers lectured his topic on us without giving any opportunity for discussion or exchanging ideas and experiences."

A Saudi EFL teacher elaborated:

"The course trainers are language educational supervisors and some of them do not really differentiate between teaching and training. Actually as teachers we attend the course to become more skilled in how to do thing in the classroom. This is what some trainers can not differentiate between teaching/knowledge and training/skill. Thus there is a need to train those trainers to be able to handle the training process."

The point that the EFL teachers make clear is that trainers are lecturing and passing information theoretically to the course's participants. This raises the question, would it have been more effective if an opportunity for discussion and sharing ideas and experiences among teachers was

given? Cullingford⁽¹⁾ suggests us that *“one of the most creative uses of in-service training courses is to enable teachers to work alongside others, to share their experiences and to define what they observe.”*

Reading our participants' reflections on the in-service training courses offered by the Centre of Educational Development for EFL teachers, it appears that although those courses are offered for EFL teachers, they still need some improvements in different aspects to be at the teachers' expectations. First, advanced specialized courses for EFL teachers need to be included. EFL teachers need to be introduced to language learning and teaching research and theory. They also need to acquire practical skills and be given new ideas that they can apply in the delivery of their lessons. Second, the trainers need to have training skills to help teachers' benefit the most from the in-service training course. EFL teachers need to pick some teaching skills to apply when performing their lessons and not merely a theoretical framework of what teaching is. The important thing to remember is that if EFL teacher-trainers are to be effective, they must emphasize the practical aspect of teacher training. This means that training of EFL teachers should always be centered on classroom practice, on the tasks that the classroom teacher needs to perform⁽²⁾. Third, there should be follow-up in-service training courses to keep teachers abreast of recent developments in the field of education in general and of English language teaching in particular. Smith et al⁽³⁾ argue that *“As long as knowledge about education continues to increase and new techniques and devices are contrived, there will be something new for the teacher to learn, regardless of his degree or years of experience. The continuum of preparation can, therefore, cover the teacher's entire career.”*

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- (1) Cullingford, C. (1989) 'The Teacher and the Purpose of Primary Education' in Cullingford, C. ed. **The Primary Teacher: The Role of the Educator and The Purpose of Primary Education**. London: Cassell. P.12.
- (2) Lee, W. (1974) 'On Getting Down to Grass Roots in EFL Teacher Training.' **English Language Teaching**, Vol. 29, pp. 35-42.
- (3) Smith, B., Saul, B. and Arthur, P. (1969) **Teacher for the Real World**. Washington: The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Educators. P.151.

Stevens,⁽¹⁾ on the other hand, suggests three components of a different sort that will lead to the creation of the ideal teacher. These are the skills component which *"embraces the teacher's command of the language he is teaching, teaching techniques and classroom activities, including the 'management of learning', through which the teacher assesses the progress of each individual and adjusts his teaching accordingly"*. The information component which *"includes information about education, about the syllabus he will be following, the materials he will be using, and about the nature language"*. The theory component within which there is *"an appropriate selection of the theoretical findings from educational philosophy, psychology, linguistics, applied linguistics, etc."* In-service training should be directed towards extending the knowledge of teachers in general, and the subject taught in particular and has the aim of helping teachers to acquire the latest teaching skills and techniques⁽²⁾. Effective in-service training should begin by providing teachers with basic information, including practical examples of appropriate materials and activities; followed by opportunities within the in-service programme for 'safe practice' of these new skills. This is because teachers in simulated conditions do not feel unduly at risk in trying out new techniques, and will not lose face and can feel less threatened than in a real-life teaching situation.⁽³⁾

Given that language journals and periodicals are very often used to communicate research findings, interviews with EFL teachers went further to establish whether they used these kinds of materials during their in-service training. The EFL teachers were asked if they had the opportunity to read such materials or if the in-service training course lecturers did refer them to language journals or periodicals. The interview data, in this respect, revealed that language learning and

(1) Stevens, P. (1977) **New Orientation in the Teaching of English**. Oxford: OUP. P. 22.

(2) Robin, L. (1978) 'Continuing Professional Education in Perspective' in Robin L. ed. **The In-service Education of Teachers, Trends, Processes, and Prescriptions**. Boston; London; Sydney: Allyan and Bacon Inc.

(3) Peacock, A. (1993) 'The In-service Training of Primary Teachers in Science in Namibia'. **British Journal of In-service Education**, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 21-25.

teaching journals and periodicals were not used or provided to in-service training courses' attendants to read. Furthermore, the attendants were never referred to such materials by the course lecturers.

Section Three: The availability of academic conferences and in-service workshops for EFL teachers

Academic conferences and in-service workshops are considered as other possible ways of exposing teachers to new ideas in language learning and teaching. Apart from the various academic conferences and symposiums organized by academic associations in Saudi Arabia, Al-Yamamah college hosted a symposium for educators titled "Teaching English in Saudi Arabia: Opportunities and Challenges". This symposium offered educators the opportunity to present papers and share their teaching and research experiences. The symposium was held in Riyadh city in 2005 and very few EFL teachers participated in it. In this study, the EFL teachers were specially asked, during interviews, to indicate how often they had attended academic conferences and in-service workshops. The interviewees' comments on this issue revealed that most of the EFL teachers had never attended any academic conference; some of them had attended in-service workshops.

A non-Saudi EFL teacher talked about the issue saying:

"... during my first year in Saudi Arabia, my supervisor offered me, among other newly arrived teachers to the profession, to attend a model-teaching lesson presented by an experienced teacher in one of the Saudi secondary school in Riyadh city. I still remember that lesson. It was useful for me, but unfortunately, other than that model-teaching lesson I was not offered any training course, workshop or whatsoever related to English language"

Another non-Saudi EFL teacher elaborated stating:

"As a matter of fact, I have not been offered any academic conference or workshop since I arrived and started my teaching profession in the Saudi secondary schools. I have a Bachelor Degree in English literature where my learning was concentrated on English language and its literature, which does not help in the process of teaching EFL. Therefore, I believe

attending in-service training courses, conferences and workshops would help in improving me in the education filed, in general, and English teaching methods and techniques, in particular.”

A Saudi EFL teacher pointed out that:

“I have been in the teaching profession in Saudi Arabia for about 16 years. During that period of time I attended some workshops and seminars where we discussed some language learning problems and difficulties and such issues, but I did not attend or offered to attend any academic conference.”

Interview data, in this area, gives us an idea of the issue of professional development of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabian context. EFL teachers are not kept up-to-date on developments in language learning and teaching. They need to keep abreast of issues in language learning and teaching. The EFL teachers believed that attendance at academic conferences and in-service workshops are useful for purposes of acquiring information on recent developments in language learning and teaching. They identified academic conferences and in-service workshops as sources where they can inform themselves on matters pertaining to the latest developments in language teaching. They also raised the issue that they need some refresher training courses to enable them to catch up with the latest developments in language teaching. The academic conferences and in-service workshops that were provided were said to be infrequent and inadequate.

The EFL teachers were further asked to indicate whether they were members of any research associations. All of them said that they do not belong to any research associations. The need for EFL teachers to participate in research was highlighted by one of the interviewed EFL teachers, who said that:

“A lot of research is needed to improve the quality of language teaching in the secondary schools. EFL Teachers should be fully involved in research and they need support from the Ministry of Education to achieve this – it is very essential.”

There were also other EFL teachers who recommended that in order to improve language teaching in Saudi Arabian context, EFL teachers need to be given training on action research and given the necessary support to undertake research activities such as classroom-based research.

Section Four: EFL teachers' resources to obtain ideas on language teaching

The present study went further to ask the EFL teachers to indicate the type of sources that they used to obtain ideas for teaching the language. The interviews with the EFL teachers revealed that, they relied heavily, in their teaching, on the prescribed textbooks and teacher's guides. The following comment from a non-Saudi EFL teacher is a typical view. It expresses other EFL teachers' point of views:

"School supplies us with textbooks and teacher's guide which we follow and rely on in our teaching. Specialized reading materials related to language learning and teaching are not available in our school for us to look at and get ideas from ..."

In my opinion, textbooks and teacher's guides will continue to constitute a crucial part of teachers' resources because, as discussed earlier, they had limited access to other materials that could be used in the classroom. EFL teachers seem to rely excessively on textbooks and teacher's guides when they lack sufficient training⁽¹⁾, and in a context, like the Saudi Arabian context, where EFL teachers have to cover a set syllabus, a textbook becomes not only the main resource but also the driving force. Williams⁽²⁾ points out that:

"The textbook can be a tyrant to the teacher who, in his or her preoccupation with covering the syllabus, feels constrained to teach every item in exactly the same sequence and context in which presented by the textbook writer."

The interviews with EFL teachers also revealed that they relied, in their teaching, on their learning and teaching experiences. In addition, they exploited their individual creativity as part of the teaching process.

Johnson⁽³⁾ reminds us about the influence of the early experience on how language teachers perceive their profession and their tasks. He points out:

- (1) Williams, D. (1983) 'Developing Criteria for Textbook Evaluation'. *ELT Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 251-255.
- (2) Williams, D. (1983) 'Developing Criteria for Textbook Evaluation'. *ELT Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 251-255. P. 251.
- (3) Johnson, K. (1995) *Understanding Communication in Second Language Classroom*. Cambridge: CUP. P.11.

“... teachers’ frames of reference encompass the range of their prior experiences as students and as second language learners, the nature of their professional knowledge and how that knowledge develops over time, the theoretical beliefs they hold about how second languages are learned and how they should be taught, and the ways in which they make sense of their own teaching experiences.”

This suggests that teachers bring with them to the profession their beliefs, and past experiences on how teaching should be and how they perceive their roles in the classroom. Interviewed EFL teachers made the same point.

A non-Saudi language teacher said:

“Looking back to my school days, I remember my English teachers ... I still remember the way they used to teach us the language. I still remember my classmates and the classroom atmosphere.”

A Saudi language teacher elaborated, stating:

“I started learning English when I was 13 years old. I still remember my secondary school language teacher. I still remember him well. He was an old man but a hard worker. He was always trying to make it easy for us to learn the English language. He occasionally used to use Arabic (students’ native language) in his teaching. He used to give us handouts for each unit of the syllabus, which we had to keep in files. These handouts included the unit’s new English words, general questions and grammar rules with some examples. I like the idea of the handouts and I am planning to apply it with my students as I am in the process of preparing some handouts for them.”

A non-Saudi language teacher reflected:

“... I like English. My intermediate and secondary English teachers made me love it. I still remember the way they used to teach us and the way they used to encourage us to learn. I liked their way of teaching the language. Our teacher, at that time, was always asking us questions related to our daily life. He was always trying to be closer to us. By the way and believe me, his way of teaching was positive and effective.”

Given the wide-ranging experiences and creativity of the EFL teachers interviewed, this study went further to explore whether EFL teachers exchanged and shared their experiences as part of the teaching process. The interview data indicated that this was one of the predominant modes employed by the EFL teachers included in this study.

Comments such as these indicate that the EFL teachers obtain most of their ideas for teaching from their learning experiences and from classroom practice, which encompasses their own way of doing things and how other teachers do it. They also rely on their individual talent and ability to react to different classroom challenges, and this translates into what they see as their creativity. Kumaravadivelu⁽¹⁾ argues that the effectiveness of teaching methods tends to vary with learning context, and this has compelled teachers to creatively devise pedagogical strategies that will suit their classroom conditions. Canagarajah⁽²⁾ also supports the issue of experience and creativity as he asserts that the unavailability of language teaching resources for teachers justifies the need for them to derive their teaching "... from their years of accumulated experience, wisdom, and intuitions about what works best for their students". He continues stating that:

"Though terms like experience, wisdom, and intuition are unscientific to base pedagogy upon, in the post-Enlightenment period ... [applied linguists] are comfortable with them. After all, empirical research hasn't produced ... the best method that answers with finality the challenges of learning another language."

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Summary of Findings:

This section presents summary of the findings of the present study in relation to the questions formulated to achieve the aim of the study and to the main common issues emerged from the interviews with the participants in the nine boys secondary schools. To that I shall now turn.

The results of the present study, discussed above, suggest that:

- (1) Kumaravadivelu, B. (1994) 'The Post Method Condition: (E) Merging Strategies for Second/ Foreign Language Teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 27-48.
- (2) Canagarajah, A. (2002) 'Globalization, Methods and Practice in Periphery Classrooms', in Block, D. and Cameron, D. ed. *Globalization and Language Teaching*. London: Routledge. P. 140.

- Research does not seem to be a major contributing factor in the teaching of English in the Saudi boys secondary schools.
- The key contributing factors, in the teaching of English in the Saudi boys secondary schools, appear to be the EFL teachers' experiences and creativity, the prescribed textbooks and teacher's guides.

This trend is in agreement with the arguments raised in literature which suggest that teachers tend to rely more on doing things the way that they are used to in the absence of language teaching resources to resort to.

The results of the study also indicate that:

- There is a gap between classroom practice and research as the EFL teachers in the present study are concerned.
- The EFL teachers in the present study value research but they do not have access to it. One of the factors that have been identified as militating against the use of research is the non-availability of specialized reading materials such as research journals and periodicals in school libraries in Saudi Arabian context. Furthermore, language learning and teaching journals, periodicals and the like are not provided to in-service training courses' attendants to read and they are not referred to such materials by the course lecturers.

For this, there is perhaps a need to develop a conducive environment that will enable teachers in secondary schools to undertake research activities that will enable them to critically review available research on language teaching, as well as reflect on their own teaching practice. There is also a need to avail modern technology to the schools in the form of personal computers, so that they could access the internet.

The discussion of the results, cited above, also points out that:

- No regular and adequate specialized in-service training courses are provided for EFL teachers.

- Academic conferences and in-service workshops that are provided for EFL teachers are said to be infrequent and inadequate.

EFL teachers in Saudi Arabian context, therefore, have little opportunity for contact with recent research and theory in language teaching.

Recommendations:

In the light of the above findings, several recommendation remarks can be made. It is hoped that these recommendations may contribute to improving English language teaching in Saudi secondary schools, in particular, and in Saudi state schools, in general. To these recommendations we shall now turn.

- The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education should establish language resource centres in the schools and in the Directorates of Educational Supervisory and equip them with resources that can be used to facilitate and improve language teaching.
- The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education needs to mount regular and adequate specialized in-service training courses which target EFL teachers.
- EFL teachers should be encouraged to attend academic conferences, in-service workshops and seminars related to English language teaching.
- EFL teachers should be encouraged to undertake research activities, such as classroom-based research, which will enable them to critically review their own teaching practice, as well as ideas presented in applied linguistics journals and periodicals.

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