# English Language Learning Challenges Faced by Secondary School Students in Saudi Arabia: A Case of Independent Schools in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

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**Abstract:** The present study aimed to identify the difficulties that ESL/EFL students at independent private schools in Jeddah City face in their journey to learn English. The study also intended to fill the gaps that exist in the difficulties that Saudi students experience in the classrooms of the English language. The study followed a qualitative approach and conducted a case study to examine the learning process at private independent schools in Jeddah, with a sample of (20) teachers. The researcher conducted In- depth interviews and followed classroom observations as a method for data collection. The findings showed that students' pedagogical issues and challenges were common in the study's context; as students faced reading, grammar, oral and comprehension challenges related the English language use. Other challenges were the inappropriate and inadequate language texts, inadequate application of the three main teaching approaches (structural, direct, and grammar- translation), and classroom congestion. It was also concluded that students faced immense challenges that were normalized on the basis that these challenges were among the standard curriculum structure and changing the approaches of learning and teaching might impair the education culture in Saudi Arabia. The researcher recommended schools to allocate more learning resources and employ more experienced language teachers. The schools must also engage their students in educational activities to improve their proficiency in language dialogue, acting, and oral presentation.

**Keywords:** ESL/EFL, Language Learning, English Language, Jeddah Independent Schools, Saudi Arabia.

# التحديات التي يواجهها طلاب المرحلة الثانوية في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية: دراسة حالة للمدارس المستقلة في مدينة جدة في المملكة العربية السعودية

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**المستخلص:** هدفت الدراسة إلى التعرف على التحديات التي يواجهها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية في مدارس جدة المستقلة الخاصة في سعيهم لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية وسد الفجوات المعرفية الموجودة في التحديات التي يواجهها متحدثو اللغة العربية من الطلاب في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية. تم استخدام المنهج النوعي في الدراسة مع اتباع منهج دراسة الحالة لمعاينة عملية تعلم اللغة في مدارس جدة المستقلة بعينة قوامها (20) معلماً. كانت المقابلات المتعمقة ومنهج الملاحظات هي تقنيات جمع البيانات النوعية الرئيسية المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة. أظهرت النتائج أن التحديات التعليمية التي تواجه الطلاب وقضايا تربوية كانت شائعة في سياق الدراسة؛ حيث واجه الطلاب صعوبات نحوية، صعوبات في القراءة، وصعوبات شفهية تتعلق باستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية. وشملت الصعوبات الأخرى وجود نصوصٍ لغوية غير ملائمة تربوياً، ازدحام الفصول الدراسية، والتطبيق غير المناسب لأساليب التدريس الرئيسية الثلاثة؛ الطريقة المباشرة، الهيكلية، والترجمة القواعدية. كما خلُص إلى أن الطلاب واجهوا صعوبات كبيرة؛ صعوبات تم تطبيعها بناءً على الحجة القائلة بأن ذلك كان جزءًا من المنهج وأن تغيير هذا المنهج قد يضعف ثقافة التدريس في المملكة العربية السعودية. أوصى الباحث المدارس بتخصيص

المزيد من مصادر التعلم وتوظيف مدرسي لغة أكثر خبرة. يجب على المدارس أيضاً إشراك طلابها في الأنشطة التي يمكن أن تعزز كفاءتهم مثل التمثيل والحوار والعرض التقديمي الشفوي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية أو أجنبية، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية أو أجنبية، تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، مدارس جدة المستقلة، المملكة العربية السعودية.

## Introduction

English is an international language used across the world in business, educational instruction, media, and others. This makes the English language learning the center of research because of the relevance of this particular language in international integration. Research has been conducted on the learning concepts of the English language, its benefits, challenges, and techniques implemented in English as a foreign/second language (EFL) classroom. It is always essential to determine whether learning another language is suitable for a certain occasion because different individuals have different needs regarding their reasons for second language acquisition. It should be stated that learning another language, irrespective of the individual's age, is quite important due to the numerous advantages associated with this learning process (Anamaria- Mirabela and Monica- Ariana, 2013).

It is suitable to postulate that learners learning a new language increase their capacities to interact with each other socially on several social platforms. Anamaria- Mirabela and Monica- Ariana (2013) stated that gaining the understanding and knowledge of a foreign language increases an individual's career opportunities, travel processes, and culture learning; as it is almost spontaneous that learning a new language will be accompanied by knowing the language's associated culture. As much as language learning is considered a positive trend in the current world, many issues must be regarded in learning settings. The most important issues entailing the learning of a new language include motivation, teaching strategies, students' academic achievement, and attitudes (Al- Qahtani, 2013). These issues are relevant in the argument on the significance of English as a universal language for communication. However, they are also the determining elements in the pitfalls establishment that face EFL/ESL learners.

For Al- Qahtani (2013), attitudes are the most dominant element deterring the process of language learning. However, other various challenges that learners face in language classrooms are both systematic and personal such as the availability of learning materials and the pedagogy. The physical environment must always be taken into consideration when determining the difficulties that learners. It is also essential to analyze the context of language classrooms related to ESL learners in Saudi secondary schools where English is taught. Other challenges characterize English classrooms such as; requiring suitable analysis to improve a culture of forwardness regarding the systemic and physical impediments in the accomplishment of set goals. The research on these challenges is present concerning Saudi learners' experience in ESL classrooms; yet, there is still room for improving the existing literature to develop new approaches, identify new issues, and determine the best solutions.

This background sets the precedence for researching this essential topic of English language learning; discussing the difficulties that ESL learners face in English classrooms. This shows that the available literature must be constantly advanced to ensure that the key issues related to the teaching and learning settings in ESL classrooms are addressed effectively. This also intends to develop the teaching and learning methods used in language classrooms to improve students' experiences and improve the learners' competence in acquiring and improving English proficiency.

## Statement of Problem

Studies have been conducted already on the challenges facing ESL/EFL learners in various non-native countries; as these studies identify the knowledge problems and gaps. Numerous challenges exist that ESL students face in their English language learning. These have been around for long and minimal efforts were conducted to implement strategies that could counter the difficulties experienced by the students.

Having a persistent problem of language learning in the ESL classrooms in Saudi Arabia might imply that the educational establishment and the concerned agencies are not being keen to diminish those challenges, which are experienced by the Saudi ESL learners and still affecting their learning experience even in the future interactions. Therefore, those students cannot favorably compete with their native counterparts on global platforms. This shows that the problems must be eliminated through the application of effective measures to improve the competitiveness of ESL students in Saudi Arabia. It is essential to conduct studies on a sample of ESL learners in Saudi Arabia in order to identify the classroom difficulties faced by them, assess the situation, and determine possible solutions to use to counter the difficulties and make suggestions for sustainable improvement.

## Research Questions

The current study asks: What are the challenges Saudi students from the private independent secondary schools of Jeddah City face related to listening, reading, writing, and speaking in the English language? From this, other sub- questions emerge:

1- What are the challenges independent secondary school learners face in learning English from the point of view of their teachers?

2- What are the pedagogical problems English teachers and students face in ESL classrooms?

3- Which teaching techniques of English language are currently used at secondary independent schools in the City of Jeddah?

4- What are the recommended approaches and solutions to the challenges experienced by students in ESL classrooms at the independent secondary schools in the City of Jeddah?

**Research Objectives:**

The current study mainly aims to identify the challenges faced by the students of the private independent secondary schools regarding the skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking in the English language in Jeddah City. The main objective is supported by the following sub- objectives:

1. Identify the challenges independent secondary school learners face in learning English from the point of view of their teachers.

2. Identify the pedagogical problems English teachers and students face in ESL classrooms.

3. Identify the teaching techniques of the English language that are presently used at the secondary independent schools in the City of Jeddah.

4. Recommend possible approaches and solutions to the challenges experienced by students in ESL classrooms at the independent secondary schools in the City of Jeddah.

**Research Rationale:**

Different aspects compel scholars to conduct research on several topics that principally entail the achievement of the research objectives. The current paper was conducted due to the knowledge gap present in this field of research. Although many studies address the issue of difficulties that ESL students face in learning the English language, not many studies have investigated the issue of Arabic students in general and the Arabic students in Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, even though the challenges that students of secondary schools' experience could be different from the difficulties that other students around the world experience, this topic remains of substantial importance; as the field of language learning and language acquisition is important for the students of Saudi Arabia in schools or universities.

Furthermore, the challenges may vary from one place to another relying on resource availability and the curriculum implemented to guide the learning and teaching of the English language. Understanding the actual issues that exist in the reality of learning English and being comprehended by language teachers is also of substantial importance in Saudi Arabia encounter. The findings of the current paper will be important in calling for changes to the curriculum required in the learning and teaching methods used in ESL settings. This paper will also fill the current gap of literature and knowledge and be the reference for future research on this field. This paper is among the various factors that guide the application of changes needed in the teaching techniques used in the schools of Saudi Arabia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Extensive literature exists in language acquisition and learning that is generally revisited when identifying the gap of research and knowledge. Language acquisition is often identified as the input of

language skills that results in proficiency and construction of linguistic rules. The literature is used as the background for addressing the paper's results.

**Second Language Acquisition (SLA)**

SLA of English includes a series of activities that the teachers present to their students. Andrade (2016) believes that language acquisition is set by the presence of three elements. The first element is the intelligible input and the competency in reading and listening. Secondly, writing and speaking skills showing proficiency and students' ability to follow the linguistic rules. Thirdly, using the learned language; as it is easy to present feedback on the comprehensibility and linguistic output (Andrade, 2016).

"It has been decided that if they [non- native English speakers] meet our admissions criteria, they have demonstrated adequate English understanding and as such no further monitoring is performed" (Andrade, Evans, and Hartshorn, 2014). The previous statement means that students passing the tests of proficiency must not be supervised further; as they have attained language proficiency. However, many believe that screening on these grounds is problematic; as most establishments that apply the tests of proficiency on Non- Native English Speakers (NNESs) have recognized the fact, that screening is not a suitable method of evaluation (Andrade, et al., 2014).

The problem with this method is that standardized exams are suitable in measuring the individual's passive knowledge instead of the individual's ability to use such language effectively (Andrade, 2016). Therefore, other suitable methods of proficiency testing in SLA must be developed to ensure that the outcomes and measures are considered realistic that do not revolve around the skills only but also using those skills effectively.

## Theories of Language Learning:

**Theory of Behaviorism:**

Behaviorism was introduced by Skinner to show the relationship between language acquisition and behavior. Skinner (1957) stated that the environmental effects on SLA are evident. In Skinner's theory, he believed that SLA is promoted by the reinforcement behavioral principles; where words are connected to their meaning. Ambridge and Lieven (2011) believed that rewarding a child would improve his/her use of language. The same methods must be applied in ESL classrooms to reinforce the acquisition of English and improve the learning experience to increase proficiency.

1- Universal Grammar Theory

For Chomsky (1965), the theory of Universal Grammar ensures an accurate integration of the grammatical data suitable for combining the categories of the verbs and nouns to create meaningful phrases and sentences. This shows that a structured process needs to be followed to improve the

communicative linguistic and competence of language students; meaning that students' linguistic competence is important for determining the reality of their achievements in the SLA.

This theory is related to the subject of the current paper because it advances the comprehension of the paper's questions relating to the integration of nouns and verbs to create sensible and complete statements. This theory is a communicative method that students can use to communicate with other individuals effectively in social contexts. The theory's use is comprehended through evaluating the approach Arabic learners can easily acquire language skills and grammatical tools that aid them in language competency's skills of communication. Furthermore, the theory also analyzes the connection between First Language Acquisition (FLA) and SLA, which provides significant points regarding the challenges that both groups face in SLA.

2- Innatism Theory:

This theory argues that the language acquisition process is not consistent with the previous theorists; as the theory states that language development is not affected by environmental or behavioral stimuli as stated in behaviorism (Conteh- Morgan, 2002). But the theory is consistent with Chomsky's (1965) belief that all individuals are born with what Chomsky called "Language Acquisition Device (LAD)". This device enables individuals to innately understand the linguistic rules.

The statement implies that SLA is not completely affected by environmental factors because of a device that improves the applications of the language rules specific to a certain language. Children, for instance, do not only mimic the words they hear from the surrounding environment; yet, they combine all the important instructions on other languages during their process of development (Conteh- Morgan, 2002).

3- Interactionist Theory

The theory analyzes language use in communicative activities and its use in various situations. Language communicative skills are a two- way factor that involves both the receiver and the speaker. For example, native speakers often adjust their speech to accommodate the level of proficiency and understanding. In these cases, students also change to develop their proficiency and improve their skills in SLA while communicating with other individuals (Conteh- Morgan, 2002). The interaction between individuals allows language students to seek understanding and clarification from the language's native speakers who can use a simple illustration for this purpose. Such interactions improve the competency of these students.

**General English Learning Challenges**

1- Students' Challenges:

There are many challenges that students experience concerning SLA. For Akbari (2015), the known difficulties in SLA is the lack of a suitable environment that familiarizes the students with the

Target Language (TL). The ideal explanation for this aspect is that English requires an active use outside the educational setting. Yet, students do not have the tools that can motivate this purpose; as the only tools to motivate the English language used to exist only in the educational system.

Another difficulty is that students do not understand the essentiality of ESL, particularly, when they are not planning to travel to English- speaking countries. For example, Akbari believes that few teachers coming from English- speaking countries teach in Iran and the citizens there are not permitted to have satellite TV, which undermines their ability to improve their language competence. However, Mirzaie Rizi, et al. (2014) reported that other many countries allow access to visual- audio aids; where citizens can listen and watch language instructions or English- speaking shows. Citizens can also read magazines and newspapers written in English.

2-  Teachers' Challenges:

The key challenge here resides in the educational system because such a system directs instructors to prepare learners for tests that only seeks grades; yet do not improve their linguistic proficiency in the TL (Akbari, 2015). Teachers in certain countries are pressured to align to set criteria in teaching methods that fulfill the standards of the country's language exams (Jahangard, 2007; Hosseini, 2007). This means that language teachers are bound to function within a set framework that has been created by the criteria of ESL classrooms; thus, teachers cannot change any teaching method needed to fulfill an academic objective. In the current paper, another perspective on the challenges that teachers experience will be regarded to determine the similarities of those challenges with the context of this paper.

**English Learning Challenges Facing Arabic Speakers:**

As teachers, ESL students also face several challenges. Specifically, ESL Arabic students are a quite interesting field of study; where Rass (2015), Akasha (2013), and Fareh (2010) illustrate some challenges facing ESL students:

-  Writing Problems:

Studies have been debating this issue to define the connection between SLA and writing. Rass (2015) believes that the propensity of writing skills being a challenge exists among ESL Arabic students since they need to balance multiple elements of this language such as audience, content, organization, vocabulary, and purpose. Rass also believes that ESL Arabic students face various challenges writing in the TL due to the significant differences between English and Arabic. Moreover, the other challenge facing ESL students is that they retain their thinking pattern in the Arabic language and transfer it to the context of English; therefore, creating grammatical problems of development and constructions. Al- Khresheh (2010) calls this first language interferences; when the researcher analyzed the answers of (120) Jordanian students and found (426) grammar mistakes. This creates an ideal background for the arguments on the

way writing challenges are common in Saudi Arabian language classrooms and the reasons behind those challenges facing ESL students.

- Content and Culture:

The issue of culture and content is inevitable in any argument on the challenge's ESL students face in SLA. Akasha (2013) states that learning culture and curricular content were the key challenges ESL students faced in the US because of their limited access to language resources. Rass (2011) also believed that the transfer of culture is looming during ESL learning because learners' first language influences their behavior. L1 culture affects L2 skills of writing to a certain extent; yet, few studies have analyzed this connection. Rass found that ESL Arabic learners, in writing, fail to consider the audience's interests; as they were translating their presentation of thoughts from the Arabic language into English.

Furthermore, Elachachi (2015) determined the challenges that culture creates to NNESs. According to the study, students' Arabic culture affects linguistic elements such as letters, alphabets, word patterns, grammar, rhetorical and syntactic styles, and writing methods. This shows that culture affects the methods students communicate in both languages; therefore, causing these challenges. Abdelwahab (2015) also questioned the fact that it is suitable to teach language and culture. Nevertheless, this is not the paper's scope.

- Negative Transfers:

Palmer, et al. (2007) analyzed the effects of L1 transfers; showing that inadequate reading abilities lead to L2's negative transfer; meaning that students facing trouble reading or writing in the Arabic language might also face the same trouble in writing or reading in the English language. Breen and Abdo (2010) also reported negative transfers as a key aspect in learning English by ESL Arabic speakers mainly due to Arabic being oppositely written and for the irregular English graphophonemic rules. Therefore, the current paper gives room to analyze the way negative transfers affect the competence of ESL Arabic speakers.

- Inadequate Texts:

Lack of authentic texts for ESL learners has been considered a significant challenge; as Al-Seghayer (2014) confirms that learning resources are limited in the SLA; resources that are needed to improve language acquisition in Saudi Arabia. Besides, Palmer, et al. (2007) believes that ESL Arabic students must read culturally and linguistically rich materials that demonstrate a positive connection with the students' culture. Mollaee, Maleki, and Khosravi (2014) also state that English textbooks' inadequacy has been taken as a factor that creates boredom, includes inappropriate texts and pictures, non- standard questions, lack of transparency, etc.

**Evaluation and Teaching Techniques**

1- Evaluation Techniques:

Evaluating students is a major step towards realizing the success of the teaching methods used in a certain educational context. Various techniques of evaluation and teaching are implemented in many environments. Evaluation in Saudi Arabia is conducting through exams and the teachers are the evaluators. Therefore, the evaluation and teaching methods are substandard because of the methods' overreliance on role learning in Saudi Arabia. The use of summative evaluative methods in the Kingdom focuses only on memorization instead of improving the understanding of the language curriculum (AlSeghayer, 2014). According to Alsadaawi (2010), language exams in Saudi Arabia mainly evaluate students' performance; however, not many believe that this approach is as effective as it is believed. To solve this challenge, applying formative evaluation is advised instead of summative evaluation methods on ESL students due to the latter's potential to facilitate the process of learning and teaching. Al Alhareth and Al Dighrir (2014) believe that formative evaluation allows teachers to determine the difficulties that some students experience and propose suitable solutions to overcome those challenges.

2- Teaching Techniques:

- Direct Style. Here, SL teachers use only the TL and refrain from using students' First Language (FL). This includes using an inductive approach for grammar, visual teaching materials, and concentrating on the question- answer technique that encourages oral communication. This approach enhances the alertness of the students, facilitates language understanding, improves speech fluency, and develops listening (Muthuja, 2009).

- Grammar- translation. This method enhances the participation of students in learning new languages, focuses on teaching TL grammar, and allows a deep analysis of TL grammar rules (Larsen- Freeman, 2000). It does not focus on grammar memorization to understand TL syntax and morphology; as the method focuses mainly on writing and reading (Richards and Rodgers, 2015).

- Structural Approach Language. This includes a varied application of words and clauses in a structured approach; where TL can be learned through structuring and selecting sentences and vocabulary. For the approach, understanding the structures of the TL is more important than acquiring the vocabulary of such a language (Mukalel, 2005).

**Technology in Language Teaching/Learning:**

Technology use in education aims to improve the teaching and learning processes, which is suitable for achieving students' learning needs (Stoddart, 2015). Fadzil (2018) believes that technology in education has shifted the standard teaching and learning process to student- centered instead of teacher- centered; meaning that the technological application of ESL teaching may have the power to improve competencies and skills. Moreover, Richards and Rodgers (2014) argue that Computer Assisted Language

Learning (CALL) is used in many schools for language improvement in terms of providing a task- based approach to teaching and learning a second language (SL).

## METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

### Research Paradigm:

The study followed the interpretive research paradigm with an interpretive case study for being effective methods in education research and seeking to identify the challenges through the participants' perceptions; meaning that the researchers subjectively use the sample to identify the phenomenon without referring to other sources of data; this, understanding the present phenomenon and its context (Thanh and Thanh, 2015).

### Methodology

The researcher followed a qualitative research design to identify the research problem; as the design was mainly motivated by the inductive aspect of the research topic and the use of the grounded theory to create a theory from the data (Faggiolani, 2011). Thus, since the researcher gathered enough data on the challenges facing ESL students, the phenomenon was to be examined through the grounded theory in order to create a theory that suits the paper's aims in Jeddah independent secondary schools.

### Research Method:

### Case Study

A case study was selected due to its contribution to the knowledge of elements related to the phenomenon; elements like individuals, groups, and organizations (schools) (Yin, 2014). The complex phenomena of this paper are the English learning processes at independent schools in Jeddah and the challenges faced by the students in their classrooms.

### Research Setting

The setting of this study was independent schools in Jeddah. These schools offer ESL lessons to the students to enhance their competitiveness on a global scale. Most ESL learners from these schools join universities, where English is the main communication tool and the language used in instructions. The schools were also chosen based on the availability of researchers and the significant number of Arabic students present there.

**Sampling**

The study's participants were students selected from secondary school and English teachers at independent schools in Jeddah City. Through purposive sampling, (20) teachers were selected. The study's participants were selected based on the following inclusion/exclusion criteria:

- (10) Males and (10) females over (25) years.

- At least (5) years of teaching ESL.

- Must be currently teaching at independent schools in Jeddah.

All participants were filled in on the study's purpose and given the information on the study's time and setting.

**Data Collection**

Several methods were used to enhance the data's trustworthiness; as the use of various sources of data improves the study's investigation process (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2009). Observation techniques and in- depth interviews were applied for the collection of data.

❖ Interview

The interview approach was selected; as a simple and cost- effective approach for one- on- one interaction with participants (Creswell, 2014). In- depth were used and supplemented by questions obtained from the literature. The interview sessions were held in teachers' offices at a convenient time.

The sessions started with formal greetings; followed by a short introduction of the researcher's name, the research question, course, and a short explanation of the conducted process. The researcher explained that this conducted process fully considers the confidentiality of collected data and participants' anonymity at their request. After obtaining consent, the researcher asked the teachers to respond to each of the (9) questions. The researcher took notes and recorded the audio of the sessions.

❖ Observation

The observation sessions were done during language lessons; as the teachers and students were briefed on the study's objectives to gain their trust and prepare them (Phillips, 2010). During such a process, the teachers' instructions were evaluated, students' reactions were observed, and the teachers' reactions towards certain behaviors in the classrooms were recorded as well.

**Data Analysis**

Data from the observation process and conducted interview were written and recorded; where the interviews were transcribed into text. The textual analysis was chosen as an appropriate approach, especially, in this process of data analysis according to Creswell (2014). This was accompanied by several activities of data organization including typing up the acquired notes, optically scanning the material, and sorting various sources of data relying on their origins. After that, the generic procedure included gaining a

general understanding of the material by examining it and its meaning. The researcher followed coding for (180) responses; each participant responded to (9) questions; meaning that there were (9) aspects (questions) and (180) groups (answers).

### Ethical Considerations:

The initial step of this study was to acquire permission from the university's ethics committee, which was acquired by completing the ethics forms and presenting the papers of the participants' consent and information to the committee. Moreover, the researcher obtained the schools' formal permission; as the selected teachers gave consent after offering the sheets of data and explaining the purpose of this paper for all participants. The participants' identities and information were used only for this paper's purposes.

### Reliability and Validity:

Assistant researchers participated in counter- checking and checking the data to form the themes and create the categories related to the paper's purposes. The researchers had suitable experience in the thematic analysis of data. However, the data analysis process faced certain issues; as the first issue required the coding scheme's discriminant capability regarding the coders' ability to unambiguously and readily categorize the acquired text. The second issue involved unitization caused by certain parts of the text that were not presented; thus, requiring the subjective interpretation of the coder. Nevertheless, great efforts were invested by creating unitization to limit potential errors.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS:

### Interview Results:

Participants were interviewed and all questions were answered effectively. Since there were (9) questions for each respondent, (180) responses (categories) were provided. The following describes the data gained from the (20) participants answering (9) questions.

Q1: How many years have you teaching foreign language in this school?

The results show that all teachers have at least (5) years in teaching English; however, a variation is found in the timeframe of their teaching period at the independent secondary schools of Jeddah City. The most experienced teacher, according to the answers, was Participant No. #06 who has (15) years of experience followed by Participant No. #07 who was a teacher for (12) years with Participant No. #02who teaches for (10) years now. The findings showed that the experienced instructors showed concise, detailed, and precise responses as opposed to other instructors who did not have the same experienced. For example, Participant No. #18with (1) year of experience provided substandard details, avoided some questions, and responded in brief sentences that were not properly illustrated or justified.

Question 2: Do you believe that the current curriculum is satisfactory for improving the methods of language learning?

Most responses thought that the curriculum is good because it is suited to the culture of teaching in the Kingdom. For example, Participant No. #02 stated: Yes, because many teachers have accomplished great achievements in the field of teaching and learning English. Similar to Participant No. #02, No. #03 answered: Of course, this curriculum defines and dictates the way it must be applied. As we observe, the learners are pleased.

However, others, who were concerned over the curriculum's state in achieving students' needs, believed that adjusting the curriculum is required to fulfill those needs completely. Furthermore, others believed that the current curriculum is unsuited for the learning process of a second language; as Participant No. #05 stated: I do not think that the curriculum is suitable for the needs of the students. Where No. #10 stated: The learners still find it challenging to communicate in English whenever they are outside the Kingdom.

The responses varied from yes and no; as No. #15 stated: I can say that the answer is both yes and no. On the one hand, the learning process has been normalized and on the other hand, the majority of the learner's face challenges in communicating even after finishing their secondary level of education.

Question 6: What are the challenges? And how are they address?

Participants stated that the interactions with the learners improve their capabilities to identify the challenges and discuss them using the available and appropriate methods. The solutions differ; as the commonest ones were learners' reassessment in order to confirm the difficulties, offering extra lessons, presenting student- centered methods based on students' weaknesses, and informing learners of the most suitable resources to develop their skills. Therefore, it is clear that the teachers choose remedial lessons and coaching to improve students' proficiency; yet, other methods such as proposing constant evaluation were chosen by others.

Question 7: Do the challenges affect your students' performance in school's assessments? And Why?

Most answers agreed that the challenges of language learning affect students' performance greatly in schools' assessments. For example:

Yes, the challenges do affect the students' performance; as students often achieve low grades; while students with previous exposure to English and non- Arabic students show different results."

Others said: I do not know the reason, but yes, I do believe that this affects their performance significantly

Some respondents disagreed on such an effect; saying:

I do not believe that because ESL students have different capabilities; therefore, you see some students pass, other show average performance, and others fail.

Question 9: Can these solutions be an effective approach to diminishing the mentioned challenges? And why?

Some responses presented ample information on this subject; while others presented brief responses. For example:

Those solutions are effective because they include all methods needed to improve students' skills in acquiring a second language.

Others stated: Many conducted confirmed that the methods are actually effective in most learning environments.

Others believed "I do not know if they are effective; however, I believe that they would be in the learning environment of Saudi Arabia.

Question (9) showed responses that were suggestive of a diverse state among the respondents. This question was unique due to the amount of contradictions. Some of the responses above were relevant in fulfilling the research aims; yet, they do not tackle the main aims. Therefore, it was essential to focus on (4) questions as they were found to be consistent with the paper's questions (Qn.3, Qn.4, Qn.5, and Qn.8). Coding these questions retrieved (80) responses from (20) participants. Each respondent provided a unique answer. During the process, the researcher's focus was on the commonest answers with the goal being to categorize them under particular themes. The following presents the (4) categories with their analysis.

**Theme 1: Teaching techniques and students' reactions:**

Which teaching methods do you use as a teacher and how do you think students respond to such methods?

This question presented responses to the five teaching approaches teachers use in the ESL classroom. The main responses were:

- Grammar- translation.
- Direct method.
- Audio- lingual.
- Immersion.
- Structural approaches.

**Theme 2: Challenges faced by students:**

What are the challenges that the students you interacted with face in English language learning?

This question covers the paper's problem and questions; where data analysis assigns (12) challenges. The main responses were:

- Inadequate reading skills in the FL.

- L2's negative transfer.

- Difficulties in grammatical construction.

- Lack of verbal communication.

- Reading difficulties.

- Comprehension difficulties.

- Speech difficulties.

- Lack of self- confidence.

- Poor performance in language skills.

- Inadequate resources and suitable textbooks.

- Cultural differences between the two languages.

- Classroom congestion.

### Theme 3: Pedagogical issues:

Demonstrate some pedagogical challenges that you think are causing the difficulties experienced by the ESL students.

This question supplements Qn.2; as an extension of the ESL classroom challenges. Twelve pedagogical issues were identified and responses were:

- Learning the content of the set curriculum.

- Lack of suitable, authentic language resources.

- Language teachers' incompetence.

- Congestion.

- The doubtful effectiveness of teaching and learning methods.

- Content- based method followed by schools; limiting students' potentials.

- Shortage in English teachers.

- Informal evaluation.

- Inadequate oral evaluation.

- Curriculum's detachment from FL's pedagogy.

### Theme 4: Proposed Solutions:

Which solutions do you propose as a result of your personal experience as an English teacher at this school? Illustrate briefly.

Respondents presented solutions that must be implemented to diminish the challenges faced by the students. These solutions were:

- Providing culturally suitable and sensitive textbooks.

- Relying on both formative and summative evaluation methods. Formative evaluation has been an effective method in FL classrooms.

- Speech sessions.

- Engaging in competitions in English drama classes.

- Using educational technologies for teaching and learning.

- Conducting constant informal evaluations during ESL classes.

- Using formative evaluation more as cited in many English- speaking countries.

- Reviewing the curriculum used for English learning.

- Incorporating efficient teaching/learning methods in the curriculum.

- Filling the gap created by absent English teachers.

- Encouraging students to engage in the decision- making process.

- Aligning language textbooks with ESL students' cultures.

- Working on improving reading skills in the FL first.

- Encouraging creative writing.

- Using the latest technologies in the educational field.

- Constant evaluation of the competency and content of language skills.

- Applying modern methods to language teaching in ESL classrooms.

- Encouraging children to speak the TL at home.

- Allocating time for weaker students to improve their SLA.

- Encouraging practice to improve comprehension and reading skills.

**Observation Results**

ESL classrooms were monitored; actions, reactions, and behaviors were observed. The following shows the results of the conducted process.

**Students' actions.** The observations showed that:

- Whenever a transition occurs from a subject to English, some students were happy; while some were anxious. One student stated: *English!! I do not like this subject*. This showed a subjective dislike of the language by this student and many others. Yet, other students were happy with this transition and were prepared to attend.

- Most students did not finish their assignments when the time ended. Some students reported having trouble in completing the assignments due to instructions' complexity.

- Nearly 25% of the students were actively engaged by responding to the teacher's questions and asking for clarifications from the teacher.

- Most students showed low performances in reading/comprehension tests.
- Some often used the Arabic language during English language lessons.

  **Learning Resources.** The observations showed that:

- Four students shared only one language textbook.
- Classroom congestion limited teacher- student interactions.
- Textbooks did not include attractive and colorful content.
- Some lacked needed translations.
- No use of any form of technological applications.

  **Teachers Approaches.** The observations showed that:

- Teachers relied on the content of the language curriculum.
- Teachers primarily used curriculum books.
- The grammar- translation, direct technique, and structural teaching technique were frequently used.
- Formal assessments were mostly applied; while informal ones were applied occasionally.
- Summative assessments were a constantly used assessment technique.
- Some teachers coach students after school lessons; calling this intervention 'remedial'.
- Some teachers allocated specific instructions to the slow students; while others were not concerned with the challenge's students were facing.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

**English Language Teaching Techniques:**

Language teachers listed various methods when asked about methods used in the ESL classrooms at the school. The paper found that the commonest used methods of teaching were the grammar-translation, direct method, audio- lingual, structural approaches, silent way, immersion, and communicative teaching of TL. However, most teachers often choose a teaching method based on the method's advantages in improving language skills and acquisition. Some noted that comprehension enhancement is a key factor in their choice of teaching approaches. Many teachers reported using the direct method to teach English in the classroom because it has been engraved in the Saudi curriculum; without offering other explanations as to the reasons behind this preference except the idea that this method is outlined as an essential method by the curriculum in achieving language acquisition objective. Muthuja (2009) believes that the use of the direct method is due to its ability to maintain the TL's use is in ESL classrooms; while avoiding the reliance on the first method and employs the use of visual materials to

teach language. Therefore, based on these advantages, the direct method is an appropriate technique for independent schools' students in Jeddah.

The second common approach is the grammar- translation approach that concerns with teaching only the TL's grammar to improve competency among the students. The approach's goal is to understand the syntax and morphology of the language grammar. Moreover, this approach improves proficiency in writing and grammar, which are important in enhancing SLA (Richards and Rodgers, 2015). This approach should be continuously used together with others to advance language learning.

The structural approach was the third method used by most teachers; as it structures the TL into separate aspects that can be easily learned. This method allows students to improve in the SLA because it encourages the structuring and selection of the TL's structure and vocabulary (Mukalel, 2005). It is noticeable that most participants repeated that they follow at least one method of the mentioned; meaning that the used method can achieve the needed goals in the educational process.

## Challenges in Learning English:

From the teachers' account and classroom observation, the challenges identified include inadequate Arabic reading skills, negative L2 transfer, grammatical construction challenges, verbal communication challenges, reading and comprehension challenges, oral presentation challenges, lack of confidence, poor reading skills, inadequate resources, cultural challenges, and classroom congestion. The challenges that were covered in the literature include lack of an appropriate environment to promote language acquisition (Akbari, 2015), constant focus on exams (Jahangard, 2007), writing problems (Rass, 2015), cultural differences (Akasha 2013; AlKhresheh, 2010), negative L1 transfers (Abdo and Breen, 2010), unsuitable texts (Mollaee, et al., 2014; Tsiplakides, 2011), and overreliance on summative assessment (Alsadaawi, 2010).

Arabic speakers at independent schools in Jeddah faced several challenges that have been covered in the literature (Rass, 2015; Akasha, 2013; Fareh, 2010). The previous studies corroborate the findings of the current study; where writing was reported to be a problem among students based on the interview and observation findings. The data showed that writing, reading, grammar challenges, comprehension, and oral presentation were encountered in the students' learning environments.

Arabic speakers showed difficulty in L1 transfers, which showed a relationship with writing and speaking difficulty due to the interference of Arabic's structure (Rass, 2015). Cultural issues were another challenge related to L1 interference by Arabic (Akasha 2013; Al- Khresheh, 2010). This challenge has been covered in past research; Akasha (2013) reported that culture and curricular content were among the challenges that face Arabic speakers when learning English. Moreover, the cultural differences between English and Arabic make it difficult for teachers to understand the students and address their needs (Ahmad, 2011; Abdo and Breen, 2010).

**Pedagogical Issues:**

The main pedagogical issues that were discovered include the language learning curricular content, lack of authentic textbooks, lack of trained teachers, inadequate teaching/learning resources, inappropriate assessment approaches; paying less attention to formative approaches, scarcity of learning/teaching aids, the content- based approach used limits students' potentials, inadequate oral assessments, and many others. These issues can be classified into three categories: inadequate resources, inappropriate assessment techniques, and inappropriate teaching approaches.

**Inadequate Resources:**

This pedagogical issue means inadequate or inappropriate texts with the potency to impact the language learning process (Al- Seghayer, 2014; Palmer, et al., 2007). Tsiplakides (2011) believes that coursebooks should encourage self- directed learning is essential in this case. This implies that the learning process can be enhanced if texts contain appropriate content in tandem with the Arabic culture. It is also evident that overcrowding and congestion are common in language classrooms. This and other issues make it impossible for student needs to be identified and addressed.

**Inappropriate Assessment Techniques:**

The type of assessment has a direct relationship with students' performance in language acquisition. Students are generally subjected to end of term or end of year examinations. During the period, it was observed that teachers were more oriented towards instilling content knowledge in students to enhance their performance in exams. Although they are independent schools influenced partly by the American learning system, the schools have not changed the assessment approach to match the native language standards. The finding relates to the findings of Al- Seghayer (2014); stating that summative assessment is used widely in Saudi schools. However, the technique's disadvantage is that it focuses on the content's memorization only (Alsadaawi, 2010). Alternatively, the formative technique has been more effective; as it allows teachers to easily identify the challenges being faced by the students, and then develop solutions for the problems (Al Alhareth and Al Dighrir (2014). Therefore, the formative assessment should be used as a key assessment technique.

**Inappropriate Teaching Methods:**

Teaching methods' appropriateness is necessary for language teaching for its effect in easing language acquisition. In the interviews, teachers stated their use of structural, direct, and grammar- translation methods; as all these approaches are superior to some mentioned by some teachers including the silent way, immersion, audio- lingual, and communicative language teaching (Al- Seghayer, 2014). It was observed that the teachers did not completely apply all tenets of these approaches, which limited the fulfilling learning objectives. Although the use of the direct method was observed, the process was not

consistent with the used method. Another challenge is that teachers apply traditional methods using Arabic as an instructional language in English classes (Fareh, 2010).

**Solutions to the Challenges:**

The interviewed teachers gave an account of the solutions that they think can advance the learning of English at independent schools in Jeddah. Most solutions were subjectively stated, while a smaller percentage was observed. During the observation, some teachers engaged in informally assessing students to determine the challenges they face. It was also observed that teachers tended to solve these challenges by offering alternatives to textbook shortage issues. These observations adequately corroborate the statements by teachers regarding what they think are the most appropriate solutions to the learners' challenges.

The need for effective strategies in solving the challenges of English language learning at independent schools in Jeddah produced significant responses as compared to the other (3) questions. The responses, taken from the interview transcript, include the provision of culturally sensitive language textbooks, reliance on formative assessment technique for its effectiveness in native language classrooms, oral practical sessions, use of teaching technology, allocation of teaching/learning resources, teachers must be proactive and personally, coach students experiencing difficulties, review the language curriculum after a certain period, encouragement of creative writing, teachers must apply contemporary approaches of language teaching, practice must be encouraged to improve comprehension and reading skills, and many others.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The answers to the (4) questions are provided as follows:

Q1: What are the challenges independent secondary school learners face in learning English from the point of view of their teachers?

The challenges include inadequate reading skills in the FL, L2's negative transfer, verbal communication difficulties, grammatical structuring difficulties, reading and comprehension difficulties, speech difficulties, lack of self- confidence to verbally communicate, poor reading abilities, cultural issues, and classroom congestion. Although most of the responses were from the interviews, observations recorded some pressing issues like congestion.

Q2: What are the pedagogical problems English teachers and students face in ESL classrooms?

The pedagogical reported by the teachers include lack of authentic textbooks, lack of trained language teachers, inadequate learning/teaching resources, ignoring effective assessment approaches, classrooms congestion, the content- based method implemented that limits learners' potentials, scarcity of learning/teaching aids, inadequate oral assessments, and others.

Q3: Which teaching techniques of English language are presently used at the secondary independent schools in the City of Jeddah?

Teachers' applied methods include structural, direct, and grammar- translation. Yet, based on observation, teachers were not applying all methods' tenets; as they were used haphazardly. This limits the accomplishment of the learning goals; showing that the above- mentioned methods are suitable in the educational context but their application in these schools is inadequate.

Q4: What are the recommended approaches and solutions to the challenges experienced by students in ESL classrooms at the independent secondary schools in the City of Jeddah?

Solutions proposed by language teachers include using formative evaluation methods for their effectiveness in ESL classrooms, speech improvement sessions, using technological applications, allocation of suitable learning resources. In addition, teachers should be in charge of coaching students facing certain difficulties, review the language curriculum after a certain period, promote creative writing, implement modern methods of language teaching, conduct activities to improve comprehension and reading skills, etc.

The following recommendations are proposed based on the difficulties experienced by the ESL students. Inevitable recommendations are presented; aiming to improve the students and teachers' learning process:

1. Schools must allocate suitable language textbooks that show appropriate language content and adhere to the culture of NNESs.
2. Hiring and retaining more language teachers to fill the educational gap.
3. Teachers must apply all tenets of the (3) main methods used in teaching.
4. The curriculum should be changed for the formative evaluation method to be the primary method used in this context.
5. Schools should implement reliable instruments of CALL- in order to improve the learning/teaching experience.
6. Students should engage and participate in informal activities and evolutions such as drama competitions, dialogues, and acting to improve their basic skills of TL.

**Study Limitations**

Various limitations were cited:

1. Limitation in the sample's size. The paper selected (20) participants from one school.
2. The paper followed the case study even though the paper was limited to the investigation's exploratory level.
3. Students' perspectives were not investigated in this paper.

In conclusion, the paper identified the challenges faced by ESL students and recommended changes in policies and structural developments to achieve positive outcomes. Therefore, for the aim of improving the language learning experience, more studies must be conducted to analyze the diverse challenges for teaching and learning development and learning environment improvement.

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