

# Glocalizing English Language Teaching in the Arabian Gulf: Professional Development's Mediating Influence

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## Abstract

The unique socio-cultural contexts of instruction influence methods and materials in English Language Teaching (ELT). Nonetheless, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching practices in the Arabian Gulf tend to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach with regard to teaching methods and pedagogical approaches. This study investigates the influence of the Cambridge English Teacher (CET) professional development program on the classroom practices of EFL instructors in the Arabian Gulf and its role in facilitating the contextualization of teaching in alignment with Saudi cultural norms. The study involved 120 Saudi EFL university teachers as participants. Employing a convergent, parallel design that incorporated a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, the results demonstrated that the CET program empowered participants to contextualize their teaching methods and adapt their classroom delivery to the local teaching environment. Specifically, the findings revealed that participants perceived their learning experience in the CET program in four dimensions: contextualizing teaching methods, localizing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, diversifying teaching methodologies and materials, and comprehending context-specific classroom management strategies. Moreover, the study highlighted the significant impact of contextually tailored in-service professional development programs in the process of "glocalizing" teaching methods. It is important to note that the findings of this study should be interpreted in light of the fact

that only participants from the male campus were included, in adherence to Saudi Arabia's gender segregation policy. In conclusion, the research findings have implications for EFL educators and professional development initiatives and provide directions for future studies in contextualizing ELT methods and materials.

**Keywords:** Contextualized Language teaching, professional development, EFL teachers

## INTRODUCTION

The global expansion of English has significantly impacted English Language Teaching (ELT) worldwide. Specifically, in the six Arabian Gulf nations—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman—governmental neo-liberal educational policies, coupled with an increasing focus on global trade and cultural exchange, have enhanced the prominence of the English language, fostering a more nuanced understanding (Barnawi, 2018).

Despite these developments, the dissemination of the English language, particularly in the context of ELT, faces various socio-cultural challenges in the region. Among others, a notable obstacle arises from rigid religious ideologies that view English as the language of imperialism (Elyas & Picard, 2012). Consequently, Arabic, the predominant language in the region, presents a significant challenge to the widespread adoption of English. To counter this perceived threat, these nations prioritize reinforcing Arabic in education and society, diminishing the centrality of ELT (Hillman & Eibenschutz, 2018). Deeply embedded socio-cultural factors and ingrained societal values act as barriers to implementing necessary policy and program changes (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017; Shah et al., 2013). This resistance hinders efforts to adapt global English Language Teaching (ELT) practices, often rooted in Western contexts, to the intricacies of local settings.

Within this landscape, the Saudi EFL context adheres to traditional teaching norms and conservative practices (Elyas & Picard, 2012), even as thousands of students enroll in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs annually at secondary and tertiary institutions (Alsowat, 2021). Unfortunately, these programs often fail to address the evolving needs of learners in the face of contemporary educational and economic changes (Al-bargi, 2019), with inappropriate teaching methods identified as a major contributor to students' underachievement in language learning (Al Asmari, 2016). Despite the unique complexities of the Saudi EFL context compared to other EFL settings (Afzal &

Omar, 2021; Al-Asmari, 2016; Sulaimani & Elyas, 2015), efforts to localize global ELT methods and approaches have been lacking.

English language teaching approaches in the Saudi EFL context typically align with prescriptive teaching methods, paying limited attention to contextualizing practices for local teachers and learners (Alshaikhi, 2018). While imported teaching theories and methods have found success in other contexts, their suitability in Saudi Arabia, particularly with regard to communicative language teaching (CLT) principles, has been questioned (Al-Mohanna, 2010; Farooq; 2015; Sulaimani & Elyas, 2015). CLT often conflicts with traditional text-based, teacher-fronted language teaching approaches, especially in developing countries (Liu & Littlewoods, 1997). Researchers have proposed the localization of CLT methods by blending local traditional teaching approaches while preserving CLT's essence (Han, 2022). Additionally, a theory-practice gap has hindered language learning in Saudi Arabia, with theories behind language teaching practices often struggling to align with the local context (Alshaikhi, 2018).

Policymakers and professional development programs have overlooked Saudi EFL classrooms' unique composition and nature. These classrooms feature mixed-ability students with varying learning styles, backgrounds, skills, and beliefs about the English language (Siddiqui & Alghamdi, 2017). Current methodological approaches tend to adopt a one-size-fits-all formula, whereas differentiated instruction has been identified as a solution for accommodating students with diverse abilities and learning styles (Jahan et al., 2017). Furthermore, the prohibition of L1 usage in EFL classrooms, while effective in second language teaching contexts, has been shown to hinder classroom management in Saudi Arabia, where students share linguistic similarities (Alkatheery, 2014; Almohaimed & Almurshed, 2018). This has led to a need for a shift in perspective, recognizing the use of L1 as essentially a classroom management tool (Moskovsky, 2018).

The roadblocks to effective EFL teaching in the Saudi context can be traced to teacher training and professional development programs that often neglect the adaptation of ELT practices to local classroom dynamics (Assalahi, 2021; Moskovsky & Picard, 2018). These programs predominantly focus on language teaching methods without considering their applicability in the Saudi EFL context (Al-Shehri, 2017). Despite substantial investments by the Saudi government in

English language teacher training and professional development over the last two decades, desired outcomes have remained elusive (Assalahi, 2021; Alshumaimeri & Almohaisen, 2017; Oudah & Altalhab, 2018), resulting in a perception of underachievement among learners (Al-bargi, 2019). In the context under consideration, prior research (e.g., Ghajarieh & Safiyar, 2023; Khan et al., 2020) has posited the necessity of culturally responsive professional development initiatives to facilitate the adaptation of pedagogical approaches and instructional materials to local contexts.

Recent initiatives in Saudi higher education have introduced in-service professional development programs to better align EFL teachers with context-based realities. One such program is the Cambridge English Teacher (CET) program, which delivers professional development programs in preparatory years in Saudi public universities. The CET program which was initiated in 2016 stands out for its emphasis on glocalizing ELT methods and materials to suit the Saudi EFL classroom environment. Unlike other local and international PD programs, the CET conducts a comprehensive needs analysis involving institutional experts, including teacher trainers, academic coordinators, PD experts, and mentors. The initial CET program was launched at the English Language Institute (ELI) of King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. The researcher, who participated in the program, was among the PD experts and institutional trainers involved in the needs analysis and the CET course, which identified areas for development, including adapting ELT methodologies, contextualizing CLT approaches, introducing differentiated instruction, and enhancing classroom management skills.

A language teacher's teaching methodology and philosophy profoundly shape their worldview about the teaching process and students' learning, forming the foundation of their teacher identity (Richards, 2017; Pennington & Richards, 2016). Given that teaching methodology reflects a teacher's beliefs and opinions about educating learners, teacher professional development programs should illuminate methodologies that align with the ever-evolving educational landscape (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Therefore, this study aims to explore how the CET program influenced the classroom practices of Saudi EFL teachers and how customized, institutionally imposed in-service professional development empowered teachers to enhance their students' academic outcomes in the English language. The study will address the following research question:

"How has the CET professional development program facilitated the contextualization of Saudi EFL teachers' classroom practices?"

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Participants and Settings**

The study centers on EFL teachers within the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. As a crucial part of their academic journey, high school graduates enroll in ELI's intensive one-year English course before embarking on higher education at the university. This preparatory year consists of four modules, meticulously designed to align with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Each module spans seven to eight weeks with the ultimate goal of fostering intermediate-level English proficiency among students. ELI, a large institution, annually welcomes approximately 20,000 students, reflecting its significant impact on English language education.

To maintain high educational standards, ELI selectively hires qualified EFL instructors renowned for their strong pedagogical skills and effective classroom management abilities. Recognizing the importance of continuous professional development, the institution encourages its faculty members to engage in ongoing programs aimed at enhancing their teaching prowess. One such program, the Cambridge English Teacher (CET) initiative, was made mandatory for ELI instructors, including those who participated in this study.

It is worth noting that all participants in this study were exclusively drawn from the main men's campus of ELI due to Saudi Arabia's gender segregation policy. To gather data for the study, convenience sampling was employed for quantitative data collection, involving a total of 120 EFL teachers. Out of the 120 participants, 55 held master's degrees in English Language and Literature, 40 possessed bachelor's degrees in Applied Linguistics, 30 held master's degrees in Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)/Applied Linguistics, and only 5 had attained Doctoral degrees. Additionally, 35% of the participants (42) possessed Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) qualifications. Purposive sampling was utilized for qualitative data collection, with the participation of five teachers in this phase of the research. These sampling methods were selected following the recommendations of Cohen et al. (2018) and

Creswell & Creswell (2018), and they align with the study's overarching purpose and its convergent parallel design.

### **Assessments and Measures**

For the quantitative aspect, the Teacher Classroom Practices Questionnaire (TCPQ) was developed based on a literature review and the CET content. It employed a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree) to measure the four-item survey questionnaire. The questionnaire's face validity was established by subjecting it to review by a panel of six field experts (Olsen, 2011). Their feedback informed modifications and improvements to the questionnaire. To ensure content validity, Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR) (Wilson et al., 2012) and Content Validity Index (CVI) (Devon et al., 2007) were calculated. A five-member expert panel was asked to rate the questionnaire's four items as 'Not essential,' 'Not that essential,' or 'Essential.' Items rated as 'Essential' were retained if they had a CVR  $\geq 0.78$ , following which two items with lower content validity were removed. Initially comprising six items, the TCPQ was reduced to four items with an overall Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.80. Finally, the questionnaire's internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , resulting in values of .897 (before) and .920 (after), indicating high reliability (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000).

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. To maintain parallel constructs with the quantitative strand, the interview questions corresponded to TCPQ items. Qualitative data reliability and validity (trustworthiness) were established based on the criteria for qualitative trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Data Collection**

In this convergent parallel mixed-methods study, both quantitative and qualitative elements were conducted concurrently in the same phase, with independent analysis but integrated interpretation (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Quantitative data were collected through a retrospective pre-test/post-test survey questionnaire, where participants' pre and post-ratings were collected simultaneously (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). In the pilot stage, 30 CET participants completed the questionnaire to assess the importance and relevance of items (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007). Their feedback guided questionnaire modifications.

Subsequently, 180 EFL male instructors who had participated in the CET were invited to complete the questionnaire, with 120 responses collected via a retrospective pre-test/post-test questionnaire. Concurrently, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

For the TCPQ analysis, means, standard deviations, percentages, and frequencies of participant responses were calculated. Inferential statistics were used to determine whether changes between before and after measures were statistically significant. To assess data normality, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) Test was employed, which indicated that the data was not normally distributed. Consequently, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test, a non-parametric equivalent to the dependent sample t-test, was applied to assess whether before and after responses were statistically different.

For qualitative data analysis, semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim and shared with interview participants for their feedback. The interview scripts were analyzed in MAXQDA 2022 using both deductive and inductive approaches. The initial analysis produced 15 codes, which were subsequently grouped into four broader themes. To protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were used instead of actual names.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The current study aimed to explore how the CET professional development program contributed to the contextualization of classroom practices among Saudi EFL teachers. First, quantitative results are presented by analyzing the TCPQ. Then, the combined findings of quantitative and qualitative are discussed. The impact of the CET on EFL teachers' classroom practices is discussed. The themes of teachers' classroom practices in relation to professional development investigated in the current study are (a) adapting teaching methods, (b) localizing communicative language teaching (CLT), (c) differentiated instruction (DI), and (d) contextualizing classroom management.

All four items of TPCQ are analyzed through means, standard deviations, and frequencies. Then, the normality test's results are presented. Finally, results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank are given.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Analysis of the Four TCPQ Items

Teacher-Classroom practices (TCP)	N	Pre		Post	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
	120	3.9875	.86957	4.1283	.86259

As indicated in Table 1, the mean score of the posttest is greater than that of the pretest, which shows that EFL teachers' classroom practices were improved as a result of the CET program.

**Table 2.** Analysis of Individual Items

TCPQ Items	Pre					Post				
	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%
1	2.5	6.7	15.0	40.0	35.8	1.7	2.5	9.2	25.0	61.7
2	1.7	6.7	13.3	40.0	38.3	1.7	3.3	9.2	25.8	60.0
3	2.5	10.8	22.5	42.5	21.7	1.7	2.5	9.2	20.0	66.7
4	2.5	6.7	15.0	40.0	48.3	2.5	1.7	6.7	22.5	66.7

SD=Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

As can be seen in Table 2, a considerable increase in combined agreeing and strongly agreeing responses of all four items resulted. The four TCPQ items are 1. *I can adapt the teaching methodologies according to the contextual requirements*; 2. *I can adhere to the communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches*; 3. *I am aware that differentiated instruction caters to the needs and styles of different learners in mixed-ability classes*; and 4. *I am confident in my classroom management skills*.

**Table 3.** Normality Test

N	Pre		Post	
	K-S Z	Sig. (2-tailed)	K-S Z	Sig. (2-tailed)
120	2.162	.000	2.683	.000

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test result in Table 3 indicates that the *p*-value is less than 0.05 which shows that the data violated the assumption of normality. There is enough evidence that the data is not normally distributed. Thus, a non-

parametric test is justified to calculate the differences between the before and after scores.

**Table 4.** Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

	Ranks	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks	Z	Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative	5	25.70	128.50		
Positive	66	36	2427.00	-	.000
Ties	49			6.719	
Total	120				

Note: *Negative*=POST<PRE, *Positive*=POST>PRE, *Ties*=POST=PRE

The results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test shown in Table 4 indicate that the post-test ranks were statistically higher than the pretest ranks ( $Z = -6.719, p < .000$ ). Thus, according to the findings, EFL teachers' classroom practices were significantly improved because of the CET program.

### Contextualizing Teaching Methods

The current study through the TCPQ questionnaire and in-depth qualitative interviews showed that participants of the CET not only enhanced the current language teaching methodologies while they were participating in the course but also convincingly proved that they enacted the skills and methods within their own ongoing system of teaching practice. Findings of the classroom practices part of the quantitative questionnaire showed statistically significant gains before and after the CET intervention. In response to the TCPQ item 1: *I can adapt the teaching methodologies according to the contextual requirements*, a 10.9% increase in agreeing and strongly agreeing responses (pre 78.5%, post 86.7%) resulted. The qualitative data provided commodious support to the findings of quantitative data. The change in teachers' perceptions and practices was not only vocalized by teachers themselves but was also observed by the institutional experts. The current study is probably the first and foremost endeavor, at least in the Arabian EFL teaching context, to evaluate and foreground the CET-a powerful learning experience- which addressed teachers' methodological effectiveness rather than exclusively focusing on teachers' content knowledge (Kennedy, 2016).

A powerful theme that emerged from the interview data was contextualizing teaching methods, styles, and content according to the Saudi learners' cultural norms and religious values. The interview participants declared that after taking

part in the CET they are better able to modify their teaching methods according to the classroom situation. Hosni, for instance, mentioned that he "contextualized his daily lessons by starting from a local example", and he "learnt this during face-to-face training sessions at the CET when the Cambridge trainer would always localize the training material". Another participant, Maha, stated that now he "is able to tailor his activities according to the local culture by giving students local examples". He further said that "it would be inappropriate and unacceptable if he gave examples of women wearing bikinis on the beach"; rather he would say "a man is riding a camel in the desert to build learners' schema for a reading or listening topic". Another participant mentioned that "during the last module I was eliciting responses about Vancouver city -a reading a topic in the textbook- but the students were unable to give responses. Then I elicited the same points about Jeddah and the students responded".

This finding aligns with Picard's (2006) plea for Islamizing the English language curriculum and professional development in Saudi Arabia. The aim is to help teachers and learners avoid cultural shock since themes like alcoholism, sexuality, and politics are considered taboo in this culture. The current study argues that although an Islamizing curriculum is a way forward to contextualized English teaching, there are other themes that do not come strictly under the purview of 'non-Islamic' and are still not allowed to be subjects of Saudi classroom discourse despite them being in the prescribed syllabus. For example, due to the recent Saudi government's political rift with Qatar, teachers are directed not to mention Qatar to students and give an alternate example of their own if the existing textbooks have any mention of Qatar. It shows that the instructors have learned through the CET to strictly adhere to institutional policies to facilitate contextually appropriate learning and yet not to hinder students' performance. Therefore, this study suggests that in addition to the Islamizing curriculum, professional development content and design should also be Islamized as was the case in CET.

Bridging the theory-practice gap at the CET was another emerging theme in the qualitative data of the current study. The participants stated that at various stages in CET, the debate of linking theory to practice and vice versa made them conscious of a strong connection between the seemingly divergent worldviews of theory and practice. They explained that before the onset of the CET, on the one hand, their classroom practices were based on their experience, but they were

unaware of their underlying theoretical bases. On the other hand, they knew a plethora of theoretical concepts about EFL teaching but they were unable to put them into practice. For instance, Smith elaborated that he would "apply differentiation at different levels in his class without being aware of a theoretical support", but after the CET he "learned the philosophical underpinnings of differentiated instruction".

The finding ties well with previous studies that examined the bridging of theory and practice in relation to professional development. For example, Hennissen et al. (2017) studied the impact of a 10-week curriculum program on primary school geology pre-service teachers' professional behavior and knowledge in linking theory to practice. The results show that teachers' cognitive schema and conceptual knowledge had expanded and that they experienced linking theory to practice during the program. However, Hennissen et al. (2017) showed that the participants' practical knowledge was not developed at all, only their conceptual knowledge was broadened. While in the CET participants' conceptual as well as practical knowledge was expanded. One reason for this divergence could be that the CET employed both inductive and deductive approaches to knowledge generation and theory practice connection was a two-way rather than a one-way process where only conceptual knowledge was generated as was the case in the reviewed programs.

Similar results were obtained by Allen and Wright (2013), who studied how teachers learnt to integrate theory and practice during a three-week practicum in an Australian urban university. The study presented three findings in relation to theory practice integration and the three of them could be compared and contrasted with the findings of the current study. The first finding is that participants learned how to integrate theory and practice during their practices. The second finding was that sometimes the process of bridging theory practice was impeded by the lack of clear policies by different stakeholders such as teachers, coordinators, and administrators. This is in contrast with the findings of this study as the need for bridging the theory-practice gap was identified and advocated by all stakeholders in the ELI; therefore, teachers did not face any hindrance in its implementation in the post-CET period. The third finding was that the material assessed and presented at practicum was different from what was used in actual classroom teaching. It also stands opposed to the findings of the current study

because at all stages of the CET including the theory practice bridging stage Cambridge Unlimited textbook was used. It is to point out that the same textbook has been used for all levels in the ELI right after the CET.

### **Localizing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

The participants in the current study fervently reported a transformation in their Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) techniques and the acquisition of new dimensions of CLT after participating in the CET. In response to TCPQ item 2: *I adhere to the principles of communicative language teaching*, there was a notable 7.5% increase in respondents agreeing and strongly agreeing (pre 78.3%, post 85.8%). Qualitative interviews not only corroborated the quantitative results but also provided insights into why the CET made teachers more communicative. Sara elaborated, "The CET course offered an excellent opportunity for communicative language teaching. This has opened up many ways of teaching for me and many other teachers...Now I think that communicative language teaching or the scaffolding method should be the way forward in EFL/ESL."

A growing body of recent CLT literature (e.g., Alqahtani, 2019) has recognized that teacher-centeredness in Saudi EFL classrooms has contributed to the failure of CLT and, by extension, has led to low student proficiency. Even though ELI instructors had a limited and parochial view of student-centered classroom delivery before engaging in CET, participants in the current study showed that their shift from traditional language teaching to highly communicative teaching was phenomenal in an ultra-conservative Saudi society. The researcher is convinced that the contribution of the CET in transforming EFL teachers' beliefs and practices from a didactic view to a more constructivist notion has been invaluable in a society where a teacher is seen as a figure of authority and the ultimate source of knowledge. The findings of the current study align with those of Han (2016), who asserted that the Confucian worldview among Korean EFL learners poses an obstacle to the implementation of CLT. However, the CET, as investigated in this study, uplifted teachers' worldviews and enhanced students' proficiency without any cultural difficulties. The effect of the CET was evident across the ELI faculty, despite some participants having teaching backgrounds in Saudi schools where the grammar-translation method is widely used.

The positive change observed in ELI teachers after participating in CET aligns with the findings of Evans (2015). Evans explored how English teachers at

Columbia State University transitioned from teacher-centered approaches to communicative methods of classroom delivery. For instance, teachers shifted their focus from deductive to inductive grammar teaching by exploiting the reading and listening texts and appropriating methodologies to students' learning styles. Also, the use of authentic materials made it possible for the teachers to situate students' learning. However, implementing CLT principles in an English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching context in Western democratic societies is generally less challenging than in conservative societies. Therefore, the current study makes a unique contribution by exploring a professional development program that enabled CLT implementation in the Saudi Arabian EFL context through the contextualization of CLT principles and methodologies. "Glocalizing" the CLT method in the Saudi EFL teaching scenario was essential to make it digestible for both learners and teachers (Al-Asmari, 2016; Sulaimani & Elyas, 2015).

In the Saudi EFL context, other studies (Al-Mohanna, 2010; Farooq, 2015) similarly highlight that teachers often lean towards outdated methods like grammar translation and audio-lingual approaches. This inclination is attributed to their limited capacity to employ CLT approaches. Al-Mohanna (2010) attributed this failure to teachers' poor theoretical background in CLT conventions, time constraints, overcrowded classrooms, and defective pre-service teacher training. The current study, however, proved that true CLT approaches are better suited for in-service professional development rather than pre-service teacher training. Moreover, Moskovsky and Picard (2018) have contended that pre-service teacher training in Saudi Arabia has failed to prepare EFL teachers to meet the emerging needs of English language learners. Therefore, this finding from the current study could serve as a starting point for future research on CLT in terms of professional learning in the Saudi EFL context.

### **Differentiated Instructions**

An overwhelming majority of the participants declared that the CET had significantly improved their professionalization in differentiated instruction (DI). In response to TCPQ item 3: *I am aware that differentiated instruction caters to the needs and styles of different learners in mixed-ability classes*, a remarkable 22.5% increase in agreeing and strongly agreeing responses on the five-point Likert scale was observed (pre 64.2%, post 86.7%). This increase is the most substantial among all TCPQ items. The reasons for this astounding change are elucidated in the

qualitative data. Although ELI students are placed in four levels through a placement test, they exhibit a wide range of English proficiency, even within the same level. In addition to being mixed-ability learners in terms of language proficiency, the students also possess different learning styles and language learning backgrounds. Therefore, the strong focus on DI in the CET was a timely intervention to stimulate the use of DI in all classrooms, regardless of the students' level. Ayesha endorsed that, "*CET courses raised awareness among teachers about the concept of differentiation, emphasizing its suitability for their students and situation, and underscored the ineffectiveness of a one-size-fits-all approach, encouraging them to creatively tailor instruction to meet their students' diverse needs*".

The current study's finding about the relationship between DI and professional development (PD) is in contrast with the results reported by Suprayogi et al. (2017), who indicated that teachers reported no knowledge or competency in DI after taking part in an extensive professional development course. The plausible reason for this difference seems to be the lack of an explicit focus on DI in the PD provided to those teachers. In contrast, at the onset of CET, the trainers had a clear objective to enable the ELI teachers to modify instructions to cater to the diverse needs of ELI's mixed-ability students, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all formula was not a viable solution in this context.

### **Classroom Management**

One of the themes in the current study was classroom management, and in response to the TCPQ item 4, which measured participants' confidence in their classroom management skills, there was a notable 10.1% increase in agreeing and strongly agreeing responses on a five-point Likert scale (pre 79.1%, post 89.2%). The interview participants indicated that before the CET, they would often struggle with handling classroom management issues unique to the Saudi EFL context, such as students talking during teacher instructions, lack of classroom interaction, the use of L1, and students' mobile phone usage; however, after the CET, they felt better equipped to address these challenges

The findings of this study are consistent with those elucidated by Macias (2018), wherein classroom management issues in language education frequently revolve around interaction patterns, the appropriate or inappropriate use of the first language (L1), and a deficiency in adherence to the target language.

Professional development interventions, whether pre-service or in-service, were found to significantly impact teachers' classroom management skills. However, it's worth noting that the current study, conducted from an emic perspective with the researcher as a teacher and teacher trainer, differs from the studies examined by Macias, which often took an etic perspective with researchers from outside the teaching context. Additionally, this study focused on in-service professional development, while Macias primarily reviewed studies related to pre-service training.

The participants in the current study also mentioned that they learned how to effectively use L1 (the students' first language) as a classroom management technique during the CET, which included workshops on this topic. Before the CET, the use of L1 by teachers was strictly prohibited, as it was seen as hindering the development of students' communicative competence in English. However, participants like Mona, Hosni, and Justin shared differing views on the use of L1. Mona believed that, at times, allowing L1 influence in the classroom could help maintain order and provide students with a sense of identity, whereas Hosni stressed that using L1 could be essential in preserving students' cultural identity. Justin, on the other hand, advocated for cautious use of L1, especially with repeater and unmotivated students. While there is limited research on the impact of professional development on teachers' perceptions of L1 use, Kang (2013) found that some teachers in the Korean context used L1 as a classroom management strategy, particularly with low-level students, to enhance obedience.

Similarly, Evans (2012) emphasized the importance of using L1 in a foreign language classroom but cautioned against it becoming the primary classroom management technique. In the Saudi Arabian EFL context, Alkatheery (2014) observed that teachers, regardless of student proficiency levels, commonly used L1, possibly for classroom management purposes and when introducing new target language vocabulary. The current study highlights the significant shift in perceptions and views regarding L1 use in ELI classrooms, especially with low-level and repeater students, as a result of the CET. However, it's essential to acknowledge that among the three groups of teachers (native, non-native Arab, and non-native non-Arab), only non-native Arab teachers have the ability to use L1. Therefore, there is a consensus that low-level and repeater students should be taught by non-native Arab teachers who share their first language. These findings

suggest the need for further research on EFL teacher professional development with a specific focus on the use of L1.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The current study's findings highlight that the CET was an effective and tailored professional development program, enabling participants to adapt their teaching methods and align their classroom practices with institutional policies and local teaching contexts. This study emphasizes the importance of localizing both teaching methods and professional development content, design, and delivery, as a one-size-fits-all approach is not universally applicable across different teaching environments. Additionally, the study underscores the significance of bridging the theory-practice gap, revealing that teachers previously implemented techniques without a strong theoretical foundation, whereas others possessed theoretical knowledge but struggled with practical application. The CET's unique approach, employing both inductive and deductive methods, successfully bridged this gap by grounding the theory-practice debate in the ELI curriculum.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates the CET's effectiveness in enhancing participants' proficiency in communicative language teaching (CLT), despite cultural disparities between Saudi norms and CLT principles. It broadened teachers' CLT perspectives and made their methods context-sensitive, expanding their pedagogical toolkit. Additionally, the CET introduced differentiation instruction (DI) to address diverse learner needs and styles, thus enriching teachers' capabilities. Regarding classroom management, the CET equipped participants with practical techniques and quick fixes to address specific issues in the Saudi EFL context. The study reveals that the use of L1 by teachers and students emerged as a valuable tool for classroom management, particularly with less motivated and repeat students, although it emphasizes the importance of cautious L1 use in EFL classrooms.

These findings hold implications for English language teaching institutes and teacher training programs. In-service teacher learning initiatives should consider tailoring teaching methods and materials to fit the unique EFL context, accounting for socio-cultural factors that influence students. Moreover, conducting effective needs analyses can identify specific teaching competencies requiring special

attention. However, it is essential to acknowledge the study's limitations. The research relies on teachers' self-reports for data collection, which may impact data completeness. The findings of this study are also limited to participants from the male campus, given the gender segregation policy in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, there is a need for further research to explore contextual language learning and teaching within teacher training and professional development programs.

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