Saudi English language teachers' pre-service education: How effective is it?

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the pre-service education of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in the context of Saudi Arabian education. The research methodology adopts a qualitative approach, incorporating document analysis and interviews as means of data collection. The document analysis is employed to elucidate the objectives and substance of the EFL teacher pre-service education program. The interviews are conducted to investigate EFL teachers' perspectives regarding their experiences as applicants in the EFL teacher pre-service education programs provided by English departments at Saudi universities. The target population of this study is a group of male teachers who graduated from Saudi universities with a bachelor's degree in English and currently teach English as a foreign language in Saudi public schools (elementary, intermediate, and secondary levels). A total of 112 EFL teachers participated in the study. Their teaching experiences range from 2 to 4 years. They graduated from different Saudi universities. This study indicates that the pre-service education for Saudi EFL instructors is insufficient in adequately preparing and equipping English teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills for their professional requirements. Therefore, it is essential to enhance pre-service education to offer the best possible support to its candidates. The study presents several recommendations and suggestions to guarantee the efficacy of EFL teacher pre-service education in the Saudi Arabian context.

Contribution/ Originality: This study is one of the few studies that have investigated English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' pre-service education/training/preparation, particularly their perspectives regarding the pre-service education program offered to them at Saudi universities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The lack of delivering quality EFL teachers' preparation programs is one of the most persuasive issues that have resulted in low performance of EFL students in Arab countries (Al-Hazmi, 2003; Baily & Damerow, 2014).

In most educational institutions, teachers with a bachelor's degree in English language and literature or translation are offered teaching positions without having adequate onsite training in teaching methodologies, and this is most dominant in the less affluent private schools and in many Arab world public schools (Al-Hazmi, 2003; Al-Mohanna, 2017; Al-Seghayer, 2014) specifically in our case, the Saudi Arabian ones. Graduates of the English language and literature or translation often lack teaching skills because they were not trained on how to teach and how to deal with the various challenges of teaching students in schools. These conditions translate themselves to classrooms where the English language spoken is loaded with pronunciation, grammatical and structural errors,

where students are taught employing the similar pace and the similar approach and where the teacher fully controls the teaching process. In teaching languages, teachers are expected to master in-depth knowledge of the topic being taught. Furthermore, language instructors should possess a sufficient understanding of pedagogical concepts such as classroom management, learning and teaching approaches, psychology, and curriculum.

Studies carried out in the Saudi Arabian context revealed that Saudi EFL teachers were inadequately trained to prepare students to be good English learners. An unpublished study carried out by the Saudi (Ministry of Education, 2005) confirmed this claim and indicated that both intermediate and secondary English teachers graduated from college without proper training in EFL, and are therefore neither competent in English nor in the affair of teaching it. The study's results showed that the average TOEFL score of the English teachers who participated in the study was only 430 Moreover, their mean proficiency in lesson preparation was 60%, whereas it stood at 64% for classroom management, 54% for evaluation, and 52% for language teaching approaches. Studies completed in the Saudi Arabian context on EFL teacher preparation programs are included below.

In Al-Hazmi (2003) did a commendatory study to assess the EFL teacher preparation programs in Saudi Arabia considering current trends, and to identify the factors that pose problems to these programs. In this analysis, he contended that programs are insufficient for the training of EFL instructors and proposed recommendations for enhancing EFL teacher education programs, advocating for a methodical approach to pre-and in-service training for EFL teachers. The study posited the presence of a disparity between EFL teacher training programs and the realistic requirements of teachers in a classroom setting. The study proposed that before developing training schemes, it is important to establish clear objectives in knowledge and behavior through needs analyses that consider factors such as teachers' overall educational background, language proficiency, professional competence, and beliefs about education.

Al-Harbi (2006) examined the training requirements of currently employed Saudi EFL instructors in the Al-Qassim province and discovered a critical deficiency in their skills. The sample consisted of 551 participants, comprising 272 male English instructors, 259 female teachers, 8 male supervisors, and 12 female supervisors. The participants were provided with a questionnaire specially designed by the researcher to examine the training requirements of English teachers. The findings indicated that the EFL instructors required further instruction in pedagogical approaches, instruction of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, implementing effective classroom management strategies, grammar instruction, and effective use of teaching aids and technology.

An investigation conducted by Alshuaifan (2009) examined the fundamental elements of the pre-service preparation programs for EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. The study involved the participation of ninety-six language instructors with experience in both college and grade school levels. The participants voiced their discontent with the pre-service preparation programs for Saudi EFL teachers. Their assessment revealed that these programs are deficient in terms of courses and linguistics, EFL syllabus design, and cultural awareness.

In Zohairy (2012) investigated the current status of both professional development and continuous professional development of Saudi EFL teachers in seven state universities and four private universities. The results showed that only two universities out of the eleven offered EFL instructors training opportunities. Additionally, the participants were not satisfied with their professional development programs.

A study undertaken by Al-Seghayer (2014) provided a comprehensive analysis of the existing training options for Saudi EFL teachers and examined the evolution of English teacher-preparation programs throughout time. The objectives were to thoroughly analyze the current state and requirements of courses for preparing EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia and to suggest areas for enhancement in the existing programs. The review revealed that the existing EFL teacher training program was deficient and insufficient in providing its applicants with the essential information, abilities, and skills required to become proficient EFL teachers. Moreover, it is anticipated that the English competence of EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia will continue to be at its present level, which is equivalent

to the insufficient training of English teachers. Al-Seghayer proposed the implementation of strategic and well-designed pre-service and in-service teacher-preparation programs, together with ongoing professional development programs for Saudi EFL teachers.

The qualitative study conducted by Alghizzi (2022) examined the perspectives and attitudes of Saudi pre-service EFL instructors towards their English proficiency and teaching competence, their instructional methodologies, the factors that motivate or discourage them in choosing a teaching career, the challenges they face, and recommendations for enhancing the English teaching profession. Eight participants who enrolled in a teaching practicum course at the university and achieved specific grade point average criteria ranging from "passable" to "excellent" were selected for recruitment. Following the conclusion of the semester, the participants were presented with four questions that specifically addressed the aforementioned aspects. The findings suggest that irrespective of gender, those with higher grade point averages tend to have more negative conceptions and attitudes towards the profession. Consequently, they are more determined to avoid it.

Hameed (2023) did a study to analyze the opinions and behaviors of English language teachers in Saudi Arabia regarding environmental education. The primary objective is to document and examine teachers' perspectives on the integration of environmental education into English Language Teaching (ELT). Furthermore, it investigates the extent to which they include environmental considerations in their instructional resources and methodologies.

A mixed-method research approach was employed in this study, utilizing a questionnaire and a focus group interview as the primary instruments for data collection. The findings indicated inadequate replies about the attitudes of EFL instructors towards the incorporation of environmental education in the ELT curriculum. Furthermore, their present process also lacks such emphasis in their classes, while they recognize its importance given current environmental issues. The study proposed that the relevant stakeholders should prioritize this matter initially to educate and prepare the EFL teachers for the intended objective to overcome these constraints and broaden the exploration of this subject matter.

The aforementioned studies have shown the urgent need to address the training and professional development requirements for Saudi EFL teachers. This is particularly crucial given the current limited scope of in-service training programs, which are carried out by local education departments located throughout Saudi Arabia and do not meet satisfactory standards. A further concerning finding is that several English teachers have had minimal in-service teaching training while having been teaching English in Saudi public schools for more than ten years (Al-Mohanna, 2017).

A comprehensive pre-service education for English teachers is crucial in equipping them with the necessary linguistic and pedagogical knowledge and skills, as well as promoting their professional development during their teaching careers. Hence, this study aims to delineate the present condition of the existing pre-service education offered to English language instructors in Saudi Arabia.

2. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The standard of English instruction in Saudi public schools is unsatisfactory. A significant number of parents express dissatisfaction with the standard of English instruction provided in public schools. research investigations have indicated that the primary problem in school English instruction in Saudi Arabia is the scarcity of proficient and certified English instructors (Al-Hazmi, 2003; Al-Mohanna, 2010; Al-Motairi, 2005; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Hameed, 2023). Studies have shown that a significant proportion of Saudi EFL instructors lack professional and linguistic competence. They lack sufficient understanding of current language-teaching techniques, especially those of a contemporary nature. Furthermore, they lack an adequate understanding of techniques for instructing language components, such as the four skills, grammar, vocabulary, and the use of educational aids and technology. In addition, their expertise in material design, evaluation, adaptation, and execution is quite restricted (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Alghizzi, 2022; Hameed, 2023).

The root of the problem can be traced back to the role of pre-service education in the professional development of English teachers. This study aims to probe suggestions for improvement in the domain of pre-service education to professionally educate school English teachers. This is particularly important in order to provide clear policy recommendations in relation to overhauling the pre-service education system for preparing English teachers.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of investigating the quality of pre-service education among EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia lies in the following reasons. First and foremost, it offers crucial information for the development and enhancement of the pre-service education program for EFL teachers in Saudi universities. The study's results provide valuable insights for evaluating the curriculum's effectiveness in terms of linguistic competency and pedagogical skills. The findings of this study can be utilized to optimize the program curriculum to effectively address the requirements of the contemporary teaching profession. Second, it might serve as a valuable resource and point of reference for academics who are interested in conducting research on teacher education within the Saudi Arabian context. Third, it could offer valuable insights for policymakers in their endeavors to enhance the quality of teachers in Saudi Arabia through policy formulation, as well as the allocation of funds and resources toward teacher education programs. Consequently, this would contribute to the enhancement of the English language teaching and learning methodologies in public schools in Saudi Arabia. Fourth, while the study was carried out in Saudi Arabia and it has the potential to offer pertinent remedies to the current situation in the country, thereby carrying implications that would help illuminate the dilemma now encountered by many other educational settings. Fifth, a comprehensive examination of the existing literature in the areas of teacher preparation and language policy has shown the pressing need for research on pre-service teacher preparation programs that specifically address the requirements of English teachers in the worldwide context (Chodidjah, 2008b; Escudero, Reyes Cruz, & Loyo, 2012; Hamid & Honan, 2012; Kaplan, Baldauf, & Kamwangamalu, 2011; Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen, 2011; Nunan, 2003; Suyanto, 2010). It is essential to develop a pre-service education program that will directly address the need to prepare future teachers to stay updated with the significant changes in the global globe (Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2024; Zhan, 2008; Zhang, Wu, & Fu, 2024). Hence, the results of this investigation are anticipated to enhance the existing body of knowledge.

4. THE STUDY QUESTIONS

The main objective of this study is to examine the pre-service education of EFL teachers at Saudi universities. These three questions define the scope of the discussion:

1. What are the objectives and curriculum of the pre-service instructional programs for EFL teachers provided at Saudi universities?
2. How do Saudi EFL instructors view their English proficiency, language teaching skills, and teaching practicum experience during their pre-service education at the university level?
3. What measures should be implemented to enhance the existing pre-service education programs for EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia?

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Participants

This study focuses on a group of male instructors who have obtained a bachelor's degree in English from Saudi universities and are presently employed as EFL instructors in Saudi public schools at the elementary, intermediate, and secondary levels. It assumes that EFL teachers possess the necessary expertise to make rational and valid assessments regarding the issue under discussion. This is defensible since they are the primary participants in the present TEFL courses and possess a superior ability than anybody else to identify the problem addressed by this

study. 112 EFL instructors took part in the study. Their instructional experiences vary from 2 to 4 years. They respectively obtained their degrees from various Saudi universities.

5.2. Research Methods

Research methodologies encompass the processes of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data (Creswell, 2009). The empirical methods employed in this study encompass document analysis and interviews. This facilitates the attainment of a more extensive perspective, therefore empowering the researcher to derive comprehensive insights from the dataset.

5.2.1. Analysis of Documents

The process of document analysis involves the evaluation of documents, encompassing both hard copy and soft copy forms (Bowen, 2009). The objective of using document analysis in this study is to acquire significance and comprehension and facilitate the development of empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Exploration of the objectives and content of the English teacher pre-service education program in Saudi universities was conducted using document analysis. To obtain additional research data that could complement the primary data collected from the interviews, this approach of document analysis was employed. Bowen (2009) asserted that documents can offer significant information and insights for supplemental data in research, and can serve as a method for monitoring the progress and evolution of a program or event.

5.2.2. Interview

In-depth interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data. From a qualitative research perspective, an interview is considered:

"The third leg of the observation-interview documentation triptych and probably is the most significant of the three, judging by the sheer volume of data generated by this method and the degree to which it is preferred in determining eventual research and evaluation judgment" (Sanger, 1996).

The purpose of these interviews was to investigate a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena in connection to English education graduates in the teacher pre-service education program at Saudi universities. The qualitative interview is a method that involves asking open-ended questions to gather qualitative data (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

The objective of this study was to obtain an insider's perspective on the efficacy of the English teacher pre-service education program within the educational context of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, this will serve as a fundamental basis for enhancing the quality of teacher education in Saudi Arabia. Thus, this study exhibits certain attributes of an evaluation. Patton (2002) clarifies that program assessment interviews are designed to gather the viewpoints of program participants. The study focused on the participants' evaluations of the program, including their experiences, perceptions, emotions, expectations, and beliefs about necessary program modifications. Typical questions commonly asked during appraisal interviews. Patton (2002) elaborated that the interviewer must establish a structure in which the participants can respond with ease, precision, and honesty to such questions.

5.3. Procedures

The interviews conducted in this study were both semi-structured and unstructured. The researcher had not devised any systematic framework for his interviews. Although he perceived the interviews he was about to conduct as unstructured, meaning he lacked a predetermined set of questions to be asked systematically or chronologically, he had a clear concept of what he wanted to inquire about. Throughout the interviews, the researcher made a deliberate effort to create an environment where the participants could take charge of the discussions and identify their concerns. This approach demonstrated their eagerness to engage in meaningful discussions and go into issues

in great depth. Arguably, this is what Bogdan and Biklen (1992) describe as "good interviews", as the interviewees feel comfortable and express their opinions naturally. The interaction between the researcher and the participants resembled a casual conversation rather than a systematic interview. Simply said, the researcher tended to guide the interviews as the questions emerged organically. This facilitated the interviewees in a non-threatening dialogue where they experienced the natural organic flow of discourse.

Arabic, the native language of the interviewees, was used as the medium of communication during the interview sessions. The researcher's decision to conduct the interviews in Arabic was to promote participants' natural self-expression and prevent any potential discomfort they may experience when attempting to communicate in English. The primary methodology employed by the researcher to document the sequences of the interviews was a compact tape recorder. The researcher requested the participants' consent to make audio recordings of the interviews, clarifying that the material provided would be used solely for research reasons. To simplify the following categorization and analysis of the data, all the cassette recordings were assigned names and dates. Each interview was carried out at a time selected by the participants. As the interviews were carried out in Arabic, the native language of the participants, they were transcribed and thereafter translated into English by the researcher, and finally verified by a third party. Each interview had a duration of about 30 minutes and was recorded in audio format. To ensure confidentiality, the anonymity of the participants was safeguarded by refraining from recording their names and instead assigning them codes such as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so on.

5.4. Analysis of Data

The objective of data analysis is to derive significance from unprocessed data (Johnson and Christensen 2008). According to Simons (2009) analysis encompasses several procedures including 'coding, categorization', idea mapping, and theme development. These processes facilitate the organization and coherent interpretation of the data, leading to the production of findings and a comprehensive understanding of the case. Consistent with the perspectives of Johnson and Christensen (2008); Simons (2009) and Creswell (2009) argued that analysis encompasses the task of 'preparing data' for examination, delving further into comprehending the data, 'representing the data', and formulating an interpretation of the broader significance of the data.

The present study employed thematic analysis to examine the data, encompassing the identification, analysis, and reporting of themes within the data. This study followed the thematic analysis approach proposed by Creswell (2009) and Liamputtong (2009). This approach involved the following steps:

(i) Arranging and preparing the data for analysis;
(ii) Thoroughly reading all the data;
(iii) Commencing a detailed analysis with a coding procedure;
(iv) Utilizing the coding to produce a description of the setting or individuals, and establish categories and themes of analysis;
(v) Determining how the description and themes will be presented in the qualitative narrative;
(vi) And interpreting or deriving meaning from the data.

To begin with, the recorded tapes were thoroughly reviewed and transcribed verbatim. Following the transcription and revision of the interview data, the researcher thoroughly reviewed the data acquired from the pre-service education program documents and the interview transcriptions several times to acquaint himself with the content. This process is referred to as "staying close to the data" (Radnor, 2002). Through an analysis of the transcribed interviews, the researcher discovered that the majority of Saudi EFL teachers acknowledged the significance of pre-service education but also expressed a need for its enhancement. Furthermore, he discovered that the Saudi EFL teachers held a common perspective on particular significant matters that could have a direct or indirect impact on their classroom teaching methods. This enabled him to construct a "thematic framework" based

on the presented facts (Lynch, 1996). The data were condensed and categorized using codes, then arranged into groups. The themes that emerged from the additional evaluation of these categories were the following:

- Pre-service education programs provided for EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia.
- The objectives and scope of the pre-service education curriculum.
- The intended objectives of the program.
- The program's scope.
- Issues on the curricula of the EFL teacher pre-service education program.
- Equilibrium between theoretical knowledge and practical.
- Temporal constraint.
- Courses with overlap.
- Issues on the preparatory experience of EFL teachers.
- Proficiency in the English language (Comprehensive understanding of the subject matter).
- Proficiency in language instruction (Pedagogical skills).
- Teaching practicum (Practical experience in the field).
- Assessment of the teaching practicum.
- Duration of the instructional practicum.
- The roles and responsibilities of university supervisors and school mentor teachers.
- Insufficient availability of suitable resources and facilities.

The following sections will focus on these main themes.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The primary objective of the study was to evaluate the pre-service education of EFL instructors at Saudi universities. The main objective was to investigate the participants' opinion of the university teacher education program specifically designed for English as a foreign language instructors in Saudi Arabia. This study used a methodology that included document analysis and interviews with Saudi EFL instructors. These instructors were graduates from several Saudi universities and are currently employed as English language teachers in Saudi public schools.

The following presents a comprehensive analysis of the study results acquired from the examination of documents and the interview data collected from the study participants.

6.1. Pre-Service Education Programs Provided for EFL Teachers in Saudi Arabia

The pre-service education and preparation of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia goes through various programs offered by the English departments at various Saudi university colleges of education/teacher-colleges, colleges of arts, and colleges of languages and translation. The program in colleges of education prepares candidates to teach English at Saudi public schools, while the other programs prepare them to be specialists in English language (literature or translation). developing expertise in the English language, such as literature or translation. However, it is worth noting that graduates from these programs are still permitted by the Saudi education system to teach in schools if they so desire.

6.2. The Objectives and Scope of the Pre-Service Education Curriculum

An analysis of the curriculum employed by the EFL teacher pre-service education program at the time of the study was performed to extract data on the program's objectives and scope. Additional supportive data was collected through interviews conducted with the participants of the study.

6.2.1. The Intended Objectives of the Program

The objectives of the EFL teacher pre-service education program at Saudi universities are to develop highly well-prepared graduates with sufficient language proficiency and teaching skills, capable of doing research in English teaching, and equipped with technological skills applicable to their teaching activities.

To accomplish the objectives of a teacher pre-service education program, it is essential to explicitly define the components of the program to adequately train and educate pre-service teachers.

Based on the outline of the EFL teacher pre-service education program in departments of English at the Saudi universities, one can find out that the program is typically divided into four categories; Language Proficiency, Content Knowledge, Teaching Skills, and Contextual Knowledge. These categories mandate that candidates are to have four competencies, namely; pedagogical competency, personal competency, professional competency, and social competency. As such, these units address candidates' pedagogical expertise, linguistic content knowledge, and their pedagogical content knowledge. The curriculum incorporates both theoretical and practical information.

Pedagogical competence is the capacity to effectively oversee and direct the process of teaching and learning. Personal competence in foreign/second language teaching requires teachers to exhibit the capacity to serve as role models for their students. Additionally, personal competence is a crucial aspect of this competence. Professional competence encompasses the specialized knowledge of a subject that a teacher must demonstrate, together with the techniques for presenting this information to students and the capacity to convey the subject matter in a manner that students can comprehend. To possess social competence, teachers must possess sufficient communication skills and the capacity to actively participate in social activities both inside the school and in the larger society. To accomplish this, instructors must be provided with opportunities to collaborate and acquire knowledge by engaging in group-oriented activities.

In preparing pre-service teachers to have adequate language proficiency and pedagogical skills, Saudi universities' language programs are designed to provide the necessary English language knowledge and skills for listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition, the programs offer language component courses, such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. For pedagogical skills, the program offers courses related to language teaching skills, such as Teaching Methods (theory), Teaching Methods (practice) courses and Teaching Practicum pedagogical skills. The programs provide training in language testing, curriculum and material development, and curriculum design to specifically target the aspect of teachers' content knowledge.

The teaching practicum project is a primary component of the pre-service education curriculum for EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. This course is mandatory and must be completed by pre-service teachers once they have completed the majority of credit points in courses focused on language teaching skills, language proficiency, and knowledge. The practicum is scheduled during the last semester of the program and carries a credit value of around 8-12 points. The practicum takes place in public schools in Saudi Arabia. During the practicum, pre-service teachers apply their academic teaching ideas while being supervised by university teaching faculty and School Mentor Teachers.

6.2.2. The Program's Scope

Over the course of four years, candidates are exposed to linguistics, teaching methodology, English literature, and education courses. At the outset, in some universities, candidates must first enroll in an intensive program for one or two semesters. Upon successful completion of this program, candidates are matriculated in the actual academic mainstream English program, where they take:

- Foundational education courses that are mandatory for university or college graduation.
- Courses mandated by the English department encompass skill-building, general linguistics, applied linguistics, and English literature courses.
- Choice of elective courses.

The 4-year program, provided by English Departments in Colleges in Saudi universities for pre-service EFL instructors, generally comprises four categories:

- Language competency: This encompasses the language-specific skills necessary for language teachers to engage in effective teaching. These skills include the capacity to accurately understand texts, offer appropriate language models, and employ the target language for classroom instruction. The language competence courses offered in the EFL teacher pre-service education program encompass Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Interpreting, English Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Translation, both oral and written. These courses are classified as English skills and language components.

- Content knowledge: This pertains to the specific information that language instructors should possess concerning language acquisition and associated knowledge that is not commonly encountered by teachers in other academic disciplines. The EFL teacher pre-service education program delivers a range of courses that address the content knowledge required by language teachers. These courses include Introduction to Linguistics, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Introduction to Literature, Prose, Poetry, Drama, Literacy Criticism, Curriculum Study, Material Design and Development, and Language Testing.

- Teaching Skills: Education and training programs for teachers provide an opportunity to cultivate a wide range of teaching skills. For instance, choosing educational activities, equipping students for new instruction, assessing students' progress, providing feedback on students' learning, and so on. Training courses such as Teaching Methods Theory and Practice and Teaching Practicum exemplify the teaching skills addressed in the pre-service education program for EFL teachers.

- Contextual knowledge: This specifically refers to the necessary contextual knowledge that EFL teachers must learn to effectively operate in various situations. Among the courses available in the EFL teacher pre-service education program are Cross-Cultural Understanding, English for Specific Purposes, Religion, Citizenship, and Arabic.

The emphases of the above courses differ according to levels. For instance, first- and second-year level courses concentrate on developing candidates' language skills, including listening comprehension, reading, writing, and speaking, as well as language areas such as grammar and vocabulary development. This focus is based on the assumption that candidates are not expected to have sufficient competency in English when they first enroll. These courses also contribute to future EFL teachers' abilities to teach introductory courses on English literature and linguistics. During their third and fourth years, candidates are introduced to more advanced subject area courses together with methodology courses. Candidates are thereby exposed to English literature courses, including the history of English literature, poetry, novels, drama, and literary criticism, and linguistics courses, such as semantics, syntax, and phonology. They also take advanced courses in translation, advanced writing, and grammar, along with courses in English teaching methods. The final semester of the program is designated as a practicum, in which candidates are assigned to teach for one semester in an elementary, intermediate, or secondary school under the supervision of one of their teaching staff (University Supervisors).

Notably, the overall number of courses and the specific focus in each of these aforementioned categories may differ among universities. Moreover, the pre-service education programs for EFL teachers, which are delivered in Saudi universities, aim to prepare and train Saudi English teachers. However, each university has its distinct programs and requirements, which prevents the establishment of a unified philosophy and the development of national standards and guidelines that govern and guide the key issues associated with the preparation and training of future English teachers in Saudi Arabia.

Upon careful analysis of the aforementioned four categories, it becomes evident that candidates are only required to complete three modules that specifically address teaching methodology. The three distinct categories are Teaching Methods theory and practice and Teaching Practicum. These three units constitute approximately 10% of the entire curriculum. The remaining curriculum consists of classes that provide instruction in the English

language to the candidates, as well as courses that are completely unrelated and might be replaced with more practical courses that equip the EFL teacher for their future profession.

The majority of the EFL teachers included in this study indicated that they were not exposed to the school English curriculum while pursuing their university studies. Some instructors noted that they had the opportunity to instruct the prescribed curriculum as trainees during their final semester of university studies. According to them, they were provided with a Teacher's Guide and explicitly instructed to adhere to its guidelines while delivering the curriculum. Other teachers said that they lacked the necessary training to teach English as they had graduated from courses in other English departments, such as literature or translation. Their employment as English teachers by the Saudi Ministry of Education was contingent upon their completion of pre-service training courses.

6.3. Issues on the Curricula of the EFL Teacher Pre-Service Education Program

6.3.1. Equilibrium Between Theoretical Knowledge and Practical Aspects

The interviewed Saudi EFL instructors believed that the pre-service education program, in its courses, focused more on theoretical material rather than practical insights. Analysis of interviews indicated that courses on knowledge and general pedagogical skills require enhancement in terms of their ability to effectively balance theory and practice. An exemplary statement made by one of the EFL instructors interviewed:

"There are a minimum of four courses that specifically address general pedagogical skills, emphasizing theory rather than practical application. Our coursework aims to provide a theoretical understanding of the concepts of education, teaching, and learning."

One crucial inference can be made from the aforementioned remark. The participants desired courses focused on pedagogical skills to prioritize the allocation of more time for the practice of such skills, therefore maximizing the benefits derived from such courses. Another EFL instructor made a similar observation on the requisites of practice, specifically referring to the Teaching Methods courses in which they were registered. He highlighted that the Teaching Methods courses explicitly mentioned the need for additional practice hours in teaching. However, due to time constraints and a high number of registered candidates, each candidate is only afforded a single opportunity to demonstrate their teaching skills in front of his classmates. Furthermore, he expressed that this was insufficient and fell short of the expectations and requirements of the candidates. He stated:

"I believe that Teaching Methods courses are crucial in equipping us with the necessary knowledge on how to effectively teach English to students. Our curriculum covers topics such as classroom management, student grouping, and English teaching methodology. Regrettably, our limited time and the high number of candidates registering for these courses have created only one opportunity for us to apply the teaching skills we have acquired".

As perceived by interviewees, the need to balance theory and practice in pedagogically-related courses was supported Kömür (2010) who argued that language teacher education programs have not sufficiently integrated knowledge and practice. Kömür (2010) recommended that the theory and practice components of any teacher pre-service program should be balanced. The integration of theory and practice in teacher pre-service education is crucial due to the inherent difficulty of acquiring knowledge in isolation from practical application (Darling-Hammond, 2009b). Furthermore, it is necessary to achieve a harmonious equilibrium between theoretical knowledge and practical application in courses on pedagogical skills. Novice teachers may struggle to grasp the correlation between their university education and its subsequent application as successful classroom practices (Hameed, 2023; Komesaroff & White, 2001).

Interviews with participants in the EFL teacher pre-service education program at Saudi Universities revealed that connecting theories to practice in the pedagogical courses was considered crucial. Hence, the program must

enhance the equilibrium and elucidation of these connections within the curriculum by using theory and practice integration as educational material.

6.3.2. Temporal Constraints

Another concern expressed by the participants was the restricted duration dedicated to courses focused on pedagogical skills. Analysis of data collected from interviewed EFL teachers revealed that although the Teaching Methods courses description explicitly mentioned the need for practical teaching experience, the limited time and high number of candidates enrolled in these courses resulted in each candidate having only one opportunity to demonstrate their teaching skills in front of their peers. Consequently, there was a scarcity of time available for pre-service teachers to have sufficient exposure to practical experience.

Allocation of time and the number of candidates registered in the EFL teacher pre-service education program have emerged as significant concerns. The study participants affirmed that the opportunity to engage in teaching skills activities is essential in forming perceptions of the true essence of teaching. The absence of proper opportunities for pre-service teachers to use their acquired knowledge became a challenge. A Saudi EFL teacher expressed:

"Completion of pedagogical skill-related courses, such as Teaching Methods courses, is crucial for candidates to acquire a diverse set of teaching strategies necessary for working with students. However, the challenges of a large class and insufficient practice hinder the effective utilization of these courses in familiarizing candidates with teaching skills."

Another EFL teacher mentioned a comparable experience of teaching in sizable courses. He declared:

"Teaching writing skills in a classroom with over 40 candidates becomes challenging. Our university English lecturer effectively instructs us individually on the various stages of writing, including drafting, paragraph development, and concluding. However, working with many candidates simultaneously is both exhausting for the lecturer and ineffective."

From the researcher's point of view, the problem of time constraints and big class sizes can be addressed by dividing candidates into many concurrent classes when there is a high number of students enrolled in practical courses, such as the Teaching Methods courses. This approach will afford the candidates more time and opportunity to enhance their teaching skills in these courses.

6.3.3. Courses with Overlap

Data obtained from the interviews indicated a noticeable overlap in course content provided by university instructors, resulting in candidate tedium caused by the repetition of subjects covered in several courses. The analysis of program documents revealed recurring trends in courses on Research, as well as evident overlap in content across several courses linked to Listening & Speaking as well.

In the context of the EFL teacher pre-service education program in Saudi universities, prioritizing the acquisition of language proficiency and teaching skills is more beneficial than allocating significant attention to research skill domains. Not imply that candidates are not required to acquire research skills, but prioritizing the appropriate balance of research courses is crucial.

Referring to the feedback collected from participants in this study, it is necessary to reconsider the courses provided in the program. This implies that the quality should not be compromised, but rather, the courses should be meticulously chosen and any irrelevant ones should be eliminated. An English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructor expressed the opinion that certain subjects covered in those courses exhibit a high degree of similarity. The key observation derived from this comment is that there was a noticeable overlap in the course content provided by the university faculty, perhaps resulting in candidate tedium owing to the repetition of the addressed subjects.

Another EFL instructor had similar observations about the presence of overlapping courses, which can potentially hinder the effectiveness of teaching and learning for pre-service teachers.

"There is a significant degree of course overlap within the program. For instance, the curriculum includes courses in Research in Education, and Research in Literature, and the program provides courses in Linguistics Research, as well as Research on English Language Teaching and Classroom Action Research. However, I believe that the program would be more efficient if it only included courses in research methodology, research proposal, and seminars".

Furthermore, a third language instructor concurred that there were courses that had overlapping content. One factor that contributed to this problem was the absence of a precise description of the required courses, including Listening & Speaking 1, Listening & Speaking 2, and Listening & Speaking 3. An EFL teacher provided further details on this matter:

"In general, the curriculum used in the program is commendable; nevertheless, there is a significant overlap among several courses on English skills, namely Listening & Speaking 1, 2, and 3. Furthermore, there is a lack of sufficient description regarding the requisite competencies for prerequisite courses, such as the Listening & Speaking, Writing, and Reading courses."

It is important to recognize that the teacher pre-service education program is not a fixed document, but rather a dynamic one that adapts to the changing requirements of candidates and the specific circumstances of the local environment (Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2024; Graves, 2009; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000). Therefore, it is advisable to regularly update the program based on informed assessment. By eliminating the overlap in courses, candidates may achieve improved time management and complete the program in more realistic and logical ways. Irrelevant courses that are removed might be substituted with more pertinent ones, therefore ensuring that applicants acquire the fundamental knowledge required in the program. Consistent with Salli-Copur (2008) findings, Coskun and Daloglu (2010) suggested that university teaching staff should engage in cooperation, collaboration, and integration to analyze and address conflicts in course material, therefore preventing course overlap. Implementing this approach will result in the development of more efficient courses and offer applicants more practical methods to fulfill their pre-service education. In brief, there exist multiple concerns within the EFL teacher pre-service education program that necessitate increased focus in terms of its implementation in Saudi universities. Initially, pre-service teachers should engage in more practical application specifically tailored to pedagogical-related courses, rather than unduly emphasizing the theoretical aspects of teaching. Furthermore, the duration assigned to certain courses must be duly considered. Thirdly, an extensive number of courses overlap and require redesigning.

6.4. Issues on the Preparatory Experience of EFL Teachers
6.4.1. Proficiency in the English Language (Comprehensive Understanding of the Subject Matter)

Regarding the language skills and knowledge that English teachers must acquire, the study participants stressed that knowledge of the subject matter helps build self-confidence in terms of what they are required to teach to students. The findings from the data suggested that participants perceived their EFL teacher pre-service education program had provided them with the language proficiency needed to confidently teach English to students. Their responses, during interviews, revealed that they felt confident and prepared to teach if they knew the subject matter well, as stated by one of the participants: "If I know well the kind of subject matter I am going to teach, automatically I will feel confident standing in front of my students to deliver my English lessons." Another English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructor explained: "When I am instructing my students in the topic of speaking, I feel well-prepared and self-assured because I am certain that my speaking skills are satisfactory."

These results suggested that the participants felt adequately equipped to use English skills for communication purposes. However, they also identified some courses on English language proficiency that they considered

inadequate in terms of their delivery and content. Qualitative data obtained from the interviews indicated that grammar, writing, and listening classes are seen as the most challenging to acquire.

English grammar classes cover instruction on the rules of the English language, which were determined to be considerably more complex than Arabic, the native language of Saudis. Moreover, the university teaching staff delivered the grammatical classes in an unsatisfactory manner. The grammar lessons were frequently dull, consisting of repetitive exercises that demanded students to complete several assignments and drills on constructing well-structured English sentences and selecting the appropriate part of speech. An EFL teacher recognized grammar as the most difficult and intricate aspect of the English language. He expressed feeling unequally prepared to teach the subject of grammar to his students.

Participants identified the grammar course as a particularly challenging academic subject that required enhancement in its delivery to pre-service teachers due to the intricate nature of language rules and patterns that hinder learning. Inadequate delivery even intensifies the challenge of acquiring grammar in an EFL environment. Participants noted that the grammar classes were delivered by a methodology of repetition, whereby students were required to compose accurate sentences using suitable tenses. Under this method, it is necessary to commit the rules of grammar to memory to successfully carry out the tasks. An approach of this nature is considered unsuitable, and university teaching staff should be aware of this premise. University teaching staff should employ contemporary pedagogical approaches. The primary focus is to enable candidates to actively participate in the learning process, therefore facilitating optimal acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills. Cullen (2012) identifies three stages implicated in the acquisition of grammar. These three steps were obtained from empirical investigations on the acquisition of a second language. First and foremost, learners must possess the ability to perceive grammar characteristics in authentic and practical application situations. Secondly, learners require chances to develop theories regarding the functioning of grammar. Furthermore, learners require adequate chances to engage in the practical application of grammar within relevant situations. Hence, it is the primary responsibility of grammar instructors to ensure that these procedures are integrated into their instruction, enabling students to acquire grammar in authentic and efficient manners that are engaging and not overburdened by repetitive patterns.

When participants were questioned about the specific language knowledge (English skills and English elements) they needed to enhance, their answers provided pertinent information that is necessary for boosting their confidence in teaching the English discipline. For participants, this was focused on enhancing their writing skills. The following is a representative comment made by one of the participants. "I believe I need additional writing courses... when I was required to write for my last assignment in the program, I struggled with structuring my writing." As to the accounts of the EFL instructors interviewed, the average number of pre-service teachers in a single class exceeded 40. This posed challenges in instructing writing skills as the lecturer had to facilitate each pre-service teacher in understanding writing elements, practicing them, assigning them, and evaluating their writing. Executing such tasks will become more challenging when a lecturer is responsible for teaching a sizable class.

Other participants perceived listening skills as more difficult than other skills:

"Listening skills are more challenging than other skills. I have conferred with my colleagues and they have expressed the same sentiment regarding listening skills, particularly when we took the TOEFL test. We require more input for listening. Occasionally, we were instructed by less qualified lecturers. Our language laboratory lacks sufficient resources, such as up-to-date English cassettes or CDs (Compact Discs)".

Considering the aspect of listening, three elements could lead participants to believe that they lacked sufficient skills or knowledge. First and foremost, it could be attributed to a lecturer's inefficient method of presenting certain listening subjects. One of the EFL teachers interviewed stated that they were instructed in listening by instructors who lacked sufficient levels of qualifications. This implies that, while presenting the listening subject, the lecturer may lack adequate preparation to teach the subject. Furthermore, this could be partially attributed to the lack of

systematic arrangement and design of the listening materials. As to Field (2012) the instruction of listening skills should shift its focus away from relying excessively on task types in which the learners assume a passive role as listeners. Modern pedagogical approaches can effectively equip learners for the interactive listening process that is commonly encountered in the real-life situations of English language learners and users.

Furthermore, the inadequate quality of materials utilized in the listening courses posed a major challenge for applicants in acquiring listening skills that can be applied outside the confines of the classroom. An EFL teacher stated:

"The language laboratory at college lacked sufficient resources to assist candidates, so posing a challenge for them to enhance their listening skills. They require access to sufficient resources to freely enhance their listening skills beyond the confines of the conventional classroom setting".

In contemporary times, due to the swift advancement of technology, as proposed by Field (2012) listening classes will shift from a complete class style to a more significant dependence on self-study. The utilization of computers and smartphones in education, particularly for enhancing listening skills in self-directed manners, is seen as a viable solution to address insufficient facilities and limited resources for listening courses held in traditional classrooms (Munfangati, 2014). The use of educational software accessible on Android and iOS mobile devices allows candidates to independently practice listening skills.

Thirdly, the hours allotted for listening courses in the classroom alone are insufficient to enhance listening abilities. In response to this issue, one of the EFL instructors interviewed expressed that:

"To fully utilize the resources offered by the language laboratory, I required additional time outside the classroom. In my particular situation, I found that my progress was enhanced by listening to English lessons on cassettes and CDs and watching English lessons on video provided by the language laboratory at that time. However, it is worth noting that the majority of these cassettes and CDs were in a deteriorated state and contained obsolete instructional content."

The preceding comment suggests that the EFL teacher pre-service education program necessitates significant enhancement in terms of the accessibility of resources and facilities to facilitate the instruction and acquisition of listening skills. In Saudi universities, the pre-service education program for EFL teachers lacks the essential modern tools and facilities required to assist applicants in enhancing their listening skills. The authors Munfangati (2014) and Hameed (2023) proposed that candidates should be motivated to utilize the technology and environmental resources at their disposal to enhance their listening skills beyond the confines of the classroom. This alternative learning activity can effectively address the constraints imposed by the short time available throughout the course.

To summarize, the EFL teachers interviewed recognized the significance of linguistic competence and knowledge in fostering confidence in teaching English to students. Nevertheless, some English skill-related courses require enhancement to provide candidates with sufficient subject matter content understanding. Enhancements are Writing skills, listening skills, and grammar courses were three of the English skill courses that need to be improved. Participants needed to learn more about these English skills. Several studies investigating English teachers' language proficiency in Asian contexts revealed the same insight, with many language teachers having a low level of English proficiency, and the curriculum in EFL teacher pre-service education program needing to be redesigned to improve the current situation (Dang, Nguyen, & Le, 2013; Goh & Wong, 2014; Hoa & Tuan, 2007; Zein, 2022).

6.4.2. Proficiency in Language Instruction (Pedagogical Skills)

Language teaching skills encompass the methodologies and procedures that educators must acquire and attain proficiency in. These include: commencing a lesson, presenting and elucidating assignments, choosing learning activities, posing questions, monitoring students' progress, providing feedback on students' learning, establishing

learning arrangements, assessing students' comprehension, directing student practice, transitioning between tasks, and concluding the lesson. Essential teaching skills encompass classroom management, motivation, decision-making, and the ability to evaluate students' performance and development (Richards, 2010).

During interviews, EFL teachers emphasized the importance of pedagogical knowledge and language teaching skills in effectively teaching English. An EFL teacher expressed that while he found them beneficial in enhancing their readiness for teaching, dedicating more time to practice is preferable, rather than solely emphasizing theoretical study. Based on this comment, it is evident that there was a necessity to prioritize courses that focus on practical pedagogical skills. Pre-service teachers frequently perceived that these types of courses prioritized theoretical elements over practical ones. Consistent with this viewpoint, a language instructor in this study also emphasized the significance of these instructional skills. According to him, the topics about pedagogical skills lack sufficient exploration. Topics such as 'classroom management' and 'addressing student needs' receive far less focus. Their emphasis lies on theoretical aspects rather than practical application.

The above remarks suggest that the pre-service EFL teachers require additional time to engage in practical application of pedagogical skills, rather than solely focusing on acquiring theoretical knowledge of these skills. Participants observed that certain programs about pedagogy prioritized ideas of classroom management, student interaction, and assessment of students' development, rather than providing chances to apply acquired knowledge. Furthermore, there is a need for enhancement in the practical components of the courses about English-teaching skills. The findings of this study suggest that pre-service EFL teachers require additional time for hands-on experience in pedagogical courses due to the absence of practical applications and opportunities to reinforce skills in their pre-service education program.

Although pre-service teachers believed they had received adequate preparation in pedagogical skills during their EFL teacher pre-service education program, the findings indicated that certain pedagogical skill courses required enhancement in terms of their content and emphasis. Moreover, classes in pedagogy might benefit from focusing more on issues specifically linked to teaching English rather than teaching in general. Additionally, it would be recommended that the instructors in these courses have expertise in English teaching.

The necessity to modify the content and emphasis of courses on pedagogical skills is in line with the recognition that English proficiency must be enhanced simultaneously with pedagogical skills. The provision of courses in English that specifically address pedagogical skills and emphasize the instruction of English to students will provide pre-service EFL teachers with enhanced exposure to both the language and its pedagogy.

During the interviews, EFL teachers emphasized the significance of pedagogical skills in effectively managing difficulties encountered in the English language classroom. When faced with a challenging scenario in the classroom, such as student misbehavior, they needed to have assurance in their ability to recognize and implement a suitable strategy to handle the situation. An EFL teacher remarked:

"As an educator, I must develop effective techniques to manage students in the classroom to facilitate their successful acquisition of the English language. Partially, the strategy I employed yielded positive results, but at other times, it proved ineffective, necessitating the exploration of an alternative strategy to address the challenges encountered during my teaching sessions".

Nevertheless, another EFL teacher prioritized his ability to apply pedagogical skills acquired throughout the teacher pre-service education program. Reflecting on his experience with students, he acknowledged:

"Upon commencing my English teaching career in school, I encountered challenges related to the ever-changing dynamics that manifested in the classroom. Ensuring the pupils' engagement with the lesson proved to be challenging for me. Instruction in a sizable class poses an additional challenge for me".

Another essential teaching skill that language instructors should have mastered is the use of techniques to inspire students to learn, regardless of their age and level. An EFL teacher discussed this issue concerning his pre-service education program. He stated:

"Many subjects about educational techniques were inadequately addressed in the curriculum. At present, I am employed as a primary school teacher and I am required to handle students with special needs. Conditions and manage them. For instance, I acknowledge the need to motivate and encourage students to engage in learning. However, my knowledge of how to effectively motivate, encourage, and entice students to learn, as well as strategies to accommodate different levels of student skills, is limited".

The evidence drawn from the participants' comments above reveals that the EFL teachers found maintaining students' interest, motivating students, managing the classroom, and attracting students to learn were very difficult tasks that English teachers must practice and complete successfully during their teaching routines. Similarly, a study by Abednia (2012) investigating teachers' professional identity concluded that knowledge of different teaching techniques, such as attracting students to learn, is important for teachers to work effectively with students.

Summarily, the study data validated the strong demand for pedagogical courses tailored to the specific requirements of EFL teacher pre-service education programs at Saudi universities. Analysis of the data indicated that courses linked to pedagogy were the most often cited area that needed enhancement. When queried about how to enhance the pedagogical skills courses, the study participants proposed prioritizing practical application over theoretical instruction and incorporating additional pedagogical skills into the curriculum to meet this demand. The study results indicated that the pre-service teachers judged themselves to have been adequately equipped with pedagogical skills throughout their university studies. Nevertheless, a number of the courses' training pedagogical skills required enhancement in terms of their substance and emphasis. Applicants would more effectively engage with courses on pedagogy if greater emphasis was placed on issues specifically connected to teaching English, rather than teaching in general. Additionally, the instructors in these courses should have backgrounds in English teaching. Consequently, the emphasis is expected to be on pragmatic elements rather than solely on the theoretical components of education.

6.4.3. Teaching Practicum (Practical Experience in the Field)

In teacher pre-service education, teaching practicum or field experience is crucial as it equips candidates with the practical experience of working in schools, therefore facilitating their development into professional teachers (White, 2009). It refers to the educational component of a program that facilitates the shift from being students to being instructors (Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2024; Gao & Benson, 2012; Mtika, 2011).

Engaging in teaching practicum enables pre-service teachers to connect the theoretical elements of their knowledge base with its practical components. Instructional practicums are typically conducted in schools, overseen by University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers. University Supervisors are highly skilled faculty members employed by universities, whereas School Mentor Teachers are professional educators from schools. They both bear the responsibility of assisting and enabling pre-service teachers throughout their teaching practicum in educational institutions. The subsequent analysis focuses on the concerns about the teaching practicum that were revisited by the participants of the study during the interviews. This study utilized the teaching practicum guidelines to analyze the requirements for executing the teaching practicum in the EFL teacher pre-service education program at Saudi universities. A thorough analysis was conducted on these guidelines to evaluate the teaching practicum in terms of its definition, objectives, and principles. Furthermore, these guidelines delineate the responsibilities of University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers throughout the practicum. The following provides a concise overview of the pertinent information in these guidelines:

- Aims: The teaching practicum is to ensure that pre-service teachers will be able to understand and be familiar with the school environment and its academic and social atmosphere, understand and implement teaching skills into practice, and obtain useful and meaningful experience in relation to their teaching practice.
- Principles: The teaching practicum is a collaborative project undertaken by the university and participating schools. Pre-service teachers' teaching practicum is under the supervision of qualified University Supervisors

and School Mentor Teachers in a collaborative and clinical manner. The teaching practicum is compulsory and cannot be replaced by other courses. This is because pre-service teachers need to be equipped with adequate experience working in schools before they graduate from the teacher pre-service education program. The teaching practicum is carried out in block placements, where pre-service teachers spend the entire semester physically present in schools.

- The roles of a University Supervisor include some particular duties. His/her role is to assist and enable pre-service teachers in creating their instructional materials before engaging in classroom teaching. Furthermore, he/she oversees and evaluates the performance of pre-service teachers during their teaching practice.

- The roles of a School Mentor Teacher include the following key duties. Firstly, to acquaint candidates with the school environment, including students, school staff, school administration, and its instructional ambiance. Second, to guide pre-service teachers on efficacious teaching methods, establish connections between theory and practice, monitor their teaching and provide feedback on their work, and assess and produce reports on the pre-service teachers' practicum. His/her role involves assisting and overseeing pre-service instructors in their daily classroom teaching practice. Third, to address issues identified during teaching supervision with the University Supervisor and School Head Teacher to devise remedies. Fourthly, to evaluate the performance of pre-service teachers during their teaching practices.

The University Supervisor and School Mentor Teacher actively collaborate with the School Head Teacher to guarantee the smooth and effective execution of the teaching practicum for pre-service teachers. They all provide feedback and offer a final score to the observation report and self-reflection report of pre-service teachers as the culminating task of their teaching practicum program. An essential component of pre-service education for EFL instructors is the teaching practicum, which provides them with the necessary opportunity to apply their acquired knowledge in actual school classrooms. At Saudi universities, it is a fundamental element of the pre-service education curriculum for EFL teachers. Nevertheless, certain difficulties and limitations may emerge during the execution of the teaching practicum. The subsequent sections will elucidate and address the concerns expressed by the study participants regarding the teaching practicum in the English teacher pre-service education program of Saudi universities.

6.4.3.1. Assessment of the Teaching Practicum

Data obtained from interviews indicated that EFL teachers saw teaching practicum as a highly significant and indispensable component of their pre-service training. Astika (2014) stated that pre-service teachers acquire knowledge on enhancing their teaching skills, comprehending the attributes of students, adopting effective classroom management strategies, showing respect towards students, peers, and teachers at educational schools, and recognizing the learning needs of students during their teaching practicum.

According to the data obtained from the interviews conducted in this study, the Saudi EFL instructors regarded the teaching practicum as a significant and beneficial opportunity for them to apply the knowledge and skills they acquired during their pre-service education program in the practical setting of school teaching. A Saudi EFL teacher shared his reflections on his experience. He declared:

"During the teaching practicum, I gained practical experience in delivering subject matter, managing the classroom, and conducting assessments in front of students. In essence, it provided the opportunity to apply the theory I had learned in the program about school practice."

Once more, a Saudi EFL teacher elaborated:

"The teaching practicum is a crucial stage in the process of becoming an English teacher. Throughout my teaching practice in school, I gained extensive experience in dealing with student misbehavior, delivering

English subject material, and doing various school-related tasks. This experience allowed me to apply the theories I acquired at university in my teaching practice."

The aforementioned remarks indicated that the Saudi EFL instructors, when attending their teaching practicum, perceived that they engaged in activities that allowed them to implement the theories of practice in the classroom. They recognized that the teaching practicum provided them with a chance to use the teaching skills they had acquired theoretically in their pre-service education program courses.

Meanwhile, another EFL teacher acquired fresh knowledge of teaching preparation. He declared:

"Through the teaching practicum, I acquired new knowledge in areas such as lesson plan design, test instrument construction, and teaching device preparation. Indeed, I acquired such knowledge throughout my pre-service education program, but the learning I gained during practicum was somewhat distinct and more up-to-date".

The noteworthy aspect of the aforementioned comments is that the knowledge acquired by EFL teachers during their pre-service education program may not be up to date when compared to their exposure in real-world classroom settings. The most recent iterations of instructional resources, such as lesson plans, appeared to be in use in schools, but their implementation in universities appeared to be lacking. According to Martinez and Mackay (2002) it is common for candidates to perceive the theoretical knowledge acquired in universities as lacking relevance to the practical aspects of classroom instruction. Academic institutions are typically regarded as distinct from schools in terms of theoretical frameworks and instructional tools (Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2024; Zein, 2022).

Although the respondents considered the teaching practicum program to be beneficial, certain noteworthy concerns require attention regarding the implementation of the teaching practicum in the field. Conducting interviews with EFL teachers revealed the difficulties they had during their practicum, namely in managing the instruction of sizable classrooms, with around 40-50 students in a single classroom. According to an EFL teacher:

"During my teaching practicum, I had a remarkable experience in my classroom teaching. Contrary to the conventional expectation of a language teacher teaching a maximum of 20 students, I had to teach over 40 students in one class, which was a significant challenge for me."

Another response was provided by another EFL teacher, who said that the teaching practicum had a commendable quality, while certain aspects deserved more enhancement in the future. The teacher articulated his perspective by stating:

"Over one semester, I participated in a teaching practicum and gained a diverse range of experience that enhanced my understanding of effective teaching. However, I identified certain shortcomings in the teaching practicum project, including infrequent visits from our university supervisors during classroom teaching and less cooperative and attentive school mentor teachers. These factors posed challenges for me when I was alone in a new environment."

Two crucial conclusions can be derived from the aforementioned comments: the need to instruct large classes and the essentiality of the responsibilities of University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers. High class sizes pose a significant challenge for pre-service EFL teachers during their teaching practicum (Shamim, 2007; Shamim, 2012). Furthermore, the current responsibilities of University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers tend to be ineffective in facilitating pre-service EFL teachers to acquire sufficient experience to teach English. The primary responsibility of School Mentor Teachers is to provide sufficient supervision to pre-service teachers, therefore enabling them to enhance their teaching skills throughout their practice. Their duties include guiding the pre-service teachers in their professional development by demonstrating good teaching methods, offering chances for teaching practice, and assessing the performance of pre-service teachers in many areas (Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone, 2006).

Within the EFL pre-service teacher education program offered by Saudi universities, candidates are required to complete certain courses to adequately prepare them for their classroom teaching practicum. The document analysis

data indicated that the EFL teacher pre-service education programs in Saudi Arabia provide certain courses as a prerequisite for applicants to participate in their teaching practicum in schools. These courses include Teaching Methods theory and practice. The courses offered as part of the teaching curriculum were also deemed insufficient in equipping candidates with the necessary skills to effectively teach during the practicum. An interviewed EFL teacher said that the teaching prerequisite courses, which were completed by the candidates before their teaching practicum, were ineffective since they did not specifically address the instruction of English to students. Their training is limited to preparing candidates for broad teaching issues. An exemplary remark made by one of the interviewees:

"In these courses, we acquired knowledge on general teaching issues, but not specifically on the instruction of English to students. The pre-service teachers are organized into groups to engage in collaborative work to accomplish the assigned tasks during these courses. Subsequently, they are given the chance to engage in practical teaching techniques in front of their peers. I hope that "micro-teaching" becomes a mandatory course, rather than a brief training session conducted before pre-service teachers undertake their teaching practicum."

The remarks provided by the interviewees indicate that these courses, when served as a prerequisite project before candidates engage in their teaching practicum, were ineffective due to their lack of emphasis on the instruction of English to students. That is, it only equipped pre-service teachers with the necessary skills to work with the general teaching methodologies. A potential recommendation for the EFL teacher pre-service education program at Saudi institutions is to include "micro-teaching" as a mandatory course in its curriculum before pre-service teachers engage in their teaching practicum. This arrangement enables pre-service teachers to receive training in a reduced teaching environment to systematically reduce the complexity of teaching duties, the duration of the session, and the number of students in the class. The design of the micro-teaching course should specifically target the practical teaching requirements of pre-service teachers, including the development of classroom management skills and lesson delivery skills.

Putri (2014) proposed that to fully utilize the teaching practicum, University Supervisors should actively serve as mentors to applicants during peer-teaching sessions before they participate in teaching practicum activities in schools. According to Goh and Matthews (2011) it is advisable to employ well-practiced proven strategies to help candidates successfully apply the theoretical knowledge acquired at university in the practical classroom setting. These strategies should enable candidates to derive concrete advantages from the practicum experience. Furthermore, they suggested that teacher preparation courses should be better aligned with and relevant to real school settings and situations. Such an endeavor requires a symbiotic collaboration between educational institutions; universities and schools. Patrick (2013) argues that universities should incorporate strategies in their teacher pre-service education programs that facilitate the establishment of a collegial relationship between pre-service teachers and School Mentor Teachers before the commencement of the teaching practicum experience for pre-service teachers. Patrick contended that to establish successful connections between pre-service teachers and their School Mentor Teachers, EFL teacher pre-service education programs should develop a practicum program that allows pre-service teachers to meet their prospective School Mentor Teachers and discuss their shared expectations and collaborative methods before commencing their practicum. The transferability of this concept extends from conventional teaching practicum methods to more collaborative and advanced partnerships. Establishing this professional relationship will enable University Supervisors, pre-service teachers, and School Mentor Teachers to equally prioritize the quality of professional experience or teaching practicum (Le Cornu, 2012).

6.4.3.2. Duration of the Instructional Practicum

Concerning the duration of the teaching practicum, most participants advocated for its extension to provide them with a sufficient chance to engage with students and other teachers in schools. The study findings indicated that the participants in a need for additional time at educational institutions to ensure a sufficient chance to apply their acquired knowledge. The EFL teachers interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the teaching practicum as it did not match their performance expectations. One EFL teacher was cited as saying:

"My opportunity to engage in teaching practicum is limited to a single semester, which does not allow for comprehensive coverage of all aspects including preparation, observation, and practice. It would be more advantageous if teaching practicum were conducted in two or more schools, rather than just one."

EFL teachers have suggested that the duration of the teaching practicum should be extended and that certain unrelated subjects, such as Poetry, Drama, Religion, and Arabic, should be stripped from the pre-service education curriculum for EFL teachers. On this matter, an EFL teacher stated:

"Poetry or Drama is not a prerequisite for candidates in the EFL teacher pre-service education program as the period of teaching practicum takes precedence. Completing a teaching practicum in one semester is insufficient. The more practice I had, the more I felt prepared."

Another EFL teacher had a similar viewpoint as to the necessity of extending the duration of teaching practicum. He declared:

"From my perspective, teaching practicum holds greater significance compared to certain courses like Religion and Arabic. As candidates, we are expected to possess a greater level of experience in teaching practice, including the aptitude to develop lesson plans, effectively manage classroom dynamics, and administer assessment tests."

Another EFL teacher articulated his perspective on this matter. He stated:

"Before working in a school, I received teaching courses that were insufficient to address the many challenges relevant to teaching practice. I believe that the duration of the teaching practicum should be extended by an additional semester to enhance the preparedness of aspiring English teachers for the teaching profession."

EFL pre-service teachers would benefit from more chances to engage in teaching practicum over multiple semesters during the four-year curriculum, rather than just once in the last year. Such will enhance their consciousness of their obligations in the field of teaching. Should the practicum be conducted solely in the last year of the program, candidates may have already forgotten certain aspects of their theoretical knowledge by the time they begin their practicum. Moreover, the practicum effectively engages candidates in the dual roles of teaching and learning, therefore enabling them to combine their skills as both educators and learners. The study findings indicated a necessity to initiate teaching practicum in Saudi universities during the initial stages of the curriculum. This will not only afford pre-service teachers abundant time for observation and practical teaching, but it will also provide them with a wider range and more profound experience in their preparation for entering the teaching profession.

Nevertheless, the matter of sufficient time for pre-service teachers to allocate in schools is still a subject of debate due to several elements that can readily impact the level of experience that candidates have during the teaching practicum. Le Cornu and Ewing (2008) argue that imposing a defined number of days for teaching practicum is not a concern; rather, the primary focus should be on ensuring high-quality preparation for teachers throughout the practicum.

The reconsideration of the practicum process should encompass not only the duration and the necessary teaching courses but also the selection of schools that collaborate with the university. Participants of this study proposed that the practicum should be conducted at multiple schools to get a broader range of experience in the application of teaching skills. As one of them well-articulated:

"Regarding the temporal and spatial aspects, I believe that the teaching practicum should be of sufficient duration to allow candidates ample opportunity for practical application. Furthermore, conducting teaching practicum in multiple schools facilitated the acquisition of a diverse range of experience that candidates need."

Expanding both the length and location of the teaching practicum in the program will enhance the chances to optimize the advantages of this form of training in developing skills and forming an identity as part of the teaching profession. The expansion of the teaching practicum is expected to enhance its quality.

To summarize, the EFL teacher pre-service education program in Saudi universities includes both quality and quantity of teaching practicum as crucial elements to ensure that candidates acquire sufficient teaching experience in school settings. Notwithstanding ongoing discussions on the matter of quantity versus quality of school experience, a high-quality teaching practicum does require a sufficient duration. Emphasizing the quality component is a valuable area of concentration for redesigning teaching practicum courses in EFL teacher preparation programs. The EFL teacher pre-service education program at Saudi universities must be promptly corrected.

6.4.3.3. The Roles and Responsibilities of University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers

A crucial determinant of teaching practicum quality is the interaction between pre-service teachers and their University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Zein, 2022). Given that University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers fulfill their responsibilities proficiently and conscientiously in supporting pre-service teachers efficiently, a single-term teaching practicum may be sufficient.

Successful completion of a high-quality teaching practicum requires the active participation of pre-service teachers, University Supervisors, and School Mentor Teachers. The results of this study indicate that the current responsibilities of University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers during the practicum are not effectively facilitating a completely optimal teaching practice experience for pre-service teachers. An interviewed English as an EFL teacher expressed this perspective on the responsibilities of University Supervisors and school Mentor Teachers. According to him:

"Optimally, University Supervisors should consistently visit the school where candidates are engaged in practicum to assess their progress. However, my experience was far from ideal. My University Supervisors only visited me twice, first at the start of my teaching practicum and then during the assessment period. Fortunately, my School Mentor Teacher was very supportive and imparted valuable knowledge and skills on teaching and classroom management."

Nevertheless, the aforementioned EFL teacher's experience proved superior to that of other EFL teachers during their teaching practicum. An EFL teacher, for instance, had little input from the University Supervisor. He provided commentary on that statement:

"My University Supervisor visited me only once during my teaching practicum, namely after the program during the assessment period. This evaluation was conducted by the University Supervisor, the School Mentor Teacher, and the School Head Teacher to evaluate our teaching performance".

The infrequency of visits by the University Supervisor to the school was identified by another EFL teacher as a weakness of the teaching practicum. It is recommended that this factor be considered to enhance the quality of the practicum. He expressed:

"The University Supervisor appears to be indifferent to his role in my teaching practicum. He only visited my teaching practice once during the entire semester, namely during the last assessment of my teaching practicum. His observation was limited to evaluating my performance in front of students in the classroom, which occurred during my last episode of teaching practicum."

The study findings from interviews conducted with English as EFL teachers revealed that they encountered inadequate support from both their University Supervisors and their School Mentor Teachers. Interviewed EFL teachers reported receiving limited assistance from University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers in managing challenges related to student discipline, classroom administration, and selecting appropriate teaching methods. Nevertheless, notwithstanding this discovery, it was acknowledged that the existence of School Mentor Teachers can be beneficial for pre-service teachers who have difficulties in practical teaching within the classroom. Although other EFL teachers had less guidance from their University Supervisors, they relied more heavily on the School Mentor Teachers. An EFL teacher described his teaching practicum experience:

"To be frank, the University Supervisor's role was subordinate to that of the School Mentor Teacher during my teaching practicum. Whenever I encountered difficulties in my pedagogy, I consistently sought guidance from the School Mentor Teacher."

Equally, another English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher stated:

"The University Supervisor's role during my teaching practicum was perceived as insufficient in terms of his visits. Occasionally, when I had inquiries, he was absent to assist. Fortunately, my School Mentor Teacher was consistently accessible to offer support."

The study conducted by Astika (2014) determined that the supervising teachers, known as School Mentor Teachers, in schools and the visiting teacher educators, referred to as University Supervisors, have a crucial role in the development of teaching models during the teaching practicum. Upon the complete execution of this duty, the teaching models acquired in university teaching methodology courses were greatly enhanced and improved in highly meaningful ways.

Furthermore, it is not just University Supervisors who fail to fulfill the expectations of pre-service instructors. In certain instances, School Mentor Teachers fail to meet the requirements of pre-service teachers (Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2024). The study findings obtained from interviews indicated that School Mentor Teachers did not effectively fulfill their responsibilities in facilitating pre-service teachers' exposure to authentic teaching in the classroom and in acquiring knowledge from professional discussions on the encountered difficulties. As per the account of one of the EFL teachers interviewed:

"As a pre-service teacher engaged in teaching practicum, I had anticipated substantial assistance from my School Mentor Teacher during my classroom teaching. However, I perceived a lack of support from him. When I encountered challenges, such as managing students' behavior, my School Mentor Teacher appeared hesitant to engage in discussions with me to find effective solutions."

The EFL teachers contacted reported a lack of adequate direction and support from their University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers throughout their teaching practicum. Such occurrences were often documented. An EFL teacher said:

"Throughout the entire duration of my teaching practicum, my University Supervisor made only two visits, and he was absent during the final practice assessment teaching in the classroom. Additionally, my School Mentor Teacher did not provide sufficient assistance, resulting in my lack of awareness regarding my specific weaknesses experienced during my teaching practice."

One more EFL teacher provided further details:

"The University Supervisor visited me twice during my teaching practicum. If I encountered challenges in my pedagogical practice, I typically sought guidance from my School Mentor Teacher. However, as I also required input from the University Supervisor on my teaching practice, this approach proved insufficient."

The study data also showed that pre-service teachers needed and desired feedback from both University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers to know their strengths and weaknesses concerning teaching practice performance. Visits and assistance from their University Supervisors and School Mentor teachers were seen as essential to help them have a suitable experience in teaching English to students. Teaching practicum supervision

provides pre-service teachers with support in developing their teaching skills and professional competencies through discussion and feedback.

This study revealed that the frequency of visits by University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers to pre-service teachers during teaching practicum was insufficient, despite the well-acknowledged significance of their role in assisting such teachers in developing their teaching skills. Insufficient visits by University Supervisors and less support from School Mentor Teachers can impact the effectiveness of the teaching practicum. Le Cornu (2012) defines the quality of teaching practicum as contingent upon the School Mentor Teacher's willingness to share their classrooms, allocate more time to pre-service teachers, and offer genuine feedback. Furthermore, the School Head Teachers must demonstrate a strong commitment to ensure that School Mentor Teachers are motivated and adequately equipped to provide support and accept pre-service teachers. The teacher pre-service education program should give priority to a conceptualization of practice that facilitates collaboration between pre-service teachers and their School Mentor Teachers to establish shared expectations. This collaboration is crucial for effectively accomplishing the objectives of the practicum through the practical experience of the pre-service teachers in the school (Patrick, 2013).

Ensuring effective communication and collaboration between pre-service teachers and their University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers is crucial for their professional growth throughout their teaching practicum placement (Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2024; Mtika, 2011). University Supervisors must conduct multiple University Supervisors are required to visit pre-service teachers several times during the teaching practicum in schools. Their visits are intended to observe pre-service teacher teaching performance and give feedback on that performance. School Mentor Teachers are there to help pre-service teachers and give assistance if they encounter problems during teaching practice. They also guide pre-service teachers to do teacher work such as designing lesson plans, teaching, and assessing student performance. One of the University Supervisors 'visits is dedicated to giving a final assessment of pre-service teachers' performances on their assessment day. The pre-service teacher's performance is assessed by the University Supervisor, the School Head Teacher, and the School Mentor Teacher, who collectively determine the success of the pre-service teacher in the teaching practicum.

Undoubtedly, the meaningful aspect of the teaching practicum is the interaction between pre-service teachers, University Supervisors, and School Mentor Teachers. As stated by Mtika (2011) this contact plays a vital role in the professional development of pre-service teachers during teaching practicum. To do this, it is necessary to develop stronger and more mutually respectful connections between University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers, taking into account their respective expertise, needs, and viewpoints. Saudi universities must prioritize the establishment of collaborations of this nature to enhance the quality of teaching practicum during the evaluation and/or restructuring of their EFL teacher pre-service education programs. A more robust relationship will result in efficient responsibilities that will support pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum.

Inadequate visits and a lack of coordinated effort between University Supervisors and School Mentor instructors resulted in limited help and support in addressing issues such as classroom discipline and student motivation in both typical and demanding school environments. White (2009) contended that the visits made by University Supervisors to pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum in schools are crucial for their professionalism and effectiveness. In addition, White emphasized that the availability of University Supervisors provides genuine assistance to pre-service teachers throughout their professional practice. Hence, University Supervisors must allocate additional time in schools to support pre-service teachers and School Mentor Teachers to accomplish the intended teaching practicum objectives. During their teaching practicum, pre-service teachers require prompt and strategic assistance in implementing teaching skills and adjusting to school settings, which often present difficulties that test their determination and may result in emotional exhaustion (Arnold, 2006).

6.5. Insufficient Availability of Suitable Resources and Facilities

Effective allocation of resources is a crucial factor in enhancing the quality of every teacher's pre-service education program. Resourcing in this study pertains to the resources and facilities accessible to English EFL teachers throughout their pre-service teacher education at the university. These resources and facilities encompass the utilization of library resources, and the enhancement of current facilities such as the Self Access Centre established by the EFL teacher pre-service education program at the university, to facilitate the acquisition of English fluency outside the traditional classroom setting in a more self-directed and autonomous manner, and the utilization of classrooms for instructional purposes.

Findings from interviews with study participants indicate that pre-service teacher education programs in Saudi universities suffer from insufficient and obsolete resources and facilities. The existing university resources and facilities, including language laboratories, were inadequate for the present requirements of teaching practice. Furthermore, there were either insufficient or nonexistent library resources and facilities. The interviewed EFL teachers identified resources and facilities as a crucial component of the EFL teacher pre-service education program at Saudi universities. They believed that these elements require enhancement both in terms of quantity and quality.

Analysis of interviews conducted with Saudi EFL teachers confirmed that pre-service teachers require sufficient resources and facilities to facilitate their academic pursuits and learning as pre-service teachers at university. The importance of having reference volumes readily available in the library and access to teaching-related articles was emphasized. In addition to the scarcity of printed resources in the library, interview data also revealed that the utilization of technological tools for the acquisition of knowledge was insufficient. The inadequate availability and feasibility of technological resources and facilities posed substantial obstacles for both university teaching staff and applicants. Effective incorporation of technology in the process of teaching and learning is crucial. Technologies have the potential to influence the connections between the content, methods, and significance of our teaching in our communities, cultures, and eras (Loveless, 2011). Technological tools enable teachers to provide lessons in more dynamic and inventive ways, therefore maximizing the attainment of learning objectives.

Provision of supportive resources and facilities is essential for pre-service teachers to enhance their language proficiency beyond the confines of the classroom. Therefore, the availability of a facility that can efficiently facilitate individual learning is of utmost significance. Analysis of the interview data revealed that pre-service teachers require access to learning resources and facilities to enhance their English speaking and listening skills autonomously outside the classroom.

Furthermore, the classroom learning aids must be enhanced and effectively utilized. Interviews with EFL teachers indicated that university teaching staff did not effectively utilize learning aids. For instance, a language classroom was equipped with a single antiquated overhead projector (OHP) and a single worn-out whiteboard. Within the language classroom, EFL learners must actively interact with a wide array of technology to facilitate the acquisition of a second or foreign language. To facilitate efficient teaching, language instructors must proficiently utilize up-to-date resources and facilities (Hameed, 2023; Levy, 2012). Hence, it is imperative to enhance the resources and facilities of the pre-service education program for EFL teachers in Saudi universities. This will ensure that both university teaching staff and applicants have the means and opportunity to gain proficiency and expertise in EFL.

7. CONCLUSION

Teaching English as a foreign language requires a teacher with adequate capacities in language proficiency, language knowledge, and language teaching skills. These abilities are crucial to help English teachers be a source of language input and act as role models in how to use English for the purpose of communication. An EFL teacher pre-service education program has a responsibility to provide schools with qualified teachers to teach English to students.

This study was an investigation of the EFL teacher pre-service education program at universities in Saudi Arabia. It aimed to investigate to what extent the EFL teacher pre-service education had prepared candidates with the knowledge and skills needed to be qualified English teachers. It explored Saudi EFL teachers' views on their pre-service education at university. It aimed to study how graduates of this program perceive their English language ability, pedagogy, and teaching practice experience through the formal learning they received as pre-service teachers. This study also made recommendations for improving the quality of the EFL teacher pre-service education program in Saudi Arabia through curriculum reform, improvement of the teaching practicum, and updating teaching and learning resources and facilities.

This study followed the qualitative approach for research where document analysis and interviews were used as instruments for data collection. The participants of the study were 112 Saudi EFL teachers who graduated from different Saudi universities and currently teach English as a foreign language at Saudi public schools (elementary, intermediate, and secondary levels)

Analysis of the data indicated that certain aspects of the EFL teacher pre-service education program need enhancements to adequately prepare candidates for teaching. First and foremost, courses on knowledge and general pedagogical skills need enhancements to achieve a more suitable equilibrium between theoretical concepts and practical application. Secondly, the time dedicated to courses linked to pedagogical skills was seen to be restricted. Furthermore, the presence of course material overlap resulted in applicant boredom as a consequence of the repetitive nature of lessons and subjects covered throughout several courses. Fourthly, the teaching practicum required enhancement in both quality and quantity. Furthermore, up-to-date materials, resources, and facilities must be readily accessible to pre-service EFL teachers during their university studies.

Considering language competence, language knowledge, and language teaching skills, the interviews indicated that a substantial modification in the program's design is necessary to enhance the development of writing and listening skills for pre-service EFL teachers. Furthermore, the classes on grammar and listening were seen as the most challenging to acquire. Hence, the courses in writing, listening, and grammar have been recognized as the most requiring comprehensive review and enhancement in terms of English skills.

Regarding pedagogical skills, the interview data indicated a requirement for increased chances to engage in teaching practice within courses specifically focused on mastering such skills. Conducted interviews with EFL teachers revealed that these courses placed excessive emphasis on theoretical elements rather than practical ones. The pedagogical skills courses required enhancement in terms of both content and emphasis. Moreover, pedagogy courses were expected to provide greater efficacy if emphasis was placed on issues specifically associated with the teaching of English, rather than teaching in a broader sense. An effective approach to tackle this issue would be to require that the university lecturers conducting these courses possess expertise in teaching English as a Foreign Language.

Concerning the teaching experience during practicum, the interviewees highlighted several difficulties, namely in managing the intricacies of teaching large classrooms. In addition, they said that the teaching methods courses in the pre-service education program were insufficient in equipping them with the fundamental skills necessary to effectively teach during their practicum on school premises. The candidates articulated that the teaching pre-requisite courses completed by them before the teaching practicum were ineffective due to their insufficient emphasis on the teaching of English to students. Merely offering applicants broad teaching concerns was inadequate for the context of EFL teaching.

The study findings also indicated that the duration of the teaching practicum needed to be extended to provide pre-service teachers with sufficient opportunities to interact with students and other teachers at schools. Time plays a crucial role in guaranteeing that pre-service teachers have ample opportunities to get firsthand experience of school life and engage in meaningful teaching practice. Hence, the complementarity of quality and available time is crucial for pre-service teachers in their practical teaching experience in schools. There arose a necessity to extend

the duration of the practicum beyond a single semester educational placement. Undoubtedly, this was insufficient for pre-service teachers to use the knowledge they acquired at the university. Furthermore, the teaching practicum should be conducted in multiple schools. The training provided before to practicum placement failed to provide candidates with the necessary abilities and skills to effectively teach as pre-service teachers in schools.

Empirical study indicates that enhancing the skills and abilities of University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers in carrying out their duties and obligations would be advantageous for all parties involved. Thus, fostering strong collaboration between schools and universities in overseeing practicum is a crucial method for enhancing the professional development of pre-service teachers. Enhanced quality in the practicum experience of pre-service teachers can be achieved by fostering cooperation and collaboration, which facilitates the development of shared understandings and agreements regarding their roles and the necessary support.

To support and help pre-service EFL teachers become professional and effective teachers, it is necessary to update and improve the resources and facilities available in Saudi universities for EFL teacher pre-service education in terms of quality and quantity.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study results establish some implications for enhancing the pre-service education program for EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. The consequences of these findings give rise to the subsequent recommendations that universities, curriculum developers, and policymakers should prioritize to enhance the pre-service education programs for EFL teachers:

- A revision of the curriculum for the EFL teacher pre-service education program at Saudi universities is necessary to enhance the preparation of EFL teachers with language competency, knowledge, and teaching skills. The areas suggested for change encompass the equilibrium between theoretical knowledge and practical application in pedagogy courses, a more pronounced emphasis on teaching English rather than comprehensive teaching, and a decrease in the duplication of course material through meticulous course redesign.

- There appears to be an absence of equilibrium between theory and practice in courses pertinent to pedagogy. To attain equilibrium, it is possible to assign a greater number of credit points to courses that emphasize the practical elements of learning. One alternative approach is to reduce the enrollment of candidates in the courses or to provide parallel classes with smaller class sizes in these courses. This is especially crucial in courses targeting the acquisition and application of English language skills, including listening, speaking, and writing, as well as in pedagogical courses that necessitate the development of teaching skills.

- The syllabus of the EFL teacher pre-service education program should prioritize EFL teaching above general teaching. Hence, it is imperative to modify the curriculum of the program to offer applicants courses specifically focused on English language instruction rather than teaching in a broader sense.

- There appears to be subject matter overlap in the courses. Thus, it is necessary to establish more explicit topic limits in the courses provided in the program. Before composing the syllabi for EFL teacher pre-service education programs, curriculum designers need precise information on the objectives and goals of each course. Moreover, university teaching faculty should engage in extensive consultation among themselves over course material. This measure would facilitate the mitigation of course overlap within the program. The provision of feedback and peer evaluation regarding the content and execution of a course can foster mutual comprehension, thereby resulting in the establishment of agreed-upon course descriptions and methods for attaining the objectives of each course.

- The balance between courses related to subject matter knowledge and language proficiency of EFL teachers and courses related to pedagogical skills needs to be better accommodated. This can be done by putting more courses related to language knowledge and English skills as well as language elements such as English

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grammar and pronunciation into the curriculum. Courses about pedagogical knowledge, classroom management, and organization need to be improved so that they are up to date with the latest trends in scholarly literature.

- To facilitate Saudi pre-service EFL teachers in achieving a reasonable level of English proficiency, it is advisable to assign them to spend a complete semester or more in an English-speaking country during their pre-service education as part of their bachelor's degree. This may be achieved by establishing joint academic degree-granting programs offered by international universities.

- Based on the study data, it was found that Saudi EFL teachers were mandated to complete only two courses on EFL teaching methodology during their pre-service programs. Hence, it is necessary to modify or redesign the program's curriculum to include a greater number of courses focused on English teaching methodology.

- The present level of teaching requirements and teaching practicum in EFL teacher pre-service education programs in Saudi Arabia appears to be inadequate. Hence, it is necessary to provide additional chances for trainees in the EFL teacher pre-service education program at Saudi universities to engage in teaching practicum over many semesters within the four-year program, rather than just once in the last year. Establishing a developing and consistent understanding of professional responsibility in pre-service teachers is essential throughout the curriculum. Pre-service teachers should engage in both practical teaching and systematic study of teaching theory simultaneously. Therefore, it is necessary to redesign the practicum and the accompanying courses to guarantee that applicants excel as both learners and pre-service instructors. Additional placement visits to schools offer greater chances to acquaint oneself with school surroundings and routines, to observe, to acquire knowledge from experienced teachers, and to engage in controlled teaching practice through activities like micro-teaching or peer-teaching.

- It seems the case that pre-service EFL teachers did not have the opportunity to see the school English syllabus during their study at university. Therefore, it is beneficiary to have a firmly established link between practical courses and the actual conditions under which pre-service teachers will teach English, as well as the norms of practice expected of teachers in schools in general, and classrooms in particular. This aim can be accomplished by making a connection between what is being taught at Departments of English, at Saudi universities, and the English courses that are taught at schools. Such a connection would fill the gap that currently exists between the knowledge base that pre-service EFL teachers are receiving while studying in English departments at universities and the actual teaching experience in English classrooms at schools.

- Insufficient guidance, assistance, and support were provided to pre-service EFL teachers by both University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers. Therefore, the functions they perform in supporting pre-service teachers to apply their teaching knowledge and skills in school environments should be redefined. One possible approach to do this is by developing more robust and intimate connections between universities and schools, and by enhancing the integration of theoretical and practical elements in specific supported courses within the curriculum.

- University Supervisors should conduct visits to pre-service teachers in schools during practicum about twice a week to monitor their teaching and provide constructive input on their performance.

- School Mentor Teachers should further enhance their support and guidance to pre-service teachers, particularly in the areas of classroom management and curriculum delivery strategies. By doing so, School Mentor Teachers will also facilitate the opportunity for pre-service teachers to connect theoretical knowledge with practical application. This practice can facilitate the enhancement of teaching skills and professional competencies among pre-service teachers.

- The collaboration of University Supervisors, School Mentor Teachers, and pre-service teachers should be facilitated by continuous and substantive dialogue and constructive feedback. To commence this process, the

initial phase is to create effective communication and mutual respect between University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers. Establishing a tighter interaction between universities and schools could facilitate the achievement of this goal.

- The enhancement of practicum supervision quality at Saudi universities necessitates the provision of training to both University Supervisors and School Mentor Teachers in supervising practices and quality standards. This training should specifically focus on helping pre-service EFL teachers throughout their school teaching experience. Only those who have completed the training should oversee pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum, as the quality of supervision and mentoring during this period is crucial.

- It appears that the study materials, resources, and facilities provided to Saudi EFL teachers during their pre-service education programs at universities were out of date and insufficient. Hence, it is imperative to enhance the resources and infrastructure, including technological tools, libraries, laboratories, and classrooms, to provide pre-service EFL teachers with improved access to essential resources and facilities. This will enable them to enhance their skills and knowledge, ultimately achieving the Saudi Government's objective of delivering high-quality English instruction in elementary schools.

- It seems that pre-service EFL teachers had a sense of being inadequately equipped with listening skills. One significant factor contributing to this matter was the insufficient availability of listening teaching materials and aids. An advanced language laboratory equipped with up-to-date materials and technology will be crucial in assisting candidates in enhancing their language proficiency and listening skills.

- An EFL teacher pre-service education program is obligated to supply schools with competent English instructors. To fulfill that duty, it is necessary to have the necessary resources and facilities at its disposal. Hence, the university library must be equipped with academic journals and databases to facilitate pre-service teachers in maintaining their language proficiency, language teaching skills, and pedagogical knowledge up to date. Moreover, it is essential to equip classrooms with technical amenities to facilitate teaching and learning and foster the enhancement of pre-service teachers' technological proficiency. Furthermore, it is important to provide Wi-Fi and Internet connectivity throughout the complete university premises to guarantee the efficient use of technology for all academic purposes. Lastly, the university teaching staff should include the existing technical resources and facilities in the instruction of languages.

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