

Primary School Teachers of Social Science, Islamic Studies, and Arabic language: A study of attitudes of NNEST

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Abstract

Quality assurance and achievement of objectives has necessitated inquiry into how Non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST) with different subject specializations are influenced in terms of quality of program design, achievement of program objectives, teaching materials and methods, and English diploma program instructors' ability. Thus, this study analyzes the attitudes of social studies, Islamic, and Arabic primary school teachers towards the English diploma program. Data are collected through a self-report questionnaire comprising 36 close-ended and 10 open-ended questions administered via Google forms. The study sample included 106 NNEST (an equal number of males and females) who completed the diploma programs. Using descriptive statistics, complementary and exploratory factor analysis through SPSS 6.1, data are used to reveal the relationship between achievement of program objectives ($R^2 = 0.49, \beta = 14.98$), efficiency of online classes ($R^2 = 0.52, \beta = 15.7$), program design, content and management ($R^2 = 0.52, \beta = 18.56$), instructors' performance ($R^2 = 0.45, \beta = 17.26$), participants' specialization ($R^2 = 0.18, \beta = 12.13$), and NNEST's attitudes and perceptions. Results highlight that there is no relationship between efficiency of online classes, participants' specialization and NNEST's attitudes and perceptions. Furthermore, the outcome of the text analysis generates two central factors: (i) drivers and, (ii) enablers for an English diploma program. Further, that NNEST are keen to learn English and demand an interactive learning environment to enrich their English communication skills. These findings can guide the educational institutions and diploma curriculum developers to design a diploma based on the NNEST demands.

Keywords: NNEST, English diploma, Drivers and Enablers, Faculty development program, Trainee teachers.

Introduction

One of the most significant changes to the educational system is the emphasis on teachers' professional development or Teacher Development Programs (Soruç & Griffiths, 2021). The 21st century marked the beginning of the modern period, and ever since, efforts to make these reforms have been robust and consistent. The term "professional development" is commonly used to refer to the numerous types of work-related learning opportunities available to individuals (Yuan et al., 2022). Engineers, accountants, teachers, attorneys, surgeons, and other professionals use professional development to acquire and use new information and abilities that enhance their effectiveness in the workplace (Alzankawi & Alzankaw, 2021; AlShabibi & Silvenoinen, 2018). The quality of instruction and the direction of school administrators have significantly impact students' educational success. Educators must continue improving their knowledge and expertise to ensure that the most acceptable teaching methods are used (Mumford & Dikilitaş, 2020). Education is a never-ending process, and professional development programs are crucial in learning success. Education reforms and continuing education for educators are priorities in modern societies. Teachers' dual role as subjects and objects of reform have attracted much attention in the field of education. The majority of educators and teachers support this strategy since they see it as beneficial to the learning process overall and value it. On the other hand, some instructors are cautious of the trend because they believe it reflects poorly on their performance as educators (Dang et al., 2021; Qiu & Fang, 2022).

The ability to communicate is crucial for accessing information. Understanding more than one language is a desirable skill in today's globalized national outlooks. As human civilization progressed, language became increasingly vital (Dang & Vu, 2020; Yuan et al., 2022). The primary purpose of today's educational institutions is to

inspire students to pursue lifelong learning and to help them identify and pursue their personal and academic goals (Badash et al., 2020; Zimmerman et al., 2017). The teachers' primary responsibility is to guide students on the appropriate path while the students are responsible for individually researching, locating, and analyzing the information. Negative motivation is common in language acquisition because of the challenges students face, and their psychological traits which prevent them from mastering the content (Tan & Chen, 2022). Experience demonstrates that using new and exciting methods and materials piques students' attention and boosts their learning (McGarr & Ó Gallchóir, 2020).

Some instructors are reluctant to embrace the trend because they believe it reflects poorly on their effectiveness as educators. On the other hand, professional development programs are widely acknowledged to aid educators in continuing to deliver high-quality work and advance their careers (Cross et al., 2022). As a result, human resource managers place a premium on developing teachers' professional skills and view this as their top educational priority. In this study, the researcher explores the importance of professional development for teachers and their dual position as agents of change in the classroom (Al-Ahdal & Al-Hattami, 2014; Aksoy et al., 2021; Ritonga et al., 2022). Additionally, it seeks to clarify educators' crucial roles in the learning process. The rapid pace of change in every facet of modern life, including the field of education, demonstrates that we now live in what may be described as an information society. However, opportunities for in-service training are limited for teachers in primary schools in remotelocations of KSA. Many reasons, including access to alternative modes of transportation, distance from other schools, low teacher density, and limited chances for collaboration, have contributed to this restriction.

Teachers' professionalism may suffer from insufficient opportunities to improve themselves and learn new things in the classroom. According to Dastgeer et al. (2017), educators and students in far-flung school districts struggle with something like a shortage of opportunities for professional growth, an inadequate supply of necessary materials, and geographical obstacles. Consequences include a decline in teacher quality and limits on how much they can learn in a given time. Several variables, including cultural differences, contribute to the poor performance of non-native English-speaking instructors in their respective fields of expertise (Yang et al., 2020). The low levels of teachers' desire to participate in in-service training and the high percentages of untrained or replacement instructors in rural regions negatively affect their children's academic performance (Yang et al., 2020). In the light of the recently adopted reforms and adjustments in many other countries, teachers must demonstrate continued proficiency in their tasks and adapt to the changing employment demands. For the most part, success requires the involvement of educators.

Literature Review

Numerous studies show that instructors' subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical abilities improve after participating in professional development programs (Al-Ahdal, 2014; Chien et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2016). Researchers have shown that taking such courses can help educators have a more optimistic perspective on their profession and the education of their students. In the United States and the United Kingdom, researchers have paid a lot of attention to how they may best help educators in the pure sciences to grow in their careers. However, the effects of professional development courses on elementary school teachers have received scant attention. In KSA, only a minimal emphasis is placed on teacher education within the English Diploma Programs. Recently, the Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced an 18-week diploma program available both on-campus and online. The instructors who enroll in these programs gain mostly theoretical knowledge and improved communication skills. Thus, this research aims to understand how the English Diploma Program is perceived and experienced by primary school Non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST) of Arabic, Islam, and social sciences. In order to effectively teach English and set a good example for their students, the instructors must have a firm grasp of the language themselves. Possessing strong grammatical skills necessitates a broad understanding of the language, including words, grammar rules, sentence construction, pronunciation, and spelling (Rao & Chen, 2020). The term "competence" is used to describe proper linguistic usage. Appropriate language use is at the heart of sociolinguistic competency. Language proficiency is defined as the capacity to utilize a language adequately in a given social context. Speakers who have a high sociolinguistic competence are aware that the form, style, and degree of politeness of language that is used in different contexts, such as educating children and conducting job interviews, are distinct from one another (Badash et al., 2020). Finally, strategic competency is the ability to devise and implement solutions to communication problems. Even when all parties involved in a conversation have a solid grasp of the language syntax and vocabulary, complications might develop in the process of actually communication.

In recent times, educational institutions have begun to diligently focus on the quality of primary school teachers through faculty development programs. Most of the studies in educational research are written in English language. Non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST) need to enrich their knowledge of English to access the latest

developments in education across the globe. Towards this end, primary school teachers take the English Diploma Program for NNEST, a governmental initiative in Saudi Arabia. Further research on teachers' perspectives on professional development is warranted because of the significant influence teachers' perceptions, experiences, values, and beliefs about their duties, activities, and positions in schools have on students' learning outcomes. In the light of teachers' pivotal position as change agents in the classroom, it is essential to get an insight into how primary school teachers perceive professional development. There must be a greater focus on teachers' professional development to maximize the effectiveness of research implementation and data collection. Evidence points to similar issues in the classrooms of both Yemen and Kuwait (Alzankawi&Alzankaw, 2021; Muthanna &Karaman, 2011). Several faculties and administrations failed to make unambiguous declarations about curricular theory. This study shows that school administrators devote little attention to enhancing their programs or effectively implementing their policies. These findings indicate a need for further examination and change in theory and practice.

Research questions

The study undertakes to answer the following questions:

1. Does the NNEST specialization help the participants to earn the English Diploma?
2. How does the teaching environment improve the communication skills of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST) in the Saudi context?
3. How does the English Diploma Program influence the NNEST teaching ability?

Methods

Research design

This study uses a self-report questionnaire to understand the primary teacher's perceptions of the English diploma program. Various studies employed self-perception theory in the field of education (Borg, 2001). Deniz et al. (2020) argued that students' perception of teaching methodology could improve the outcome of the educational program. This study applied a survey design methodology. The data were collected and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The study was conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for the academic year 2021-2022.

Context of the study

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the Ministry of Education has introduced Faculty Development Programs (FDP) to enhance the quality of the education system. English diploma course is one of the FDPs that offers four months of training for primary teachers across KSA. Primary school teachers of different academic backgrounds can participate in the training program. The program is provided in mixed mode: Teachers can attend the course online or on-campus. However, all participants need to appear for the practical sessions and examinations. During this period, teachers must also complete their assignments. The assignments are based on communication skills and group discussions.

Participants

The sample comprised of NNESTs working in primary schools across KSA. There was a total of 230 NNESTs enrolled during 2021–2022. However, the questionnaire was sent out to all 120 NNEST who had finished the diploma courses as part of a larger study, the Teacher Preparation and Professional Development Survey. This analysis only included data from NNEST in primary schools who had earned the diploma. With a total response rate of 88.3%, 106 out of 120 NNEST submitted valid responses. However, the participation percentages differed widely amongst schools. In all, 52.8% had post graduate degrees, 41.5% had undergraduate degrees, and 5.7% had some other degree. Twenty-six (24.5%) of NNEST were found to have Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Table 1 outlines the demographic data.

Table 1 Participant characteristics

No.	Items	Total (N=106)	Percentage(%)
1	Gender		
	Male	53	50
	Female	53	50
2	Age		
	Less than 35 years	16	15.1
	35 – 45 years	61	57.5
	46 – 55 years	25	23.6
	55 and above	4	3.8

3	Degree		
	Bachelors	44	41.5
	Masters	56	52.8
	Others	6	5.7
4	English proficiency		
	Poor	16	15.1
	Average	47	44.3
	Good	33	31.1
	Very Good	10	9.4
5	Academic Specialization		
	Arabic	29	27.4
	Islamic	56	52.8
	Social Studies	21	19.8
6	Province		
	Eastern	21	19.8
	Western	41	38.7
	Northern	24	22.6
	Others	20	18.9
7	Internet Connection		
	Yes	99	93.4
	No	7	6.6
8	Organization type		
	Public	66	62.3
	Private	37	34.9
	Others	3	2.8

The research was conducted to investigate the Arabic, Social Science, and Islamic teachers' perceptions of the English Diploma Program. Participants were chosen using a "purposeful sampling technique," which involves the targeted selection of respondents with relevant information. This sampling method was selected because it is a mixed method study and because the study focuses on the perspectives of Arabic, Islamic, and Social Science teachers. According to Cohen et al. (2017), researchers can select information-rich subjects through purposive sampling, consistent with a qualitative and quantitative methodology.

Instrument

Reliability and Validity

The researcher designed the questionnaire by taking guidelines from existing literature. The questionnaire contained 32 close-ended and 8 open-ended questions with 8 demographic questions. Based on the research questions, the researcher used 5 independent variables and one dependent variable. A total of 5 items were adopted from (Dastgeer et al., 2017) for achievement of program objective (APO) variable, efficiency of online class (EOC) variable included 5 items, which were adopted from (Badash et al., 2020). The researcher adopted 6 questions from (Dastgeer et al., 2017) for program design, content, and management (PDCM) variable. The variables, instructor's performance (IP) and participant's specialization (PS) comprised of 5 and 4 questions respectively, which were adapted from (Badash et al., 2020). Finally, the researcher utilized (Dastgeer et al., 2017) and included 6 items in Teacher's attitude and perception (NAP) variable. A five-point Likert scale was applied for close-ended questions. In order to develop the 8 open-ended questions for qualitative study, the researcher followed (Rezvani & Miri, 2021).

Both an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were conducted to identify the most appropriate factor structure to model the SLEQ. Inductive theme analysis was used to recursively evaluate the recorded interviews. Three fundamental processes of data familiarization, code development, and theme extraction made up the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews were transcribed word-for-word and analyzed for themes and perspectives of interest during the first stage of analysis. The interview data were initially coded and analyzed by a senior researcher, and then a subset (20%) was reanalyzed by the primary researcher to confirm coding and analytical consistency. Initially, the reliability of the inter-coders was 85%. After discussing and

resolving points of contention, both researchers reanalyzed a unique 10% of the data, resulting in a 96% level of agreement.

Table 2 outlines the outcomes of the EFA analysis. Factor loadings were analyzed after being rotated after each analysis. Items were removed if their loading on any one factor was over 0.30, a threshold often employed for elimination.

Table 2 Factor analysis of Variables

Variables	Number of Items	Item Loadings	Communality	Eigenvalue	Percentage of Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha
APO	5	0.88 – 0.92	0.78 – 0.81	3.42	81.48	0.91
EOC	5	0.83 – 0.88	0.77 – 0.80	3.31	79.16	0.93
PDCM	6	0.82– 0.86	0.81 – 0.84	3.65	82.45	0.91
IP	5	0.81 – 0.86	0.82 – 0.86	3.52	83.54	0.87
PS	4	0.81 – 0.84	0.83 – 0.85	3.79	82.45	0.92
NAP	5	0.82 – 0.85	0.78 – 0.81	4.56	85.71	0.96

Table 3 shows AVE and CR of the responses. It affirms that AVE is greater than 0.64 which is higher than the baseline value of 0.5. Likewise, CR is greater than 0.8.

Table 3 Reliability

Variables	AVE	CR
APO	0.781	0.935
EOC	0.646	0.892
PDCM	0.742	0.818
IP	0.647	0.896
PS	0.813	0.946
NAP	0.760	0.93

Table 4 represents the outcomes of correlation analysis. It indicates that the correlation value between EOC, PS, and NN is not higher compared to other variables.

Table 4 Outcome of Correlation analysis

Items	APO	EOC	PDCM	IP	PS	NAP
APO	1					
EOC	0.81	1				
PDCM	0.68	0.68	1			
IP	0.58	0.56	0.65	1		
PS	0.69	0.61	0.72	0.68	1	
NAP	0.71	0.21	0.80	0.72	0.13	1

Thus, a better match to the data is provided by 32 items organized into six factors. As compared to the other models, it has the highest values of Chi-square/df ratio, GFI, AGFI, CFI, RMSEA, and TLI (when compared to a null model). Additionally, Chi-square tests were used to determine statistical significance. The Chi-square test showed that the unaltered five-factor model performed better than the one-factor model by a substantial margin χ^2 difference (6) = 2106.35, $p < 0.001$). The modified six-factor model was superior to both the original and the reduced versions in terms of goodness-of-fit χ^2 difference (27) = 812.79, $p < 0.001$ and χ^2 difference (32) = 2536.17, $p < 0.001$, respectively).

The modified five-factor model fit the data well, according to generally accepted guidelines for assessing model fit. GFI (0.9182) was above 0.90, AGFI (0.89) was very near to 0.90, CFI (0.95) was above 0.90, RMSEA (0.04) was below 0.05, and TLI (null)(0.95) was above 0.90. The Chi-square/df ratio was 1.89, which was below 2.0. **The questionnaire was validated by computing alpha reliability coefficients in SPSS 6.1.3 to ensure internal consistency.**

The outcomes as tabulated in Table 4 show a global alpha of 0.90 was quite satisfactory. There were no factors that, if removed, would have resulted in a significantly higher coefficient. Individual scale alpha coefficients varied between 0.70 to 0.90. The innovation factor was missing one item that pushed the alpha coefficient up from 0.70 to 0.73 when the factor was examined further.

Data Analysis and Findings

RQ1: Does the NNEST specialization help the participants to earn the English diploma?

Table 5 reveals that NNEST demand an efficient online class for English diploma courses. In addition, there is no relationship between participants' specialization and the diploma program.

Table 5 Relationship between Independent and Dependent Variables

Hypotheses Paths	Standardized parameters	R ²	Outcome
APO→ NAP	14.98	0.49	Supported
EOC→ NAP	10.23	0.12	Not supported
PDCM→ NAP	18.56	0.52	Supported
IP→ NAP	17.28	0.45	Supported
PS→ NAP	12.13	0.18	Not supported

RQ2: How does the teaching environment improve the communication skills of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST) in the Saudi context?

The text analysis outcome generates two key themes, including drivers and enablers for the diploma programs. The researcher discovered that NNEST established objectives for themselves and made plans on how to reach them were more likely to complete the course, pass the final exam, and attend the lectures. Furthermore, the findings show that NNEST who reported having strong abilities in goal setting, strategic planning, self-evaluation, task methods, and elaboration were more likely to review course materials, particularly for the exam. Research on self-regulated learning in traditional e-learning contexts has shown that it can improve students' performance in the classroom.

RQ3: How does the English diploma program influence the NNEST teaching ability?

In this analysis, the researcher focused on the role that instructor credibility had in influencing NNEST motivation, engagement, and performance. The findings suggest that NNEST were more motivated to learn, participate in class, and tackle difficult concepts when they perceived their teachers to be credible.

Discussion

To present a solution for first and second research questions, the author conducted a quantitative study and found a positive relationship between APO, PDCM, IP, and NAP whereas a negative relationship existed between EOC, PS, and NAP. In order to strengthen students' ability to speak before a group, the laboratories have to be equipped with computers for use in the computer assistance program as well as other audio-visual aids. Listening to an audio or audio-visual program in which students may hear and see models of correct English pronunciation is an effective way to help them master the language. It will improve their vocabulary. Cheung, (2013) Mumford and Dikilitaş, (2020) mentioned that students are overloaded with excessive technological sophistication. People may use a wide range of devices to access information, such as social networking apps on their phones. These provisions provide additional opportunities for English learning students to expand their vocabulary. The participants in this study confirmed that they were using cutting-edge technology to learn a variety of linguistic competencies, including precise pronunciation, by listening to the pronunciations provided by the suggested online dictionaries. The target language's grammar may be learned in its entirety, including its complexities. Passive English language acquisition can be enhanced if more attention is devoted to practicing language structures with these advanced tools. In line with these studies, the researcher affirms that technology development can support NNEST to improve their communication skills. English listening and writing skills assist Arabic, Islamic, and Social Science primary school teachers to interact with the international educational and research communities to improve the students' learning ability.

Rezvani and Miri (2021) believed that NNESTs are more likely to participate, retain information, and advance their education when they feel comfortable asking for help, bringing up interesting topics of discussion, and completing classroom activities because of their instructors. NNEST motivation and interest in studying English were also shown to be influenced by the instructors' level of excitement. In general, when students have faith in their instructors, they benefit in ways that affect their immediate actions and their long-term goals. Teachers' Professional Development (TPD) appears like a good way to improve teachers' skills and dedication since it incorporates all behaviors designed to modify the skills, information, and experience one gains both officially and informally while one works, beyond any initial training. In other words, the goal of instructors engaging in professional development is for them to improve as educators by creating, implementing, and disseminating techniques, knowledge, and beliefs that cater to the needs of all pupils.

Conclusion

This research explored the problems that prevent primary class teachers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from creating a seamless learning environment for their Diploma courses. It proposes solutions to the current learning difficulties and language barriers. The study's results demonstrate that grammatical issues affect every aspect of language. The ability to effectively communicate in English has been identified as a significant obstacle to trainees learning from their instructors. Their linguistic proficiency was deficient. It was proposed that, in order to get rid of all these linguistic issues and difficulties, the curriculum should be altered to suit the demands of primary school teachers better, and the language learning environment should be enhanced. The study's findings make it abundantly clear that, despite the linguistic difficulties and other obstacles that stand in the way of trainees' acquisition of English language skills, there is still space within the whole educational system for the English language to undergo a period of revitalization. As a result of globalization, the English language has taken on an increasingly vital role in several socioeconomic fields, as well as scientific and technological ones. The advancement of science and technology is inaccessible to those who cannot speak English. Now more than ever, teachers must draw on their expertise across disciplines to design lessons that meet the requirements of students learning English in a wide range of settings. This implies that teachers must be able to first assess their students' requirements, then develop appropriate learning objectives, then select the most appropriate strategies for facilitating their students' progress toward those objectives (such as the use of specific tasks, repetition of a pattern, or open dialogue), and lastly, evaluate their students' progress towards such goals.

Recommendations

This study's findings encourage the researcher to that it is essential that the best possible resources for teaching a second language to be located, created, and made available to all students. In order to inspire and promote language learning, it is necessary to provide content, mainly textbooks, that focus on the level of the learners. Additionally, it is suggested that the curriculum design and relevant resources go hand in hand. In order to ensure that the resources are meeting the needs of the learners at a given level and time, they must be constantly monitored and assessed.

The present study also shows that NNEST demand an effective course material to enrich their knowledge. However, the available resources are not adequate for them. As a result, the government should take considerable measures to address the shortcomings in teaching materials.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are also proposed as a possible solution to the problem of outdated methods of training and information distribution in TPD.

Limitations

Gender of teachers and location of primary schools any be important factors in the learning outcomes in English Diploma Programs. These, however, have not been considered in this study, which is its limitation.

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