



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Qassim University English Language Teachers' Perspectives about the Usage of Unconventional Teaching Methods

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ABSTRACT

There is abundant research available in the previous literature regarding teaching methods in the global context generally and in the Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. However, a gap exists regarding research on novel and unconventional teaching methods. Thus, the current study aims to explore the EFL teachers' perspectives on the usage and effectiveness of these methods in the English language learning of Saudi EFL learners. A qualitative research approach was employed for this purpose. Moreover, in order to collect the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven teachers teaching at Qassim University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Thematic analysis was used to extract significant themes from the transcription of the interviews. Findings indicated that teachers had used several novel methods, including the flipped method, mindfulness-based teaching, emotioncy-based instruction, and loving pedagogy. The teachers mentioned numerous advantages of using these methods, which help Saudi EFL learners learn English. Based on the findings, the study presents a few implications of using these methods for teachers, students, and educational policymakers.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, learning English is deemed crucial as it is considered the lingua franca (Rao, 2019). Moreover, its speakers are growing exponentially with every passing day. Therefore, almost all nations are trying their best to improve the English language skills of their people so that they may contribute to various aspects of society, including education, business, innovation, and general development (Ibrohimova and Ziyaboyeva, 2022). Owing to its importance, several teaching methods are being used, including the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), Direct Method (DM), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Communicative Language Teaching

(CLT), among others. However, previous research depicted mixed results regarding the effectiveness of these methods in the English language learning context (Renau, 2016). Czerkawski and Berti (2020) affirmed that in the 21st century, the teaching and learning goals have been changed. The focus has been shifted from a teacher-centred to a student-centred methodology. The majority of the older teaching methods focus on rote learning and memorization of grammatical rules and structures. In contrast, the modern ones (e.g., the Flipped method, digital game-based language instruction, emotioncy-based teaching, and mindfulness-based instruction) focus more on communication, real-life scenarios, and

creativity (Alhothali, 2021; Mynbayeva et al., 2018). Moreover, since the 21st century is known as the age of Information Technology (IT), language teachers must employ the latest teaching methods that involve the role of IT in the classroom (Aljameel, 2022; Biletska et al., 2021).

Recently, researchers have paid ample attention to these novel teaching methods in correlational and experimental studies (Hosseini et al., 2023; Jajarmi and Pishghadam, 2019; Zeilhofer and Sasao, 2022). However, only a few studies have considered teachers' perspectives on using these methods in their language classrooms. Knowing their perceptions would highlight the feasibility of using these methods and draw our attention to their potential weaknesses in certain situations. Moreover, these findings could be helpful for educational policymakers, as they can make policies to encourage using the most effective methods in language classrooms. Also, students would benefit directly from these findings as they would be taught using more engaging techniques. In turn, they would feel more involved and motivated in the target language learning. Thus, the study's main aim is to explore the effectiveness of unconventional teaching methods in English language learning in the Saudi EFL context. The following section includes recent studies on unconventional teaching methods.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the present study, the term 'unconventional teaching methods' refers to those methods that teachers rarely employ in language classrooms due to their novelty. They need to follow the traditional, teacher-centred approach. They are inclined more towards a student-centred approach where students' needs are catered to by engaging them in interactive and dynamic activities. Previous literature confirmed that using these methods in a language classroom could be significantly valuable for EFL learners as they foster creativity and critical thinking among the students (Alhothali, 2021; Mynbayeva et al., 2018). In the following paragraphs, recent literature regarding four unconventional teaching methods (i.e., the Flipped method, digital game-based language instruction, emotioncy-based teaching, and mindfulness-based instruction) has been reviewed.

Mindfulness-based instruction

Mindfulness exercises, which have been the centre of attention recently (Zeilhofer and Sasao, 2022), are described as pointing one's concentration to internal and environmental occurrences (Kabat-Zinn, 2023). The notion of mindfulness is a combination of several components, including physical sensations, feelings, beliefs, and external impetuses (i.e., smell, sight, etc.), in a non-judgmental manner (Kabat-Zinn, 2023). The application of mindfulness in education is still in its infancy; thus, more research should be conducted regarding its application in teaching in general and EFL education and teaching in particular (Zeilhofer and Sasao, 2022).

Recently, several studies have been conducted regarding the influence of mindfulness-based interventions on numerous aspects of language performance. For instance, Moghadam et al. (2022) found that mindfulness cultivation interventions significantly improved the English language achievement of Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, Moghadam et al. (2020) conducted a mixed-methods experimental study on Iranian EFL learners. They found that the students who were taught using the mindfulness-based method outperformed the control group in both receptive skills of the English language (i.e., listening and reading) and reduced burnout levels.

Thierry et al. (2016) conducted a study on kindergarten students and divided them into two groups. Findings revealed that the group taught via mindfulness-based instruction outperformed the other group regarding reading and vocabulary performance. Likewise, Zeilhofer and Sasao (2022) conducted a study on 269 Japanese EFL learners and found that mindfulness significantly improves German vocabulary retention.

Despite the plethora of experimental studies conducted regarding the role of mindfulness in language performance, limited studies consider teachers' perceptions of mindfulness-based instruction in the EFL context.

Flipped method

The flipped method is defined as a teaching method in which the teacher provides the students with a recorded lecture and readings as homework, and within the class, they are supposed to be involved in

a lecture discussion and perform hands-on exercises (Lage et al., 2000). One of the most significant benefits of the flipped method is that the responsibility shifts from the teacher to the students, which makes the learning process more student-centred (Zou, 2020).

Numerous studies have been conducted within the language learning domain, showing the positive impact of the flipped method on language learning performance. According to a recent systematic literature review, 80% of the previous studies in language learning were conducted in English language learning classrooms (Zou et al., 2022). Phoeun and Sengsri (2021) found that the flipped method contributed to a significant improvement in the English-speaking performance of Thai EFL learners. Likewise, Abdullah et al. (2019) found that the flipped method improved the speaking ability of Omani EFL learners.

Al-Harbi and Alshumaimeri (2016) conducted an intervention study on Saudi EFL learners to determine the effectiveness of the flipped method in English grammar learning. They divided the students into two groups (i.e., experimental and control groups). Findings indicated that the group taught using the flipped method significantly outperformed the other group regarding English grammar performance. Likewise, another study conducted on school students in a Saudi EFL context found that the flipped method significantly enhanced students' English language performance (Najmi, 2020).

Zou et al. (2022) conducted a systematic literature review on the flipped method in the context of language teaching. They concluded that future studies need to be conducted to explore the experiences or perceptions of teachers and learners regarding the flipped method's effectiveness. Thus, the author of the present study acted upon their recommendation to fill a considerable gap in the body of literature.

Emotioncy-based instruction

Pishghadam et al. (2013) first defined the notion of emotioncy as sense-stimulated emotions that can affect one's cognition. Senses are essential in linking people's cognition and things present in the world (Pishghadam et al., 2013). Pishghadam et al. (2013) affirmed that each language component (e.g., vocabularies) instigates a different intensity of emotion; the more intense this emotion is, the better

learning will occur. Several studies found a positive impact of emotioncy on English language reading achievement. For example, Shahian et al. (2017) found a significant and positive link between emotioncy and the English reading performance of Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, Moradi et al. (2023) found that emotioncy is crucial in enhancing English reading achievement in the EFL context. Farani et al. (2019) found that emotioncy reduces reading comprehension anxiety among EFL learners.

Some studies found the positive influence of emotioncy-based instruction on other aspects of English language learning, i.e., vocabulary learning (Pishghadam and Shayesteh, 2016), willingness to communicate (Amini and Weisi, 2023), and listening and speaking skills (Heydarnejad et al., 2019).

Loving pedagogy

A well-known emotion, i.e., love, is crucial to a learner's overall social and emotional development (Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2015). Eminent thinkers like John Locke and Roger Ascham have highlighted the idea of love (Yin et al., 2019). Additionally, Maslow (1954) presented the well-known "hierarchy of needs" model. He emphasized that without the emotion of love, one cannot achieve the highest level of self-actualization. The literature mentioned above clearly underscores the role of love in our lives.

Määttä and Uusiautti (2012) found that love has multiple aspects. One of them is pedagogical love. It is a learner-centred idea that focuses on the needs of the learners. The teachers are required to be sympathetic, considerate, and respectful towards learners (Määttä and Uusiautti, 2012). A loving instructor can significantly strengthen the potential of a learner (Määttä and Uusiautti, 2012). Loreman (2011) presented a conceptual model of loving pedagogy with nine significant components: empathy, forgiveness, community, intimacy, passion, acceptance, kindness, sacrifice, and bonding.

Numerous studies have been conducted recently regarding the role of loving pedagogy in language learning and teaching. Li and Miao (2022) study of 414 Chinese EFL teachers concluded that a significant link exists between loving pedagogy and teacher engagement. Ye et al. (2022) found that loving pedagogy is one of the crucial factors in the L2

performance of EFL learners. Moreover, Liu (2021) found that teachers' loving attitude considerably reduces students' hopelessness in the EFL context.

Recent studies concluded that more studies should be conducted regarding loving pedagogy in the EFL/ESL context. They recommended that future researchers focus on this crucial variable (Ye et al., 2022; Zhao and Li, 2021).

Research hypothesis

Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H: The majority of the teachers will have a positive perception of the effectiveness of unconventional teaching methods in English language teaching. The following section includes several aspects of the methodology, including research design, sampling, data collection instruments, and data analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

A qualitative approach has been used because of the nature of the research problem and research questions. Hammersley (2000) recommended using a qualitative approach in certain situations to look at a phenomenon in greater depth. Regarding the present study, semi-structured interviews helped the researcher get a deeper picture of the teachers' perspectives regarding the influence of unconventional teaching methods on the English language learning of Saudi EFL learners.

Sampling

In order to select the interviewees, the purposive sampling technique was used, as it allows the selection of the respondents based on particular characteristics. The researcher looked for two main characteristics. Firstly, only teachers who partially or fully use unconventional teaching methods were selected. Secondly, only those teachers who teach English language skills at Qassim University were selected. The sample size was determined via the saturation point benchmark. Creswell (2003) confirmed that the interviewer should continue conducting interviews until he or she reaches saturation point. According to Creswell (2003), the saturation point is the point at which new interviewees repeat what the previous interviewees had to say. Thus, in the current study,

interviews were conducted with only seven teachers as the saturation point was reached.

Instrument

The qualitative instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview. Kajornboon (2005) affirmed that in this kind of interview, the researcher develops the main questions before conducting the interview; however, a few sub-questions can be asked to elicit the answer to the main question. Thus, before collecting the data, an interview protocol was developed based on the research question of the present study (refer to Appendix A). It consists of four main questions. Numerous probing questions were also asked during the interviews to elicit responses and get richer data.

Analysis

The qualitative data collected from interviews was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. More specifically, Graneheim and Lundman (2004) four steps served as the foundation for thematic analysis. Firstly, a researcher is required to go through the transcripts thoroughly to identify the essential threads. Secondly, the identified important threads must be converted into simple, straightforward words or notions. Graneheim and Lundman (2004) named them 'condensed meaning units'. Thirdly, the researcher must assign specific codes to the compressed units (Thomas, 2003). Lastly, assigned codes are further categorized into groups, subgroups, and themes (Thomas, 2003; Waheed and Jam, 2010). The following section includes the findings based on the themes developed after thematic analysis.

RESULTS

Teaching methods used by the respondents to the study

Firstly, the interviewees were asked about the teaching methods they use in their classrooms (refer to Table 1). Two teachers (i.e., T3 and T7) frequently use mindfulness-based instruction while teaching English language skills. Moreover, another group of teachers (i.e., T1 and T2) uses the flipped method. In addition, T5 shared that he mainly uses emotioncy-based instruction in his classroom. Lastly, two teachers (i.e., T4 and T6) said they employed loving pedagogy in their classroom.

Table 1: Major themes related to the influence of teaching methods on language learning

Interviewees	Teaching Methods Used	Major Themes
T3 & T7	Mindfulness-based instruction	Increased attention span, higher concentration level, reduced stress, increased interest
T1 & T2	Flipped method	More time for discussion, autonomous learning
T5	Emotioncy-based instruction	Better retention of concepts in memory, better results in exam
T4 & T6	Loving pedagogy	Lack of hesitation among students, passion for learning, formation of a bond of trust between the teacher and the student

Influence of teaching methods on English language learning

The interviewees shared significant information regarding the influence of unconventional teaching methods on the English language learning of Saudi EFL learners. As mentioned earlier, T3 and T7 use mindfulness-based instruction in their classrooms. They revealed several positives of this method, and based on their responses, numerous themes have been generated, including increased attention span, higher concentration levels among the students, reduced stress, and increased interest (refer to Table 1).

Both the teachers (i.e., T3 and T7) admitted that mindfulness-based instruction increased the attention span of Saudi EFL learners. For example, T3 shared one instance in which he compares two methods (i.e., lecture-based method vs. mindfulness-based instruction), which is as follows:

Earlier, I used to teach my students using a traditional lecture-based method and found that they needed help to retain their attention related to the lecture content for 25 to 30 minutes at most. However, in mindfulness-based instruction, students remain attentive most of the time (T3). Likewise, T7 affirmed that he observed a significant improvement in the concentration level of his Saudi EFL students.

One of the best things about this method is that students remain focused during the English language class. From time to time, I keep checking their concentration by asking sudden questions related to grammar, vocabulary, etc.; they usually provide correct answers (T7).

The respondents also mentioned that mindfulness-based instruction allows the students to reduce their stress while learning English language skills.

Before every class, I make the students smell the

lavender scent for 2 minutes with their eyes closed. Afterward, I ask them to meditate for 4 to 5 minutes. This practice increases their mindfulness and reduces their stress, which helps them learn effectively. Students also shared that they grasp concepts related to grammar in a better way when they are relaxed (T7).

T1 and T2 mentioned that they use the flipped method frequently in their classrooms and found it extremely useful. They mentioned several advantages of using it, including more time for discussion and autonomous learning.

T1 and T2 agreed that the flipped method is desirable as it offers discussion-based learning.

Students here in Saudi Arabia need more discussion-based learning in schools. They are exposed to traditional learning in schools, mostly listening to lectures and doing exercises. Moreover, the duration of school classes is around 45 minutes, which restricts the students and the teacher from discussing the concepts at length. However, I use the flipped method with my university students. I record my video lecture and ask them to listen at home. In the classroom, we discuss the concepts related to the recorded lecture at length. It is quite useful for them as they have many questions related to grammar and pronunciation; more time is available in the classroom for examples and exercises (T1).

T2 acknowledged that another benefit of using the flipped method is developing a vital skill among students (i.e., autonomous learning).

Autonomous learning is a vital skill for students to learn, which will help them not only in learning English language skills but also in other subjects. For instance, if my recorded lecture is about parts of speech, the students search for additional relevant

information on the internet before attending the class. This also increases their inquisitiveness (T2).

Out of all the interviewees, only one teacher (i.e., T5) uses emotioncy-based instruction in his classroom to teach English language skills. He mentioned that this teaching method is commonly used globally and in Saudi Arabia. He learned about this method by reading research papers and found it quite effective when applying it to his students. He mentioned several benefits of using it, including better retention of concepts and better test results.

My students love learning English vocabulary through the emotioncy-based method, as it allows them to use all of their possible senses. For example, I used this method when teaching them about fruits, which most had never eaten. So, I tried to enhance their senses by letting them see, touch, taste, and research those fruits. This way, they will retain the names of those fruits in their memory for longer (T5).

In addition, T5 affirmed that the emotioncy-based method improves students' performance in the language exam. He concluded this based on an experiment that he had performed with his students.

I still remember that experiment. I taught vocabulary to one of my sections using an emotioncy-based method. On the other hand, I used the traditional lecture-based method in the other section. To my surprise, the first group significantly outperformed the second group.

Lastly, T4 and T6 confirmed that they use 'loving pedagogy' in their EFL classrooms. They were delighted with the outcomes of this method and were adamant about using it in their upcoming classes in the following semester. More particularly, they mentioned three benefits of using this method: lack of hesitation among students, passion for learning, and trust between the teacher and the student.

T4 mentioned that loving pedagogy breaks the barriers between students and their teacher, allowing students to share their concerns with the teacher without hesitation.

At the beginning of every semester, I break the ice and get super friendly with my students. I tell them to consider me their friend. Within one or two weeks, we developed an amicable environment in the classroom. The students need to break the hesitation barrier because there should not

be any obstruction in a foreign language learning environment. Students openly share their problems regarding English language learning with me. At times, they interrupt me while I am explaining things. However, that is okay if they learn things in a pleasant environment (T4).

According to T6, EFL teachers should use loving pedagogy because students get involved in learning the English language with the utmost passion.

Earlier, I used to teach English traditionally. I did not intermingle with the students. However, recently, I have started using loving pedagogy in my English language classrooms. I have observed a clear difference in the students' attitudes. Now, they are more passionate and inquisitive about learning grammar, particularly. Grammar is generally considered boring by many students. However, in my class, students love to learn it because I appreciate their efforts and give them small rewards for their performance.

The following section discusses the findings in light of previous literature.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings revealed several themes focusing on the role of numerous unconventional teaching methods in English language learning in the Saudi EFL context. Some respondents mentioned that mindfulness-based instruction is desirable for EFL classrooms because of its many advantages. One of the advantages they mentioned is that it increases the attention span as well as the concentration level of the students. This finding aligns with numerous past studies (Boonphadung, 2017; Felver et al., 2017; Ricarte et al., 2015). Ricarte et al. (2015) conducted an experimental study on primary school students and found that the group that was taught using mindfulness-based instruction showed higher attention span and concentration levels. Likewise, Felver et al. (2017) conducted an intervention study on young learners in the USA. They found that, owing to mindfulness-based instruction, the participants regulated their attention in a better way. Both of the studies mentioned above were conducted on young learners. Thus, the current study differs from them as it focuses on adult EFL learners.

Moreover, the current study's interviewees revealed that mindfulness-based instruction's advantage is reducing students' stress while learning English in the classroom. Several studies support this finding. For instance, Skelly and Estrada-Chichon (2021) conducted a systematic literature review and concluded that mindfulness-based instruction significantly reduces stress in EFL settings and improves the performance of EFL learners. Moreover, another study conducted on 502 learners in a Chinese EFL context found that mindfulness significantly reduces anxiety among students (Shen, 2022). The tri-semester system recently introduced in Saudi universities has caused classes to have a longer duration, which causes stress and boredom for students. The use of mindfulness-based instruction has helped the teachers overcome this hurdle, as a teacher who uses this method explained to the researcher of this study.

The abovementioned findings related to mindfulness can also be explained via the theory of mindfulness presented by Kabat-Zinn (1994). This theory emphasizes focusing on the current moment. Focusing on the present moment not only increases one's attention but also reduces the anxiety level.

Some interviewees declared the advantages of another novel teaching method, i.e., the flipped method. One of the positives of this method is that it allows learners to discuss the lesson's contents thoroughly. They can also clarify their doubts comprehensively. DeLozier and Rhodes (2017) affirmed that the flipped method provides room for discussion-based activities in the classroom. The teacher has multiple options to foster discussion-based learning, including pair work, group work, and whole-class discussion. The flipped method also benefits dormant students, as they must participate in discussion sessions. However, dormant students need more chances to express themselves in lecture-based teaching due to its teacher-centred nature (Ajmal and Hafeez, 2021).

Respondents to this study also mentioned that the flipped method fosters autonomous learning among Saudi EFL students. Aprianto et al. (2020) also found that the flipped method was crucial in developing autonomous learning among students. Students learn the target content and get exposed to the idea of

'how to learn' (Aprianto et al., 2020). As discussed above, the flipped method involves much discussion within the classroom, and the students must prepare themselves well before coming to the class. To achieve this, they explore different sources (i.e., the internet, encyclopedias, textbooks, essential books, etc.) to gather material for discussion (Hosseini et al., 2023). Among all of the respondents in the present study, only one teacher (i.e., T5) uses emotioncy-based instruction in his English language classroom. He shared that this method is advantageous in teaching English vocabulary as students can better retain the target word in their memory for extended periods. This finding can be explained in light of the emotioncy model presented by Pishghadam et al. (2013). This model explicates the importance of senses (i.e., touch, hearing, sight, smell, and taste) in learning things. It also explains that there is a significant link between the senses and cognition. Pishghadam et al. (2013) explains that if a teacher has to teach a new word, he or she should try to activate all of the possible five senses of students for effective learning and retention of the target vocabulary.

Moreover, T5 mentioned that the emotioncy-based method made his students score higher in the vocabulary exam. Jajarmi and Pishghadam (2019) conducted an experimental study on Iranian EFL students. They concluded that the emotioncy-based method helps the learners retain the newly learned words in their long-term memory. They also found that the students who used more senses outperformed those who used less.

Lastly, two teachers (i.e., T4 and T6) indicated that loving pedagogy has numerous positives. One of the benefits they mentioned was that it allows language learning to occur in a friendly environment, and students can share their concerns without any barriers or hesitation. Wang et al. (2022) asserted that one of the essential components of loving pedagogy is developing interpersonal relationships. Learning becomes smoother and more efficient once the teacher develops ample rapport with the students. The students trust their teacher more and become more honest in their responses (Derakhshan et al., 2022). Moreover, one of the respondents indicated that loving pedagogy fosters a passion for learning the English language among learners.

Zhao and Li (2021) established that students own their learning when they are taught using loving pedagogy and consequently learn with more passion and enthusiasm.

CONCLUSION

The study's main aim was to explore the EFL teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of unconventional teaching methods in Saudi EFL. Findings revealed that the usage of these methods can have several benefits for EFL students, including increased attention span, reduced stress, discussion-based learning, the development of autonomy and passion among students, better retention of concepts in long-term memory, improvement in results in language tests, and a lack of hesitation among students.

Implications and future directions

The findings could have several implications for teachers, students, and educational policymakers. Policymakers could arrange workshops and refresher courses for teachers to make these unconventional teaching methods more common in the teaching methodology of language teachers. In addition, teachers ought to foster autonomy among students so that they can learn to deal with language learning challenges independently. Moreover, teachers could look into the research conducted on these methods to know more about the techniques involved in their effective implementation. For instance, they could look into the research journals that are particularly focused on teaching methods and techniques, including 'TESOL Quarterly' and 'International Journal of Instruction', among others.

The present study has a few limitations. This study only focused on the advantages of using these methods. Future studies can look into the loopholes or weaknesses involved in their implementation. Moreover, the interviewees in the present study were university EFL teachers. Future studies should consider interviewing school teachers in an ESL/EFL context. In addition, the current study's findings cannot be generalized due to its qualitative nature and smaller sample size. Future studies should conduct mixed-methods research to incorporate a larger sample size and corroborate the qualitative and quantitative data.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. Do you employ any unconventional teaching method while teaching English language?
2. Which unconventional teaching method do you use while teaching English language?
3. Why do you employ this teaching method?
4. How does it affect the students' English language learning?