Teaching English as a Foreign Language among the Saudi Teachers: Impact of Different Factors on Research Engagement

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Abstract

This comprehensive study evaluates motivation, institutional support, professional identity, and advanced education in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) research method. The objective of this study is to explore and analyze the research engagement and productivity of English teachers in Saudi Arabia, focusing on the factors that influence their motivation and participation in research activities. Specifically, the study aims to understand how intrinsic motivation, emotional intelligence, and external factors contribute to teachers' involvement in research.The study targeted 50 teachers from Saudi Arabian schools. Findings show various influences on research procedures. 52.0% said their identity and positionality influenced their research engagement. However, only 24.0% strongly agreed that their master's degree boosted their research identity. Institutional support was positive, with 58.0% admitting their institutions provide enough research resources. However, 34.0% were neutral about the value of research for professional identity, demonstrating diversity in the sector. 62.0% of participants were satisfied with their colleagues' help, which was also important. EFL researchers need specialized support and resources to meet their needs, and personal identity, institutional backing, and motivational factors influence research practices and involvement, according to this study.

Keywords: *Research engagement, institutional support, motivation, financial support, academic teaching, emotional intelligent, positionality, EFL teaching, Saudi Arabia*

1. Introduction

Saudi Arabian teachers engage in research for professional growth and with academic institutions' resources and encouragement. Motivation help teachers engage in research[1], [2]. Cultural and positional dynamics also affect research methods [3]. In Saudi Arabia, [4] found that intrinsic motivations like professional growth and extrinsic factors like institutional support and recognition drive teachers' research engagement. In Saudi Arabia, [5] emphasize the importance of institutional support in encouraging teachers to conduct research. Teachers who enjoy their jobs are likelier to pursue research diligently, so intrinsic motivation is crucial for long-term research engagement. [6] examines how emotional competence and creativity can help academics find deeper meaning and become intrinsically motivated.

Institutional support, personal motivations, and context shape faculty reading practices. According to [7], language teachers' research engagement is often influenced by their institutions' support and incentives. According to [8] and [2] , emotional intelligence affects academic performance and research engagement.

Research engagement in EFL is a multifaceted endeavor influenced by various factors, including institutional support, intrinsic motivation, and the unique socio-cultural contexts of the teachers involved [4], [5]. Institutional support also affects Saudi EFL teachers' research engagement [4], [9]. According to [4], supportive institutional policies like professional development and research funding increase teachers' willingness and ability to conduct research. [10] adds that universities boost research productivity by valuing and rewarding research. Another important factor in EFL teacher research engagement is emotional intelligence [2]. Researchers have multiple identities that change with context, affecting how they interact with and interpret the world [11]. [12] stated, "People have multiple overlapping identities... [and] make meaning from various aspects of their identity" (p. 96). Based on the positionality theory, the study answers the research questions by using a self-administered survey questionnaire.

1. How does the level of institutional support influence the engagement of Saudi EFL teachers in research activities?
2. What role does intrinsic motivation play in sustaining the research engagement of Saudi EFL teachers?
3. To what extent do emotional intelligence levels affect the collaboration, resilience, and overall research engagement of Saudi EFL teachers?
4. How do identity and positionality affect the research engagement of Saudi EFL teachers?
5. What are the most significant barriers to research engagement among Saudi EFL teachers?

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study used a quantitative research design with a survey questionnaire. The literature supports this approach in studying research engagement and productivity.

2.2 Data Collection Procedures and Measurements

This study collected data from January 15 to April 15, 2024. 50 English teachers at Saudi schools that teach English as a second language. Stratified random sampling ensured a representative sample across schools and teaching experience. We sent the survey questionnaire via email and sent reminders two weeks later to encourage participation. It is important to select EFL teachers as the sample population because they bridge language education and research in academia. Language teachers should engage in research to improve teaching and advance academia (i.e.,[7]). The participants are mainly Saudi and exhibit a range of experiences across various professional backgrounds

A structured survey questionnaire uses categorical and Likert scale questions to measure Saudi EFL teachers' research engagement. We collect age, teaching experience, EFL education levels, EFL research interest, nationality, and cultural background to analyze how demographics affect research engagement and practices.

2.3 Data Analysis

This study used SPSS software, which excels at demographic, descriptive, correlation and regression analyses. Thus, [14] note that the software excels at complex statistical analyses, making it ideal for investigating variable relationships and identifying research engagement predictors.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic analysis

Table 1. Demographic analysis

Demographics	Categories	N	%
EFL Research Interest	Yes	46	92.0%
	No	4	8.0%
Age	20-29 years	9	18.0%
	30-39 years	16	32.0%
	40-49 years	13	26.0%
	50 years and above	12	24.0%
Teaching Experience	0-5 years	6	12.0%
	6-10 years	15	30.0%
	11-15 years	16	32.0%
	16 and above years	13	26.0%
Educational Level	Certificate in EFL/ESL	18	36.0%
	BS degree in EFL/ESL	19	38.0%
	Master degree in EFL/ESL	13	26.0%

3.2 Institutional Support

Teachers struggle to get institutional support for research in schools (see Table 2). A large 60% of survey teachers reported low support, including limited funding and research time. This shows a huge institutional support gap that can limit instructors' relevant research. Only 12% indicated significant support, including large funds and devoted research time.

Table 2. How would you rate the level of institutional support you receive for research activities?

Categories	Low (e.g., minimal funding, limited research time)	Moderate (e.g., some funding, occasional research time)	High (e.g., substantial funding, dedicated research time)
Frequency	30	14	6
Percent	60.0%	28.0%	12.0%

The survey questionnaire shows that teachers appreciate seminars for improving teaching. Workshops can improve teaching approaches, according to 54% of teachers and 26% of others (see Table 3). This 80% consensus shows that workshops are beneficial. Professional development is essential for teachers to learn new skills and keep up with educational trends. Despite the difficulties of institutional research assistance, teachers actively seek seminars to improve their teaching.

Table 3. Do you think attending workshops can help you improve your teaching practices?

Categories	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Frequency	27	13	6	3	1
Percent	54.0%	26.0%	12.0%	6.0%	2.0%

Teachers understand the value of training to help struggling students (see Table 4). Such instruction was beneficial to 72% and 14% of responders. This overwhelming majority shows that instructors enjoy and benefit from customized training programs to help kids with academic or personal issues. Only a few found the training neutral or harmful.

Table 4. How beneficial do you find receiving training to deal with students who have difficulties?

Categories	Very Beneficial	Beneficial	Neutral	Not Beneficial
Frequency	36	7	4	3
Percent	72.0%	14.0%	8.0%	6.0%

3.3 Intrinsic Motivation

Table 5 shows instructors' inherent drive for research without financing or promotions. A staggering 72% of teachers reported extremely poor motivation, while 26% reported low. Only 2% showed high intrinsic motivation for research without external support. Due to severe workloads and lack of recognition and resources, instructors' intrinsic motivation for research is likely low. The findings suggest that intrinsic motivation alone does not motivate teachers to research. Most professors are unmotivated to research without incentives.

Table 5. How would you rate your intrinsic motivation for engaging in research activities?

Categories	Very Low	Low	High
Frequency	36	13	1
Percent	72.0%	26.0%	2.0%

3.4 Research engagement and practices

Table 6 shows that most teachers read EFL teaching research. In particular, 44% of teachers read research material often and 24% sometimes. This combined 68% implies that most teachers understand the necessity of keeping up with EFL teaching research to improve their classrooms. However, only 4% of teachers never did this, demonstrating substantial professional reading involvement among the majority.

Table 6. How often do you engage in reading research literature related to EFL teaching?

Categories	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Frequency	2	13	12	22	1
Percent	4.0%	26.0%	24.0%	44.0%	2.0%

Table 7 provides an alternative scenario for instructors' engagement in publishing research linked to EFL teaching. The data shows that 30% of teachers never publish research, and 44% rarely do so. Only 12% of the teachers, presumed to be those with a master's level or above, sometimes publish research, with an equally tiny amount of 12% doing so often or very often. This gap between reading and publishing activities reveals a possible barrier where teachers may be consuming research but are less inclined or able to contribute to the academic literature, maybe due to a lack of time, support, or confidence in their research skills.

Table 7. How often do you engage in publishing research related to EFL teaching?

Categories	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Frequency	15	22	6	6	1
Percent	30.0%	44.0%	12.0%	12.0%	2.0%

The data from Table 8 highlights the main difficulties teachers encounter in engaging in research activities. The major barrier is a lack of finance, mentioned by 32% of teachers. This is followed by a lack of institutional support (22%) and a lack of time (18%), demonstrating that both financial and organizational support are crucial in enabling teachers to do research. Additionally, 14% of teachers cited restricted access to research materials and a lack of enthusiasm as hurdles.

Table 8. What are the main barriers you face in engaging in research activities?

Categories	Lack of Time	Lack of Funding	Lack of Institutional Support	Limited Access to Research Resources	Lack of Motivation
Frequency	9	16	11	7	7
Percent	18.0%	32.0%	22.0%	14.0%	14.0%

While majorities of teachers are actively engaged in reading research literature, their engagement in publishing research is substantially lower. This challenge emphasizes the need for institutional support and resources to promote active research and publication.

3.5   *Emotional Intelligence*

Table 9 shows that 52% of teachers rated their emotional intelligence as very low, 24% as low, and 4% and 2% as high or very high. This suggests that most teachers may lack confidence in their emotional intelligence, which could affect their ability to manage.

Table 9. How would you describe your level of emotional intelligence based on self-assessment or a validated emotional intelligence scale?

Categories	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Frequency	26	12	9	2	1
Percent	52.0%	24.0%	18.0%	4.0%	2.0%

Tables 10 and 11 show how teachers solve classroom issues. 32% use online resources or forums, 32% attend professional development workshops or seminars, and 22% consult colleagues or friends. Conversely, only 4% read academic research articles.

Table 10. When you encounter a problem in the classroom, how do you typically seek solutions?

Categories	I read academic research articles or studies related to the problem	I consult with my colleagues or friends for advice	I look for online resources or forums	I attend professional development workshops or seminars	I rely on my own experience and intuition
Frequency	2	11	16	16	5
Percent	4.0%	22.0%	32.0%	32.0%	10.0%

Table 11. When you encounter a problem in the classroom, how do you typically seek solutions?

Categories	I read academic research articles or studies related to the problem	I consult with my colleagues or friends for advice	I look for online resources or forums	I attend professional development workshops or seminars
Frequency	3	6	17	18
Percent	6.0%	12.0%	34.0%	36.0%

Table 12 shows how teachers address student motivation difficulties. The most prevalent tactics are professional development workshops or seminars (36%) and internet resources or forums (34%). 12% of teachers seek help from colleagues or friends. A mere 6% of responders consult scholarly research. This pattern shows that teachers may benefit from more systematic and research-based approaches to understanding and managing student motivation difficulties.

Table 12. When you notice a recurring issue with student motivation in your classroom, how do you typically seek solutions?

	I read academic research articles or studies on motivation strategies.	I consult with my colleagues or friends for advice on motivation techniques.	I consult with my colleagues or friends for advice on motivation techniques.	I attend professional development workshops or seminars on student motivation.	I rely on my own experience and intuition to address the issue.
Frequency	3	6	17	18	6
Percent	6.0%	12.0%	34.0%	36.0%	12.0%

According to Table 13, 40% of teachers rarely (40%) or never (28%) conduct research on interventions that can support students' well-being and learning, primarily due to time constraints. Only 12% of teachers regularly conduct such research. Table 14 shows that 34% of teachers never see an immediate effect on their students after applying research findings.

Table 13. Do you conduct research on interventions that can support students' well-being and learning?

	Yes, regularly.	Occasionally, when time allows.	Rarely, due to time constraints.	No, I do not have time for this.
Frequency	6	10	20	14
Percent	12.0%	20.0%	40.0%	28.0%

Table 14. Do you apply what you read in research and see an immediate effect on your students?

	Yes, often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Frequency	13	10	10	17
Percent	26.0%	20.0%	20.0%	34.0%

Table 15 indicates that a majority of teachers (64%) regularly keep their knowledge updated by reading recent research or attending professional development. This is a positive sign of ongoing professional growth. However, in the context of practicing English outside the classroom (Table 16), only 20% of teachers do so frequently, while 36% do it occasionally, and 28% never practice outside the classroom. This suggests that more opportunities for practicing English should be encouraged. Lastly, Table 17 shows that 44% of teachers sometimes provide their students with additional resources to improve their English outside the classroom, but 20% never do.

Table 15. Do you keep your knowledge updated by reading recent research or attending professional development?

	Yes, regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Frequency	32	11	4	3
Percent	64.0%	22.0%	8.0%	6.0%

Table 16. Do you practice more English outside the classroom, considering the EFL context where opportunities to practice outside the class are limited?

	Yes, frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	No response
Frequency	10	18	6	14	2
Percent	20.0%	36.0%	12.0%	28.0%	4.0%

Table 17. Do you provide your students with additional resources to help them improve their English outside the classroom?

	Yes, regularly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Frequency	11	22	7	10
Percent	22.0%	44.0%	14.0%	20.0%

3.6 Identity and Positionality

The tables show how identity and positionality affect EFL researchers' research approaches. Table 18 illustrates that many teachers believe their identity and positionality influence their research activities. In particular, 26.0% said their identity influences their research "A lot," while an identical number said "A great deal." This shows that more than half of teachers believe their identity and positionality strongly influence their research. Only 22.0% said their identification does not affect their research.

Table 18. To what extent do you believe your identity and positionality (e.g., gender, cultural background) influence your research practices?

	Not at all	A Little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Frequency	11	6	7	13	13
Percent	22.0%	12.0%	14.0%	26.0%	26.0%

Table 19. How strongly do you identify as a researcher in the field of EFL?

	Very Strongly	Strongly	Moderately	Slightly	Not at All
Frequency	12	15	6	11	6
Percent	24.0%	30.0%	12.0%	22.0%	12.0%

Table 19 shows a strong sense of identity among EFL researchers. With 54.0% of teachers identifying as "Very Strongly" (24.0%) or "Strongly" (30.0%) researchers in this topic, professional commitment is high. When assessing how higher education affects research identity (Table 20), responses vary. While 26.0% "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" that their master's degree has reinforced their research identity, 44.0% are "Neutral," "Disagree," or "Strongly Disagree," suggesting that advanced education may not be the only explanation. As an element of their professional identity, 30.0% consider research "Very Important" or "Important." A significant 34.0% remain "Neutral," and 36.0% find it "Slightly Important" or "Not Important at All," demonstrating various opinions on research engagement and professional identity.

Table 20. If you have completed a master's degree, do you feel it has strengthened your identity as a researcher?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Frequency	5	8	15	10	12
Percent	10.0%	16.0%	30.0%	20.0%	24.0%

Table 21. How important is it to you to engage in research as part of your professional identity?

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Slightly Important	Not Important at All
Frequency	4	11	17	8	10
Percent	8.0%	22.0%	34.0%	16.0%	20.0%

4.   Conclusion

The findings provide a thorough overview of the characteristics affecting EFL academics, from identity and positionality to professional engagement and education. Starting with identity and positionality, 52.0% of teachers said their identity and positionality strongly influence their research activities. Over half of teachers (54.0%) identify strongly as EFL researchers, demonstrating professional commitment. Only 26.0% strongly agree or agree that a master's degree strengthens research identity, while 44.0% are neutral or disagree. While 30.0% of teachers hold research participation in high regard for their professional identity, 34.0% are neutral, and 36.0% are less so, demonstrating various views on research engagement. However, research needs additional money and assistance. Many teachers want to contribute to their field and gain a professional reputation, which drives their research. The findings show that personal identity, institutional support, motivation, and professional development influence EFL academics' research practices and involvement.

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