

Empowering Learners' Metalinguistic Awareness and Multilingual Competence in the Language Classroom: Exploring Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Dr. Nada Nasser Bin Ghali

Assistant Professor, ELSD

King Saud University, Saudi Arabia

 Innovation in Language Learning - 18th Edition
International Conference



Introduction & Rationale

- Translanguaging & multilingual competence are recognized in ELT (García & Lin, 2023).
- However, **strict monolingual policies** persist in many EFL contexts (Macaro, 2020).
- Saudi Arabia is an increasingly **multilingual society** but follows **English-only classroom policies** (Alasmari, 2022).
- This study explores:
 - **How ESL teachers conceptualize multilingual strategies to empower learners.**
 - **The gap between beliefs and actual classroom practices.**

- **What is Metalinguistic Awareness?**

learners' explicit, articulated or declarative knowledge about the syntactic, morphological, lexical, phonological, and pragmatic features of the second language (L2) (Anderson 2005; Hu 2002; Hulstijn 2005).

It is identified as one of the key components of language learning aptitude (Alderson et al. 1997; Dörnyei 2005) that is especially relevant in adult learning contexts.

Metalinguistic awareness is linked with “learners’ ability to correct, describe, and explain L2 errors”.

- **Why is it Important?**

Critical for **multilingual competence**, enhances literacy, cognitive flexibility, and cross-linguistic understanding.

- **What is Multilingual Competence?**

Individual's knowledge and ability to use multiple languages, encompassing both native and additional languages (Cook, 1995; Cook, 2020). This concept, also termed "multicompetence," extends beyond linguistic skills to include cognitive systems and cultural understanding (Cook, 2020; Franceschini, 2011).

Research Context – Saudi Arabia

- Arabic Language.
- Bilingualism and Multilingualism in Saudi Arabia.
- English Teaching Contexts.
- Future Trends in Saudi Arabia Resulting from Saudi Vision 2030.
- 36.4% of Saudi residents are expatriates, contributing to linguistic diversity (Al-Ahdal, 2020).
- The need for a paradigm shift.



Main groups of KSA dialects (Alghamdi et al., 2008)

What Previous Research Found?

Multilingual teachers are more likely to implement metalinguistic strategies (Otwinowska, 2017).

Monolingual biases limit language awareness development (Burner & Carlsen, 2023).

Bilingualism Enhances Metalinguistic Awareness *Al-Ahdal (2020)*

- ✓ Bilingual learners outperform monolinguals in English proficiency.
- ✓ Teacher resistance to using Arabic in English classes limits students' growth.

Teacher Attitudes Matter *Alsaawi (2020)*

- ✓ Many teachers favour monolingual English instruction.
- ✓ Multilingual teachers are more likely to support cross-linguistic learning.

Multilingualism Improves Productive Language Skills *Al-Dawoody (2022)*

- ✓ Exposure to multiple languages **enhances grammar, vocabulary, and fluency.**

Research Questions



RQ1: To what extent do University ESL teachers in Saudi Arabia possess the components of multilingual cognition?



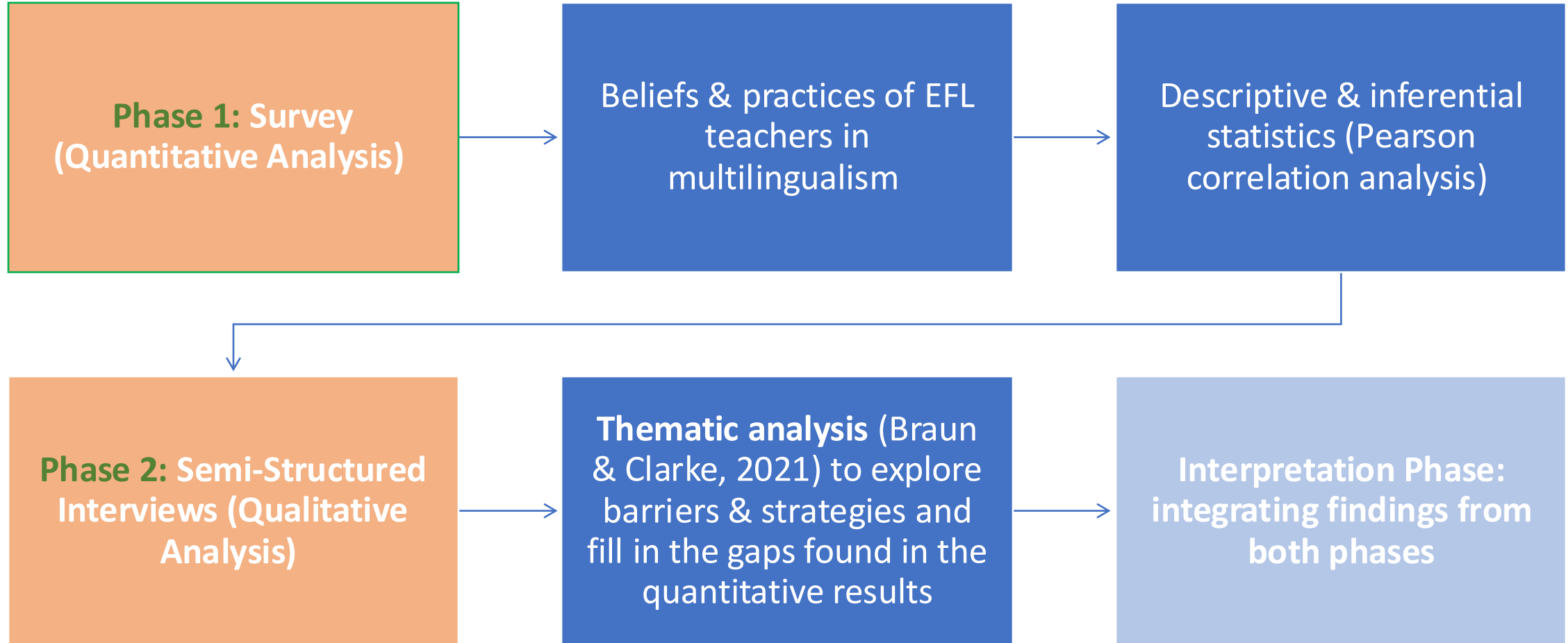
RQ2: In what ways do University ESL teachers' multilingual beliefs reflect on their classroom practices in Saudi Arabia?



RQ3: How can University ESL teachers in Saudi Arabia empower learners to take ownership of their language learning and develop multilingual competence and metalinguistic awareness?

Methodology – Study Design

Explanatory Sequential Mixed Approach (Creswell, 2014)



Participants & Data Collection

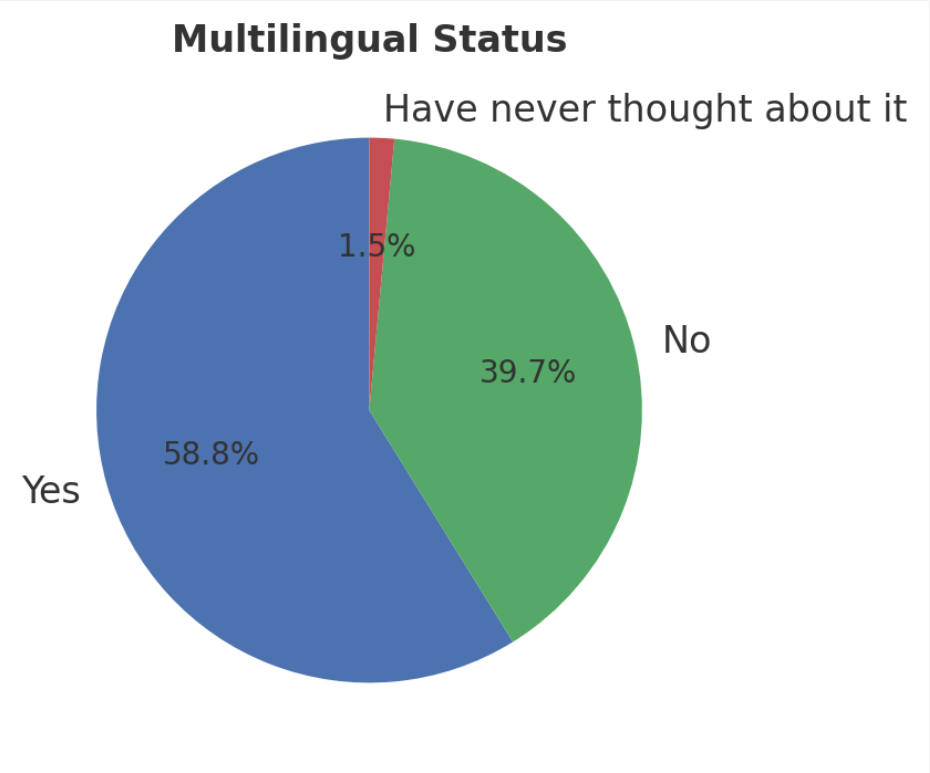
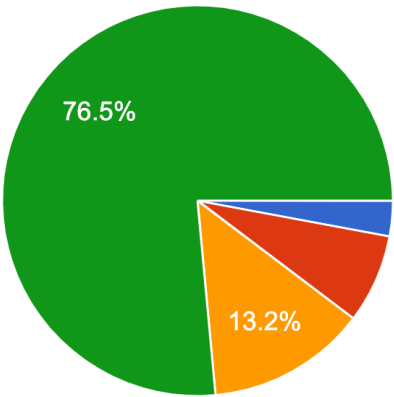
Total Participants: 68 EFL teachers in Saudi Universities

Gender Distribution: Male (50%) | Female (50%)

Teaching Experience

Multilingual Status

Years of teaching experience
68 responses



The comparison between Teachers' beliefs and practices in the EFL Classroom

A- Items in the survey concerning beliefs of English Language Teachers:

1. cognitive characteristics of a multilingual person
2. psycholinguistic knowledge in multiple language acquisition.
3. metalinguistic knowledge in multiple languages acquisition.
4. crosslinguistic knowledge in multiple languages acquisition.
5. knowledge of multilingual approaches.
6. teachers' multilingual identity

B- Items in the survey concerning practices of English Language Teachers:

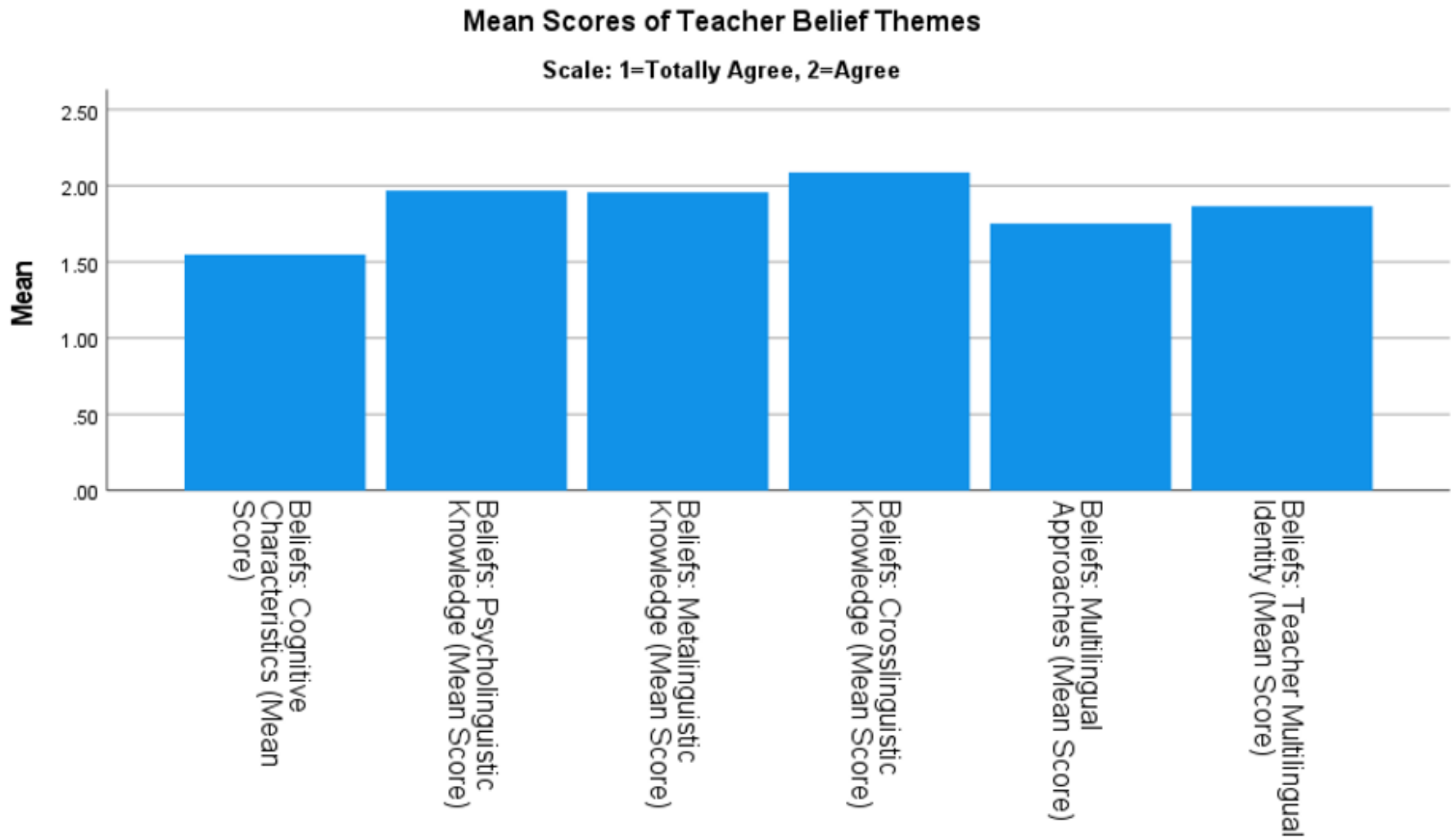
1. Engaging cognitive characteristics of a multilingual person and teacher multilingual personality
2. Implementation of crosslinguistic knowledge in multiple language acquisition
3. Implementation of metalinguistic knowledge in multiple language acquisition
4. Implementation of psycholinguistic knowledge in multiple language acquisition



RQ1: To what extent do University ESL teachers in Saudi Arabia possess the components of multilingual cognition?

Components of ESL Teachers' Multilingual Cognition: Beliefs and Practices

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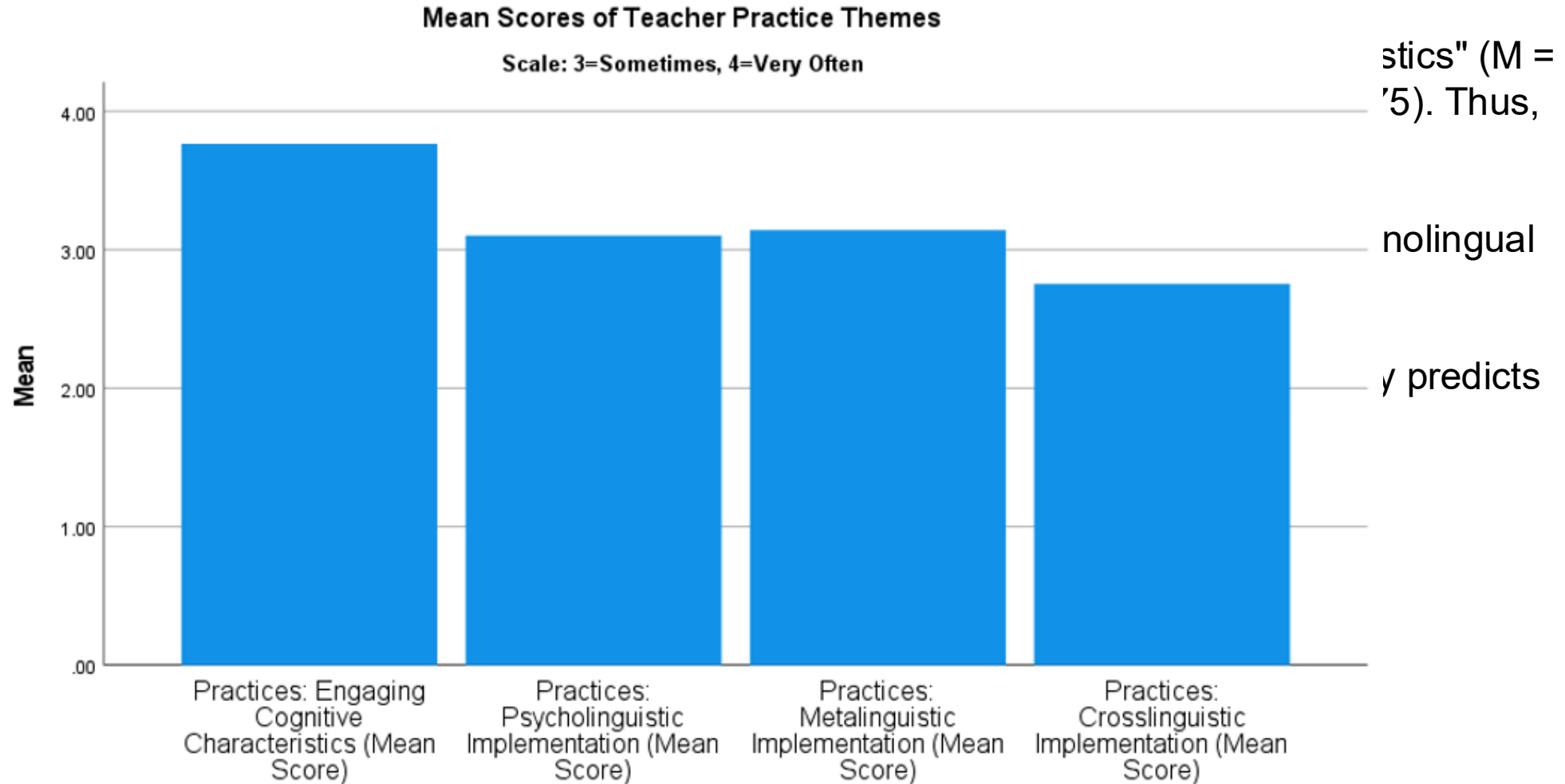


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Components of ESL Teachers' Multilingual Cognition: Beliefs and Practices

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RQ2: In what ways do University ESL teachers' multilingual beliefs reflect on their classroom practices in Saudi Arabia?

- ❖ Pearson Correlation coefficients (r) are all very close to zero, indicating an absence of a meaningful linear relationship (belief-practice gap)
- ❖ Multilingual teachers do not significantly differ from monolingual teachers in implementing multilingual practices.
- ❖ No significant predictors (multilingual status or experience) were found for classroom practices.



RQ3: How can University ESL teachers in Saudi Arabia empower learners to take ownership of their language learning and develop multilingual competence and metalinguistic awareness?

- There is a **moderate, positive, and statistically significant** correlation between teachers' beliefs in metalinguistic knowledge and their beliefs in learner autonomy ($r = .351$, $p = .004$).
- Neither of these belief constructs significantly correlates with **the use of empowering classroom practices**. The relationship between "Metalinguistic Beliefs" and "Empowering Practices" is negligible.
- Similarly, the relationship between "**Autonomy Beliefs**" and "**Empowering Practices**" is very weak and not statistically significant

Learner Empowerment to Develop Multilingual Competence and Metalinguistic Awareness

This gap suggests potential barriers (e.g., institutional policies, lack of training, or personal teaching styles) preventing teachers from implementing their beliefs into practice.

Simply being multilingual does not automatically translate into more multilingual classroom practices.

Phase 2 of Interviews with teachers looked at these discrepancies.

So why do teachers believe in multilingual cognition but struggle to implement it?

- Institutional policies restricting multilingual approaches.
- Lack of training in psycholinguistic and crosslinguistic teaching methods.
- Teacher confidence in applying multilingual practices.

Thematic Analysis Summary

1-Institutional Barriers

2-Teacher Confidence and Training Needs

3-Effective Multilingual Strategies

4-Student Autonomy

5-Multilingual Learning Engagement

4-Student Autonomy	T2 framed autonomy as essential to all learning, encouraging self-directed exploration and even facilitating an extracurricular WhatsApp learning group. T3 promoted autonomy through peer scaffolding and mini-research projects, allowing students to access information in their L1 but holding them accountable for L2 production. Across all cases, autonomy was seen as both a goal and a method for deepening engagement and responsibility in language learning.
5-Multilingual Learning Engagement	T2 reported that students “love and appreciate” opportunities to use their L1 in learning, finding translation tasks motivating. T3 emphasized the confidence-building effects of translanguageing, particularly for lower-level learners: “it does excite them to use both at the same time.”

Conclusion, Recommendations & Next Steps

Challenges in Saudi Classrooms

Monolingual policies limit metalinguistic awareness.
Teachers lack training in multilingual teaching strategies.



Solutions & Best Practices

- ✓ Encourage translanguaging pedagogy for improved comprehension.
- ✓ Train teachers to integrate Arabic-English comparisons in lessons.
- ✓ Promote cross-linguistic analysis to build critical thinking.

Final Thought:

Leveraging multilingualism in Saudi classrooms can empower students, enhance learning, and strengthen English proficiency!

