

# Students' Emotional Experiences, and English as a Foreign Language Learning: EFL Teachers' Perspectives

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**Abstract:** The primary goal of this study is to examine how Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors view the factors that impact the educational journey of EFL students, particularly female college students in Saudi Arabia. The study is mainly interested in exploring these factors in depth, focusing on their influence on the EFL learning process. To frame this investigation, the study draws upon the concept of "perezhivanie," which Vygotsky (1932) defines as the emotional experience in learning. Despite an extensive literature review, there is a noticeable gap in research that applies Vygotsky's concept of emotional experience to EFL instruction in Saudi Arabia. The chosen research methodology is a qualitative single case study, with data collected through interviews, teaching materials, and teacher journals. Thematic analysis was used to scrutinize the gathered information. The outcomes of the study indicate that Saudi EFL female teachers perceive students' emotional experiences, cognitive abilities, and socio-cultural contexts as crucial factors that influence EFL learning at the college level in Saudi Arabia.

**Keywords:** EFL teachers' perspectives, sociocultural theory, [perezhivanie] or the emotional experience, EFL students.

## 1 Introduction

Studies conducted in the realm of language learning have historically centered on the notion of learning as a cognitive skill taking place within the human brain. Language acquisition has been examined through the lens of cognitive changes and progressive phases of transformation. Several researchers exploring EFL teaching within the Saudi context have portrayed it as a cognitive process involving the acquisition and mastery of the four language skills [26;38;28]. For example, the majority of writing programs in Saudi Arabia continue to adhere to the traditional cognitive instructional approach, which places a strong emphasis on ensuring the correctness of grammatical structures and vocabulary usage [10;46]. Nevertheless, EFL learning encompasses more than just academic content and the mental capacities of students. It also encompasses a third dimension intertwined with students' socio-cultural context [47]. The psychological development of children is recognized as a pivotal factor that influences their interactions and connections with their surroundings. This dynamic is referred to as [perezhivanie] or the emotional experience, as described by Vygotsky [48]. Studies have substantiated that learners have the capacity, given some determination and guidance from educators, to harness the potential of their emotions for enhanced absorption of a foreign language and its associated culture [9]. One of the most significant oversights in the traditional Individual Differences paradigm is its limited recognition of the essential role that emotions play in shaping human cognition and behavior. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore EFL teachers' views on the elements that impact students' learning focusing on EFL students' sociocultural context and its role on language learning processes. Furthermore, it sheds light on Saudi EFL teachers' perspectives regarding the differences in students' awareness and interpretation of situations in the context of EFL learning. The ultimate aim is to elevate and advance the teaching of English as a foreign language at the college level in Saudi Arabia.

As per Vygotsky [48], the emotional experience [perezhivanie] arises from various situations or aspects within a learner's environment, influencing the nature of the impact that the situation or environment will have on the child. Vygotsky [47] further notes that children respond to each environmental factor uniquely, based on their comprehension of the situation's sense and meaning. It's the awareness of a situation that drives reactions, not the situation itself. According to Vygotsky, the child grasps a portion of a situation, although not entirely. They apprehend one aspect of the subject matter while remaining unaware of the other components. The child comprehends the subject yet does so through their own unique lens. They reconstruct and adapt it according to their own perspective, choosing specific elements from the information that has been presented to them [50]. Consequently, mediation within the classroom environment, coupled with sociocultural experiences, contribute to variations in language comprehension and acquisition. Studies informed by Vygotsky's theoretical framework underscore a perspective on teaching and learning that highlights the significance of

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culture, context, and system in the educational process [32]. As such, this study aims to gain insights from Saudi EFL female teachers, shedding light on the psychological and sociocultural factors that shape EFL students' learning experiences.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### Belief as a concept

In the context of this research, which is centered on the perspectives, views, or beliefs of Saudi female EFL teachers, it is essential to provide a clear explanation of the term "belief" to establish a comprehensive understanding of the specific focus of the study. The following section includes a collection of definitions that illuminate the significance of belief in shaping teachers' conceptual frameworks and influencing their attitudes towards educational and sociocultural phenomena.

Beliefs encompass our judgments and evaluations concerning ourselves, others, and the world at large. They are personal notions derived from observations or logical reasoning [11]. Pajares [40] stated that there is no single way of defining belief because this term is used differently in different contexts. As per Sigel [12], "beliefs" represent mental constructs derived from personal experiences, often condensed and integrated into schemata or concepts (p. 351). In the realm of educational research, this term, "belief," has been referred to using various terms, including "attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy," among others, as found in the literature (p. 309).

Teachers' beliefs are rooted in four primary sources: their knowledge of the subject matter, educational resources and materials, formal teacher training, and their practical experiences, as outlined by Shulman [45]. Based on these given definitions, I employ the term "teachers' perspective" within this paper to denote the internally conceptualized ideas of educators as they engage in sociocultural discourses. These perspectives serve as guiding frameworks that shape their comprehension of students' foreign language learning and instructional practices within classroom settings.

### EFL teaching and emotions

Numerous studies have delved into the connection between EFL teachers' and students' autonomy and its correlation with emotions in the context of EFL teaching and learning. In the context of Saudi Arabia (KSA), there has been a focus on examining the perspectives and convictions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers regarding autonomy. In a study conducted by Al-Rabai [13], the author delved into how 136 English teachers in Saudi Arabia perceived learner autonomy. The findings of the study indicated that these teachers saw themselves as accountable for their students' educational progress and tended to view their students as passive, dependent, and deficient in creativity. These teachers also identified various factors related to students, institutions, and teachers as challenges when attempting to incorporate autonomy in the classroom. Similarly, Asiri and Shukri [29] conducted research on the perspectives of female teachers regarding learner autonomy within the Saudi context. The findings indicated that teachers perceived Saudi learners as currently lacking autonomy due to insufficient knowledge and training. The teachers emphasized the necessity for appropriate training courses that equip them to effectively support the implementation of learner autonomy in the classroom.

Alhayasony [30] conducted research into the convictions and actions of EFL instructors regarding learner autonomy. The findings highlighted the EFL teachers' positive attitudes toward learner autonomy, recognizing its importance in language learning. However, when it came to practical implementation, their enthusiasm was somewhat tempered in terms of its effective integration into the EFL classroom. Over the past two decades, second language (L2) motivation has been the most extensively studied emotional factor in the Saudi EFL context. Previous studies have established connections between EFL students' emotions, language skills, learning strategies, and EFL performance [15]. Factors such as students' motivation, attitude, and the time they invest in studying English have been identified as influencers of EFL learning [16;18;19;20;21].

Some research has explored the extent to which religion shapes the attitudes of Saudi teachers and learners toward EFL instruction and learning [3;22;8]. For instance, Asiri's study made a substantial contribution to the literature by investigating how religious, economic, and political factors have impacted EFL teachers' beliefs regarding the status of English in the Saudi context. Similarly, Shah et al. [44] research examined the factors

influencing EFL instruction in Saudi Arabia through the perspectives of five EFL teachers. The results illuminated three significant barriers affecting EFL teaching: social, cultural, and religious sensitivities. Moreover, the lack of student motivation and unfavorable institutional policies and procedures were identified as obstacles that impact EFL teaching. Currently, Saudi Arabia is undergoing a significant transformation through the implementation of the 2030 vision, which

is aligned with moderate Islamic principles, representing a departure from the period prior to 2016. In the past, policy makers in education consulted religious authorities for guidance across all aspects of education, including the field of EFL. However, contemporary Saudi society has experienced substantial sociocultural changes at various levels. As a result, the sociocultural influence on EFL teachers is likely to differ from findings in previous studies. In my perspective, it is imperative for research to extend its focus beyond religious aspects and encompass a comprehensive exploration of EFL teachers' and learners' lives in the context of English teaching and learning. This shift is essential to understand EFL teachers' attitudes within the realm of their students' current sociocultural context and how this context influences EFL learning. This approach is essential for shedding light on the viewpoints of EFL teachers concerning the influence of sociocultural factors in shaping the dynamics of both EFL teaching and learning.

### **EFL teaching approaches**

In a study conducted by Alrabai [14], the focus was on the convictions of 36 instructors of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. The study specifically delved into their practices related to motivating students in language classes and also gathered perceptions from 826 students regarding their motivation in these classes. To assess the frequency of using certain motivational techniques, a structured questionnaire was employed. The study's outcomes indicated that motivational techniques were not commonly applied in English language classes in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, important aspects of learners' motivation, such as reducing language anxiety and promoting their independence, were often overlooked in the teaching practices within this context.

Similarly, Altalhi [16] conducted research on EFL teachers' personal beliefs concerning motivational strategies and how these strategies were incorporated into EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia. This research utilized a mixed approach research design and included a questionnaire developed by Dornyei & Cheng. The results of Altalhi's study revealed that EFL teachers held beliefs in favor of using motivational strategies in their classrooms and indeed applied them. I think students' mother tongue language is one part of their linguistic sociocultural experiences. This notion encouraged me to search the literature on EFL teachers' perspectives on the use of the mother tongue in EFL classrooms. It is a topic that has been widely addressed in literature. Mansory [38] conducted a study that intended to explore teachers' perspectives and practices on the use of the mother tongue as a mediational tool in Saudi EFL classrooms. The findings indicated that a number of EFL teachers still believe in minimizing the use of L1 (first language) in their teaching as an educational tool as much as possible. In addition, it seems teachers tend to use L1 (Arabic) in the classroom with students who have low English proficiency. In the same vein, Al-Amir and Al-Hashemi [27] researched Saudi female teachers' perceptions of the L1 use in EFL classrooms. The data analysis showed that the majority of teachers preferred using students' first language in their EFL classrooms. Also, the results of the study concluded that EFL teachers were eclectic when to use L1 in the EFL classroom. They used students' first language for providing directives or giving instructions. Bamanger and Gashan [26] undertook a study to explore the beliefs of Saudi EFL teachers regarding the significance of imparting English reading strategies. The study sought to uncover how these beliefs impacted the classroom practices of EFL teachers. The study's findings demonstrated a connection between the convictions of in-service teachers about effective reading teaching strategies and their actual implementations within classrooms. Similarly, Alsofyani and Algethami [28] examined the beliefs of Saudi EFL teachers concerning pronunciation instruction. Their research delved into how these beliefs influenced the approach to teaching pronunciation and the extent of pronunciation training received. The study involved fifty-five English language teachers at the English Language Center of Taif University in Saudi Arabia, who participated in an online survey regarding their pronunciation teaching practices. The outcomes indicated that the teachers placed considerable importance on teaching pronunciation, considering it as crucial as other language skills. However, the research revealed a deficiency in available pronunciation training opportunities for the teachers. Consequently, the teachers expressed a strong desire for increased training options.

From my perspective, considering society and culture in language teaching is worth noting. For instance, reading is not only teaching a collection of sentences, but it has a deeper meaning when an educator connects reading to students' social context and their experiences, which leads to different interpretation of the text. In my research, I focused on investigating the factors that influence EFL teachers' beliefs on incorporating EFL students' emotional and sociocultural experiences in EFL teaching.

### **EFL teaching and sociocultural theory**

Several studies in the field of EFL instruction have employed the sociocultural theory developed by the Russian Scholar Lev Vygotsky [49] as a foundational framework. In one such instance, Alanazi and Widin [1] examined various forms of teacher talk (TT) known as "f-moves" and their influence on the development of students' dialogic abilities in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom in Saudi Arabia, utilizing Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) as the theoretical foundation. Their data included examples where TT effectively facilitated student engagement and bolstered their dialogic skills. Conversely, when TT was reduced, students' participation potential diminished, resulting in a decrease in their spoken output.

In the context of EFL writing instruction, Aldossary [2] conducted a longitudinal classroom-based study investigating the impact of collaborative writing on the progress of university EFL students in Saudi Arabia. The 46 participants were divided into two groups: a control group that composed essays individually and an experimental group that worked on essays in small groups. Both groups took a pre-test before the eight-week intervention and a post-test at the conclusion of the study. Additionally, the experimental group completed an end-of-study questionnaire. While both groups demonstrated improvement, the experimental group exhibited significantly greater progress in the post-test compared to the control group, and they expressed positive attitudes toward collaborative writing in the questionnaire.

Almuhailib and Al-Ahdal [4] adopted the sociocultural theory as the framework for their research, which explored preservice teachers' perspectives on the implementation of a learner-centered teaching approach in the classroom. The findings indicated that student-teachers held favorable views on the learner-centered teaching approach, but they also encountered significant challenges in its application.

Similarly, Almohideb [7] investigated the perceptions of Saudi university teachers and students regarding Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches in English instruction, utilizing Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (1987) as the theoretical framework. Data were collected through teacher interviews, student questionnaires, textbook analysis, and classroom observations. The results revealed that teachers were indeed incorporating CLT approaches into many of their classes. However, the study identified several challenges associated with CLT, with both teachers and students expressing hesitancy and difficulties in fully embracing certain aspects of CLT in their teaching and learning practices. In the realm of teacher development, Putra and Al Alalwi [41] explored the insights of an EFL teacher with 20 years of experience regarding the essential qualities that an EFL teacher should possess. Their findings emphasized the importance of language teachers continually enhancing their professionalism and demonstrating adaptability in response to new professional and social environments.

Almutairi [5] conducted a study to investigate the disparities in the impact of teacher feedback versus peer feedback on students' writing effectiveness, as well as how students responded to a combination of both types of feedback [6]. The findings revealed that students held positive perceptions regarding the significant role of both teacher and peer feedback in improving their writing skills. A comprehensive review of the literature provides valuable insights into research studies that have incorporated socio-cultural theory within EFL education in Saudi Arabia. However, the exploration of students' sociocultural emotional experiences in EFL learning remains an unexplored area. The majority of existing literature on emotions and EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia predominantly examines emotions as immediate psychological responses stemming from interactions with peers and teachers. Undoubtedly, there is a crucial need to introduce a third dimension that impacts EFL learning, such as students' interpretation of experiences and their sociocultural context. As a result, the core objective of this research is to make a significant contribution to current literature. This will be achieved by delving deeply into the concept of emotional experiences [perezhivanie] within the EFL classroom setting. This comprehensive exploration will be undertaken through the perspective of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. By doing so, we anticipate enhancing our understanding of the intricate interplay between emotions, sociocultural context, and the dynamics of language learning.

### Research question

What are the considerations that EFL teachers take into account when delivering English instructions to EFL students?

### Sub-question

To what extent do Saudi EFL female teachers believe in incorporating students' sociocultural context into their EFL teaching methodologies?

To what extent do Saudi EFL female teachers support the inclusion of students' emotions in their EFL teaching approaches?

## 3 Method

Case study has been identified as a qualitative research method that can be employed in education. Qualitative research method aspires to an in-depth understanding of the social context in relation to its participants [23]. In addition, qualitative research is meant to be an analytical tool to analyze specific cases in particular time and place, looking at people's experiences and activities in their local context [35].

I used a Single Case Study design with Embedded Units [51] in this study. As part of studying this case, I focused on the views presented by six Saudi EFL female teachers who are teaching English as a foreign language in college level EFL programs. Each EFL teacher's beliefs about the case is a unit of analysis. The six teachers' perspectives become the units of analysis of this single case (English language teaching considering EFL students' experiences and sociocultural setting

In the current study, I am applying an instrumental exploratory case study [24] to explore how EFL education has been implemented and understood through EFL teachers' perspectives.

### **Collection Method**

Creswell identifies case study as a qualitative approach at which the researcher discovers bounded cases or cases that have been formed in a specific time period through in-depth data collection utilizing various methods. The case should investigate the issue deeply, which was helpful in my research design. In this case, interviews and participants' documents (autobiographies, some teaching materials) were major data collection methods.

For precise results, I have collected more than one data source, that is, data triangulation. According to Denzin and Lincoln [31], data triangulation denotes the integration of different data sources, distinguished by time, place, and person. Moreover, triangulation is defined as the use of a minimum of three research methods as data collection sources to ensure truthfulness [23]. I collected data utilizing the semi-standardized interviews and the documents (autobiography writing, some teaching materials that they talked about in interview) to examine closely EFL teachers' teaching and learning beliefs in Eastern Province.

Interviews. Responsive interviewing is a qualitative interview method that rests on a give and take relationship as a result of trust and an outlast rapport between the researcher and the participant [43]. Starting interviews requires trust, less confrontation, and flexibility in the question patterns [35]. I conducted each of the participants' two interviews, and a third optional interview to clarify some points. I conducted my interviews with my participants' time preferences. I conducted the interview in the language the participants preferred (Arabic or English). I wanted them to feel comfortable speaking any of the two languages to express their opinions, feelings, and thoughts.

Teachers' Documents (autobiographies). Merriam [40] states "documents are in fact a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator" (p. 139). My goal of employing autobiography writing as a data collection method was to understand how EFL teachers' perspectives influenced their understanding of students' EFL learning. Before starting the first interview with the study participants, I met with five of the teachers in person to explain to them what is preferable to include in their autobiographies. One of the teachers couldn't meet in person, so I explained to her on the phone. I have utilized the primary source originated documents to guarantee authenticity in the study data. I asked each teacher to write an autobiography in the language she prefers (in Arabic or in English) about her EFL teaching journey including some stories, incidents, or events that had influenced her. All of the participants chose to write the autobiographies in English.

### **Sampling**

Since my research is a qualitative design, I used substantial criteria (purposeful sampling) to choose my research participants because this way of selection is based on specifying the participants' features that I included in the sample. The inclusion criterion for participants in this research is: EFL female teachers who are teaching in EFL college programs as they help me to understand teachers' beliefs and teaching practices. In terms of materials for data collection, I defined my sample structure beforehand, that is, before data collection. The sampling idea emerged from my inferences about a certain group and how I believe this group was relatable to my study.

### **Description of the Participants**

All participants have been lifelong residents of Saudi Arabia since birth. They spent their formative years in various Saudi cities, namely Taif, Abha, Qatif, and Dammam. Their educational journeys encompassed elementary, middle, and high school education within Saudi Arabia. Their ages ranged from 33 to 37 years. They attained their master's degrees from different countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Bahrain. Exposure to the English language occurred before their enrollment in Saudi colleges for their undergraduate degrees. Of the six participants, five held master's degrees, while one held a bachelor's degree. All six participants specialized in English during their undergraduate studies, and their master's pursuits covered fields such as Translation, Linguistics, English Literature, and TEFL. Their teaching experience was predominantly in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, where they worked as EFL instructors for college-level students. Notably, one participant had recently transitioned to teaching in a high school located in Southern Saudi Arabia.

### **Data Analysis Method**

I followed inductive reasoning for identifying the codes, the categories, and the themes that had emerged from the data by using my theoretical framework as a lens [40]. Additionally, inductive reasoning necessitates using emergent coding as a feature of qualitative research that reflects the voices of the participants instead of having prefigured codes that limit the analysis [34]. I had carried out thematic analysis to familiarize myself with the data and then made codes and found connections across the categories that I had formed in advance in the process of creating a theme.

## Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness is an important element in qualitative research. It relies on validity and reliability [40]. In this research, I drew from Rossman and Rallis [42] regarding protecting participants' rights. I am aware of the issues related to protecting the participants, how to learn about the participants, and what to learn about and from them. I took attentively the meaning of the interpretation and principles they reflected. A researcher might face some ethical dilemmas that lead the researcher to decide how to use certain principles, especially those that guide decision-making in the data interpretation section. Therefore, I employed Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) principles to avoid ethical dilemmas by applying the following:

- 1) I kept away from sites where I hold an administrative or supervisory role over study participants.
- 2) I did not select participants who were uncomfortable sharing information.
- 3) I did not choose a time and place to meet with the participants, rather, they did.
- 4) I protected participants' privacy in both oral and written communications.
- 5) I respected study participants.
- 6) I had the honesty to present the findings as they are.
- 7) I avoided risky questions.

To preserve privacy and confidentiality, I used pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Some participants may want to express their voices freely without restrictions when their identities are recognized. As a researcher, I protected my participants by keeping anything that revealed their identities such as their names, workplaces names, or any recognizable information about them. Also, I explained to them that their direct quotes would be used from the data.

Participants who met the outlined criteria and expressed their willingness to partake in the study were provided with comprehensive details about the study to poll their interest. Additionally, I presented the consent form to them in English, as their proficiency in the language negated the need for an Arabic version. During this phase, I encouraged them to share their contact information for seamless communication. To ensure clarity, I electronically forwarded the consent form before our scheduled meeting, allowing them to review, sign, and initiate the data collection process.

The informed consent encompassed a thorough overview of the study's objectives and the role expected of them. In this context, I emphasized that their involvement was entirely voluntary, and they held the prerogative to withdraw at any juncture. It was made explicit that their privacy was of paramount importance and their participation entailed no associated risks.

## 4 Results

### The Use of the Students' mother tongue and EFL Culture in EFL Classroom

The findings indicate that the participants had different views about the use of the students' first language (L1), Arabic, and the use of the target language culture in the EFL classroom. By the target language culture, I mean the different ways of perceptions and living of English language speaking countries such as USA, UK, Canada, or Australia. While some teachers have chosen the first language, Arabic, alongside English, the others were opposed to the use of students' first language in an EFL classroom. Mona believed that comparing the target language to students' L1, Arabic, in the EFL classroom could increase students' involvement in the lesson. This belief had an impact on her way of teaching, as explained in the following excerpt: I always talked to them whenever we had the chance and told them how easy it is to use the language [English] and it is not as rich as Arabic and has very little vocab and grammar it is not little but compared to Arabic, which is like, I don't know, they have over 30 thousand words and roots not only roots, nevertheless the words themselves. (January, 2020)

However, Faten had a similar belief about using the students' L1 in the EFL education. She thinks that we need to balance English and Arabic language in education: We still need to think about balancing that [using English as a medium in education] with the knowledge of Arabic, especially with standard Arabic. Yes. I don't know how it is going to exactly influence education as a higher level (January, 2020). Moreover, she thinks the first language can be utilized in EFL classroom with weak students to increase their understanding of the lesson. She explained: "I usually give instructions in grammar points, in first language if I feel grammar points are complicated to be explained in second language" (January, 2020).

Likewise, Reef used the students L1 with beginner classes. She claimed: "for beginners they actually try to find the

meaning in English, and the definition in English, but I always double the word in Arabic if they find difficulties defining the word using complete definition, I usually say the word in Arabic” (December, 2019).

On the contrary, Noor and Reef believed that “English only” policy should be enforced in EFL classroom practices and curriculum. When I asked Reef about the advantage of having a teacher that speaks the students’ L1, she explained that, “Students are forced to use English when speak by native speakers, someone doesn't speak their language, but with me they feel more confident with someone speaks their language. So I don’t think it is an advantage, it is a disadvantage for me and for them” (December, 2019). Likewise, Noor thinks that teachers should use English as the medium of instructions in the EFL classroom, and she criticized teachers who use Arabic language in an EFL classroom. She stated that, “some teachers still teach in Arabic while the course books are written in English” (January, 2020).

The analysis yielded that the participants believed in the importance of incorporating the target language culture in the EFL classroom. To them, incorporating the L2 sociocultural context was a mediation at which enhances students’ learning. However, some teachers illustrated the significance of making EFL teaching culturally sensitive. For instance, Mona and Faten believed in the importance of teaching the students about the target language culture in EFL classrooms. According to them, learning about the culture of the English-speaking countries not only could support the students’ learning of the target language, but it would also grow their Funds of Knowledge [37]. Mona stated, I think it’s very important. Once you study a language, you study its culture. Now let’s say we are studying English and we are studying about sports. For studying sports, we come across the word “soccer”. Which we don’t use here [in Saudi Arabia], but it’s a common sport, and we do play it in most countries. (December, 2019).

However, Faten believed that the classroom materials need to be culturally sensitive when including any thoughts of the target language culture. That is, such incorporation should not be at the expense of neglecting their own cultural values, as she illuminated in the following quote: I try to be culturally sensitive in terms that I don’t try to enforce anything on them ,and I am not trying to tell them this is right or wrong, I just tell them that it[the culturally sensitive norm] exists around the world and they need to be aware of it now, at the same time I try to tell them more relatable things relatable to their culture about their life. (January, 2020).

Likewise, Reef believed in the importance of exposing the students to the target language culture. According to her, it is one of the ways through which the students could learn how to use the language properly. However, she advised her students who are beginner English language learners to just try to immerse themselves in the target language and culture to learn it better. She stated learning a language can be good for you, but learning the culture alongside the language would be better [...] [the native speakers on T.V.] use words and phrases in specific context now the need of native use them for example, you would never know that if you don’t watch if you don’t communicate immerse self of the culture (December-January, 2019-2020).

According to Reef, EFL Saudi teachers in the past faced some constraints that prevent them from incorporating any aspect of the target language culture in the EFL classroom in KSA due to the predominant Saudi conservative culture in the past. Therefore, teachers were permitted to show their students any Western movie or song. However, this situation has changed completely in KSA. Currently, Reef thinks that EFL teachers have more liberty to get students involved with the L2 culture. Reef disclosed that, I felt paralyzed by not being able to play music or display pop culture related material [...] we have recently encountered huge cultural changes in the kingdom, allowing us to use what was previously classified as taboos like music, movies and TV shows in our teaching approaches. (January, 2020).

## 5 Discussion

The findings indicate that the participants had contradicting opinions viewing the use of Culturally Relevant Teaching [36]. Particularly, they had various opinions on comprising EFL students’ sociocultural context such as students’ first language (L1), Arabic, in the EFL classroom. According to the participants, the use of the students’ L1, Arabic, is enriching in the EFL classroom as it might expand the students’ comprehension and involvement in the lesson. In addition, Arabic has been viewed as an instrument that can be used only with learners with low English language proficiency who need additional support in learning the language. However, according to the participants, the use of the students’ L1, Arabic, in the EFL classroom can be allowed only when it is exceptionally necessary. It should be the only spoken language in the classroom practices and curriculum, so students do not lean on Arabic in an English class, which is a similar finding to [25;38].

Similarly, the findings indicate that the participants thought that enriching EFL students about the English language sociocultural context is a source of knowledge that can benefit its learners because it could add to their funds of knowledge about the English language which aligns with [37]. So, the target language culture has been perceived by the participants as a desirable culture and inspiring culture that could develop EFL learners’ language. Moreover, there has been an emphasis on the importance of applying culturally relevant pedagogy in the EFL classrooms to construct knowledge that

arises from students' social and cultural experiences. Moreover, EFL students' cultural backgrounds were appreciated and well thought out. These findings are consistent with (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012). Saudi EFL Female Teachers' perspectives on the Elements that Impact EFL Students' English Language Learning According to the EFL female teachers, there are a number of elements that impact EFL students' learning. Those factors can be categorized into two types: psychological factors (motivation, self-confidence) and society-driven factors: (family and friends' support, teachers' support, and social support). In what follows, I report these findings in more detail.

### Psychological Factors

The data revealed that EFL teachers think that there are factors within students that impact their EFL learning. These are related to their way of thinking and psyche. All the participants believed in motivation as an internal factor that can influence EFL students' learning in KSA. Faten demonstrated that students who are motivated will create learning opportunities for themselves not only inside the EFL learning environment, but also outside of that environment. She emphasized that: I think [good EFL students] is the ones who try to create as many opportunities as possible for themselves outside the classroom to practice the language so they try to use other sources, they try to read, they maybe it comes naturally to them because they love watching, for example, movies in English, or shows in English, or like reading or they follow someone famous on Instagram or Twitter. So, people who actually create opportunities for themselves. And they are. So, these are going to be very motivated to learn the language. (December 2019).

In the same vein, Enas believed in the significant role of motivation in students' learning. She thinks motivated students will use all of the possible means to learn. She stated that "The most the most the significant characteristics about EFL students throughout my experience, I think the desire because if there is a will there is a way. (December, 2019).

Similarly, Thani believed in intrinsic motivation as a main factor to learn English. She came to this conclusion as a result of her recent experience of teaching adults in a rural area. In that context, students were able to learn English although they neither had access to internet nor had a chance to practice the language outside the classroom. She said about these students: The main characteristic or the main factor [in EFL learning] I believe it's the intrinsic motivation. If the student is intrinsically motivated from my experience with my students. Because you know I teach in a place where not all my students believe it or not, have internet. I teach in a place where you don't have any single spot to practice the language. Everyone in this place I am teaching speaks Arabic. Everywhere, gas stations, hospitals, restaurants, everywhere no English. In spite of this, I have students who are perfect, fluent in English, amazing at writing. How?[...] They have the passion to learn intrinsically (December, 2019).

Likewise, Mona stressed that there are factors that greatly influence EFL students' learning, such as students' motivation that arises from their determination and love for learning the language. According to her, a good student in other subjects must be a good student in English, too, regardless of the personal differences among people. Even though she was aware that some students were better and quicker at acquiring the language, she insisted that a good student can study any discipline. She commented that, "to be a good EFL student, you don't have to have certain characteristics. you have to be willing to intake the language [...] it depends on the person not the characteristics. If he's a good student, if he's willing to know, if he wants to master whatever he has, he will be a really good student" (December, 2019).

Furthermore, Enas believed that the students' willingness and passion for learning that stems from their motivation can stimulate them to find their way to learn English. She stated, "They [her students] keep telling me they want [to be fluent in English], but it is difficult, and I always remind my students that if there is a will there is a way" (January, 2020). She had formulated this thought based on her students' own experiences who graduated from governmental schools where English language education is usually not intensive. In spite of that, those students had advanced English language skills.

Likewise, to Reef, learning the language should be through having love for learning and should not rely on people to make them eager learners, when I asked her about the right way to learn the language, she replied "is to love the language , speaking English you need to love the language , you have to be dependent sorry, independent , you don't need to wait for someone else" (January, 2020). EFL teachers believed that the lack of motivation led to low EFL students' performance. Despite the fact that participants tried hard to motivate their students, they had some students who were not keen to learn. For example, some students in Faten's class were demotivated as studying English was not their choice; they were obligated to study it. She said "it wasn't the choice for them to study English it's enforced on them. It could be demotivating for some of them" (December, 2019). Mona mentioned that some students were forced by their families to join the English class, and they have to achieve it. She stated that, "they look, they discontent when they are looking at you, you can tell that they are forced" (January, 2020). Also, they do not want to get involved in the classroom activities for that. She said that "they only want to pass, they don't even try to get high grades" (January, 2020).

Noor shared her moments when she felt disappointed due to her students' lack of motivation. She noticed carelessness on their part regarding classroom work. As a result, they got bad grades. She felt powerless in her classroom when students did not meet the course work deadlines due to their demotivation, she stated that, "They believe it [English] is not worth



In addition to motivation, the data also revealed that the participants believed that self-confidence is the second major internal factor that could influence the EFL students' learning. This belief influenced their way of perceiving teaching and daily practices as it demonstrated in their responses and the classroom activities they described. According to Enas, the EFL teacher should pay attention to her students' mental conditions because such matters could prevent them from learning. Therefore, she believed that teaching is more than just explaining the lesson and taking exams. There were some methods that Enas employed to enhance her students' self-confidence. She reported that, “ [she conducted activities]to give them the chance to make them show of their ability, and their ability gives them the confidence just to express themselves”[...]” “you know success and confidence are always related to adolescence and they get attracted by these topics” (January, 2020).

In addition, Reef believed that increasing the students' confidence is one of the goals of any EFL classroom. She enhanced students' confidence and enabled them to express the prevailing social and cultural issues in English. Reef said: For some students they think they cannot describe cultural issues in English using the English language, I would like to make them feel more confident using language describing not talking about, it is not something they don't like to talk about, there is nothing they cannot talk about (December, 2019).

She clarified one way to boost students' confidence is by urging and praising her students' work. She thought it's an effective way to push students to achieve in the foreign language class. She explained how praising was effective with her as a second language learner in the US. Reef added, “This [praising] filled us, students, with a warm feeling of accomplishment and kept us looking for bigger and more meaningful achievements. Because of the feeling this has left in me, I was determined to infuse my classes with the same positive environment”. (December,2019). The findings revealed that some of the participants associated the importance of boosting the students' self-confidence with encouraging them to learn from their mistakes. Faten stressed that willingness to make mistakes and acceptance of other points of view are also important to create independent learners. She stated: I try as much as I can not to put pressure on students to create something like make complete sentences without mistakes, what I need them to have in the beginning to gain confidence to speak in the language .... if they believe they can speak this language, then they will have the motivation to practice enough and speak it at the end. (January,2020).

Likewise, Mona tries to convince her students that they should not feel shy of presenting her a speech in front of the class. She encouraged them to use the language without being afraid of judgment from others. She said that “one student refused to do one minute presentation about her family, and I gave them one week to prepare and it is only one minute , so you are going to say your name, your family members, and that's it, I think it is like be done, if you started , it is done , but she has a stage phobia and she did it after all,[Manal told her] so you say it to me in the office, so you say it in front of your colleagues, and she did it”( January,2020).Reef believed in the significant role that students' self-confidence can play in their learning. Thus, she enhanced her students' self-confidence via following a strategy in order to make her students feel comfortable in expressing their thoughts without being worried about making errors. She explained: I want something that makes the students want to learn not something boring, or curriculumwise in my way of teaching.... I don't know if this something applied to study to students but most of them tend to shy out, they don't like to participate they don't like to make mistakes so I usually help them by saying or maybe trying to understand what are they trying to say in order to me to say instead of them I am always like to encourage them to say what is on my students' mind, it is okay to make mistakes. (December, 2019).

Similarly, Thani felt so satisfied that her students had reached a level where they had no reluctance to ask her or their classmates some questions related to the curriculum. They also practiced the target language speaking without being under the pressure of making mistakes. She mentioned that “I'm very proud of how my students reach the extent that they never feel ashamed to have any mistake, because I always tell them... and this could be under the question of the value also I always tell them that having mistaken that mean you are learning” (December, 2019).

Likewise, Enas advised her students to not be shy of making mistakes and encouraged them to keep learning. In her view, students would eventually master the target language as long as they are passionate and believe in the importance of developing their English language skills. Therefore, Enas's aim was to promote her students' confidence. To her, developing students' fluency was more essential. However, accuracy and having correct grammar came after fluency in her class. Her teaching method of writing with beginners is explained in the following quotes: I ask them to just write whatever on your mind but watch your grammar, try not to pay that much attention to grammar and.... we discuss the idea and I check up their papers for examples and the grammar, I start to underline the mistake and they correct it again, but at least they have [written something]. (January, 2020)

The analysis of the data showed that EFL teachers were aware of the psychological factors that might influence EFL students which are: motivation and self-confidence; and those factors are inspirable from the outside factors that I will be refer to below. Therefore, the interpretation of both sub-sections is joined together at the end of this theme.

## Society-driven Factors

EFL teachers explained that there are some society-driven factors that affect EFL students' learning to the target language. Those factors are connected to any environmental aspects in their social contexts. These could include both small-scale such as family, friends, and teachers, or to large-scale such as society or the country. The findings indicated that the participants believed that family and friends assistance is one of the main social factors that could enhance students' EFL learning.

Mona believed that stimulating a family atmosphere and a supportive family could help the students to get over the difficulties that they might encounter while learning. Additionally, to her, the influence of peers or friends cannot be denied. In order to support her claim, she shared her life experience and how she got influenced by her colleagues who were with her in the same classroom. Mona believes that the encouragement she received from her family, particularly her father, played a crucial role in empowering her and motivating her to pursue further education and attain higher degrees.

Likewise, Faten believed that students who their family members are fluent in English are having a better chance to learn it effectively. She thinks that those students will have access to the necessary resources through their parents. She provided an illustration of the various avenues through which students can acquire language skills beyond the confines of the classroom. According to her perspective, students can attain proficiency in the English language not through enrollment in bilingual schools with intensive English instruction, but also by having a family member who is proficient in English. This family practice can significantly enrich the educational experience of students who are studying English as a foreign language. She said that, I think if you agree with me that there is like a pattern that we observe in these students. Like the ones who already receive some sort of good instructions in English sometimes before coming to these classes [...] or when students have someone in the family who is committed to teach them the language, and those family members spend enough time outside the classroom to teach them" (December, 2019).

Reef believed that being a member of an educated family or a friend of fluent English speakers could encourage a student to work harder so that he or she does not look inferior when comparing herself to others. When I asked her about what impacts students' performance, she replied that, "peer pressure; maybe relatives, friends, classmates as they all advanced, they get you the pressure to learn or you are going to forever feel inferior" (December, 2019). To Reef, being socialized with members who are sophisticated in English leads a person to seek knowledge in that field to avoid the feeling of inferiority.

Similarly, Enas held the belief that a student's learning experience could be impacted by the company of friends who are enthusiastic about learning. Also, family plays an essential role in their children's EFL education. She mentioned in one of her statements, "if the family is well-educated, they know the importance of expanding their kids' knowledge and the importance of knowing another language also the students themselves if they know that this is the only way to get better in the future to get better chances in the future, so the only way is to have good English. So I think it's about family" (December, 2019).

Furthermore, Thani held the view that a student's academic performance could be influenced by the social conditions within their family, even when the student possesses intelligence and strong eagerness to acquire knowledge. She illustrated that, "sometimes the student is intrinsically motivated, but the family atmosphere or their style doesn't help" (December, 2019). This conclusion was drawn from a personal experience she encountered with a student. This particular student demonstrated proficiency in English and a genuine enthusiasm for learning. Unexpectedly, her performance in the English class began to deteriorate, prompting Ibtihal to question the abrupt decline because of her parents' divorce.

Evidently, the analysis of the data also uncovered that a family's socio-economic status (SES) plays a pivotal role in shaping the academic performance of EFL students both overall in college and specifically within the EFL classroom. The SES can exert its influence on EFL students through various means, such as providing access to resources or attending private schools. Thani, Reef, and Faten shared the belief that the family's SES constitutes a significant determinant in enhancing students' accomplishments. The availability of necessary resources to achieve the students' educational objectives emerged as a notable aspect emphasized as a consequence of the family's SES.

Thani's teaching experience with girls from a Saudi Arabian village led her to view the family's socio-economic status as a possible barrier on some occasions in EFL classroom. She explained that: They can't have internet at all. And I'm talking about... I'm giving you a real-life example. [the teacher asked them] why you didn't write your paper, why, why? "[the students replied] I don't have internet; we can't have internet". They don't have cell phones, believe it or not. They do have cell phones I'm sorry, but not smart. They don't have smart phones. So, their financial status is a sensitive factor. (December, 2019).

Moreover, Enas was of the opinion that the availability of books and access to information could have a profound impact on the learning journey of EFL students. Similarly, Faten asserted that the socio-economic status of a family intersects with various other factors, as it has the potential to influence the EFL learning of students. She provided an explanation of how certain families can afford the expenses of enrolling their children in international schools, enabling them to engage with diverse subjects taught in English. Alternatively, these families might also have the means to send their children abroad for educational purposes. This idea is encapsulated in the subsequent quote: “This [students’ English language learning] might also overlap with some economic factors because they will know that those students who have these opportunities are also students who are well off, whose families afford such education or afford sending them for example abroad to other countries” (December, 2019).

Similarly, Reef held the belief that possessing financial support constitutes a pathway to achieving enhanced English language education and accomplishments. Consequently, students from families of higher socio-economic status (SES) have an increased likelihood of achieving high GPAs and gaining admission to prestigious universities. This advantage stems from the comprehensive preparation provided by both their schools and families, facilitating their entrance into such esteemed institutions. Furthermore, Reef emphasized that the absence of access to a quality educational institution can impact the process of acquiring proficiency in the English language. Private schools, in contrast to public or government-run schools, offer superior English language education and cultivate language proficiency among students. Notably, international schools in Saudi Arabia tend to be situated in major urban centers, catering to individuals in well-paying occupations. She asserts that, “if you are not lucky enough to be living in a big city that offers a lot of options schoolwide, that might affect your learning journey” (December, 2019).

Furthermore, the collected data indicates that, as per the participants’ viewpoints, the learning journey of EFL students might be shaped by their EFL instructors, particularly those educators who hold a sense of responsibility for their students’ achievements. Thani, an accomplished EFL teacher at the college level, has been offering emotional support to her students. She has been actively motivating her female students, originating from Saudi villages, to pursue higher education. In addition, she has played a role in raising awareness among these students’ families about the significance of education. Her approach has been influenced by specific incidents, including the one she recounted: There are some moments that I as an EFL teacher feel disappointed such as one of my students’ cases. I have an excellent student in the second year of secondary school. She told me that her parents never let them go to the university because of family and social constraints. I didn’t believe her until I contacted her parents whom they shocked me with the truth that yes we never let girls go to the university (December, 2019).

However, Ibtihaal interfered and contacted the female student family to convince them, but unfortunately, they did not show willingness to send their daughter to college.

Mona believed that EFL instructors have the potential to influence the learning process of their students by offering them academic guidance. She conducted tutoring sessions for a student who was caring for her ill mother during a prolonged hospital stay. This specific event led to a shift in Mona’s relationship with her students. She said, “this thoughtful gesture made me more compassionate towards my students’ circumstances and their ability to pay back” (December, 2019). In the same vein, Faten held the belief that the EFL teacher plays a substantial role in shaping the achievements of her students. She mentioned that “sometimes they get good English teachers and sometimes they don’t. So, one teacher can lift them up, another teacher might take them down” (December, 2019).

The provided data highlights the EFL educators’ viewpoints regarding both intrinsic and extrinsic influences on EFL students’ journey to master the English language. Motivation, self-confidence, and a genuine passion for learning are regarded as intrinsic drivers. Conversely, the roles played by social factors like family, friends, and teachers were stressed. Moreover, the participants were of the view that the support students receive from schools and communities can have a multifaceted impact on their learning. The impact of the Socio-economic status of the family was emphasized as a social factor.

## 6 Conclusions

Saudi EFL female teachers regarded students’ emotional experiences, cognitive capacities, and their socio-cultural context as pivotal factors influencing EFL education. However, EFL teachers need to have awareness of foremost obstacles that cause students’ low achievements such as students’ socioeconomic status (SES) that should be looked at as a barrier rather than a problem. In addition, the outcomes of this study have notable implications for EFL educators and policy makers, underscoring the importance of taking psychological and sociocultural factors into consideration during the development of EFL curricula and classroom activities. Further studies are needed in other regions in Saudi Arabia as the sociocultural context might differ. In addition, people’s beliefs change over time. Thus, the findings are applicable here and now and might not be applicable later. Therefore, a follow up study is needed in future to investigate teachers’ beliefs.

## Conflict of interest

The author declared that there is no conflict regarding the publication of this paper.

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