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The Effect of Professional Licensing on English Language Teaching Practices and Teacher Motivation in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract
This study investigates the effect of professional licensing on English language teaching practices and teacher motivation in Saudi Arabia. The main aim is to examine whether licensing requirements influence classroom strategies and educators' enthusiasm toward teaching. The central research questions explore how licensing impacts teaching performance and motivation, and what implications this has for job satisfaction among English language teachers. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 1,084 English language teachers across Saudi Arabia. In the second phase, in-depth interviews with ten teachers were conducted to enrich and explain the survey findings. Results revealed a generally negative perception of professional licensing, with most teachers reporting minimal impact on their teaching practices and motivation. Only teachers aged 41–50 showed a statistically significant positive response. Financial penalties linked to licensing were found to reduce intrinsic motivation. The study highlights a misalignment between the intended purpose of licensing and teachers' perceptions of its value. It recommends decoupling licensing from salary-related consequences, enhancing communication about its benefits, offering targeted professional development, and providing more frequent and flexible assessments. These steps may foster a more positive attitude toward licensing and improve its effectiveness in supporting educational quality.

Keywords: Educational policy, English language teaching, pedagogical approaches, professional licensing, Saudi context, teacher motivation

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Introduction

The teaching of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia is essential for advancing both social and economic development (Al Mahmud & Khan, 2023; Saqlain et al., 2013). As English continues to dominate as a global medium for communication, education, and business, improving English proficiency among Saudi students is considered a national priority (Al Mahmud, 2023). In response, educational authorities have introduced reforms, including professional licensing for teachers, to improve teaching quality and promote accountability.

Professional licensing has been widely adopted across multiple professions, including medicine, engineering, and education (Al-Suwailem, 2002; Bajammal et al., 2008; Barzanji, 2024). However, despite its growing implementation in the education sector, there is limited empirical research investigating how licensing influences the actual teaching practices and motivational levels of English language teachers in Saudi Arabia. Although international studies (e.g., Larsen, 2013; Ghamrawi et al., 2023) have explored licensing in broader contexts, the specific implications for English language teaching in the Saudi educational system remain underexamined.

This research gap is especially important given that teacher motivation and pedagogical effectiveness are central to successful language education. There is a need to understand whether professional licensing enhances or hinders these elements in practice. Therefore, this study aims to explore how professional licensing affects English language teachers' instructional practices and motivation, offering insights that can inform policy reforms and improve educational outcomes in Saudi Arabia.

This research seeks to provide important insights into how professional licensing affects English language teaching (ELT) practices and teacher motivation in Saudi Arabia. The results could contribute to the current literature on the topic. Furthermore, the results may guide Saudi policymakers and educational institutions in devising strategies to improve professional licensing systems and boost teacher motivation.

This study explores the correlation between professional licensing and changes in ELT practices in Saudi Arabia, evaluate teachers' perspectives on how professional licensing influences their teaching methods, investigate the relationship between professional licensing and teacher motivation in ELT, and examine the effect of professional licensing on teachers' motivation and job satisfaction.

1. How does professional licensing impact English language teachers' teaching practice?
2. How does professional licensing impact their motivation?
3. What are the implications of professional licensing on teacher motivation and job satisfaction in Saudi Arabia?

Literature Review

Professional Licensing

Teachers require a teaching license to work legally in a specific area (Keller et al., 2016; Toktamysov et al., 2021). They can obtain this license by meeting educational and training requirements. Those who do not meet these requirements cannot legally practice (Klee, 2013). According to Wiseman et al. (2017), while issues such as teacher salaries and assessments have received considerable attention, the educational establishment has historically overlooked teacher preparation and licensing needs. It largely assumes that licensure is a critical and effective system for ensuring high-quality teachers (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1999). Palmquist (2013) highlighted the

importance of licensure by noting its significant impact when integrated into the civil engineering curriculum, underscoring its value for engineering students. Khan and Ahmad (2021) explained that teacher licensing typically follows one of two models: the university affiliation model or the independent authority model. In the university model, the university sets all standards and procedures for teacher certification. In contrast, the independent authority model has an external body, such as the Ontario College of Teachers, establishing the standards and procedures.

Professional Licensing and English Language Teaching

Every state in the United States provides its own unique version of either an initial certification or an additional certification (such as an endorsement or infusion) for English language teachers (Reeves, 2010). Gras and Kitson (2021) conducted a study in the United States, collecting data from state policies by sending questionnaires to 51 teacher certification boards. They investigated whether state policies include initial or add-on English as a Second Language (ESL) certification, offer a test-out option, mandate specific credit hours, and adhere to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) coursework standards. The findings showed a trend toward less demanding additional certification routes, with numerous states either ending initial certification requirements or permitting teachers to skip coursework through testing.

Additionally, few state policies align with TESOL guidelines, leading to a disconnect between current policies and evidence-based best practices in ESL teacher education, especially in the linguistic and cultural dimensions of learning a second language. Larsen (2013) conducted a study in the U.S. context, revealing that stricter licensing laws might cause some highly qualified new teachers to leave the profession. However, among teachers who remain in the profession for several years, stricter licensing tends to improve overall teacher quality at most levels. Student test scores also tend to be higher with stricter licensing, especially for top-performing students.

Professional Licensing in the Middle East

In the Qatari context, Ghamrawi et al.'s (2023) study unveiled a nuanced interplay of perspectives, where teachers appreciated clear licensure protocols and potential advantages for educational quality. Nonetheless, there was still a gap in recognizing how these protocols directly influenced their own professional development. Abdallah and Musah (2021) conducted a research study in the UAE context, exploring the influence of the licensing program on teachers' professional skills. They assessed the self-rated competencies of teachers from various UAE schools regarding licensing using reliable tests and statistical methods. Teachers rated their social skills highly but gave significantly lower ratings to their professional skills and growth. There was a notable correlation between test results and teachers' experience, but no discernible connection between assessment quality and factors such as gender or age.

Alqahtani (2018) examined ELT and educators in Saudi Arabia since the inception of English instruction in schools in the 1970s. He scrutinized ELT policies throughout different periods, encompassing Ministry of Education directives from 1970 to 2001 and 2000 to 2014, and the new ELT framework from 2014 to 2020. Al-Seghayer (2011) observed that determining the precise initiation date of ELT in Saudi Arabia is complex; however, most scholars concur that it formally commenced in 1928, a few years after the establishment of the Directorate of Education in 1923. Althubaiti and Alqurashi (2022) highlighted various approaches utilized in teaching English as a foreign language. Among the approaches they mentioned are the teacher-centered approach and the student-centered approach. More recently, Alasmari (2024) has undertaken a

research study with 23 new graduate teachers in the Saudi Arabian context. The findings of this study indicate that the novice teachers hold a negative attitude towards professional licensure exams.

Professional Licensing and Teacher Motivation

Alhamad (2018) conducted qualitative research involving novice teachers and found that challenges these teachers faced impeded their professional development. Notably, participants highlighted difficulties in handling students with low English proficiency and addressing negative attitudes toward learning English. Additionally, the author identified other significant challenges, including adapting teaching methods, establishing student-centered approaches, managing student behavior, planning courses, addressing individual differences, and communicating with parents.

Elyas and Al Grigri (2014) identified further challenges for English language teachers, such as the lack of development programs and in-service training, inadequacies in existing training programs, low student motivation, reliance on traditional teaching methods, limited use of teaching aids and technology, insufficient school resources, and scarcity of language laboratories.

Alhujaylan (2019) suggested that employing Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) could lead to more rapid improvement in students' writing skills compared to traditional methods. Bahanshal (2015) conducted a study involving Saudi high school students learning English and found that they tended to utilize specific strategies, such as inferring word meanings from context, consulting dictionaries, and memorizing new vocabulary, with greater frequency, often without conscious awareness. Conversely, they employed strategies such as note-taking and seeking assistance from others less frequently.

In Saudi Arabia, various organizations oversee professional licensing standards across fields such as engineering, medicine, and education (Al-Suwailem, 2002; Bajammal et al., 2008; Barzanji, 2024). Alhazmi et al.'s (2022) study demonstrated that participation in professional development programs significantly improved teachers' knowledge and skills. Furthermore, it indicated a moderate increase in awareness regarding specific practices among program participants. Hameedadin and Hill's (2024) comparative study highlighted a shortage of career development opportunities both at the college level and during in-service training in Saudi Arabia. The authors also noted the need for a standardized teacher evaluation system that includes constructive feedback and reflection. Teachers expressed negative sentiments about the current licensing program.

Methods

For this study, the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to collect the quantitative data to analyze the research problem through surveys and then use qualitative data to interpret the results (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

First, a structured questionnaire was distributed among English language teachers to capture their perceptions of professional licensing requirements and the effect on their teaching practices and motivation. There are several reasons for using surveys. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) described surveys as a cost-effective way to collect data from people spread out over a large area. Surveys are also useful in exploring people's opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. Second, I conducted interviews with the teachers to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences with professional licensing and its impact on their professional lives.

Participants

For the quantitative component, a structured questionnaire was distributed to 1,084 English language teachers across various regions of Saudi Arabia. The participants represented a wide range of educational qualifications and teaching experience levels, spanning from 1 year to over 31 years. A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed to ensure timely access to a large and geographically diverse group of teachers. This method was chosen due to its practicality in reaching participants through professional networks and online platforms, particularly within the time and resource constraints of the study. Although convenience sampling may limit generalizability, it was suitable for this exploratory research given the scale of participant involvement and the logistical challenges of conducting a nationwide study.

For the qualitative phase, purposeful sampling was used to select ten in-service English language teachers (five men and five women) for in-depth interviews. This method was appropriate for capturing rich, detailed insights from individuals with direct experience of the professional licensing process. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to select participants who varied in gender, experience, and educational background, ensuring a balanced and diverse perspective on the issues under investigation.

Procedures

A structured questionnaire was administered to 1,084 English language teachers across Saudi Arabia to assess their perceptions of professional licensing and its effects on teaching practices and motivation. The questionnaire comprised 35 Likert-scale items and included demographic questions covering age, gender, and years of teaching experience. Participants received a detailed invitation letter explaining the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. To ensure wide accessibility, the survey link was distributed via WhatsApp, and data collection occurred during the winter of 2024.

Following the survey, qualitative data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 purposively selected teachers (five men and five women). The interviews explored their understanding of the licensing process, its impact on their pedagogical practices and motivation, and their recommendations for improving the system. Each interview was audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed to identify key themes. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided a nuanced understanding of the effects of professional licensing, informing actionable recommendations for policy improvement.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Categorical data, such as age, gender, and work experience, were furnished in tables and bar graphs. Numerical continuous data, such as the sum of the survey results, were summarized using mean and standard deviations and presented in a box and whisker plot. For the qualitative component, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software was used to facilitate the coding process and to create categories. Five main themes emerged: (a) understanding and perceptions of the professional licensing process, (b) impact on pedagogical approaches, (c) effect on teacher motivation, (d) correlation between teacher motivation and professional licensing, and (e) recommendations for enhancing professional licensing influence.

Sample Characteristics

A total of 1,084 English language teachers participated in the study. A scale consisting of 35 statements was used to quantify the effect of professional licensing on ELT practices and teacher motivation in Saudi Arabia.

Results

Quantitative Findings

The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 (95% CI: 0.78–0.89). The overall mean teaching score for the participating teachers was 2.53, indicating unfavorable teaching practices and motivation because it fell below the neutral cutoff point of 3.00. The sample consisted of 1,160 male teachers (64.3%) and 644 female teachers (35.7%). In terms of age distribution, 128 participants (7.1%) were aged between 20 and 30 years, 692 (38.4%) were aged between 31 and 40 years, 832 (46.1%) were aged between 41 and 50 years, and 152 (8.4%) were aged between 51 and 60 years.

Regarding work experience, 124 teachers (6.9%) reported having 1–5 years of experience, 248 (13.7%) had 6–10 years, 540 (29.9%) had 11–15 years, 420 (23.3%) had 16–20 years, 364 (20.2%) had 21–25 years, 92 (5.1%) had 26–30 years, and 16 (0.9%) had over 31 years of experience.

Table1. *Baseline Demographics of the Study Participants*

Factor	Male teachers Mean. *SD*	Female teachers Mean. *SD*	*T* test value	*P* value
Count	1,160 (64.3%)	644 (35.7%)		
Age 20–30 31–40 41–50 51–60	52 268 280 20	76 424 552 132	$X^2 = 69.18$ (df = 3)	< 0.001
Work experience 1–5 years 6–10 years 11–15 years 16–20 years 21–25 years 26–30 years 31 years and more	68 168 304 316 216 72 16	56 80 236 104 148 20 0	$X^2 = 63.67$ (df = 6)	< 0.001
Certification as a professional is crucial for English language instructors in Saudi Arabia.	1.3	1.3	5.75	< 0.001
Setting for the license as a professional is essential for the optimal functioning of individuals in the workplace.	2.71	2.23	8.32	< 0.001
Professional licensing is a crucial element in augmenting the efficacy of the classroom environment.	2.72	2.01	11.62	< 0.001
The acquisition of professional accreditation has significantly enhanced my pedagogical approach.	2.83	2.16	10.91	< 0.001

Professional licensing has increased my teaching motivation and commitment to the teaching profession.	2.64	1.98	10.83	< 0.001
Professional licensing has enhanced my professional development.	2.64	1.99	10.72	< 0.001
Possessing a professional license has bolstered my self-assurance as an English language instructor.	2.81	2.39	6.95	< 0.001
Professional licensing has enhanced my capacity for self- evaluation with regard to my teaching abilities.	2.85	2.41	7.01	< 0.001
Teachers who possess professional licensing exhibit enhanced efficacy in their instructional practices	2.82	2.36	7.54	< 0.001
The existing professional licensing system in Saudi Arabia satisfies my requirements.	2.63	2.11	8.62	< 0.001
Maintaining a professional license has enabled me to remain current on the most recent teaching trends.	2.81	2.31	7.61	< 0.001
I agree that professional licensing should be linked to the annual stipend.	1.14	1.43	-7.42	< 0.001
It is reasonable for the Ministry of Education to use the results of the professional license as a measure of competitiveness.	2.08	2.42	-5.79	< 0.001
Total Perceptions of Professional Licensing	2.57	2.18	8.71	< 0.001
By participating in professional development, an educator remains current on the most recent trends in the field of education.	2.68	2.31	5.69	< 0.001
Professional licensing maintains teachers informed about the latest pedagogical approaches and practices that are critical for the holistic development of students and the success of the education.	2.73	2.33	8.34	< 0.001
Professional licensing maintains educators' interest in acquiring new knowledge and enhancing their pedagogical skills.	2.80	2.37	6.75	< 0.001
Professional development aids in the enhancement of educators' disposition, expertise, comprehension, and capabilities.	2.96	2.05	7.20	< 0.001
Professional development positively impacts educators' pedagogical abilities.	2.88	2.45	6.52	< 0.001
Professional licensing improves teachers' classroom management abilities.	2.68	2.34	5.39	< 0.001
Professional development facilitates the efficient implementation of curricula in the classroom.	2.75	2.42	5.14	< 0.001
Professional licensing provides the self-assurance necessary to confront novel	2.69	2.40	4.76	< 0.001

obstacles that may arise during teaching and learning activities.				
Professional licensing enhances the assessment and evaluation methods that educators use.	2.61	2.54	1.18	0.235
Total Professional Development Needs	2.73	2.38	6.74	< 0.001
Professional licensing has propelled me to teach English language effectively.	2.62	1.98	10.16	< 0.001
The professional licensing program has instilled in me a sense of pride and accomplishment in my teaching profession.	2.67	2.12	7.33	< 0.001
The challenges associated with professional licensing have diminished my enthusiasm for teaching English language.	2.81	2.46	5.56	< 0.001
The rewards and benefits associated with professional licensing have bolstered my drive to excel in teaching English language.	2.74	2.34	6.34	< 0.001
The professional license has served as a guide to remind me of my duties toward my job.	2.70	2.47	3.55	< 0.001
The professional licensing process has opened doors for me to get specialized in my teaching practices.	2.86	2.11	10.23	< 0.001
The professional licensing program has encouraged me to seek out ways to stay innovative and relevant in my teaching practices.	2.71	2.16	8.44	< 0.001
Professional licensing has contributed to my sense of belonging within the teaching profession.	2.70	2.08	9.46	< 0.001
Overall, professional licensing has had a positive impact on my motivation as an English language teacher.	2.71	2.11	9.21	< 0.001
The annual stipend is my only reason for taking the professional license.	4.43	4.56	-4.27	< 0.001
I will not prepare myself for the professional license test if it is not linked to the annual stipend	4.16	4.26	-3.66	< 0.001
Because I don't want to lose my annual stipend, I am motivated to get my professional license	4.71	4.82	-4.62	< 0.001
It is fair to link promotion to a higher position with the marks on the professional license test. For example, supervisor position, school principal position, etc.	2.06	2.27	-3.66	< 0.001
Total Teacher Motivation	3.07	2.76	7.54	< 0.001

Inferential Statistics

To investigate the effect of teacher-related background factors—namely gender, experience, and age—on professional licensing in ELT practices and teacher motivation, I conducted Poisson generalized linear regression analysis and summed and modeled the total scores from the survey responses. Table 2 presents the results. Among the factors examined, I found only the age group 41–50 years to have a statistically significant association with an increase in professional licensing in ELT practices and teacher motivation. The incidence rate ratio (IRR) for this age group was 1.70, indicating a 70% increase in teaching practice and motivation scores compared to younger teachers under the age of 30 years ($p = 0.043$).

Table 2. *Estimates for the Effect of Background Demographic Factors on Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Licensing*

Factor	IRR	95% CI RR	Estimate	*SE*	*T* value	*P* value
Gender: female	2.00	0.50 to 7.99	0.69	0.701	0.779	0.377
Age: 31–40 years	1.3	0.153 to 2.93	0.269	0.342	0.619	0.431
Age: 41–50 years	1.70	0.12 to 2.78	0.549	0.293	3.49	0.043
Age: 51–60 years	1.47	011 to 2.35	0.389	0.260	2.24	0.134
Work experience: 6–10 years	0.63	0.129 to 2.55	−0.459	0.763	0.340	0.560
Work experience: 11–15 years	0.589	0.57 to 2.1	0.639	0.793	0.446	0.504
Work experience: 16–20 years	0.528	0.144 to 2.7	0.558	0.761	0.700	0.403
Work experience: 21–25 years	0.573	0.231 to 4.73	0.472	0.748	0.537	0.573
Work experience: 26–30 years	0.397	0.067 to 2.55	0.050	0.773	0.397	0.563
Work experience: 31+ years	1.05	0.47 to 3.54	0.053	0.053	0437	0.324

Note: IRR = incidence rate ratio; CI = confidence interval; *SE* = standard error

Qualitative Findings

Ten in-service teachers (five men and five women) were selected to participate in the study. In the interview, they were asked open-ended questions, and their responses were recorded and transcribed. After the transcripts were read thrice, codes and themes were generated from the interview material. The following five main themes emerged from the interviews: (a) understanding and perceptions of the professional licensing process, (b) impact on pedagogical approaches, (c) effect on teacher motivation, (d) correlation between teacher motivation and professional licensing, and (e) recommendations for enhancing the influence of professional licensing.

Regarding participants' understanding of the professional licensing process in Saudi Arabia, they all knew about the license and the process of getting it. Ali stated, "I know how to get the professional license. I also know all the requirements for this process." However, most of the participants were unhappy with the license and process. I was curious to know about the effects of professional licensing on their pedagogical approaches. Many of the participants stated that professional licensing had no effect on their teaching practice. Only two said that they benefited from the preparation process for the professional license. They said they had implemented different strategies and approaches in their classes because of the licensing process. Faisal stated, "When I was preparing for the professional licensing, I was learning new strategies and approaches. Later, I used those strategies in my classes."

The impact of professional licensing on participants' motivation was also studied. They had mixed opinions about it. While some mentioned that they had been motivated to get the professional license just for the sake keeping their annual salary stipend, others said that they were not much interested in getting the license and obtained it only because it was compulsory for them

to get it. One of the participants stated, "If the professional license is not obligatory, I will not think of getting it. Also, if it is not linked with the annual salary stipend, I will not even think about it."

Further, the participants were asked about their views of the correlation between teacher motivation and professional licensing. All of them mentioned that the only negative motivation was making the professional license mandatory by linking it with their annual stipends.

The final part of the study was interesting. The participants were asked for their recommendations on ways to enhance the influence of professional licensing on teachers' motivation in Saudi Arabia. Most responded that getting the professional license should be optional. Amani stated, "I think [the] professional licensing should be optional." They further stated that the Ministry of Education should provide a specific curriculum to cover testing for the professional license. They stated that the ministry should conduct the test monthly. They also complained that linking the professional license with the annual stipend was not fair and suggested that the license should have no connection to the stipend. One of the participants stated, "The Ministry of Education should not link the professional licensing with the salary stipend. They should keep it separate. They should give bonuses instead."

Discussion

This study investigated the effect of professional licensing on ELT practices and teacher motivation in Saudi Arabia. The first research question was "how does professional licensing impact English language teachers' practice"? Professional licensing has been used by various organizations (Webster, 2020). Klee (2013) argued that a prospective practitioner could obtain a license by satisfying a list of education and training requirements. The results of this study show that all participants knew what professional licensing was and how to fulfill the requirements to obtain it. However, some participants were unhappy with the requirements and procedures for getting the license. This finding supports Larsen's (2013) view that stricter licensing laws might cause some highly qualified new teachers to leave the profession. Van Cleef (2022) argue in favor of removing unnecessary barriers into the professional teaching. It is also noteworthy that English language teachers refused to abandon their traditional methods. Even after getting their professional license, they did not change their teaching practices. In other words, the license had no effect on their teaching. However, the literature indicates that professional development influences teaching. For example, Alhazmi et al. (2022) showed that professional development programs significantly enhanced teachers' knowledge and skills. Abdallah and Musah (2021) examined the impact of the licensing program on the professional skills of teachers in the UAE and found that the participants' social skills improved but their professional skills did not improve as much.

The second research question was "how does professional licensing impact English language teachers' motivation"? In many contexts, professional licensing is compulsory for teachers. Klee (2013) stated that those who were unable to fulfill the licensing requirements could not practice lawfully. The findings of this study are consistent with Klee. Most of the participants mentioned that they were motivated to obtain the professional license because it was compulsory. However, financial incentives motivated other participants. In this study, only participants aged 41–50 years were associated with a statistically significant increase in professional licensing for ELT practices and teacher motivation. The mean overall teaching score for teachers was 2.53 (indicative of unfavorable teaching practices and motivation because it is below 3, which is the cutoff point for neutral teaching practices and motivation).

The third research question was "what are the implications of professional licensing on English language teachers' motivation and job satisfaction in Saudi Arabia"? The primary motivation for obtaining a professional license is to avoid financial penalties rather than a genuine desire for professional growth. Participants perceived the link between professional licensing and the annual salary stipend as a negative factor affecting teacher motivation. Their suggestions in this regard played an important role in improving the quality of professional licensing in Saudi Arabia. For example, they suggested that there should be monthly instead of yearly exams for professional licensing. They also were opposed to making professional licensing a mandatory requirement. The professional licensing body appeared unable to convince them of the value of professional licensing. Ghamrawi et al., (2023) found participants in their study acknowledged that the licensure protocols were clear and recognized the potential benefits for improving educational quality. However, it seems that the clarity of these protocols and their perceived advantages were not fully addressed.

One notable finding is that only teachers aged 41–50 demonstrated a statistically significant positive response in both teaching practices and motivation. This may be explained by two factors:

- **Experience**: Teachers in this age group often have over 15 years of classroom experience, which may help them contextualize the licensing process more constructively and apply insights to their teaching.
- **Career stage**: These teachers are likely at a mid-to-late career stage, where they are more invested in professional growth and career advancement, making them more receptive to licensure as a formal recognition of their status. This observation aligns with international studies such as Larsen (2013), which noted that stricter licensing requirements may deter new teachers but strengthen quality among veteran ones.

Compared with UAE and Qatari findings, the Saudi context shares several patterns—especially the sense that licensing does not adequately support professional development. However, unlike the UAE case where social skills were rated higher than instructional skills (Abdallah & Musah, 2021), the Saudi findings revealed that even affective dimensions like motivation suffer when licensing is tied to penalties rather than rewards.

In sum, this study contributes new empirical evidence on the disconnect between the goals of licensing policies and the lived experiences of English language teachers. While licensing is theoretically positioned as a strategy to improve teaching quality and motivation, in practice it may achieve the opposite unless accompanied by adequate support structures, clear benefits, and intrinsic motivators.

Recommendations

Building on the relevant past studies, the following four recommendations are proposed to enhance the quality of professional licensing for teachers in Saudi Arabia:

Enhance the Clarity and Communication of Licensing Benefits

In this study it was found that although teachers understood the licensing process, many of them were not convinced of its value. Establishing clear communication channels to explain how licensing can improve educational outcomes and benefit teachers' professional growth could help in garnering more support. This could include workshops, informational sessions, and detailed guidelines that outline the benefits of professional licensing beyond just compliance.

Develop Targeted Professional Development Programs

Although participants noted little to no impact of the licensing process on their pedagogy, research shows that effective professional development can enhance teaching skills. By designing licensing preparation programs that include practical, evidence-based teaching strategies, teachers can see direct improvements in their classroom practices, thus increasing the perceived value of the licensing process.

Decouple Licensing from Financial Penalties

Many participants stated that their motivation for obtaining the license was primarily to avoid losing financial incentives. To foster intrinsic motivation, the Ministry of Education should consider alternative incentives such as professional development credits, career advancement opportunities, or bonuses for achieving licensure, rather than penalize those who do not obtain it.

Implement Flexible and Frequent Licensing Assessments

Participants suggested that monthly exams would be more beneficial than annual exams. Frequent assessments can reduce the pressure associated with a single high-stakes test and provide more opportunities for teachers to demonstrate their competence. Additionally, offering assessments throughout the year can better accommodate teachers' schedules and make the process less burdensome, thereby improving overall participation and success rates.

In making these recommendations, the aim is to address participants' concerns and align with best practices in professional development and teacher motivation. By implementing them, the professional licensing process in Saudi Arabia could become more effective and positively impact teachers' pedagogical practices and motivation.

Limitations

The present study was focused exclusively on English language teachers in Saudi Arabia, which may restrict the applicability of its findings to other educational contexts or subject areas. Specifically, the experiences and perceptions of teachers in disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) may differ significantly, especially regarding how licensing influences instructional methods and motivation. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results beyond English language education.

Additionally, the study employed convenience sampling for the quantitative phase, which, while practical and efficient, may have introduced sampling bias. Teachers working in rural or remote regions may be underrepresented in the sample due to limited access to professional networks or online survey distribution channels. This potential underrepresentation may affect the comprehensiveness of the findings, especially considering the unique challenges rural educators might face in relation to licensing access, preparation, and perceived relevance.

Finally, both the survey and interview components relied on self-reported data, which are inherently subject to biases such as social desirability, selective memory, or subjective interpretation. These factors may influence how teachers perceive and report the impact of licensing on their professional practices and motivation. Future studies could benefit from including classroom observations and document analyses to triangulate the data and enhance validity.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods study provides important insights into the perceptions and experiences of English language teachers in Saudi Arabia regarding the effects of professional licensing on teaching practices and motivation. The findings reveal a notable gap between the intended goals of licensing reforms and their actual impact in classroom settings. While most teachers understood the licensing process, many expressed dissatisfaction with its implementation, citing limited influence on pedagogy and a heavy reliance on extrinsic motivation driven by financial penalties.

The study showed that only teachers aged 41–50 appeared to benefit from the licensing process in terms of improved motivation and professional engagement—suggesting that career stage and experience may influence how licensing is perceived and utilized. Comparisons with studies from the United Arab Emirates and Qatar further underscored regional challenges in aligning licensing with meaningful professional development and teacher empowerment.

To improve the effectiveness of licensing policies, the study recommends greater clarity in communicating the benefits of licensing, more targeted and practice-oriented professional development, the removal of financial penalties, and the introduction of flexible, more frequent assessments.

These reforms can help transform professional licensing from a procedural requirement into a tool for genuine teacher growth. Future research could explore the longitudinal effects of licensing reforms, particularly their impact on teaching quality and student learning outcomes over time.

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