Investigating the Impact of Professional Development in ELT on Instructors' Quality and Students' Achievement: EFL Instructors' Perspectives in Saudi Universities

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Abstract: *This study investigates the impact of professional development programs in English Language Teaching (ELT) on the quality of instruction provided by EFL instructors and the subsequent impact on students' academic achievement in Saudi universities. The hypothesis suggests that higher educational attainment results from instructor professional development. The researcher used a questionnaire to gather ideas, perspectives, and opinions from English language instructors at Saudi universities. Findings indicate that continuous professional development is essential and influences instructors' effectiveness, the quality of educators, and students' academic achievement. Implementing new ideas and methods inspires instructors, improves their capacity to address students' needs, and results in improved instruction and student achievement. Recommendations include instructors being lifelong learners, using effective techniques and tools to assess programs, and considering cross-cultural perspectives in future research comparing studies in Saudi Arabia and other countries.*

INTRODUCTION

Professional development is a crucial aspect of any career, and for English language instructors, it holds particular significance. As educators, English language instructors are responsible for not only imparting knowledge but also fostering a love for the language and its nuances among their students. Continuous professional development ensures that instructors remain updated with the latest teaching methodologies, technological advancements, and educational research, which in turn enhances their teaching effectiveness and student engagement (Kennedy, Mary M. (2016). In the dynamic field of language education, professional development encompasses a wide range of activities, including workshops, seminars, conferences, online courses, and peer collaboration. These opportunities allow instructors to refine their skills, explore new instructional strategies, and stay informed about the evolving trends in language teaching. Moreover, professional development helps instructors to address the diverse needs of their students, adapt to different learning styles, and create an inclusive and supportive classroom

environment (Garrett, Francene Ramon (2017). By investing in professional development, English language instructors can achieve personal growth, gain confidence in their teaching abilities, and contribute to the overall improvement of the educational system. It is an ongoing journey that not only benefits the teachers themselves but also has a profound impact on their students' learning experiences and outcomes. Research has shown that an inspiring and well-informed teacher is the most crucial school-related factor influencing students' achievement. (Dawkins, Lakeshia Darby (2017). Therefore, it is essential to prioritize teacher training and development, supporting both novice and experienced educators. As an experienced English teacher, the researcher recognizes the importance of studying teacher professional development. The journey of teaching the English language begins with teacher development. Additionally, there is a limited amount of research on professional development in the Arab region.

Statement of the Problem

After thoroughly investigating the English language programs at various Saudi Arabian colleges, it was discovered that some instructors continue to use outmoded methods of instruction, and their students' language proficiency has declined. So far, little has been done in Saudi Arabia to develop, train, and assess English instructors (Zaid, Mohammed Abdullah. 1993). It is widely known that faculty members' continued education and professional development play a vital role in increasing university standards. Over the last decade, research on professional development evaluation has turned away from focusing on instructors' commitment to innovation and satisfaction and toward investigating the relationship between instructor quality and student achievement. As a result, an educational revolution is required to improve student achievements, increase instructor effectiveness, and ensure that every student receives an exceptional education. To maintain a good level of education and retain a competent staff of educators, instructors should have access to in-service professional development opportunities.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1- To investigate how professional development in ELT affects the quality of instructors and the academic achievement of students.

2- To examine English Language instructors' perspectives on professional development.

3- To explore the advancement of English language instructors to formulate successful future professional development.

Research Questions

This study addresses the main questions:

1- What is meant by professional development?

2- What is the impact of professional development on instructors' quality and students' achievement?

3. What are the perspectives of instructors in some Saudi universities on professional development?

Significance of the Study

This research will enhance the field of teaching English as a second language and improve students' educational achievements. The researcher aims for this technique to enable educators

to collaborate effectively, planning professional development that meets their needs as instructors and boosts student achievement.

Limits

This study was carried out in Saudi Arabia during the 2024 academic year. The participants are English Language instructors from various Saudi universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on professional development and its connection to student achievement (Penuel et al., 2007). As the world and generations evolve, so does the understanding of various aspects of education. Alongside advancements in technology, curriculum, and assessment methods, research on second language acquisition has progressed. Given that the foundational knowledge for teaching is constantly changing, instructors must continually update their professional skills and expertise to meet the demands of the twenty-first century (Richard & Farrell, 2005). They further emphasized that to ensure the long-term professional development of teachers; higher education institutions must provide opportunities for in-service training.

Researchers have identified several key elements of professional development that are essential for enhancing teachers' skills and knowledge, as well as positively impacting student achievement (Desimone, 2013; Penuel et al., 2007). However, in Saudi Arabia, there has been limited research on the effects of professional development on university-level English language instruction. Additionally, the perspectives of Saudi university instructors on student achievement and professional development have not been thoroughly examined (Zaid, Mohammed Abdullah, 1993). Investigating these areas would provide valuable insights for creating professional development programs tailored to the specific needs of teachers, thereby supporting their professional growth. It is also important to understand how to motivate educators to take advantage of these opportunities.

What is Professional Development?

In simple terms, professional development helps university instructors gain a deeper understanding of their workplace, their responsibilities, and how to perform them more effectively (Zepeda, Sally, 2013). This process is ongoing throughout our careers. New laws, social movements, and economic trends continuously shape the environment in which we live and work, while technological advancements have introduced entirely new ways of doing things. As our world rapidly changes, professional development opportunities allow us to expand our skill set, stay current with these changes, and enhance our productivity. Professional development in education can be a means to become a better practitioner, enhance employment opportunities, or gain greater confidence and personal fulfillment in one's work. It may serve as a stepping stone to advanced degrees or improved job prospects, or it might be mandated by professional organizations to uphold one's standing in the field. Additionally, it can provide an opportunity for individuals to shift their career paths or achieve goals set by workforce performance management programs.

Corcoran (1995) describes professional development as a broad term that includes a variety of activities. Teachers need to learn new teaching methods, deepen their subject knowledge, collaborate more with colleagues, update their curricula, and explore new ways to engage with

students. Desimone (2009) states that the purpose of professional development is to help educators enhance their knowledge and skills to improve their own performance and that of their students. According to Frechtling, Sharp, Carey, and Vaden-Kieman (1995), professional development goals should aim to boost student achievement and engagement, increase teacher knowledge, provide networking opportunities, modify instructional practices, and enhance leadership. Many of these principles and goals for professional growth are shared by educational scholars.

According to Appolloni (2009), Desimone (2009), and Jacquith, Mindich, and Chung Wei (2010), professional development can occur in various settings, including online, in school buildings, and in classrooms. The providers of professional growth are also diverse. Corcoran (1995), Garet et al. (2010), and Jacquith et al. (2010) identify teachers, coaches, administrators, professional organizations, schools and universities, and corporations as some of the main contributors.

Learning Forward (2011) defines professional development as "a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement." The organization also highlights other essential elements, such as the need for professional development to promote collective accountability, occur multiple times a week, be part of an ongoing development cycle, and include job-embedded coaching. Additionally, Learning Forward (2011) notes that professional development can benefit from external support.

Forms of Professional Development
Professional development can take various forms, such as classes, webinars, conferences, training sessions, workshops, internet podcasts, discussion boards, and degree programs. Saudi universities offer a range of professional development programs, including conferences, workshops, training sessions, technical support, and consulting. The choice of professional development methods by stakeholders depends on the intended goals. Here are some examples of these formats.

1. Coaching: Coaching is an effective method for increasing people's performance and developing their skills and abilities. It can also help to solve problems and obstacles before they worsen. Randall P. White and Robert Witherspoon (1996), p. 124.
2. Consultation: The goal of consultation is to help an individual or group of people discover and resolve urgent issues through a methodical approach to problem resolution. (Susan M. Sheridan et al. (2009): 377–401. The consultation technique approaches problem solving in a similar way to the case study method, but it focuses more on following procedures to achieve a resolution. This strategy is more regimented and helps teach staff workers how to follow the policy on time.
3. A case study method: A case study method is a teaching style that entails providing students a case and putting them in the position of a decision maker dealing with an issue. (Hammond, 1976). A group leader walks students through a case study and encourages them to explore ideas and come up with a solution as part of the Case Study approach. This strategy promotes group communication, self-assurance in problem-solving ability, and cooperation.
4. Lesson study: Lesson study is a popular professional development strategy that began in primary school in Japan. It is a strategy for enhancing instruction. Teachers work in small groups to discuss learning objectives, plan a real classroom lesson (known as a "research

lesson"), observe it in action, and then update and report on the findings so that other teachers can use it. Clea Fernandez (2002): 393–405.

5. Mentoring: Is to help and encourage people to manage their learning so that they can reach their full potential, develop their skills, enhance their performance, and become the persons they want to be. (" Eric Parsloe, the Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring (2009). Mentoring is one of the most powerful techniques for empowering people and promoting personal growth. It is an effective tool for helping people advance in their careers, and as its potential is acknowledged, its popularity grows. It is a collaboration between two people (mentor and mentee), usually from similar backgrounds or occupations. The partnership is beneficial and based on mutual respect and trust.

6. Reflective supervision: Reflective supervision, developed in the multidisciplinary field of neonatal mental health, provides practitioners with the support they need while dealing with the high emotional content and life experiences connected with working with families. (Klein, Nancy K., and Lisa I. N. D. A. Gilkerson (2000): 454-483. Early childhood professionals can improve their understanding of individuals and families with reflective supervision, an ongoing professional development process, allowing them to provide high-quality care, education, and intervention.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

The following areas highlight the range of effective practices that research has identified as crucial for ensuring student progress and teacher growth (Vanessa Vega, 2003): 1. Effective leadership by administrators and teachers; 2. Job-based professional development; and 3. Professional learning communities. Effective leadership has been shown to enhance student achievement in various ways (Leithwood et al., 2004; Vescio, Ross, and Adams, 2008; The Wallace Foundation, 2012). 1. Academic success grounded in high expectations for all students. 2. A safe and collaborative educational environment. 3. Support and guidance to promote ongoing professional development. 4. Data to monitor and support collaborative research and practices that improve student learning. 5. Encouraging parents and community partners to take an active role. Studies indicate that instructors who engage in well-designed professional development for an average of 49 hours over six to twelve months may perform better.

Yoon et al. (2007) report that student achievement increased by 21 percentile points. Workshops lasting 14 hours or less and consisting of one-time, "drive-by," or "spray-and-pray" sessions did not significantly affect student learning. Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) highlight the importance of job-embedded professional development programs for teachers that incorporate five essential components. Collaborative Education Teachers gain from a collaborative learning environment where the curriculum is structured by grade level and subject. b. Investigating the connection between professional learning opportunities, curriculum, and assessment when teaching specific content. c. Active learning involves teachers applying new material and receiving feedback on how their methods influence students' learning over time. This results in better subject understanding and more effective teaching strategies. Long-term learning goes beyond merely teaching teachers' new skills and habits. Research indicates that providing teachers with 30 to 100 hours of professional development over six months to a year can enhance student performance. Over the past decade, research on teacher professional development has shifted from program offerings and evaluation to real-world teacher learning and supportive environments (Wright-Webster, 2009). Professional learning communities (PLCs) or networks (PLNs) consist of educators who share and discuss

their methods in a reflective, cooperative, inclusive, learning-focused, and growth-promoting environment to enhance teacher and student learning (Stoll et al., 2006). PLCs equip teachers with the resources and knowledge they need to refine their teaching strategies, as well as a supportive community that acknowledges their classroom experiences and helps them boost student learning (Vescio et al., 2008). Research shows that professional learning communities with four key characteristics can improve teaching methods and student achievement in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies (Vescio et al., 2008). Effective collaboration requires a focus on student learning, continuous professional development for teachers, and teacher autonomy in curriculum, learning methods, and school governance. Professional learning communities have adopted methods such as lesson study, grade-level teams, mentoring, and video reflection.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research approach is utilized. The data was collected using a rating scale questionnaire. It has fifteen items. A three-person panel analyzed the questionnaire's validity. A pilot research was conducted to assess reliability, and the Pearson's coefficient resulted in 0.00.86. To ensure that all applicants had an equal chance of being picked, the study's subjects were drawn at random using the lottery method. The sample size was 35.

 Data Analysis
Descriptive statistics are used for data analysis. There is a use of frequency distribution and percentages.

Table 4. 1 Have you received any English Language training in your tenure?

Response (s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Yes	39	97.5%
No	1	2.5%
Total	**40**	**100%**

Figure 4. 1

Have you received any English Language training in your tenure?
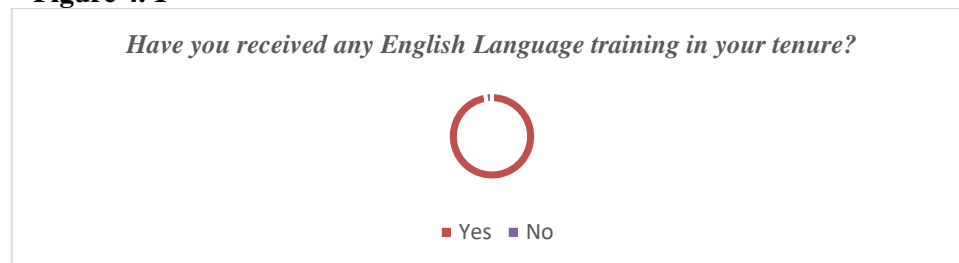
■ Yes   ■ No

Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1 demonstrate that most respondents—97.5%—had English language training during their employment, with only 2.5% not receiving it.

Table 4. 2 *How would you describe your students' English Language proficiency on average?*

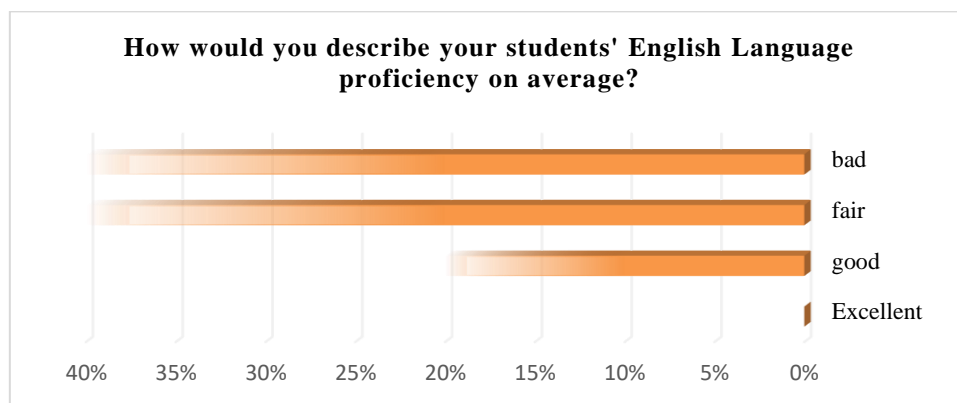| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Excellent	0	0%
Good	8	20%
Fair	16	40%
Bad	16	40%
Total	**40**	**100%**

Figure 4. 2

Table 4.2 and Figure 4.2 show that just 20% of teachers believe their students' English competency is good, while the remaining 40% describe their students' English language skills as fair to bad.

Table 4. 3 *Professional development affects teaching quality and students' achievement.*

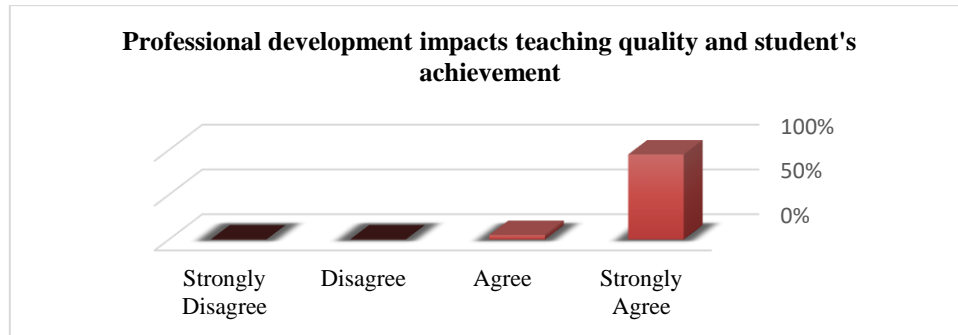| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	38	95%
Agree	2	5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	**40**	**100%**

Figure 4. 3

Table 4.3 and Figure 4.3 95% of responders "strongly agree," indicating that professional development affects student achievement and instructional quality. Only 5% of respondents selected "agree," while 0% chose "disagree" or "strongly disagree.

"**Table 4. 4** *Continuous professional development is crucial and has a significant impact on teaching effectiveness.*

Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	37	92.5%
Agree	3	7.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	**40**	**100%**

Figure 4. 4

Table 4.4 and Figure 4.4 show that 92% of respondents chose "strongly agree." They ensure that ongoing professional development is essential and has an impact on instructional effectiveness. Only 7.5% chose "agree," while none chose "disagree" or "strongly disagree."

Table 4. 5 *To encourage instructors to maintain their professional development, good professional development should be offered.*

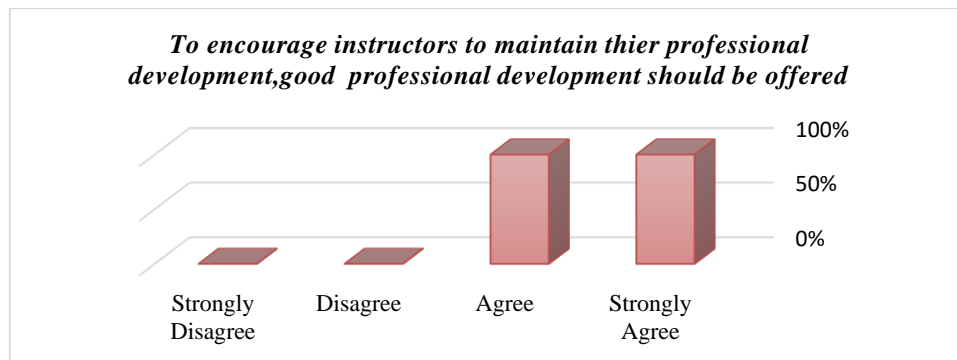| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	21	52.5%
Agree	19	47.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 5

Table 4.5 and Figure 4.5 demonstrate that 52% of respondents strongly agree that enough professional development should be offered in order to inspire teachers to pursue additional professional development. There were zero strongly disagrees, and around 47.5% chose "agree."

Table 4. 6 *Professional development improves instructors' skills to meet the needs of students.*

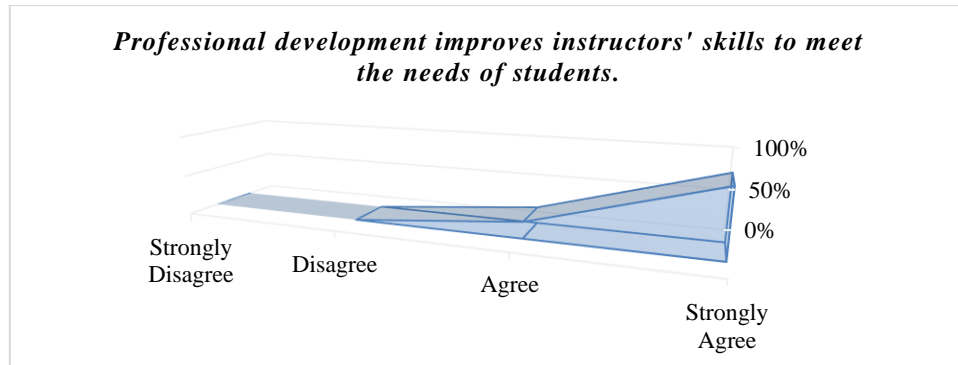| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	32	80%
Agree	8	20%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 6

Table 4.6 and Figure 4.6 show how professional development helps instructors better meet the needs of their students. Eighty percent of respondents strongly agreed, twenty percent disagreed, and no one strongly disagreed.

Table 4. 7 *Effective professional development leads to improved teaching and enhances student performance in using authentic language*.

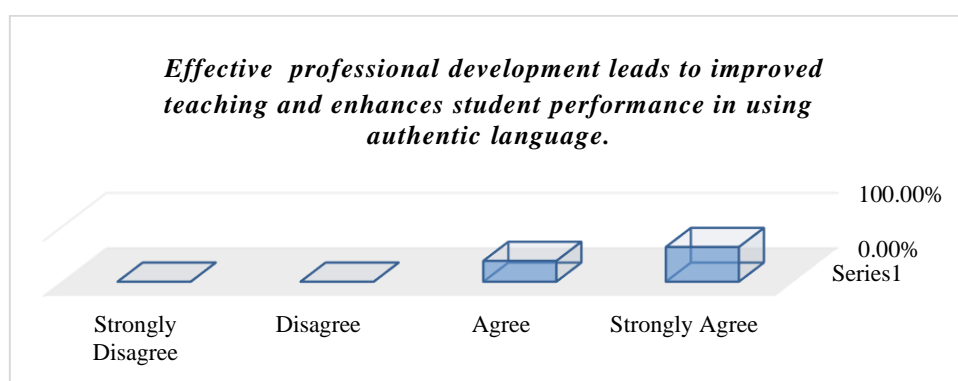| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	25	62.5%
Agree	15	37.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 7

Table 4.7 and Figure 4.7 reveal that the majority of respondents (62.5%) strongly agreed that effective professional development leads to improved teaching and student accomplishment in the use of real language. None of the respondents strongly opposed or disapproved, with 37.5% saying they agreed.

Table 4. 8 *Well-trained instructors can significantly boost students' achievement.*

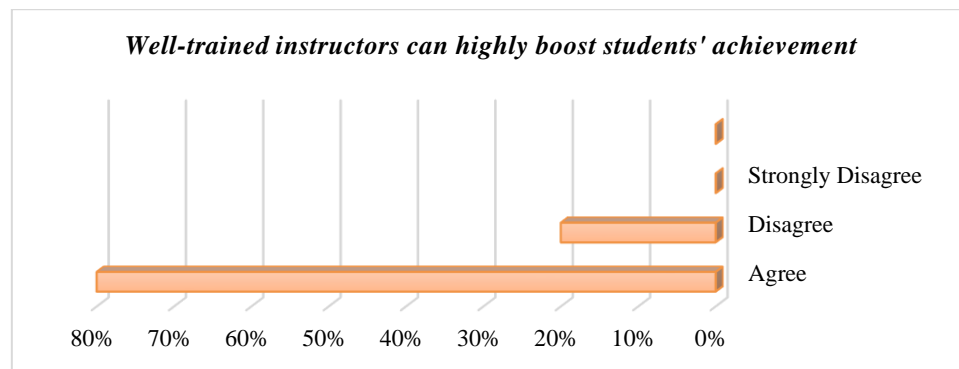| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	24	60%
Agree	16	40%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 8

Table 4.8 and Figure 4.8 demonstrate that 60% of respondents strongly believed that having professors with professional development might greatly improve students' performance. Furthermore, 40% of respondents agreed, with none strongly disagreeing or disagreeing that highly skilled teachers can greatly improve students' performance.

Table 4. 9 *Participating in workshops and conferences is crucial for instructor professional development.*

Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	12	30%
Agree	28	70%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 9

Table 4.9 and Figure 4.9 Show that the majority of respondents (70%) agreed that participating in workshops and conferences is crucial for instructor professional development.. None objected or strongly disagreed, but approximately 30% strongly agreed.

Table 4. 10 *Instructors should take partial responsibility for their professional development.*

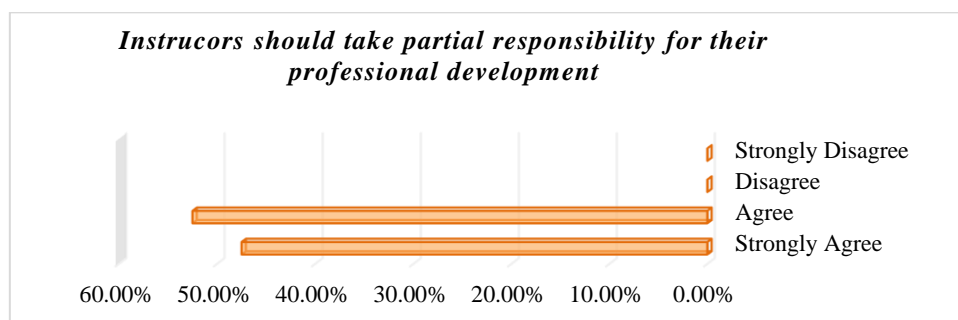| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	19	47.5%
Agree	21	52.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 10

Table 4.10 and Figure 4.10 According to the survey results, 52% of respondents believe educators should share some of the responsibility for their professional development. Of those polled, 57.5% agreed that educators should shoulder some of the burden for their professional development, with none strongly objecting.

Table 4. 11 *Professional development is essential for addressing today's educational demands.*

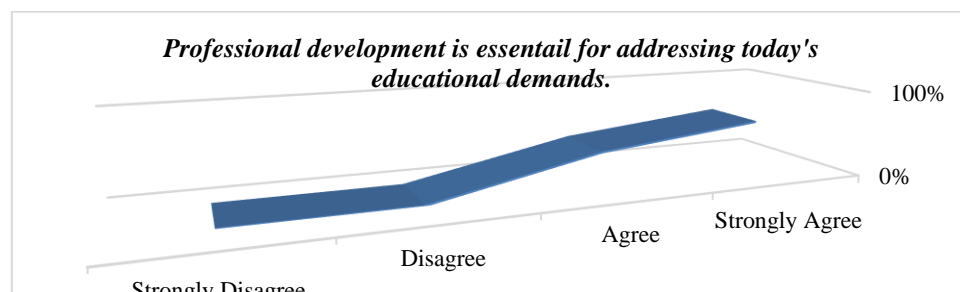| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	24	60%
Agree	16	40%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 11

Table 4.11 and Figure 4.11 highlight the significance of professional development in meeting the demands of modern education. 60 percent of those polled said they strongly agreed. 40% of respondents selected "agree," 0% chose "strongly disagree," and 0% chose "disagree."

Table 4. 12 *Effective instructors create a classroom environment that promotes language use.*

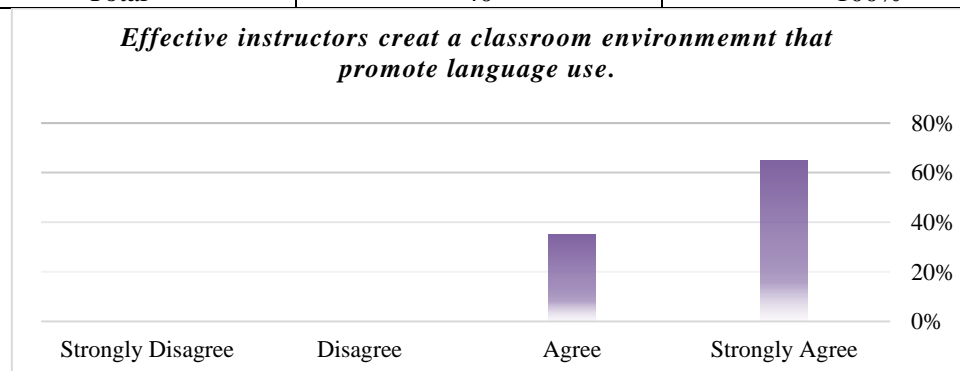| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	26	65%
Agree	14	35%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 12

Table 4.12 and Figure 4.12 demonstrate that the majority of respondents (65%) strongly believed that effective teachers foster an environment in the classroom that encourages language use. Only 35% of the participants chose "agree." 0% of participants chose "strongly disagree" or "disagree."

Table 4. 13 *Teaching quality is linked to professional development.*

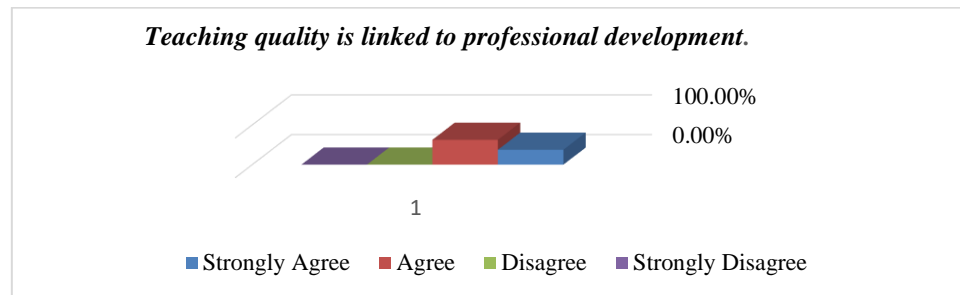| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	15	37.5%
Agree	25	62.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 13

Table 4.13 and Figure 4.13 indicates that the majority of respondents (62%) strongly agree that professional growth and teaching quality are linked. Only around 37% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 4. 14 *Professional development enhances teaching quality.*

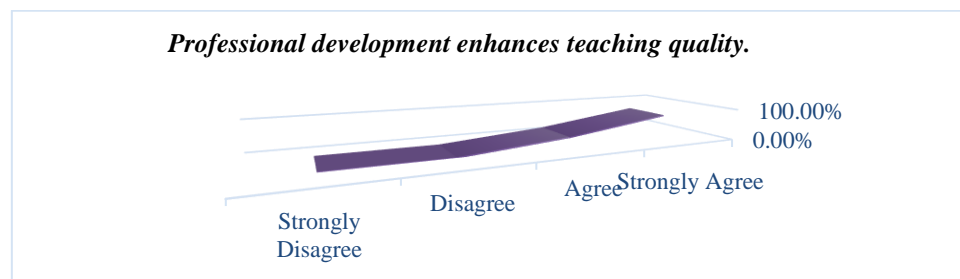| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	29	72.5%
Agree	11	27.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 14

Table 4.14and Figure 4.14 The majority of respondents—72.5% who selected "strongly agree"—believe that professional development enhances teaching quality; approximately 27.5% agree, and none disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 4. 15 *Professionally developed instructors make a difference in the effectiveness of education.*

Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	16	40%
Agree	24	60%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 15

Professionally developed instrutors make a difference in the effectiveness of education
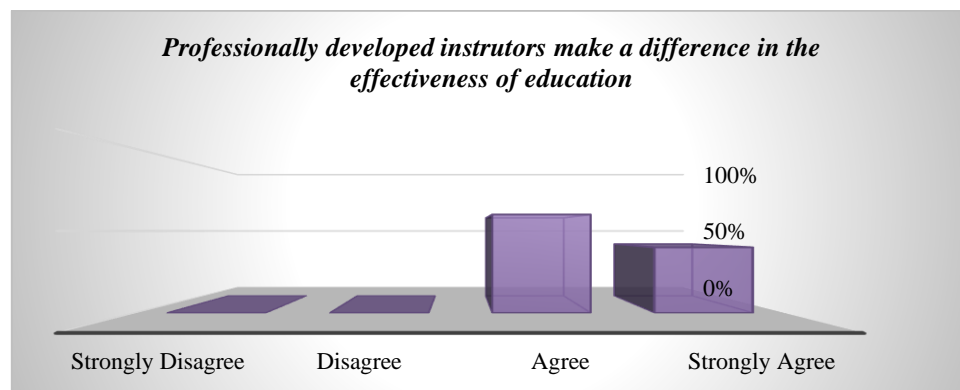
Table 4.15 and Figure 4.15 demonstrate how instructors who have received professional development influence the quality of instruction. The majority, 60%, agreed. 40% of respondents strongly agreed, compared to 0% strongly disagreed.

Table 4. 16 When *professional development is subpar, it becomes challenging to inspire instructors to pursue ongoing growth.*

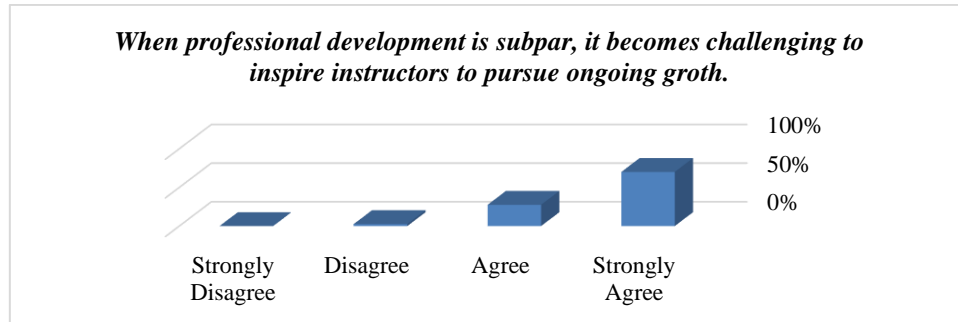| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	28	70%
Agree	11	27.5%
Disagree	1	2.5%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 16

Table 4.16 and Figure 4.16 70% of respondents believe that when instructors receive inadequate professional development, it is difficult to motivate them to pursue additional professional growth. Only 2.5% of respondents chose "disagree," with 0% selecting "strongly disagree." Approximately 27.5% of respondents chose "agree."

Table 4. 17 *Recognizing and addressing each learner's unique needs is crucial.*

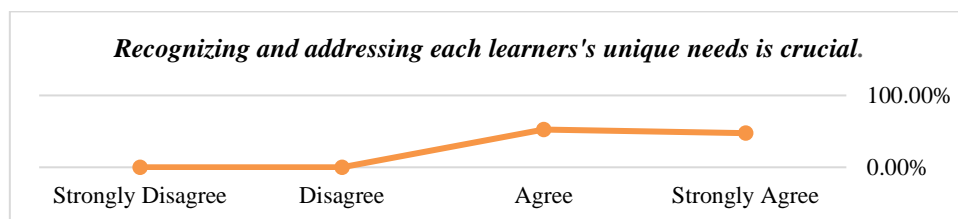| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	19	47.5%
Agree	21	52.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 17

Table 4.17and Figure 4.17 demonstrate the importance of identifying and meeting the unique requirements of each student. 52% of respondents agreed. 47.5% chose "strongly agree" while 0% decided to disagree or strongly disagree.

Table 4. 18 *Effective professional development for instructors leads to students using language authentically.*

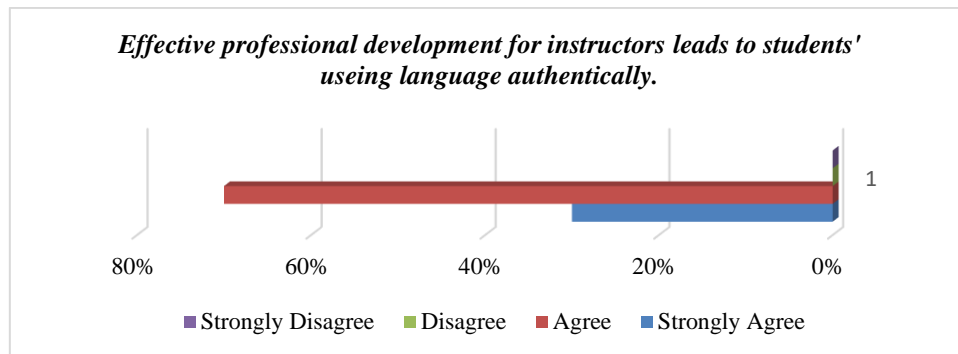| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	12	30%
Agree	28	70%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 18

Table 4.18 and Figure 4.18 reveal that the majority of respondents (70%) believe that if instructors receive good professional development, students' language use will be authentic; almost 30% chose "strongly agree," while none disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 4. 19 *Instructors must engage in continuous learning and embrace being life-long learners.*

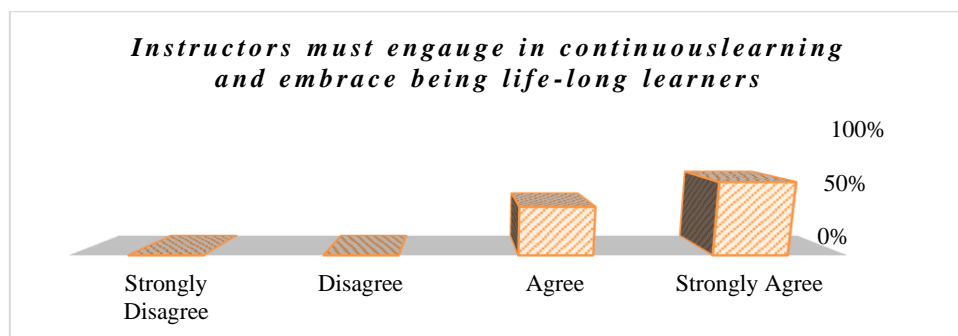| Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	24	60%
Agree	16	40%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Figure 4. 19

Table 4.19 and Figure 4.19. According to the survey, 60% of respondents strongly believe that instructors must learn on a constant basis and become lifelong learners. 40% agreed that professors must continuously learn and be lifelong learners. 0% disagree; strongly disagree.

Table 4. 20 *Implementing new ideas and techniques is both motivating and encouraging.*

Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	28	70%
Agree	12	30%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

Implementing new ideas and techniques is both motivating and encouraging.

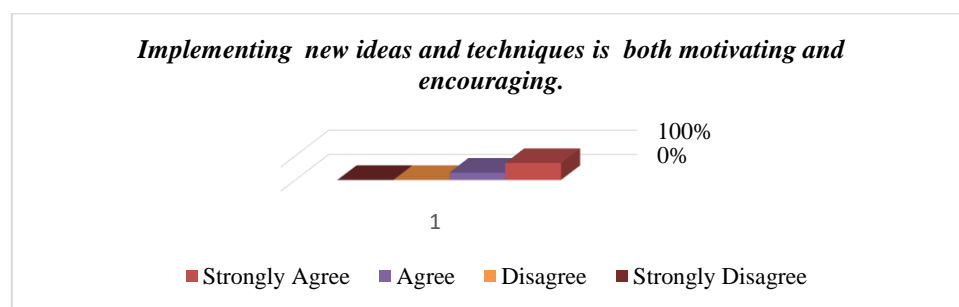■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

Figure 4. 20

Table 4.20 and Figure 4.20 70% of respondents strongly believe that using new ideas and techniques is motivating and encouraging. 30% agree, 0% disagree, and strongly disagree that implementing new ideas and procedures is motivating and encouraging.

Table 4. 21 *Student achievement is connected to professional development.*

Response(s)	Frequencies	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	17	42.5%
Agree	23	57.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	40	100%

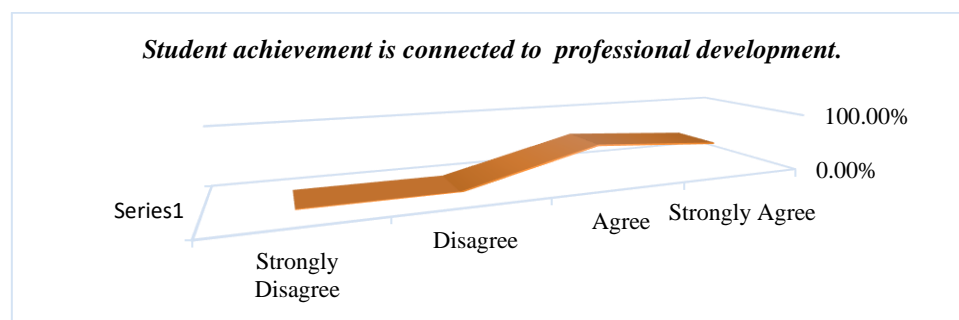*Student achievement is connected to professional development.*

Figure 4. 21

Table 4.21 and Figure 4.21 demonstrate that there is a relationship between student progress and professional development. 57% of respondents agreed. 42.5% strongly agreed, whereas none disagreed or strongly disagreed.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore how professional development in English Language Teaching (ELT) affects instructors' abilities and students' achievements. It focuses on the perspectives of instructors at several Saudi universities to inform future professional development planning. The findings indicate that English language instructors at these universities should engage in professional development to enhance their teaching skills and student outcomes. It is essential for instructors to stay current with the latest research on effective teaching methods and to receive high-quality professional development tailored to their needs.

Study Findings
1. Professional development influences both academic achievement of students and the quality of instructors.
2. Instructors who engage in professional development are better equipped to meet their students' needs.
3. High-quality professional development that incorporates authentic language use leads to improved education and student achievement.
4. Introducing new concepts and techniques is inspiring and exciting.
5. Effective instructors foster a classroom environment where language use is valued.
6. Continuous professional development is essential for instructors' effectiveness.
7. It is challenging to motivate educators to pursue professional growth when they receive minimal training.
8. Highly qualified instructors can significantly enhance student performance.
9. Instructors should be lifelong learners.
10. Professional growth is necessary to address the challenges of modern education.

Recommendations for Further Studies
1. Develop efficient professional development programs for English language instructors that are tailored to their specific needs, considering their subject matter expertise, teaching strategies, approaches, and skills, as well as their students' needs.
2. Instructors must stay current to improve their students' achievement levels.
3. English language instructors should attend workshops to enhance their performance and their students' academic achievements.
4. English language instructors must be lifelong learners who continually seek knowledge.
5. English instructors should be involved in planning and contributing to professional development initiatives.
6. Prioritize the use of effective methodologies and tools for evaluating current and future projects before, during, and after implementation.

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