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children with learning difficulties can be done, with extra help and support, patience, and adaptation of the material, to allow each child to participate at a level suited to his/her ability. Saudi Arabia, like other countries, faces fundamental issues about accessibility of education to pupils with SEN, curriculum design and flexibility, teacher training (pre service and in-service), resources, and the need for support such as teaching assistants.

Based on the study's results, it is recommended to give EFL teachers opportunities to train and be up to date with new techniques and strategies used. Pre-service teachers should undergo courses on dealing with pupils with SEN. Recommendations are offered to develop the education facilities provided to English language learners with SEN. Further studies could experiment with some of the teaching methods mentioned in this study and investigate teachers' perceptions after using these approaches. It would also be useful to collect qualitative data to explore in depth the reasons for teacher's perceptions.

results match Lemperou et al. (2011), Wilson (2011), Haung (2020) and Boote et al. (2002).

The results reveal that weak reading and writing skills and a limited vocabulary are challenges encountered with pupils with SEN, as are low self esteem and lack of motivation. Therefore, the teacher should take into account all these difficulties when designing work for them.

**Conclusion:**

All individuals with a learning disability have the right to learn English as a foreign language. This study explores the issue of readiness and the challenges facing teachers when the teach another language to pupils with SEN, according to EFL teachers' perceptions. Teachers involved in teaching pupils with SEN must collaborate to ensure that schools address the educational needs of this group of people. In this study, the researcher described the context in which the education of English language learners with special needs is taking place in Saudi Arabia, and discussed some resources and methods that can be used to stimulate and motivate pupils and provide opportunities for them to practice the language.

The findings reveal some issues which arise in making the learning of a foreign language (English) accessible for pupils with learning difficulties, and gave some suggestions for overcoming them. The teacher is responsible for providing different kinds of activities and materials to suit individual needs. All methods and materials should be adapted to be easier and more flexible for pupils with SEN. It was once thought that teaching a foreign language to pupils with SEN is impossible, but the evidence confirms that teaching languages to

themselves ready to teach pupils with SEN and were aware of the need to adapt teaching for those pupils by using a variety of strategies and techniques. This is consistent with the arguments of educationists such as Brown (1993), Kormos and Smith (2012), Parra (2021), Alenizi (2019) and Li et al. (2019). However, it is interesting to note the overall neutral response to the item concerning training related to SEN, suggesting that a considerable proportion of teachers had not attended such a course, or were unsure of the relevance of any training they had received in this area. Such an interpretation is in line with previous claims by Saudi authors (Abdallah, 2015; Arrah, 2013; Al-Ruwaili, (2018) and Al-Qarni (2020). Lack of relevant training may also account for the level of agreement with items (in both scales) reflecting somewhat negative attitudes towards pupils with SEN, consistent with Al-Ruwaili (2018), although the respondents did not display the reluctance towards integration reported in his study. As a remedy for lack of training, participants strongly advocated mutual collaboration to exchange experiences, implying their potential openness to any such opportunity as a way of strengthening their practice and enhancing teaching for pupils with SEN.

Regarding responses to the second question, this study confirms what previous studies have found regarding the challenges that face EFL teachers when they teach pupils with SEN and highlights the difficulties that prevent the teaching and learning of other pupils that do not have special education needs, similar to the study of Lemperou et al. (2011). Moreover, pupils with SEN find difficulties in reading and writing skills and limited vocabulary as reported by the sample of the study. These

with special education needs would prevent the teaching and learning of other pupils that do not have special education needs”, “They have a limited number of concepts to communicate “, and “They find it difficult to read or write in a foreign language”, with mean scores of 4.29, 4.23, and 4.21, respectively. The overall means for the items ranged from 4.29 to 2.71, the overall scale mean was 3.66, and the overall standard deviation was 1.22. Thus, the EFL teachers agreed that they face challenges when they teach pupils with SEN, according to their responses.

Those statements suggest that teaching pupils with SEN requires resources not provided in the schools. The teaching strategies for teaching SEN pupils differ from those for teaching other pupils. The curriculum and strategies used do not take account of the individual differences between pupils

### **Discussion**

Teaching pupils with SEN a foreign language is not an easy job, as it needs appropriate approaches and professional development on how pupils can be encouraged to enjoy learning with attractive materials which support slow learners, helping them to achieve success and overcome their difficulties. The kinds of teaching approaches used play a vital role in promoting the teaching of foreign languages to pupils with learning difficulties. This raises the question of whether teachers are ready and able to teach those pupils in the light of the problems and difficulties that they face.

Regarding responses to the first question, the finding of this study indicated that the participating Saudi teachers generally considered

were keen to consider the use of various techniques and methods to succeed in teaching them a foreign language.

To answer the second question: What are challenges face EFL teachers when they teach pupils with SEN according to their perceptions? Table 5 presents details regarding the results.

**Table 5 Teachers' Perceptions of their challenges when teaching English to pupils with SEN**

N	Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Level	Rank
1	Teaching pupils with special education needs would prevent the teaching and learning of other pupils that do not have special education needs.	4.29	0.97	Strongly Agree	1
2	Pupils with special education have poor concentration on what the teacher says.	3.59	1.31	Agree	10
3	Most people with learning disabilities feel that they are not as good as others	3.03	1.47	Neutral	13
4	Teaching children with special educational needs will cause stress and anxiety for me	3.44	1.33	Agree	11
5	Teaching children with special educational needs will be too much work	3.68	1.28	Agree	9
6	They lack motivation.	3.74	1.19	Agree	8
7	They have a limited and poor memory.	3.88	1.17	Agree	6
8	Learners with disabilities are unwilling to work in a group.	3.94	1.35	Agree	5
9	People with hearing difficulties are delayed in the development of speech.	3.32	1.27	Neutral	12
10	There is support from the principal to teach pupils with special educational needs.	4.18	.94	Agree	4
11	There are sufficient resources in the school to teach pupils with special educational needs.	2.79	1.27	Neutral	14
12	The school has a system to detect and help pupils with special educational needs	2.71	1.38	Neutral	15
13	The number of pupils in the classes is too large to help pupils with disabilities	3.88	1.17	Agree	7
14	They find it difficult to read or write in a foreign language.	4.21	1.04	Strongly Agree	3
15	They have a limited number of concepts to communicate.	4.23	1.19	Strongly Agree	2
Total		3.66	1.22	Agree	

It appears from Table 5 that EFL teachers face three main problems, reflected in statements 1, 15, and 14, that: "Teaching pupils

N	Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Level	Rank
7	I had the experience to assess people with learning disabilities.	3.15	1.33	Agree	12
8	I should not expect too much from pupils with learning difficulties	4.18	0.94	Agree	4
9	I capable to interpret results of exam to SEN.	2.94	1.32	<b>Neutral</b>	15
10	I recognize people with learning disabilities needs some time for break, play, and enjoyment.	3.76	1.28	Agree	7
11	I can manage individual differences between pupils with learning difficulties.	3.88	1.17	Agree	6
12	Teaching pupils with special education needs requires different techniques.	4.29	0.97	Strongly Agree	2
13	You have to be careful what you say when you are with people who have learning difficulties	4.26	1.24	Strongly Agree	3
14	Ensures that all activities are flexible of all students and match the ability pupils with learning difficulties.	4	1.37	Agree	5
15	Teachers should collaborate to help pupils with special educational needs	4.59	0.82	Strongly Agree	1
Total		3.69	1.19	Agree	

It is clear from Table 4 that statement 15 gained the highest mean score, 4.59, which indicates that teachers strongly agreed that they should collaborate with each other to help pupils with SEN. Similarly, teachers agreed that teaching pupils with SEN requires different techniques, as statement 12 had a mean score of 4.29. Furthermore, statement 13 also obtained a high mean score of 4.26, which shows teachers strongly agreed on the need to be careful what they said when they were with people who have learning difficulties. The general means for the items ranged from 4.59 to 2.94, the overall mean for the scale was 3.69, and the overall standard deviation was 1.19. Thus, the teachers agreed that they were ready and prepared to teach pupils with SEN. They

## Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation and percentage) were used to analyse the data collected from teachers' questionnaire, using SPSS (version 20). For data interpretation, the researcher referred to the rating system illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3 Ratings Used to Interpret the Study's Findings**

Mean value		Level of Interpretation
From	To	
1	1.79	Strongly disagree
1.80	2.59	Disagree
2.60	3.39	Neutral
3.40	4.19	Agree
4.20	5	Strongly agree

Table 3 shows the mean values of agree and disagree opinions using a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) to interpret the obtained data. The expected means for the standards ranged from 4.59 to 2.94 in the first axis, and it ranged from 4.29 to 2.71 in the second axis.

## Results

To answer the first question: What are EFL teachers' perceptions about their readiness to teach EFL to pupils with SEN. Table 4 below contains details of teachers' responses to the relevant items.

**Table 4 Teachers' Perceptions of their readiness to teach English to pupils with SEN**

N	Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Level	Rank
1	I have knowledge about pupils with special educational needs	3.74	1.19	Agree	8
2	I am prepared to teach all types of pupils with special educational needs	2.94	1.32	Neutral	14
3	I took a course in Special Education	2.97	1.24	Neutral	13
4	I have read about teaching pupils with special educational needs	3.41	1.21	Agree	11
5	I have skills for teaching pupils with special educational needs	3.68	1.37	Agree	9
6	I adapt my lessons to meet the unique need of pupils with special educational needs	3.55	1.15	Agree	10



difficulties. Questions were in Arabic to be sure the statements were clear.

The total number of statements was 30, 15 for each axis. A 5 – point Likert type scale was used as a response scale in which respondents were asked to specify their level of agreement with a statement (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree. The questionnaire was created and delivered using the Google form questionnaire. The Form is an efficient way to collect responses from samples in a short time. After creating the questions, testing the validity and reliability, and providing detailed instructions, the researcher used the online questionnaire for distribution.

### **Validity and reliability**

The researcher tested the validity by sending the questionnaire to five experts who are Ph.D. holders in the field of teaching and instruction, working in several universities in Saudi Arabia. They suggested deleting and editing some statements, then the questionnaire was fully approved.

Reliability was calculated by Cronbach’s alpha, a measure of internal consistency, that is, how closely related a set of statements are as a group as indicated in Table 2. The questionnaire obtained a high total reliability of 0.98, indicating a valid and reliable instrument.

**Table 2 The Cronbach’s alpha of the research instrument.**

axis	No. of statements	Cronbach’s Alpha
Readiness	15	0.97
Challenges	15	0.98
Total	30	0.98

different grades in primary, intermediate and secondary schools. The study was applied in the second semester 2019-2020. The SEN pupils taught were mostly pupils with learning difficulties. The sample was selected randomly by asking the supervisor of SEN in the province for permission to distribute the questionnaire to SEN teachers. The researcher had a list of all possible candidates in the target population of EFL teachers teaching pupils with special needs in Al Madinah schools and selected every fifth name on the list to receive the questionnaire. Thirty- four completed responses were received as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1** Sample distribution according to demographic variables

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Female	22	64.71
	Male	12	35.29
Teaching experience	0 -5	6	17.65
	6-10	9	26.47
	11-15	9	26.47
	15 +	10	29.41
School stage	Primary	10	29.41
	Intermediate	13	38.24
	Secondary	11	32.35
Teachers' qualification	Diploma	4	11.76
	Batchelor	25	73.53
	Master	3	8.82
	Other	2	5.88

### The instrument

The researcher designed a questionnaire based on the literature review, to explore the teachers' views towards teaching EFL to pupils with SEN. The questionnaire contained three parts: the first elicited demographic data, the second concerned the *readiness* of teachers to teach EFL to students with SEN, and the third dealt with the problems facing teachers when teaching a foreign language to pupils with learning

teachers experience stress and anxiety when teaching SEN pupils and fear that their inclusion will prevent the learning of other pupils (Arrah, 2013). Also Lawrence (1981), Murni(2019), Kasumagić-Kafedžić and Pintol (2021), and Haung (2020) found a lack of self-esteem, lack of motivation, slowness in learning language, lack of speech. All these problems require EFL teachers who are willing to teach SEN pupils to train on the development of differentiated techniques, strategies, and teaching practices (Khan, 2019). On this point, the research suggests some teaching strategies, resources and methods for SEN pupils, that can be used to stimulate and motivate pupils and provide opportunities for them to practise the language. The teacher is responsible for providing different kinds of activities and materials to suit individual needs. All methods and materials should be adapted to be more easy and flexible for children with special needs.

### **The methodology**

The current study used a descriptive method as it is appropriate to achieve the objectives of the study and answer the research questions. It is a method that describes the phenomenon and characteristics of a problem by collecting and analyzing data. “This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened. Therefore, observation and survey tools are often used to gather data” (Gall et al. 2007, p. 131). The researcher used this method to collect data and explore the teachers’ perceptions.

### **The sample**

The study population were EFL teachers in Al Madinah province teaching English as a foreign language to pupils with special needs in

children with learning difficulties in real situations. A good teacher will match each child to a suitable role. The more able children may have a longer or more difficult role, while those with learning difficulties can join in by saying individual words. To play their parts, children need to recognise the language of the story, repeat and memorise then practise their performance. The play which the children perform should be based on something familiar to the children. If the play is near to pupils' lives or about their needs, it will influence children to use more language (Hillyard, 2010).

From the above review of some of the difficulties and barriers of teaching pupils with learning difficulties, it is clear that SEN pupils need extra prompting, more practice and different techniques and approaches.

**Comments on the literature review:**

A number of students in the Saudi context have cast doubt on the readiness of teachers to teach English as a foreign language. For example, Abdallah (2015) examined the familiarity of EFL pre-teachers with the concept of special education, while Arrah (2013) found absence of training of EFL teachers to deal with special needs. Al-Ruwaili (2018) found a negative attitude towards the practice of integration, and teachers' lack of skill. It has also been reported that teachers suffer from several challenges and problems such as using the same public education curricula for pupils with special needs as for their peers without SEN (Al-Qarni, 2020). Some authors have highlighted language learning difficulties such as dyslexia and slow literacy learning skills (Lemperou et al., 2011; Wilson 2011; Boote et al., 2002). Furthermore, there are reports that schools suffer from inadequate resources for SEN pupils, and

difficulties, and adapt tasks to make them simpler. They should use clear handwriting, use highlighting for important instruction and a large font for letters and numbers. Instructions should be clear and simple in order to be understood. Regarding photocopies, Holmes suggests, "When photocopying reading material, choose a pastel background, preferably yellow, apricots, and pinks. Evidence has shown that the combination of black print on white is the most unsuitable for orders"(Holmes,1991, p.26) The material should be simpler, clearer, and easier than for ordinary pupils. On the other hand, materials which children produce should be encouraged and rewarded; if they are displayed on the wall, pupils' self-esteem will be enhanced.

IT can play a successful role in teaching a modern language to pupils with learning difficulties , particularly in differentiating the learning task for different levels of ability. More able pupils may input a paragraph onto the computer, average pupils might have a sentence or small phrases and those with learning difficulties may have tasks based on individual words or letters or easy multiple choice. Moreover, most children find computer programs stimulating and are highly motivated towards learning. Also, computers encourage pupils to learn independently and reduce the need for the teacher's attention. Pupils feel comfortable because their mistakes are not recorded, but can be rectified (Huang, 2020)

Drama is an enjoyable activity and interesting for children with and without learning difficulties. If used well, it is a natural way to involve children in communication in order to practise the new language. Drama is important in developing the social and personal skills of

require hearing aids and/or instruction in sign language; those with physical disabilities may need special equipment" (Hallahan and Kauffman, 1994,p.14). The availability of a variety of media has a vital role in making learning accessible for pupils with SEN, whether it is technological aids like overhead projector, iPad, video, computer, or even visual aids. All of these aids are both useful and make learning more enjoyable (Boyle, et al., 2017).

Children with learning difficulties, who are learning English as a second language, may have double difficulties, in that they may have to learn something in English which they do not already know in their mother tongue. Deane mentions that "The task might well afford the learners the opportunities to rehearse skills which were not fully acquired in the mother tongue-such as telling the time" (Deane, 1992, p.44). Other examples are the days of the week or the months. Learning the foreign language gives such pupils a second chance to acquire the knowledge that they normally should have learned before that age. On the other hand, it may be necessary to limit objectives, for example accepting that pupils with learning difficulties may respond without necessarily having to speak or write. For example, working with a computer just needs the pupil to click on the mouse or press the touch screen (Berger and Gross, 2018).

Teachers may need to use different kinds of materials, when teaching pupils with learning difficulties, from those used with ordinary children. Pupils with learning difficulties may find it difficult to ignore the rest of the page and focus on one small part. Teachers should think carefully when designing appropriate materials for children with learning

beneficial because the element of chance means that children with learning difficulties who lack self-esteem and confidence might have the experience of winning (Li et al. 2019).

A variety of activities is very necessary because many slow learners have a short concentration span. As Murni (2019) states, variety of activity is crucial. and should be suitably challenging and meaningful. Lessons which are given to children with learning difficulties should be very varied. The teacher might use different activities involving the four skills, like a reading task, a writing activity, a listening activity, and a speaking activity. Also, the teacher could vary the activities in terms of long focus and short focus. Long focus means that children keep looking at the teacher or the blackboard or an overhead projector, while short focus activities are those where the child is doing something practical on the desk, like writing, cutting, matching cards..etc. Moreover, activities can be used in different ways, such as individual work, group work and whole class work. Not only do these provide variety, but also using games, group work and pair work requires co-operation which develops children's social skills. Physical response in terms of gesture, non verbal answers (tick, circles, underline), varying teacher's and children's position (sitting in a circle, standing, coming out to the blackboard, moving around...etc.) are also useful for adding variety and very important to keep children's attention focused. On the other hand, providing a variety of activities for pupils with learning difficulties requires a wide variety of media. Hallahan and Kauffman suggest that "For example, pupils with visual impairment may require reading materials in large print or Braille; pupils with hearing impairment may

The need for small steps: Slow learners need to divide tasks up into smaller steps. It is important that the material used should be subdivided into small component steps that can be easily understood by pupils (Hill, 2021). Pupils should gain mastery of each step before they move to the next. The first stage in teaching pupils with learning difficulties should be to use language in small units that are simple and easy to recognize. In addition, the need for small achievable steps depends on aptitude, that is, the quantity of time which is required for learning. For example, some pupils may need three minutes to perform a task, others may need ten minutes.

**Important aspects and resources:**

In a mainstream class, a good teacher who is aware of differences in the achievement of children can create a flexible learning situation that matches their capability by designing suitable tasks for children in order to enable all pupils to work. She/he may not have enough time in the classroom to help children with difficulties as much as they need help, but outside the classroom, the teacher has free time to prepare a variety of materials and tasks (Murni, 2019). However, teachers of children with learning difficulties must emphasise the following aspects and resources:

It is important in teaching all lessons to pupils with learning difficulties to focus on interesting and enjoyable activities and avoid dull, lengthy and tedious tasks. By the use of interesting exercises like games, in a fun and enjoyable atmosphere, children can learn basic language aspects. For example, teaching children numbers can be fun if it is done by playing a game. Moreover, using games with SEN pupils is

Associative learning skills: This refers to the teacher's connection of two aspects of the language. For instance, if a teacher wants to use associative learning in teaching new words to pupils who have difficulties with speech articulation, he/she might bring pictures of pairs of objects on cards, and ask pupils to collect pairs that rhyme, like hat sat, bat....So pupils associate the words with the rhyme, which helps them to remember those nouns. So rhyme is being used as a way of teaching language by association (Li et al. 2019).

A multi-sensory approach: This approach includes using all the senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, to support learning, (Parra, 2021). Normally, in the classroom pupils use hearing and seeing, but also sometimes they smell, taste and touch. Pupils with learning difficulties have been found to learn better when using a multi-sensory approach (Alenizi, 2019). Multi-sensory techniques can be used for all pupils with special educational needs and are often of great benefit. For example if the child can not see or hear and is confined to a wheel-chair (multiple learning difficulties), the teacher can take a package of grass, and encourage him to put his feet into the grass and touch it (McLagan, 1994, p.9), Another possibility would be for the teacher to give the child some food to taste. In these activities, the children can feel and respond, smell and respond. They learn physically, using touch, taste, and smell (Kelly and Phillips, 2016). These could be good stimuli to learning, and very interesting experiences for the child. In general, the use of real objects, which can be touched or smelled or tasted, can be very useful in interesting, motivating and teaching pupils with learning difficulties, even those with severe disabilities.

understand the readiness of teachers to teach children with SEN and the challenges existing in specific social and educational contexts.

### **Teaching strategies for SEN pupils**

Despite the prevalence of challenges such as those highlighted above (which, as literature shows, are not unique to Saudi Arabia or developing countries) educationists have argued that it is possible to teach pupils with a variety of SEN in integrated settings, and specifically to successfully provide them with access to a foreign language, by the adoption of a variety of strategies and techniques that have been found effective with various categories of pupils. The following are among the strategies, principles and methods that have been suggested to facilitate language teaching to pupils with SEN.

Less emphasis on cognitive tasks, less stress on grammar: These cognitive aspects of language are highly complex for a child with SEN, and need concentration to acquire. Focus on such tasks, which they find difficult, can lead to feelings of failure, disappointment and frustration in SEN children. In contrast, using easy and simple activities which require a short concentration span, will motivate and encourage them to learn successfully (Kormos and Smith, 2012).

Repetition: As important as variety of activities, is repetition and memorisation. Pupils may memorise some words by repeating or studying them so much that they can say them by heart (without looking at the text). Brown stresses that, "the initial oral presentation and repetition, through the vocabulary is needed, i. e. hear words and show understanding" (Brown, 1993, p. VI).

to communicate or enjoy practicing another language, if they can. They lack motivation, because of their difficulties and slowness in learning language. Those children find it difficult to learn independently and keep asking for translation into the mother tongue, even for simple words. A good teacher can overcome this problem by giving a child a variety of activities which are interesting and enjoyable and by the use of reward, such as arranging a trip or preparation of a meal at school, can play a significant part in motivation towards learning FL. Such activities enhance pupils' self-esteem and provide a new learning experience. Moreover, the use of visual aids, songs, IT, games and drama (as will be seen later) besides encouragement and praise, are very important to stimulate pupils with low motivation to learn a foreign language ( Al-Qarni, 2020).

So far, it has been suggested that challenges in teaching pupils with SEN arise from the impairments or inabilities of the child. However, it is important to recognize the role played by aspects of the social setting. In a Saudi study, Al-Ruwaili and Mozan (2018) found teachers' negative attitude towards the practice of integration, teachers' lack of skill, and training, and lack of sufficient physical and individual support during the inclusion of SEN pupils in mainstream schools. They also found other challenges such as parents' attitudes, poor classroom environment and school organization, lack of an inclusive curriculum, and inflexible assessment strategies, that make it difficult to integrate pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. Such findings highlight the importance of context in the teaching of pupils with SEN and the need to

reported by Dowing and Osborne (2020) include unwillingness to be autonomous, poor ability to plan and organize themselves, and unpopularity with other children. Working in a group or with a partner can enhance and develop such children's social skills and help them to establish positive relationships with other pupils. Able pupils may be willing to help other children with learning difficulties,

Another category of challenges arises from affective issues. Pupils with learning difficulties often suffer from a lack of self-esteem. Lawrence defines the concept of self-esteem as "the child's affective evaluation of the sum total of his or her characteristics, both mental and physical" (Lawrence,1981,p.10). Children with learning difficulties think that they have failed in everything and they lack confidence in their ability, so they do not expect to succeed and they get anxious. Pupils who find it difficult to read or write in their mother tongue think it will be even worse if they try to learn another language. Educational psychologists have studied the concept of low self-esteem and found that it is a significant factor in pupils' failure (ibid.p.9). Teachers should counsel and encourage those children and let them feel a sense of progress, however small their achievement, and use verbal praise. Boote et al. (2002, p6) suggest "areas in which they are succeeding need to be noticed and appreciated, It may be necessary to keep reminding them that we know that they are not generally stupid, lazy, careless and that we hold them in high regard as a person". In such ways, the teacher can improve the self-esteem of children with learning difficulties.

Slow learning pupils not only have poor self-esteem, but also they are reportedly unmotivated to learn a foreign language. They do not want

Regarding cognitive challenges, many less able pupils find it very difficult to concentrate or focus on what the teacher says and they are very easily disrupted by any other things happening outside the classroom. Wilson observes that "Many of the pupils have very low levels of literacy, poor concentration and retentive skills" (2011, p.2). Slow learners may interrupt the teacher because of something not relevant to the lesson; the moment a thought comes to their head, they say it, because they do not have the ability to control or stop themselves.

Another cognitive challenge concerns children's memory. It is difficult even for a child without special needs to remember every word in the information messages that we receive through our ears, but it might be possible to remember the important messages. Children with learning difficulties, as Kasumagić and Pintol (2020, p. 20) mention, suffer from "inability to select important information. The child might have a limited memory for sequences of events" For example, if a teacher asks such a child to read a couple of sentences, he/she may be unable to do so because he/she can only retain individual words, having only a short-term memory.

Children's learning, or teachers' plans for specific activities, may also be impeded by children's limited social skills. Some children with learning difficulties are unwilling to work in a group. They find it very hard to do group work or pair work. They have an inability to work co-operatively, because of their lack of social skills. One of the aims of teaching a modern language to pupils with special needs is, as Deane (1992, p.47) points out, "to increase social skills by providing a new context for communication and interaction". Other social deficits

should plan their lessons with differentiated instruction and the objectives of DI vary from reading, writing to grammar etc. They should consider all the aspects of DI in the process of content, implementation, and evaluation of pupils with SEN. This contributes to the agreement of the principle or theory which can be converted into an instructional strategy and implications for practice.

Problems facing EFL teachers when they teach SEN pupils:

Most educators believe that the level of achievement of children with learning difficulties is influenced by behavioural and academic problems (Neeraja and Anuradha, 2014). Therefore, the challenge for the teacher is to identify these problems and find ways to overcome them and gain success. Authors who have researched the teaching of pupils with SEN in a variety of contexts have identified challenges related to adapting to a child's physical impairment, challenges related to pupils' cognitive abilities and social skills, issues arising from emotional problems, and barriers related to the socio-cultural setting in which teaching takes place.

An example of difficulties arising from the child's physical impairment is the need to adapt teaching for the child who has difficulty in hearing or is delayed in the development of speech. McColl (1992) and Hua (2020) suggest important ways to overcome the difficulties of children who have hearing difficulties: provide a quiet place and avoid noise, use a loud and clear voice, use lip-reading, use different kinds of taped material (whole class and individual with head phones) and use the appropriate aid for hearing impaired, or video.

educate in terms of keeping MFL alive, for SEN pupils (Wilson, 2011). This requires using different approaches and a variety of interesting activities such as group work; pair work, games, songs and rhymes, use of IT, use of drama....etc; in other words, using various techniques in order to motivate and encourage the pupils.

EFL teachers should be ready and trained for special pedagogy to be able to recognize a student's special educational needs and know which approaches are likely to work with the student and how they can be implemented. Abdallah (2015) mentioned the importance of those studying to be EFL teachers being taught understanding of EFL of the concept of special education, and consequently the techniques and approaches used for teaching English as a foreign language to special education learners with specific learning disabilities/handicaps. These include strategies for teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing, skills, plus vocabulary, and grammar.

EFL teachers face challenges when teaching pupils with special learning difficulties who have a disability or language learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Nevertheless, there are many pupils who are integrated in government schools and have difficulties with learning a new language system (Lemperou et al., 2011).

Khan (2019) investigated the relevance of differentiation techniques in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to slow learners. He focused on techniques, strategies, and practices considered critical in the context, adapted to special educational needs, which he found useful for understanding, affecting slow learners of English, and the development of differentiated instruction. He concludes that teachers

the right to participate in individual subject fields, including learning a modern foreign language (Abdallah, 2015). Thus, all pupils with SEN have an entitlement to learn another language, and any activities that are not suitable for them should be simplified and adapted to meet their needs.

Teaching methods should enable pupils to have access to modern education language (MFL) learning and make it possible to present it. Teachers must think carefully about how children learn the MFL, and what are suitable approaches to achieve success. It is very important that teachers know how to break down the overall aim of the lesson into a series of tasks that are tailored to individual difficulties (Lemperou, et al., 2011). To this end, the teacher should identify pupils' weaknesses and particular needs in order to provide and adapt strategies that will help them to overcome their difficulties. For example, if a child is unable to spell common words correctly, the teacher may use the Look, Read, Cover, Write and Check approach, or if a child is depressed or suffers from any behavioural learning difficulties, the teacher may make the child work in a group to develop behavioral and social skills. Thus, teaching a foreign language should take into account the difficulties of the child, so the teacher can adopt the appropriate technique of teaching. Enabling children to have access to MFL needs careful planning and classroom management. Also, access needs co-operation with support agencies to provide teaching training and to update ideas and techniques.

Implementation is the important contribution of putting the learning of another language into action for pupils with learning difficulties. Wilson clarifies that implementation refers to how we

2. What are the challenges that face EFL teachers when they teach SEN pupils, according to their perceptions?
3. What are the strategies and approaches which can be used to make the learning of EFL accessible for pupils with learning difficulties according to literature review?

### **Literature review**

The phrase, special educational needs, can be understood by considering the reasons for disabilities. Some children might, for example, have sustained brain damage. Others might have had general education in institutions in another educational culture (Deane,1992). This definition indicates that are two types of causation of disability. One is congenital and occurs at an early stage, before birth or during birth, and the second is acquired and occurs at a later age, perhaps in relation to environmental (parent and school) factors. An example of the latter would be bilingual children who start to learn to read and write in a language other than their mother tongue.

In relation to teaching language to pupils with specific learning difficulties, the National Curriculum in the UK underlines that all pupils with specialeducational needs, both in mainstream and in special schools, should have the opportunity to learn a modern foreign language. The 1988 Education Act concerning the education of children with special needs emphasizes the need to consider three principles: entitlement, access and implementation, which are embraced by the National Curriculum (Wilson, 2011).

The aim of integrated education is to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all aspects of education, which means that every child has

depends on several basic elements that are required when working and dealing with these children. The process of integrating a pupil with SEN in the mainstream school requires planning and preparation by the school, the class, and specialists who work with the student to prepare and counsel their family. The school programme is intended to fulfil all the elements of the educational and rehabilitation process. Teachers are considered the main facilitators of the learning process. However, most EFL teachers find difficulty in teaching the foreign language, and the decision to integrate children with special education needs in mainstream schools causes difficulties and challenges. Therefore, the current study explored EFL teachers' perceptions toward teaching EFL to children with learning difficulties regarding their readiness and challenges. It concentrates on learning difficulty as a type of SEN and on teachers at schools practising integration

**The study objectives:**

1. To investigate the *readiness* of teachers to teach EFL to children with SEN.
2. To explore the *challenges* facing EFL teachers when they teach EFL to children with learning difficulties.
3. To suggest a variety of strategies and approaches which can be used to make the learning of EFL accessible for pupils with learning difficulties.

Based on the above objectives, the following questions are formulated:

1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions about their readiness to teach English as a foreign language to SEN pupils?

assessment. Similarly, Nyikes (2019) in Budapest raises the question of whether EFL teachers are aware of the various methods that can assist them handle the task of teaching pupils with SEN in their pedagogical practice. Furthermore, Cassimos et al. (2015) explored the views of Greek teachers on integration of students with SEN. They found a lack of support services and teaching materials. Arrah (2013) explored teachers' perceptions of integrating pupils with special education needs in Cameroon secondary schools. The findings showed inadequate resources for SEN pupils, and absence of training to deal with special needs. Furthermore, teachers felt stressed and anxious when teaching pupils with SEN and that their presence hindered the learning of other pupils. They were concerned that pupils who had learning difficulties and were slow in learning literacy skills had problems in reading and understanding what they read, could not spell words correctly or even recognize or decode the script; and were unable to write or copy accurately and in tidy handwriting. Pupils with learning difficulties find it difficult to share in discussion in English lessons due to lack of speaking skill, and to find it difficult to understand the teacher's instructions (lack of listening comprehension). Recently, Pérez-Valverde et al. (2021) found teachers had negative perspectives towards teaching in a real situation of integrated education in the FL classroom, which challenged them to tailor their teaching methods to the real needs of students with SEN and the rest of the class.

This indicates that the problems Saudi teachers is facing are not unique, and that the insight gained from a Saudi study may have a wider relevance. The process of teaching English for people with special needs

In Saudi Arabia, generally SEN pupils are educated in mainstream or special primary schools. To decide identifying pupils with SEN, at early education, pupils' medical history is investigated, and they undergo physical evaluation (Alhammad, 2017). During this process, the child's hearing, speech, mental and vision capabilities are assessed, to see whether they fall within normal parameters for the child's age (Alruwaili, 2018). Pupils with SEN start to be integrated in all regions of Saudi Arabia in public schools starting from the early years of education, except for those with severe disability. Pupils with SEN are generally taught in a designated separate class, and only mix with non-SEN peers at break and for the study of Arabic and religion. They follow the same curriculum as their peers, but with differences in teaching materials and strategies used. Regarding teaching English as a foreign language, teachers use the same standard English textbook, but supplement it with different teaching materials that depend on touch and vision (Almalki et al. 2021). In a previous study exploring teachers' professional development, and the availability of specialist support, teachers stated a lack of pre-service and in service training, insufficient special education supervision, as well as a lack of available specialist human resources in the schools practising integration (Alshahrani, 2018).

Integration as currently practised in Saudi Arabia causes difficulties as indicated by Al-Qarni (2020), who identifies challenges of using the same curricula as in general education for pupils with special needs, based on the perspective of teachers of deaf and hearing-impaired pupils in the Assir Region. The study revealed several problems related to curriculum objectives, content, education experiences, and

- Specific difficulties: pupils with poor concentration who have problems in learning language skills (writing, reading, listening and speaking) and also spelling. These pupils are in mainstream classes.
- Emotional and behavioural learning difficulties: pupils who have emotional and behavioural problems, for example a pupil who is depressed or disruptive.
- Hearing and visual difficulties: pupils who are deaf or hearing impaired, or blind/ visually impaired.

The issue of integrating pupils with special needs into regular schools is one of the main educational issues that has occupied educationists. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was the first Arab country to implement educational integration in its schools. The first successful experiments with integration began in the city of Hofuf in the Eastern Province in 1984. Then in 1989, kindergartens affiliated to King Saud University in Riyadh opened their doors for children with SEN. In 1990, the Ministry of Education began implementing integration in its schools, but in a partial way. In 1996, it began to apply educational integration in its comprehensive sense in the schools of the Kingdom (Almosa, 2014).

Twenty percent of pupils have SEN, according to Alquraini (2011, p. 150), who indicates that “The Disability Code...was passed by the Saudi government in 2000 to guarantee that people with disabilities have access to free and appropriate medical, psychological, social, educational, and rehabilitation services through public agencies”.

**Introduction**

In the past, in many countries the learning of modern foreign languages in schools was limited to specific pupils; it was thought that only very clever children could learn other languages. In other words, foreign languages were taught to selected and elite groups in selective schools, and they learned the language in a very cerebral way that emphasized aspects like grammar, rather than practical aspects of language like speaking. This made it very difficult for children of low ability to learn a foreign language (Padurean, 2014).

However, in 1989, the National Curriculum in the UK started to provide access to a modern foreign language for all school pupils, including pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Willson (2012, p.22) mentions that "the possibility of introducing a modern foreign language (MFL) into our school curriculum was first mentioned in 1989". So now, all pupils with SEN have the right to experience another language.

The concept of SEN, in general, includes all pupils with greater difficulties in learning who require more support and help than others of their age. There are a variety of special needs. Stakes and Hornby (2012, pp.6-7) categorize the different types of difficulties into the following:

- Physical learning difficulties: pupils who suffer from a congenital condition or who have incurred injury or who are disabled because of serious diseases.
- Severe learning difficulties: pupils who are mentally retarded or multi-handicapped.

**ABSTRACT**

In many countries, integration of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools raises issues of curriculum access and whether teachers have training, skills and willingness to teach such children. In Saudi Arabia, the integration of pupils with SEN has progressed considerably, but it is widely believed that such children can not learn a foreign language. This study investigates the readiness of Saudi teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) to teach English to pupils with SEN and the challenges they anticipate or experience when doing so. A 30-item questionnaire comprising two scales, Readiness and Challenges, was distributed to a random sample of 34 teachers in Al Madinah province and mean scores, standard deviation, overall agreement level and rank order within the relevant scale reported for each item. Findings show that teachers felt ready to teach pupils with SEN, were aware of the need to use varied methods and techniques, and strongly supported collegial collaboration to help such children. However, they doubted the adequacy of resources, thought classes were too large, and feared that teaching these children would come at the expense of their peers without SEN. Recommendations are made for resourcing and teacher training.

**Key words:** EFL teachers, SEN, teaching methods, teachers' perceptions.

## تصورات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية تجاه تعليم التلاميذ ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة

### المستخلص

في العديد من البلدان يثير دمج الطلاب ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة (SEN) في المدارس العادية قضايا تتعلق بالمناهج الدراسية، وما إذا كان المعلمون لديهم المهارات، والتدريب، والاستعداد لتعليم هؤلاء الأطفال. في المملكة العربية السعودية، هناك تقدم كبير في مجال اندماج الطلاب مع SEN، ولكن يعتقد على نطاق واسع أن هؤلاء الأطفال لا يمكنهم تعلم لغة أجنبية. تبحث هذه الدراسة مدى استعداد المعلمين السعوديين لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) للتلاميذ ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة، والتحديات التي يتوقعونها أو يواجهونها عند القيام بذلك. تم توزيع استبيان مكون من 30 بنداً يشمل على محورين: الجاهزية، والتحديات، على عينة عشوائية مقدارها 34 معلماً في منطقة المدينة المنورة. تم حساب المتوسطات الحسابية، والانحراف المعياري، والترتيب، ومستوى موافقة العينة مع بنود الاستبيان، والمحاور المتعلقة بكل بند. تظهر النتائج أن المعلمين شعروا بالاستعداد لتعليم التلاميذ ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة، وكانوا على دراية بالحاجة إلى استخدام أساليب وتقنيات متنوعة، ودعموا بقوة التعاون مع الزملاء لمساعدة هؤلاء الطلبة. ومع ذلك، فقد شككوا في كفاية الموارد، واعتقدوا أن الفصول الدراسية كانت كبيرة جداً، وكانوا يخشون أن يكون تعليم هؤلاء الطلبة على حساب أقرانهم الذين لا يملكون احتياجات تعليمية خاصة. تم تقديم التوصيات لتوفير مصادر، وتدريب المعلمين.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، طرق التدريس، ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية، تصورات المعلمين.





# **EFL Teachers' Perceptions Towards Teaching Pupils with Special Educational Needs**

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