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## Shared Ground, Separate Views: Exploring Self-Reported and Observed Positive EFL Teaching Practices

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### ABSTRACT

Professional development initiatives and teacher training programs continually adapt to the evolving needs of language learners. The present study explores positive teaching practices in an English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) context, drawing on the perspectives of both teachers and supervisors. The emphasis on positive practices is rooted in the belief that challenges are best confronted by focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses. As such, the study aims to identify convergences and divergences in what constitute positive teaching practices. To achieve this aim, a qualitative approach is employed, drawing on thematic analysis of data from teacher reflection reports, focus group discussions, and observer feedback reports. The findings reveal both shared understandings and notable differences between teachers' and observers' perspectives. Teachers focused on their own planning and responsibilities, such as time management and self-reflection, whereas observers prioritized classroom dynamics, including teacher–student rapport and student engagement. Such findings may provide insights into positive EFL teaching practices, emphasizing the salient value of teacher reflection for professional development. The differences highlight the value of considering multiple perspectives when defining positive teaching practices. The findings can also inform teacher training programs and promote a more comprehensive approach to EFL instruction by incorporating both teacher and observer perspectives.

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## 1. Introduction

English as a foreign language (EFL) is a requisite for students enrolled in Saudi universities, particularly during the preparatory year. Students' achievement in English significantly impacts their GPA and plays a critical role in their acceptance into competitive majors and colleges. In addition, the demand for proficient speakers of English has increased nationally and internationally. Accordingly, considerable efforts have been exerted to improve the curriculum, teaching practices, and the EFL educational classroom experience<sup>[1-3]</sup>.

Borg<sup>[4]</sup> noted that EFL teachers' practices, characteristics, and beliefs, such as clear lessons, games, humor, patience, and providing safe spaces for learners to make mistakes and not be punished for falling behind, reflect successful EFL teaching practices. Teacher education research has made significant strides in studying EFL teaching practices, as seen in studies by White<sup>[5]</sup>, Urbach et al.<sup>[6]</sup>, Richardson<sup>[7]</sup>, Pajares<sup>[8]</sup>, and Kiely, Brownell, Lauterbach, and Benedict<sup>[9]</sup>. These studies collectively suggest that it is essential to understand teachers' practices and their professional actions in the EFL classroom. In addition, the implications of this area of research for teacher training and professional development programs need to be considered. The effective EFL teaching practices documented in the literature from the perspective of teachers, learners, and internal and external evaluators are essential for teacher training programs. Thus, the study at hand is interested in understanding the positive EFL teaching practices employed in a university-level classroom. Drawing on teacher reflection reports, focus group discussions and observer evaluations, the present study seeks to explore positive teaching practices in an EFL context from an insider's perspective. Understanding teachers' practices in their language classrooms from multiple perspectives is pivotal in refining practice in this evolving area of education. Moreover, focusing on positive rather than negative practices is based on the belief that challenges can be confronted more effectively by drawing on strengths rather than weaknesses<sup>[10-12]</sup>. Adapting a strength-based approach and tapping into existing positive teaching practices instead of

fixating on negative practices encourages innovative thinking and can provide a foundation upon which EFL educators may rely on to improve their practices.

## 2. Literature Review

In the literature, teacher practices encompassing beliefs, attitudes, and strategies observed in classroom interactions<sup>[13]</sup>, are considered pivotal in effective language instruction. They discussed the importance of understanding teaching practices in improving second language instruction. They asserted that teacher practices play an essential role in shaping the learning experience and, consequently, influence learner classroom enjoyment and motivation. Building on this, Bell<sup>[14]</sup> suggested that a deeper understanding of effective foreign language practices enhances professional development by providing adaptable language teaching models. This perspective aligns with the broader view that teacher effectiveness extends beyond adherence to criteria, encompassing valuable teaching practices that enrich the wider educational community<sup>[15]</sup>. Consequently, positive teaching practices have a significant impact on the quality of learning English as a foreign language<sup>[1,2,13]</sup>.

Reflective practice offers a valuable theoretical lens through which to examine EFL teaching practices. Reflective practice, as advocated by scholars like Schön<sup>[16]</sup>, emphasizes the cyclical process of experience, reflection, and abstraction, allowing educators to continually refine their approaches. Within the realm of EFL education, research has flourished, exploring diverse aspects of teaching practices. Earlier studies such as Al-Jaro, Nuemaihom, and Tayeb<sup>[17]</sup> used interviews and thematic analysis to explore EFL teachers' practices and the challenges they encountered in EFL teaching. They interviewed nine teachers and conducted a thematic analysis. The findings revealed a more teacher-centered classroom and recommendations for teacher professional development. Fan and Zuest<sup>[2]</sup> drew on visual diaries and focus group discussions, revealing teachers' focus on standards and the power of student perspectives in shaping effective teaching practices. They recommended providing teachers with quality training and professional development.

Al-Mahrooqi et al.<sup>[18]</sup> found that teacher practices and their perceptions of language teaching are significantly shaped by cultural backgrounds which highlights the context-dependent nature of teaching. Similarly, Sieberer-Nagler<sup>[3]</sup> employed a mixed methods approach to exploring teacher effectiveness. Questionnaires and observations of 13 teachers revealed that positive practices, such as student engagement, teacher conduct, and feedback mechanisms, were employed in lessons. They also reported significant differences between teachers with effective practices and less effective teachers. The authors stressed the importance of self-reflection and external analysis as well. The emphasis on self-reflection, as highlighted by Sammaknejad and Marzban<sup>[19]</sup>, points to the importance of teachers' abilities to critically assess their own practices.

Despite these insights, several studies reveal a gap between espoused beliefs and actual classroom practices. Devine, Fahie, and McGillicuddy<sup>[20]</sup> observed contradictions between instructors' beliefs and their teaching practices. They noted that the effectiveness of teaching is not only limited to the characteristics of the teacher but also depends on their teaching practices. Their findings indicated a contradiction between teachers' beliefs and the observation of their practice. Alghamdi<sup>[1]</sup> also noted discrepancies between EFL teachers' pedagogical beliefs and observed practices in the classroom. He conducted a descriptive analysis of classroom observation data for 42 teachers. The findings revealed that although EFL teachers applied traditional teaching methods, they held positive views of more communicative and student-centered teaching. In addition, discrepancies between teacher beliefs and what was actually observed in the classroom were reported. For instance, Nguyen, Fehring, and Warren<sup>[21]</sup> identified factors such as insufficient time, lack of speaking evaluation, and large class sizes as barriers to implementing positive teaching practices. Sotto<sup>[22]</sup> added that fostering student support and confidence is essential.

The value of classroom observations and teacher reflections cannot be overstated; they are two essential sources of information in EFL research. Tarusha and Bushi<sup>[23]</sup> and Ferraro<sup>[24]</sup> highlighted the importance of classroom observations and teacher reflections in understanding and evaluating the teaching process. Farrell<sup>[25]</sup> noted that teacher reflections on their teaching practices provided valuable recommendations for professional development. Furthermore,

Kennedy<sup>[26]</sup> underscored the role of professional development in encouraging educators to explore effective teaching language practices.

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into teacher practices, there is a noticeable gap in research that synthesizes perspectives from both EFL teachers and classroom observers. The present study aims to address this gap by exploring positive teaching practices reported in (1) teacher reflection reports, (2) focus group discussions, and (3) observer feedback reports. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What constitutes positive teaching practices in an EFL university context, as perceived by both EFL teachers through their reflection reports and classroom observers in their feedback forms?
2. How do teachers' and observers' perceptions of positive teaching practices in EFL instruction converge and diverge?

### 3. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative approach, drawing on thematic analysis to explore positive EFL teaching practices in a Saudi University. The participants were 30 male and female English teachers at the university, selected through purposeful sampling. The selection process ensured a diverse representation of teachers with varying experience in EFL teaching. Diversity was sought across the following criteria: teaching experience (ranging from novice with 0–3 years to experienced teachers with over 10 years), representation across academic tracks (Medicine, Science, Business, and Humanities), and inclusion of instructors teaching across language proficiency levels and gender. Students are placed in three proficiency levels—beginners, intermediate and advanced—across the following tracks: Medicine, Science, Business, and Humanities.

The data consist of thirty classroom observation feedback reports and thirty self-reflection reports from the participating university EFL teachers. Observation reports are completed by observers following classroom observations and are used during post-observation meetings with EFL teachers as a form of feedback. Classroom observations are conducted by experienced instructors who possess extensive

experience in EFL teaching and classroom observations. All observers had extensive experience related to teacher observation/evaluation. The observation criteria were based on the university's teaching evaluation standardized guidelines. Teacher reflection reports are completed by teachers following classroom observations to reflect on their teaching practices. Both types of reports (i.e., observation reports and teacher reflection reports) discuss positive and negative practices. In addition, five focus group discussions were conducted to capture in-depth insights into the teachers' positive practices in their classes. To represent the spectrum of teaching experiences at the university, these focus groups were structured according to teacher performance levels, outstanding, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, and inadequate, identified through classroom evaluations (six teachers per group). However, to align with the purpose of the present study, only positive practices were analysed. The study adapted a strength-based approach rather than fixating on weaknesses<sup>[10-12]</sup>.

Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software. The coding scheme was developed iteratively through close reading of the data, and identification and refinement of recurring themes. Furthermore, to strengthen the dependability of the analytic process and the findings, data trian-

gulation was employed to enhance validity, comparing data from teacher reflection reports, observer feedback reports, and focus group discussions. In addition, to enhance the reliability of the coding process, inter-coder reliability was assessed. A second researcher independently coded 20% of the data to eliminate and resolve discrepancies in coding to ensure consistency.

In line with the research code of ethical requirements, all participants were informed about the research aims, and that their responses and identities would be kept strictly confidential and anonymous; it was emphasized to them that their participation is completely voluntary.

#### 4. Findings

The present study explored the positive EFL teaching practices in a Saudi University reported by teachers in their reflections and during focus group discussions. The first research objective was to explore what constitutes positive teaching practices in the Saudi EFL university context from the perspective of both teachers and observers. First, the findings from the perspective of the EFL teachers as indicated in their reflections and focus group discussions are illustrated in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Positive Teaching Practices in the Teachers' Reflections and Focus Group Discussions.

Practices	Frequency
1. Effective time management	16%
2. Teacher reflection	15%
3. Self-error correction and normalizing mistakes	12%
4. Promoting higher order thinking	10%
5. Concept Check Questions	8%
6. Self-learning and autonomy	8%
7. Integrating technology	6%
8. Providing feedback	6%
9. Classroom management	5%
10. Positive and safe environments	4%
11. Careful lesson planning and staging	2%
12. Encouraging student engagement	2%
13. Flexibility and adaptability	2%
14. Differentiation (learner proficiency level)	2%
15. Connecting to real world situations	1%
16. Project based learning	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

As illustrated in **Table 1**, the most frequent positive EFL teaching practices as reported by teachers in their reflections and in the focus group discussion were effective time manage-

ment, teachers' reflections, and error normalization. From the teachers' perspective, successful time management is important during language classes and in lesson planning. They

believe that successful teaching and execution of lessons depend on the teacher's ability to manage time. They also discussed the vital role reflections play in their development as professionals. Put differently, reflecting on each course, semester or even class is essential to professional growth. They reported that reflections can assist them to address what went wrong in a certain class and what effectively worked. Allowing learners to feel comfortable enough to take risks and make mistakes, for instance, was highlighted by teachers as a positive practice. They believe that employing different techniques to correct language errors, such as self-correction and peer-correction, can lower learner anxiety in the EFL classroom.

In addition, EFL teachers noted that critical thinking was a priority in their language classes. They encouraged their students to use higher-order thinking skills, such as critical evaluation, analysis, and questioning. They focused on activities that challenged the learners and reinforced meta-thinking. In the same vein of thought, concept and instruction checking questions (CCQs and ICQS) were a common practices in the EFL teachers' classes to ensure that learners are following and have well understood the new concepts and instructions. This helped teachers gauge the learners' understanding before moving to the next stage of the lesson. EFL teachers discussed the importance of learner autonomy and how they encouraged their students to take responsibility for their own learning. For example, they provide tools that allow their students to be independent learners and encourage them to develop their own self-learning habits and strategies. They aim to empower learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses and take control of their learning. Teachers of high proficiency levels noted that self-learning was less challenging for their students compared to lower proficiency levels. That is, students from lower proficiency levels did not have enough knowledge of the foreign language to build on and lacked confidence accordingly.

Technology was utilized as a key component of everyday lessons. They used PowerPoint, Padlet, whiteboards, Learning Management System (LMS), Kahoot, Google Translation, games, and ChatGPT to teach vocabulary and grammar. Technology allowed teachers to incorporate a variety of activities that involve group work, pair work, and individual work. In their reflections, EFL teachers emphasized the importance of providing feedback to learners, as

it allows them to assess their progress. They noted that the delivery of feedback should be consistent and through a variety of methods. Also, learners preferred feedback from their peers more than teachers, especially at the lower levels.

Classroom management is essential in establishing a structured and organized learning environment. Classroom management encourages student discipline and engagement, and it maximizes learning time. When teachers set clear expectations and rules for their classrooms, they promote positive learner interactions and behaviors. It plays a noticeable role in limiting disruptions, and, hence, allows teachers to cater to different needs and provide tailored attention and support. Additionally, EFL teachers stressed the importance of creating a classroom environment that is safe and comfortable for learners. When learners, for example, feel safe, they become more comfortable to use the target language and less intimidated by making mistakes.

Moreover, setting clear objectives and preparing well-structured lesson plans that flow logically is considered one of the positive practices as reported by EFL teachers in their reflections. Teachers indicated that they communicate lesson objectives both verbally and in writing at the beginning of every lesson to their learners. They also used a variety of elicitation techniques to encourage learners to use the target language. Another practice that was perceived as positive by EFL teachers was having flexible lesson plans that can be adapted as required. In the EFL classroom, learners may exhibit varying proficiency levels. Thus, teachers employ diverse activities and strategies that facilitate differentiation in classrooms. In the Saudi EFL class, teachers highlight the importance of identifying and addressing the needs of multi-level learners. Then, they tailor their lessons and activities accordingly to keep their lessons dynamic enough to reduce anxiety and boredom, and to effectively handle multilevel students inside the classroom. For example, while beginners require more support and guidance and simplified instructions, advanced learners can benefit from more challenging activities. Teachers note that they group their students during activities based on their levels in certain skills, allowing collaboration and peer mentoring.

Enhancing the relevance and applicability of learning was also perceived as a positive practice by EFL teachers. They noted that part of their lesson planning time is devoted

to integrating their learners' backgrounds and interests into their lessons to create a meaningful and relevant learning environment. This practice allows learners to connect and relate to their language classrooms and fosters a sense of motivation. EFL teachers also explained how drawing on their

students' real-life experiences allowed them to understand the cultural nuances of the Saudi undergraduate context.

Second, the most frequent positive EFL teaching practices from the perspective of the observers as found in the observers' feedback forms are presented in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Positive Teaching Practices reported in the Observers' Feedback Forms.

Practice	Frequency
1. Varied feedback and Error Correction	15%
2. Effective Elicitation and CCQs	12%
3. Clear Aims and Objectives	12%
4. Positive Rapport	9%
5. Appropriate Materials	8%
6. Logical Sequencing and Pacing	7%
7. Activities and Drilling	7%
8. Positive environment	7%
9. Physical and seating arrangement	5%
10. Integrating technology	4%
11. Student centered learning	4%
12. Promoting higher order thinking	3%
13. Anticipating Problems	2%
14. Voice and Demeanor	2%
15. Graded Language	2%
16. Encouraging student engagement	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

In the observers' comments on lesson plans and classroom instruction, varied feedback and error correction were the most frequent positive practice as illustrated in **Table 2**. Varying feedback and error correction methods are recommended in EFL classrooms as learners differ in how they respond to feedback. When teachers use a range of feedback and error correction methods, they address the diverse needs of their learners. This, in turn, ensures that all learners receive comprehensive evaluations and the necessary support for their learning and development. Equally important, and as conceptualized by observers, the use of ICQs and CCQs is also effective to help maintain the learners' focus and monitor their progress. They also stressed the importance of having well-defined objectives that are clearly displayed in every lesson.

In the observers' feedback reports, they noted that establishing a positive rapport with the students is essential to enhance EFL learning environments. The teacher's attitudes, voice, empathy and demeanor are all perceived as key variables in establishing a positive teacher-learner relationship, and any breakdowns in the relationship can negatively impact the learning process in the language classroom. Fur-

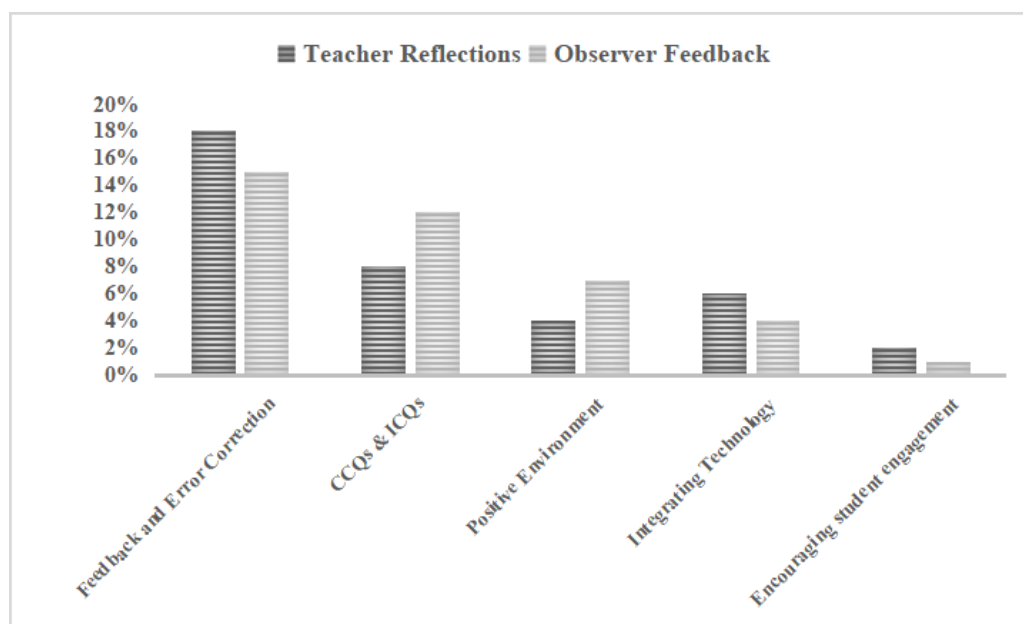
thermore, logical sequencing and well-structured lessons and the incorporation of appropriate materials, activities and drills are perceived as positive teaching practices by the observers. Observers also added that cultural appropriateness of materials used is essential. Understanding and being sensitive to the learner's cultural background is crucial in building positive rappsorts in the language learning environment.

From the observers' perspective, the physical layout and seating arrangements of learners can have a positive influence on classroom dynamics and student interactions. When students are seated in circles or U-shaped clusters of small groups, they are encouraged to collaborate and engage in discussions, allowing them to practice the language. This setup can minimize distractions and enhance learner focus and interaction. Additionally, utilizing technology in EFL classrooms is a necessity from the perspective of observers. This is due to the access that technology provides to a wide array of teaching resources that can enhance the learning experience. Interactive smartboards, games, and multimodal presentations are dynamic and they facilitate differentiation and cater to individual needs.

The observers also emphasized the positive role of a teacher as a facilitator. It is an important feature of student-centered classrooms where teacher talk time is minimized and learners are encouraged to be more active in their learning. Also, anticipating problems is key to successful lesson planning. Teachers need to anticipate problems and prepare how to address them once they arise. This, in turn, allows for successful time allocation and a cohesive flow of the lesson staging. Moreover, from the perspective of observers, it is essential to promote higher-order thinking skills to foster crit-

ical thinking and creativity among EFL learners. Teachers can incorporate activities that are challenging and enhance the learners' analytic abilities.

The second research objective was to explore how positive practices reported by EFL teachers in their reflections and focus group discussions align with or differ from the practices reported by observers in their feedback reports. Teachers and observers had similar perceptions of what constitutes positive practices in an EFL classroom in a few areas, as illustrated in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Alignment in Perceptions Regarding Positive Practices.

**Figure 1** illustrates the similarities in perceptions between teachers and observers regarding the positive practices of feedback and error correction, CCQs and ICQs, positive learning environment, integration of technology, and encouragement of student engagement. Both teachers and observers showed similar perceptions regarding feedback and error correction, at 15% and 12%, respectively. This may indicate that varying error correction methods and being sensitive to learners' differences in the way they receive feedback are essential practice in EFL classrooms. Teachers and observers also had relatively similar perceptions about the use of concept and instruction check questions, as represented by 8% and 12%, respectively. This similarity could confirm that monitoring student understanding of instructions and concepts is perceived as a positive practice as well. In addition, there were

similar views from teachers (4%) and observers (7%) on what constitutes a positive learning environment. They seem to have agreed that providing learners with a positive, safe environment is a positive teaching practice. Utilization of technology in the classroom was another area where teachers and observers had similar viewpoints, as represented by 6% and 4%, respectively. Overall, there was some observable level of convergence between teachers and observers on what is considered positive EFL teaching practices. They both perceived feedback and error correction as one of the most positive teaching practices.

The differences in perceptions between teachers and observers regarding positive practices in the EFL classroom as reported in teacher reflections, focus group discussions, and observer feedback reports, are illustrated in **Figure 2**.

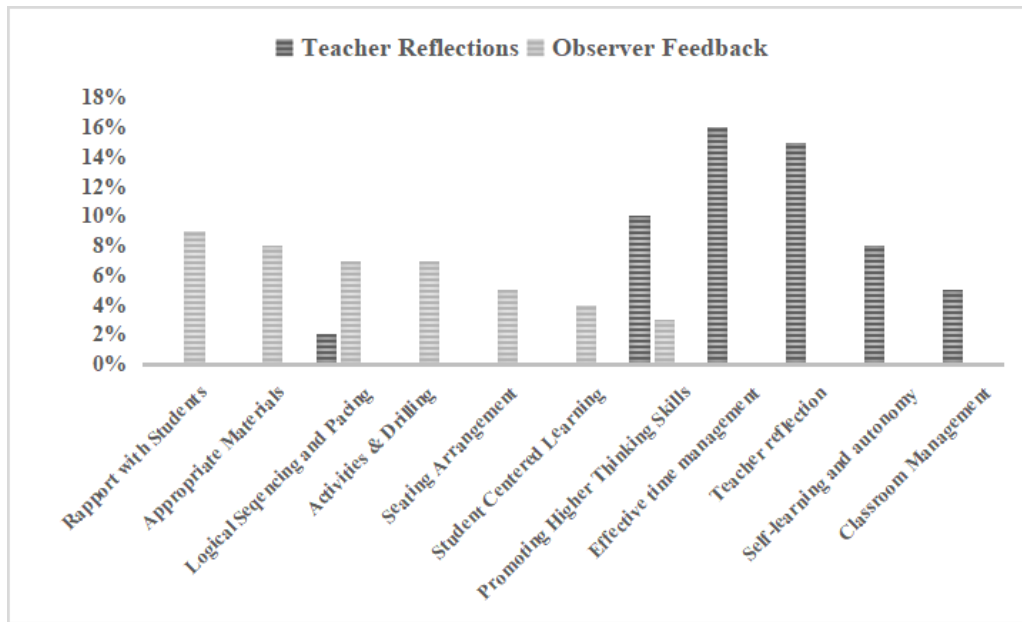


Figure 2. Differences in Perceptions Regarding Positive Practices.

As indicated in **Figure 2**, there were some differences in what teachers perceived as positive practices as compared to the views of the observers. For instance, in the teachers' reflections, effective time management, teacher reflections, promoting higher order skills, learner autonomy, and classroom management were more frequent than in the observers' feedback forms (see **Table 1**). However, in the observers' feedback forms, the most frequent positive practices were rapport with students, materials, logical sequencing of the lesson, activities and drilling, seating arrangement, and student-centred learning (see **Table 2**). For instance, teachers did not identify rapport with students as a positive practice in their reflections, while observers identified it in 9% of instances. Observers noted logical sequencing and pacing in 7% of cases, while teachers in 2% of the cases only. Similar to rapport with students, observers perceived appropriate materials in 8% of cases, while teachers did not. Teacher reflections and effective time management were noted as positive practices in 15% and 16% of instances, respectively, whereas observers did not note them in their feedback. Teachers also identified self-learning and classroom management as positive practices in 8% and 5% of instances, respectively, while observers did not identify them. However, seating arrangement and activities and drilling were noted by observers in 5% and 7% of feedback instances, respectively, whereas teachers did not in their reflections. Similarly, observers reported student-centred learning practices as positive in 4%

of their feedback, while teachers did not in their reflections. Promoting higher-order thinking skills was noted by teachers in 10% of their reflections, while it appeared in only 3% of observer feedback. A further divergence was also observed among teachers in the focus group discussions. Some teachers identified humor, for instance, as a positive teaching practice. They emphasized its importance and that it was part of their lesson planning. Nevertheless, it was not discussed in the teacher reflections or in the observers' feedback. Additionally, using the learners first language (i.e., Arabic) was highlighted as a mechanism for making the new vocabulary relevant. However, other teachers disagreed and stressed that vocabulary teaching should not be linked to the students' first language.

## 5. Discussion

The present study explored positive EFL teaching practices in a Saudi university context, examining perspectives of teachers and observers. The findings revealed a variety of practices that are considered effective, with some notable areas of agreement (convergence) and divergence between the two groups. Findings from teachers' reflections and focus group discussions emphasized time management, teacher reflection, and normalizing mistakes as crucial positive practices. In their reflections, teachers highlighted the importance of effective time management for lesson



planning and execution, and the importance of reflection for professional development. Teachers reflected on their teaching to assess its effectiveness and plan for improvement. Consequently, EFL teachers identify themselves as reflective and strive to adjust their teaching practices to meet student needs. They reported that even simple facial feedback from their students leads to decisions on what is working in class and what is not. This is in line with some findings reported by Farrell<sup>[25]</sup> and Kennedy<sup>[26]</sup>, who noted that EFL teachers should continually reflect to reshape their knowledge of teaching and learning. Teachers also believed that creating a comfortable positive environment for learners to make mistakes is necessary. That is, creating a safe environment is vital for students as it allows them to feel comfortable making mistakes and learning from them. Teachers also added that normalizing mistakes and using appropriate error correction techniques lower anxiety and encourage students to participate in class and without feeling embarrassed by their mistakes. Additionally, higher-order thinking skills, gauging student comprehension (CCQs), learner autonomy, and technology integration were prioritized by EFL teachers in their reflections and discussions. Technology was perceived as an essential tool in diversifying classroom activities and promoting learner engagement. EFL teachers stressed the necessity of providing diversified feedback to learners and creating a structured classroom environment. Contextualization and differentiation were also emphasized in the teachers' reflections and discussions. They highlighted the importance of catering for students' diverse proficiency levels and adapting lessons accordingly. Also, contextualizing materials and activities to real-world situations was identified as a positive practice by teachers. Similar to previous studies, positive practices were linked to technology integration<sup>[21]</sup>.

On the other hand, in feedback forms on EFL lessons, observers perceived varied feedback and error correction, effective elicitation and CCQs, and clear aims and objectives as positive teaching practices. In addition, they highlighted the importance of establishing a positive rapport with students. They noted that knowing student's name, individual characteristics, and showing interest in the learners first language (i.e., Arabic in this EFL context) support positive rapport building. Observers emphasized the importance of incorporating culturally sensitive materials that are appropriate for

students' levels and lesson aims. They also emphasized that lessons should be well structured and logically sequenced. Observers perceived classroom seating arrangements as essential positive practices in the EFL classroom. They added that such practices promote interaction and minimize disruptions to the learning experience. Furthermore, observers stressed the importance of anticipating problems and preparing contingency plans. Structured lessons, learner engagement, and feedback strategies were highlighted as positive practices by Sieberer-Nagler<sup>[3]</sup> in their study on positive teaching practices.

A comparison between teacher reflections and observer feedback revealed some areas of convergence and divergence. In terms of convergence, both teachers and observers emphasized the importance of learner feedback and error correction, CCQs, positive learning environments, technology integration, and encouraging student engagement. However, there were notable differences in priorities and emphasis. Teachers emphasized time management, teacher reflections, learner autonomy and classroom management as positive practices, while observers prioritized teacher-student relationships, materials, activities, logical sequencing, seating arrangement, and student-centered learning. Furthermore, both groups perceived promoting higher-order thinking skills and logical sequencing as important, but to different degrees. These findings may reflect fundamental differences in the cognitive lens through which teachers and observers perceive the teaching-learning process. Teachers, being immersed in the day-to-day tasks of planning and teaching, naturally prioritize strategies that directly impact their workload and classroom organization, hence the focus on time management and reflection. On the other hand, observers, removed from such immediate pressures, are more focused on the dynamics of the classroom and the student experience, leading them to prioritize rapport, materials, and student-centered learning. This does not necessarily mean that teachers and observers have different priorities or perspectives of what constitutes positive teaching practices. It might indicate that teachers focus on their actions while observers focus on what they observe, but further investigation is needed. Similar findings were reported by Alghamdi<sup>[1]</sup>, Sieberer-Nagler<sup>[3]</sup> and Devine et al.<sup>[20]</sup>, who identified differences between teachers' beliefs and the external observers' perspectives on what is considered positive practice.

The focus group discussions, in particular, provided valuable insights into *why* teachers prioritized certain practices. They revealed the contextual factors and underlying rationales that shaped EFL teachers' perceptions. For instance, the focus on time management stemmed not only from the teachers' desire for efficiency, but also from the recognition that effective time management allows for more individualized attention to students. The discussions also highlighted the importance of reflection as a means of adapting to the specific needs of the Saudi undergraduate context, such as the varying levels of student preparedness.

Studies in the literature emphasized the importance of exploring EFL teachers' positive practices in improving and making recommendations for teacher professional development<sup>[1,2,17,20,23]</sup>. The findings of this study build on this existing research by offering a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to positive teaching practices in a Saudi institutional context. This understanding is essential for developing targeted professional development initiatives that address the specific needs and priorities of EFL teachers in Saudi universities. Therefore, findings of the present study offer insights into positive teaching practices in EFL classrooms from the perspective of teachers and observers. This present study contributes to identifying specific practices that teachers and observers both perceive as effective, such as time management, teacher reflection, error correction, promoting higher-order thinking, and integrating technology. It emphasizes the importance of self-reflection for teachers in improving their practice to better meet their students' needs. Additionally, the findings reveal differences in the perspectives of teachers and observers. For instance, teachers focus on their responsibilities and planning, while observers tended to focus on classroom dynamics and student engagement. The study also emphasizes the importance of contextualizing and adapting teaching practices to the specific needs of the learners. Finally, the findings of the study may be vital to consider in developing well-rounded language teaching practices that reflect the complexities of EFL teaching since they represent how both teachers and observers perceive what makes a teaching practice positive. Such findings can be utilized to inform educational professional development program, and may nurture any language teacher training and teaching development initiatives.

## 6. Conclusions

The current study is situated within a broader effort to improve the quality of EFL instruction. Therefore, it explored positive EFL teaching practices from the perspectives of teachers and observers whose roles are pivotal in EFL education. The ultimate goal of the present study is to provide a foundation for EFL teachers and all stakeholders to refine their practices. The findings revealed a variety of practices that are considered effective, with some notable areas of agreement and disagreement between EFL teachers and observers. This study provides valuable insights into the complex nature of effective EFL teaching practices. It suggests that both teachers and observers possess unique perspectives on what constitutes positive instruction in an EFL context.

The findings of the study indicate consensus on core practices such as feedback, concept checking, technology integration, and a positive environment; however, there are some differences in emphasis. These differences can be an indication of divergences in focus between teachers and observers on what constitutes a positive teaching practice. Further investigation might be needed to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the realities of EFL positive classroom practices. Additionally, the findings can help in designing professional development programs for new EFL teachers. The findings of this study have important implications for EFL teacher professional development and education, such as providing EFL teachers with opportunities to reflect on their own teaching. Furthermore, professional development and teacher education programs should emphasize the importance of positive teaching practices. The study also signals safe learning environments, varied learner feedback, effective lesson planning, and time management as important constituents of EFL classroom instruction.

Although such findings are essential to language education, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, while the methodology intentionally included a diverse group of participants based on gender, teaching experience, and academic tracks, the analysis did not explore the influence of these variables on teachers' perceptions of positive teaching practices. Future research could benefit from examining how these factors shape views on positive instructional methods. Second, the study focused

only on positive EFL teaching practices. While this strength-based approach highlights successful strategies, it excludes valuable data on challenges, weaknesses, or less effective practices. A more holistic understanding could be gained by exploring the interplay between positive and negative practices. The findings are also limited by the single-context sampling, underscoring the importance of exploring EFL teaching practices across diverse institutional settings to identify more universal principles and context-specific adaptations. Additionally, the study examined teacher reflections, focus groups, and observer feedback forms. Further research could be extended to examine students' perceptions through interviews and questionnaires. This could provide a more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes positive teaching practices in the EFL context from additional perspectives and contexts.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.A. (Asma Alshehri) and A.B.; methodology, A.E.; software, A.A. (Asma Alyousef); validation, A.S., A.A. (Ayaan Aidid), and A.E.; formal analysis, A.A. (Asma Alshehri); investigation, A.A. (Asma Alyousef); resources, A.S.; data curation, A.B.; writing—original draft preparation, A.A. (Ayaan Aidid); writing—review and editing, A.B.; visualization, A.S.; supervision, A.A. (Asma Alshehri); project administration, A.E. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of King Saud University (KSU-HE-24-307, 26 March 2024).

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

## Data Availability Statement

Data supporting reported results can be available upon request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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