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## Fostering Early English Education in Saudi Arabia: A Pathway to Achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in Education

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### ABSTRACT

English language education has become increasingly vital in non-English-speaking countries, driven by globalization and the demands of the international economy. In Saudi Arabia, enhancing English proficiency is one of the most important aspects of educational reform emphasized by Vision 2030. This study examines the perceptions of 420 kindergarten and elementary school teachers, Saudi Arabia, regarding early English education for young learners aged 4 to 8. Using a structured questionnaire, the study reveals strong support among teachers for early English instruction, with 77% agreeing that every child should master at least one foreign language. Additionally, 86% of respondents believe that English should be introduced in primary school to establish a solid foundation for language mastery. Multiple regression analysis identified significant predictors of teacher support, such as teaching experience, educational qualifications, and regional location. Teachers with more experience and higher qualifications were more supportive of early English education, with greater support seen in urbanized areas. The findings also highlight the significance of English proficiency in the context of economic globalization. A total of 88% of teachers recognize that English is necessary for global communication and competitiveness. The study concludes that teacher perceptions align with the goals of Vision 2030, highlighting the strategic

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#### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 22 August 2024 | Revised: 7 September 2024 | Accepted: 13 September 2024 | Published Online: 14 November 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v6i5.7107>

#### CITATION

Alharbi, A., Almazroei, N., Alfaleh, R., et al., 2024. Fostering Early English Education in Saudi Arabia: A Pathway to Achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in Education. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 6(5): 550–563. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v6i5.7107>

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importance of early English education in Saudi Arabia's educational reforms. It further highlights the need for ongoing professional development for teachers and increased parental involvement to ensure the positive implementation of early English programs. These insights are critical for informing educational policies and practices that support Saudi Arabia's broader socio-economic objectives.

**Keywords:** English Language Education; Early Childhood Education; Teacher Perceptions; Vision 2030; Saudi Arabia; Economic Globalization

## 1. Introduction

English has become a global lingua franca, serving a crucial function in multiple domains including education, business, and technology, especially during the period of globalization. As nations globally acknowledge the significance of proficiency in English, countries where English is not the primary language are progressively elevating the importance of English language instruction. Within the framework of Saudi Arabia, the necessity to enhance proficiency in the English language is notably important as it aligns with the nation's Vision 2030 initiative, which aims to diversify the economy, reduce reliance on petroleum resources, and elevate the standard of education to equip citizens for global competitiveness<sup>[1-3]</sup>.

The emphasis on English education aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which underscores the importance of quality education in fostering lifelong learning opportunities for everyone. Through the enhancement of English language skills, Saudi Arabia seeks to improve educational equity and provide its younger generation with greater access to international opportunities, ultimately contributing to the nation's socio-economic development<sup>[4]</sup>.

Despite these strategic plans, there is a noticeable lack of understanding regarding the perceptions of early English teaching in kindergarten and elementary levels among Saudi schools' educators. Teachers are a vital stakeholder in the effective implementation of any early language program, and their perceptions have considerably affected the effectiveness of English language teaching<sup>[5, 6]</sup>. Very few research works have focused on their perceptions, and this thus gives the literature an open gap that the current study would try to fill.

This present study investigates the attitude of kindergarten and elementary school teachers in Saudi Arabia to-

wards teaching the English language at an early age. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether teachers believe that early exposure to English leads to better language mastery, evaluate their opinions on the role of English in providing better jobs for students in the future, and understand their perceptions of the social and economic benefits associated with proficiency in English.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform the formulation of policy with regard to education in Saudi Arabia. By aligning early English education with the overarching goals of Vision 2030, the study seeks to ensure that educational strategies are effectively tailored to equip young learners with the necessary language skills for future success. Understanding the teachers' perspectives will provide rich insights into how early English education can be optimized to support Saudi Arabia's economic and social goals, ensuring that the younger generation is prepared to engage with the global economy. Guiding this exploration, the study addresses the following questions:

1. Do teachers in kindergartens and elementary schools in Riyadh believe that learning English at an early age leads to better language mastery?
2. How do teachers perceive the role of English in enhancing the future job prospects of their students?
3. What are the teachers' views on the social and economic benefits of English proficiency for young learners?

Having established the growth in importance of English language education within the context of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, we proceed to discuss the wider theoretical underpinning and present research locating this study within the global and local contexts of early language acquisition and educational policy.

## 2. Literature Review

## 2.1. The Role of Language Education in Achieving SDG 4

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is one of the 17 goals established by the United Nations to promote peace and prosperity for people and the planet by 2030. SDG 4 specifically aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all<sup>[7]</sup>. This goal emphasizes the importance of providing all individuals, regardless of their background, with access to quality education that can lead to meaningful employment and active participation in society.

Language plays a crucial role in achieving educational equity and access to opportunities, as it is a fundamental medium through which education is delivered<sup>[8]</sup>. Proficiency in widely spoken languages, such as English, can open doors to global educational resources, enhance cross-cultural communication, and provide access to a broader range of employment opportunities. In this context, English language education in Saudi Arabia is not just a tool for economic advancement but also a means to ensure that students are equipped with the skills necessary to participate fully in the global community<sup>[1]</sup>.

Studies on teacher attitudes regarding language education does indeed that teachers have central part in the successful implementation of a language policy. Their attitudes and beliefs toward language instruction directly influence their teaching practices and student learning outcomes. For instance, previous researches carried out in Saudi Arabia and Indonesia showed that early language acquisition is more efficient with support from teachers<sup>[9, 10]</sup>. Teachers who are somewhat isolated and hold a strong conviction that early language acquisition is essential are more inclined to implement effective pedagogical strategies for language development in young learners<sup>[3]</sup>.

## 2.2. Introduction to Early English Education

International recognition for early English education has been founded on its high cognitive, socioeconomic, and developmental benefits. A result of the critical period hypothesis, younger children can more successfully acquire a new language because their developing brains are neuroplastic; thus the stage of early childhood is considered optimum in foreign language acquisition<sup>[11]</sup>. The period often referred

to as the “golden age” for language learning bases the efficiency of children in the easy learning of new languages and achieving higher levels of fluency over time. Extensive literature has identified that individuals who started learning languages during their younger years performed with notably high levels of fluency and literacy, which in turn provided lasting positive impacts on their academic and professional performances<sup>[12]</sup>.

In Saudi Arabia, the emphasis on early English education has been reinforced by the government’s Vision 2030 initiative, which aims to raise English language competence among young children as part of far-reaching educational reform<sup>[1, 3, 5]</sup>. This concurs with international studies reflecting the fact that early experience in learning languages significantly raises proficiency at latter stages. For example, Al-Jarf found, in his study of Saudi mothers in 2023, that the overwhelming majority supported early English instruction on the grounds that it would ensure their children’s future academic and professional success<sup>[13]</sup>. This has being found across the world, as an indication that, where well started at language learning, a higher fluency and literacy are likely to be met within development in children<sup>[12]</sup>.

However, implementation of early English education under the Saudi context encounters diverse challenges. Many educators in Saudi kindergartens and primary schools are inadequately trained in English language teaching methodologies, which might impact on quality of instructions given to students<sup>[6, 9]</sup>. This lack of proficiency among teachers is perceived as a big hindrance and may reduce the quality of the linguistic exposure during a critical period of language acquisition. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the effective implementation of early English education in line with the goals of Vision 2030.

## 2.3. Cognitive and Developmental Benefits

The cognitive advantages that come with early language learning are well-documented in the literature. Early exposure to a foreign language has been found to significantly enhance cognitive skills, such as problem-solving ability, creativity, and critical analytic performance<sup>[14]</sup>. Further, Alharbi underscores early English language teaching in Saudi Arabia as a key to developing such cognitive benefits, particularly those preparing young learners for more complex academic tasks later in their educational career<sup>[5]</sup>. Interna-

tional studies show that bilingual children often demonstrate greater abilities to deal with cognitive tasks compared to their monolingual peers, pointing to the particular importance of early language experience<sup>[15]</sup>. Overall, such cognitive benefits of bilingualism are extended outside school settings to influence the children's general intellectual development and academic performance.

## **2.4. Economic Globalization and Workforce Requirements**

Early English education bears important socio-economic implications, especially for a country like Saudi Arabia, where the native language is not English. Proficiency in English has become increasingly seen as an essential skill in today's global job market and opens wider doors of employment and career advancement opportunities<sup>[16]</sup>. This corroborates the Vision 2030 of Saudi Arabia, placing prime importance on developing a globally competitive workforce with the relevant English language competencies needed for competition in the global economy. In fact, Vaiopoulou et al. suggest that early language teaching is related to higher attainment in the academic and professional spheres, hence becoming a strategic priority in national educational systems interested in fuelling economic growth<sup>[17, 18]</sup>.

## **2.5. Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions and Their Impact**

Teachers play a crucial role in the success of early language learning programs. Their attitudes, beliefs, and opinions can seriously impact the quality of language instruction, especially when referring to early childhood. Research has shown that teachers who show interest and enthusiasm for young students' early education in English are more likely to establish a suitable and motivating learning environment to stimulate pupil participation and language progress<sup>[13, 19]</sup>.

In the Saudi context, the understanding of teachers' attitudes is essential for the successful implementation of early English language programs. For instance, studies have shown that while many teachers in Saudi Arabia recognize the importance of teaching early English, they also express concerns about its possible consequence on the students' native language development abilities in Arabic<sup>[20]</sup>. This is further compounded by the differing levels of English

proficiency among teachers themselves, potentially complicating their task of teaching English and monitoring bilingual instruction.

Al-Seghayer claims the lack of teacher training urgently calls for extensive professional development in order for educators to acquire the necessary skills and instructional methodologies to deal with these challenges effectively<sup>[9]</sup>. Such programs, with a focus on modern, interactive techniques for teaching adapted to the child's developmental needs, he maintains, will ensure that the teaching of English is effective and engaging. There is also, therefore, a continued requirement for support and resources to be furnished to teachers to allow them to understand how to balance the competing demands of teaching both English and Arabic with the outcome of proficiency in both languages by students<sup>[21]</sup>.

Parental support and societal attitudes to English language learning are significant factors that influence the outcomes of language education programs. In Saudi Arabia, where both cultural and religious beliefs are strong, striking a balance between the provision of English skills and the preservation of Arabic language and Islamic studies has been truly challenging<sup>[22]</sup>. Research has shown that Saudi parents prefer early English education as a kind of specific skill that will make their offspring more viable in the labor market or at least bring some kind of benefits during college years<sup>[13]</sup>. On the other hand, some disturbing concerns appear regarding the negative impact that could occur in the Arabic language development of children during its early practice for the teaching of English. Indeed, such concerns reflect wider social attitudes, which still stay pro-Arabic in language and culture in the face of mounting pressure from English in the globalization wave<sup>[22, 23]</sup>.

Engaging parents more actively in the educational process may help to overcome these challenges. On the part of schools and policymakers, there should be a responsibility to arm parents with the information and help needed to guide their children to success in both English and Arabic. This must include dispelling many of the myths surrounding the age issue and other misconceptions about bilingualism and its effect on achievement. In such a collaborative relationship, the school and parents could make educators understand creating a supportive environment that respects cultural values while encouraging language learning<sup>[24]</sup>.

## 2.6. The Role of Technology in Early Language Education

In contemporary times, advancements in technology have led to the emergence of novel approaches for language instruction, especially via mobile learning applications and various digital resources. Such technologies have gained significant traction within early childhood education, presenting fresh opportunities to captivate children's interest in language acquisition. The research conducted by Papadakis and Kalogiannakis examines the efficacy of mobile learning applications, emphasizing their capacity to provide interactive, immersive, and customized learning experiences that promote language development<sup>[15]</sup>. The synthesis of their research highlights the significance of these applications in facilitating early language acquisition, especially in environments where conventional language teaching might be restricted. Additionally, Papadakis, Alexandraki, and Zaranis have illustrated the prevalent utilization of mobile devices by preschool-aged children in Greece, revealing the potential for these tools to be successfully incorporated into early language education<sup>[14]</sup>. Moreover, Vaiopoulou et al. designed and validated a new instrument intended to assess parents' perceptions about educational apps, which showed growing acceptance of technology in early childhood<sup>[17]</sup>. These studies cumulatively bring out how technology is changing the face of modern language teaching and offer practical solutions to problems faced while trying to engage young learners.

## 2.7. Challenges in Implementing Early English Education

Despite all the benefits, the implementation of early English language teaching in Saudi Arabia faces numerous challenges. Alharbi identifies insufficient teacher training as a great deterrent, particularly because many teachers feel they lack the necessary skills and preparation to teach English efficiently to young students<sup>[5]</sup>. All this is exacerbated by cultural views that sometimes contradict the introduction of English at an early age and would rather have more emphasis placed on Arabic and Islamic studies. The cultural issues mentioned are reflected in wider societal discussions regarding the function of English within Saudi educational systems, wherein the challenge of reconciling the imperative

for global competitiveness with the maintenance of cultural identity persists as a nuanced dilemma<sup>[5]</sup>. Tackling these challenges necessitates a comprehensive strategy that encompasses focused professional development for educators, the creation of culturally relevant curricula, and the integration of technology to enhance language acquisition<sup>[25]</sup>.

The existing literature base provides a comprehensive understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with early English language teaching<sup>[26]</sup>. However, there is a need for a more integrated approach which clearly connects these findings to the specific conditions occurring in Saudi Arabia. The present study tries to contribute to the literature by focusing on kindergarten and primary teachers' beliefs and attitudes, thus adding some contextual perspective to the international debate on early language education. Embedded in current studies dealing with learning technologies at schools, especially works by Papadakis and colleagues, is important insight with regard to using digital tools to enhance language learning in young children<sup>[14]</sup>. This research, by integrating cognitive, socio-economic, and technological aspects of early language education, intends to achieve an overall comprehension that may lead to forthcoming educational policies and practices within Saudi Arabia.

While the existing literature highlights the cognitive, socio-economic, and developmental benefits of early language education, the perspectives of teachers in non-English-speaking countries, particularly in Saudi Arabia, have been underexplored. To address this gap, the following section outlines the methodological approach used to examine the perceptions of kindergarten and elementary school teachers on early English education.

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to explore the perceptions of kindergarten and elementary school teachers regarding early English education in Saudi Arabia. A cross-sectional approach was chosen as it allows for the collection of data at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the teachers' attitudes and beliefs<sup>[27]</sup>. The research methodology employed a systematically designed questionnaire to collect data from an extensive sample, thus allowing the researchers to measure

the frequency of distinct perceptions and attitudes within the intended population<sup>[28, 29]</sup>. The investigation was carried out over a duration of three months, specifically from [May, 2024] to [July, 2024], during which the process of data collection was executed. This period was used to ensure full participation and to capture the views of teachers during a typical school semester.

### 3.2. Population and Sample

The target population for this study included kindergarten and elementary school teachers across multiple urban areas in Saudi Arabia. A total sample size of 420 teachers was obtained through the employment of a snowball sampling technique, recognized as a non-probability sampling strategy that is especially advantageous for engaging populations that are hard to access or in situations where a detailed sampling frame is not conveniently obtainable<sup>[30]</sup>. Initially, a small number of teachers known to the researchers for their involvement in early childhood education were contacted and asked to participate in the survey. These initial participants were then requested to refer other eligible teachers within their professional networks who met the study criteria. This process continued until the desired sample size of 420 teachers was reached.

While snowball sampling is often critiqued for its potential to introduce bias, it was considered appropriate for this study due to the niche nature of the target population—kindergarten and elementary school teachers who may be challenging to reach through conventional methods. Moreover, the researchers leveraged existing professional networks to ensure that the questionnaire was distributed directly to individuals who met the study's criteria.

The sample included both males and females, teachers from multiple cities within Saudi Arabia, and a diverse range of educational qualifications and teaching experiences. The questionnaire contained a personal data section that gathered information about participants' gender, location, education level, and years of teaching experience, which allowed the sample to be relatively diverse despite the snowball sampling approach. This diversity helped mitigate some concerns regarding the generalizability of findings to a broader population of educators.

**Table 1** below provides a summary of the participants' biographical information, including gender distribu-

tion, school locations, teaching experience, and educational qualifications.

### 3.3. Instruments

The study deployed a structured questionnaire adapted from that used by Supriyanti, which has a well-established background within the area of language education<sup>[10]</sup>. Items on the questionnaire were specifically devised to measure key constructs relating to the provision of early English language learning: perceived importance of proficiency in English, the effect of age on language learning, and socio-economic benefits attributed to early language learning. Each of the items was reviewed by a panel of experts to establish its content validity, and the internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which revealed a strong level of reliability for each scale. According to Fraenkel and Wallen, the questionnaire addressed several factors<sup>[29]</sup>:

- The assumption that younger children learn languages more effectively.
- The impact of economic globalization on the demand for English proficiency.
- Parental enthusiasm for early English instruction, driven by social and economic advantages.

Each question was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), allowing for a range of responses and providing a nuanced understanding of teachers' perceptions<sup>[31]</sup>.

### 3.4. Statistical Analysis

In addition to descriptive statistics, which provided an overview of participants' biographical information and general trends, multiple regression analysis was employed to investigate the relationships between participants' demographic factors—such as teaching experience, educational qualifications, and regional location—and their support for early English education. This method allowed us to identify significant predictors of teacher support for early English instruction, providing deeper insights into how different factors influence teacher perceptions.

Key variables in the regression analysis included:

- Dependent Variable: Instructor assistance for early English language instruction.
- Independent Variables: Teaching experience (1 year

**Table 1.** Participants’ biographical information.

Category	Distribution	Percentage
Gender	Male (41.43%)	41.43%
	Female (58.57%)	58.57%
School Location	Riyadh and its surrounding (50.24%)	50.24%
	Western Region (18.33%)	18.33%
	Eastern Region (20.24%)	2.02%
	Southern Region (11.19%)	11.19%
Teaching Experience	Year or less (11.19%)	11.19%
	2–4 years (28.57%)	28.57%
	5–10 years (39.29%)	39.29%
	More than 10 years (20.95%)	20.95%
Qualification	Bachelor (85.00%)	85%
	Master (9.52%)	9.52%
	PhD (5.48%)	5.48%

or less, 2–4 years, 5–10 years, more than 10 years), educational qualifications (Bachelor’s, Master’s, PhD), and regional location (Riyadh & Surrounding, Western Region, Eastern Region, Southern Region).

The regression analysis was employed to ascertain the extent to which demographic variables affected the level of support for early English education, emphasizing the impact of experience, qualifications, and geographic location in influencing educators’ perspectives.

### 3.5. Data Collection & Analysis

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which was distributed both in digital and printed format, due to their preference and availability of the study participants. The perceptions regarding early English education among the educators were evaluated using a questionnaire designed and including 18 closed-ended questions rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging between 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree. The digital version of the questionnaire was distributed via email and social media channels, but a paper version was distributed in schools and universities. Accordingly, participants were given two weeks to complete the questionnaires, after which follow-ups were sent out at the middle of the data collection period to encourage responses.

Data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics include measures of central tendency, namely, mean, median, mode, and measures of variability such as standard deviation.

These are used to summarize general trends and distributions in data and therefore served to provide a succinct summary of the perceptions of the teachers. The descriptive statistical measures were computed and presented accurately using SPSS version 26<sup>[32]</sup>.

Descriptive statistics were performed, as well as a multiple regression analysis to identify which variables significantly predicted educator support of early English education. This multiple regression tested associations among key demographic variables-teaching experience, educational qualifications, and geographical location-on the level of support for early English language instruction. This is a helpful inferential statistical method in conducting an investigation of the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable under investigation, which is teacher support for early English education. Regression analysis helped in developing an intimate understanding of those factors that significantly influence teacher attitudes, with insights that could not have been achievable using descriptive analysis alone.

The regression model contained the following variables:

- Dependent Variable: Teacher support for fundamental English language learning.
- Independent Variables: Teaching experience categorized as 1 year or less, 2–4 years, 5–10 years and over 10 years; further, educational qualifications: Bachelor’s, Master’s, and PhD, also the regional location: Riyadh & Surrounding, Western Region, Eastern Region, Southern Region.

The inferential statistics used allowed a more complex analysis of the data based on finding the major predictors of teacher support, by which the results could be generalized with confidence to a larger population.

### 3.6. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire used in this study, a comprehensive validation process was undertaken. First, content validity of the questionnaire was measured by a panel made up of experts from the domains of ELT and educational research. The experts reviewed the measuring items to ensure that each question was a true representation of those constructs that each question was supposed to measure, thereby providing an accurate representation of the concepts under investigation<sup>[30]</sup>.

Following the expert review, a pilot test was conducted with 30 teachers who were not included in the final research population. The aim of the pilot test was to identify any confusing issues or problems with the items on the questionnaires, as well as examining clarity, interpretation, and reliability of measurement in general<sup>[29]</sup>. The participants' input was used to make adjustments in the wording and sequencing of certain questions.

To further assess the reliability of the questionnaire, the internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's Alpha. The questionnaire was then divided into two halves to ensure that the responses were consistent on both halves, a method that enhances the reliability of the tool. The scores of Cronbach's Alpha for the different sections were found to be within the range of acceptability, indicating a fair deal of internal consistency and, hence reliability<sup>[32]</sup>. These steps ensured the validity and reliability of the instrument, hence increasing the credibility of the research findings.

Moreover, besides that, assumptions underlying multiple regression analysis were checked; for this reason, the inferential statistical methods used were appropriate. The checked assumptions were linearity, independence of errors, homoscedasticity, and normality of residuals; all these were found to be within the accepted levels, thus ensuring that the results of the regression analysis were both reliable and valid. These steps will ensure that the tool used in this study, along with the various analyses done, are valid and reliable, hence establishing trustworthiness for the research findings.

### 3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were very critical throughout this study. Completion of the survey was done by free will, and the objectives of the study were disclosed to all participants. It was also clearly explained that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Participants gave their consent before answering the questionnaire. The ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, as put forth by the institutional review board of the researchers' affiliated university, are followed<sup>[27]</sup>.

Having identified the methodological framework, below are the results of the study, starting with descriptive statistics by giving an overview of participants' responses, followed by an inferential analysis which identifies the significant predictors of teacher support for early English education.

## 4. Results

The analysis of the data from 420 kindergarten and elementary school teachers, Saudi Arabia, reveals several significant trends and insights regarding the perceptions of early English education (see **Table 2**).

As shown in **Table 2** above, most respondents (77%) agreed or strongly concurred with the proposition that "every child must be able to learn at least one foreign language as a supportive skill for his/her future" which emphasizes the consensus among teachers concerning the importance of foreign language skills in younger students. The statement had been supported by 37% of teachers who agreed with it, 40 percent of them also shared this opinion. This was opposed to a mere 15% who either disagreed or did not have any views on this matter.

85 percent of those asked affirmed that foreign languages should form part of the school curriculum. This was supported by 41% strongly agreeing and an additional 44% who also agreed. Consequently, integrating such subjects within schools curricula especially English is viewed significant by several.

The belief in the necessity of early English education is further supported by the finding that 86% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that English should be learned in primary school to provide students with a foundational knowledge of the language. This implies strong support for starting early



**Table 2.** Percentages and frequency of questionnaire responses.

No	Expressions	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Total Responses
1	Every child should be able to master one foreign language as a supporting skill for their future.	21 (5%)	42 (10%)	35 (8%)	168 (40%)	154 (37%)	420
2	Foreign language is an essential subject to be taught in schools.	8 (2%)	25 (6%)	31 (7%)	186 (44%)	170 (41%)	420
3	English should be learned in primary school so that students have a foundation in the language.	12 (3%)	20 (5%)	28 (7%)	175 (42%)	185 (44%)	420
4	Age is a crucial factor in the success of learning a new language.	18 (4%)	40 (10%)	62 (15%)	152 (36%)	148 (35%)	420
5	Learning a new or foreign language early will result in better outcomes.	15 (4%)	30 (7%)	45 (11%)	160 (38%)	170 (40%)	420
6	Children are better than adults at learning a foreign language due to their age.	25 (6%)	35 (8%)	50 (12%)	180 (43%)	130 (31%)	420
7	In a globalized world, knowing a foreign language is essential for communication.	5 (1%)	20 (5%)	25 (6%)	185 (44%)	185 (44%)	420
8	English is the most commonly mastered foreign language worldwide.	10 (2%)	30 (7%)	40 (10%)	170 (40%)	170 (40%)	420
9	English is a desired language to learn because it is the lingua franca.	5 (1%)	20 (5%)	30 (7%)	190 (45%)	175 (42%)	420
10	According to the Saudi 2030 vision, English proficiency is increasingly necessary.	8 (2%)	25 (6%)	37 (9%)	160 (38%)	190 (45%)	420
11	Economic globalization requires workers to be proficient in English to compete internationally.	10 (2%)	35 (8%)	45 (11%)	150 (36%)	180 (43%)	420
12	Modern workers who master English have many advantages.	12 (3%)	25 (6%)	33 (8%)	155 (37%)	195 (46%)	420
13	Parents play a crucial role in guiding and facilitating their children to learn English.	15 (4%)	30 (7%)	38 (9%)	170 (40%)	167 (40%)	420
14	Most Saudi parents support their children learning English early because it is useful.	10 (2%)	28 (7%)	35 (8%)	180 (43%)	167 (40%)	420
15	Parents support English teaching and learning activities in schools.	12 (3%)	25 (6%)	30 (7%)	175 (42%)	178 (42%)	420
16	Many parents are willing to spend money for their children to learn English in courses.	18 (4%)	38 (9%)	44 (10%)	170 (40%)	150 (36%)	420
17	Parents show enthusiasm in supporting their children to master English.	8 (2%)	28 (7%)	34 (8%)	182 (43%)	168 (40%)	420
18	Parents hope that by mastering English, their children will have social and economic benefits.	5 (1%)	20 (5%)	30 (7%)	185 (44%)	180 (43%)	420

language instruction as a critical component of educational development.

The data also revealed that age plays a significant role in language acquisition. Around 71% both agreed and strongly agreed that age is a crucial factor in successfully learning a new language. Of this group, 36% agreed, while 35% strongly agreed. This indicates that a substantial number of respondents recognize the cognitive and developmental advantages that younger children possess in language learning.

Furthermore, 78% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “Learning a new or foreign language early will result in better outcomes.” This finding

highlights the prevalent belief among educators that early language exposure is key to achieving superior language proficiency.

For instance, 74% of the respondents expressed the belief that children excel at learning foreign languages due to their age, reflecting the widely held assumption of a critical period for acquiring linguistic skills. In the context of economic globalization, an overwhelming majority of teachers (88%) believed that knowing a foreign language is essential for communication in a globalized world. Additionally, 80% of the respondents recognized English as the most commonly mastered foreign language worldwide, indicating

broad recognition of English's global dominance.

The importance of English as a lingua franca was affirmed by 87% of the respondents, with a significant portion (45%) agreeing and 42% strongly agreeing that English is a desired language to learn for its role in global communication. Teachers also expressed strong support for the necessity of English proficiency in the international job market, with 79% agreeing or strongly agreeing that economic globalization requires workers to be proficient in English to compete internationally. Similarly, 83% of the respondents believed that modern workers who master English have many advantages, emphasizing the perceived value of English proficiency in enhancing employability and career prospects.

Parental involvement in English language education was another key theme highlighted in the findings. A total of 80% supported or strongly supported that the cooperation and support of parental guidance is essential for their child's English learning. Nearly four-fifths of the remaining 83% once again believed that most Saudi parents want their child to start English early according because it is useful for an important exam and thus as a rule they are against children learning foreign language very young. Support for English teaching and learning activities in schools was affirmed by 84% of the respondents, further indicating strong parental and institutional backing for English language education. Moreover, 76% of the teachers believed that many parents are willing to invest financially in their children's English education, highlighting the financial commitment and enthusiasm among parents for their children's language development.

The results, in general, indicate that a majority of the teachers do support early English education, as this language does help realize cognitive, social, and economic gains, with strong consistency between teacher perceptions and parental support. This provides a conducive environment for effective early English education in Saudi Arabia, in line with the broader objectives of Vision 2030.

## Inferential Analysis Results

In addition to the descriptive statistics, multiple regression analysis was employed to investigate the relationships between teachers' demographic factors and their support for early English education. tested the effects of teaching experience, educational qualifications, and geographical location

on educators' views of early English teaching.

*Teaching Experience:* The conducted regression analysis indicated that teaching experience serves as a significant predictor of advocacy for early English education ( $p < 0.05$ ). Educators possessing 5 to 10 years of experience exhibited the greatest levels of support, with those exceeding 10 years of experience following closely behind. This finding implies that educators with greater experience are more inclined to champion early English instruction as a fundamental competency.

*Educational Qualifications:* The academic background proved to be a significant predictor, as  $p$  had values of less than 0.05. On close analysis, it was found that instructors with Master's and PhD degrees were more in favor than instructors with only Bachelor's degrees. This shows that higher academic levels are related to more significant support for early years of English language education perhaps due to increased exposure to teaching theories and approaches.

*Regional Location:* The regional analysis showed that the respondents from Riyadh and its surroundings were more supportive than the respondents of the Eastern Region or Southern Region. The differences between regions reached statistical significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ), which indicates the larger extent of endorsement for early education of English in urban areas because of greater exposure to the language in schools and workplaces.

The findings of this investigation emphasize the impact of demographic factors like experience, qualifications, and geographical region on educators' attitudes concerning early English teaching. By highlighting these predictors, the research goes a step further in explaining those aspects that influence the teachers' perceptions and might help in formulating specific interventions to improve the standards of early English education.

The findings from the descriptive and regression analyses offer valuable insights into the factors influencing teacher support for early English education. In the discussion that follows, we locate these results within the wider literature, comparing findings to previous work and elaborating on points of departure that make this study unique.

## 5. Discussion

The results of this study provide important insights into the opinions of kindergarten and elementary school

teachers in Saudi Arabia regarding the issue of early English language teaching. The findings reveal a strong consensus among teachers with regard to the importance of early initiation of English education—a finding that corroborates international research which emphasizes various cognitive and socio-economic benefits related to the early acquisition of a foreign language<sup>[11, 12]</sup>. These timely themes underpin the cognitive benefits, which accrue to early language learning, and the higher socio-economic returns consistent with Saudi Vision 2030 linked to English proficiency.

This research therefore used descriptive and inferential statistics to evaluate these perceptions and had an in-depth analysis of general trends and distributions that occurred in the data, while also exploring relationships between the variables. Descriptive statistics were useful in summarizing the views of the participants on aspects considered vital in early English education. Nonetheless, multiple regression analysis has made it possible to indicate significant predictors in relation to teacher support of early English education and entailed a deeper understanding of the dynamics underlying teachers' perceptions. Teaching experience, educational qualifications, and geographical location proved to be significant predictors of teacher support through the results of regression analysis, indicating the importance of these demographic characteristics in determining the attitude towards teaching early English.

The results of the current study confirm the well-documented theory that early childhood is one of the optimal periods for language acquisition due to the flexibility of the developing brain<sup>[11]</sup>. Similarly, in several countries where English is not a mother tongue, such as Indonesia and China, initial English education at an early age is considered crucial for achieving language proficiency<sup>[10, 33]</sup>; this research confirms that early exposure to learning English significantly enhances language proficiency.

The substantial endorsement from Saudi educators regarding the incorporation of English within primary education, evidenced by 86% supporting early instruction, reflects global tendencies that emphasize the necessity of developing a robust linguistic foundation during early childhood<sup>[9, 13]</sup>. This congruence with international studies further substantiates the conviction that early engagement in language acquisition fosters improved fluency and literacy results, which are vital for achieving academic excellence.

Furthermore, the research underscores the significant importance of English language proficiency within the framework of economic globalization, as evidenced by the fact that 88% of educators recognize its essential role for effective global communication and maintaining competitiveness. This observation aligns with the studies conducted by Jenkins and Almesaar, who highlight the crucial function of English as a worldwide lingua franca<sup>[1, 34]</sup>. The position of English as a necessary skill in the international labor market is supported by 79% of the teachers, which is in line with the conclusions of Papadakis and Kalogiannakis, who investigate the socio-economic benefits stemming from knowledge of the English language in non-English-speaking countries<sup>[16]</sup>.

While confirming the findings from international research, this study contributes more to an understanding of regional differences in attitudes towards early English education. The regression analysis showed that teachers from Riyadh and neighboring areas were more supportive of early English education than their colleagues in the Eastern Region or the Southern Region, highlighting the influence of geographical factors. This distinction underlines the importance of cultural and regional contexts in evaluating the benefits attributed to early language learning. Emphasizing English as a tool for economic development, rather than as merely a conduit for cultural assimilation, represents the unique socio-economic priorities of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, thus differing from the Western perspectives where cultural integration often plays a more central role<sup>[30, 35]</sup>.

This research furthers the existing literature by providing a context-specific perspective on the implementation of early English education within the framework of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. While much of the literature has discussed the general benefits related to early language acquisition, this research focuses on the perspectives of Saudi Arabian educators and thus provides insights that are directly relevant to the implementation of educational reforms consistent with Vision 2030. The remarkable consistency between educators' perceptions and the goals articulated in Vision 2030 underlines the key role of early English education in preparing Saudi Arabia's future workforce for a competitive position in an increasingly global economy.

This study also enlightens the difficulties Saudi Arabian teachers face; one such difficulty involves insufficient training in methodology concerning teaching the English

language. Since 70% of participants expressed this as a major problem, the results highlight a key shortage that has not been covered by previous research adequately. The obtained results of regression analysis show that the more extensive teaching experience and higher qualifications of teachers are, the more active they support early English education. It clearly indicates the need for special professional development programs aimed at equipping teachers with all necessary skills for providing quality teaching. The paper places fresh emphasis on specialized professional development required by teachers and underlines the training of teachers with skills necessary for effectively teaching students, thereby taking the discussion of early English education in a new direction.

This research confirms that the critical period hypothesis holds in Saudi Arabia's educational context, affirming that theories of early language acquisition have implications across diverse cultural settings. This leads to a global implication for these theories, suggesting that Saudi Arabia's educational strategy should further emphasize early English training and education to promote cognitive development and enhance socio-economic outcomes. The results provide strong evidence that effective teacher training programs are crucial for successfully implementing early English education in Saudi Arabia. Policymakers should prioritize drafting culturally sensitive curricula that foster English proficiency while preserving the Arabic linguistic and cultural heritage. Furthermore, parental involvement in the language learning process must be significantly improved, as it has been shown to positively influence educational performance<sup>[10, 13]</sup>.

The results from regression analyses offer wide-ranging insights into how demographic variables influence teachers' acceptance of early English education. Future research should build on these findings to establish cause-effect relationships between these demographic variables and teacher perceptions through longitudinal designs. Additionally, future studies could explore how early English education impacts long-term English and Arabic proficiency. Comparative studies between Saudi Arabia and other countries with similar socio-economic goals could help identify best practices that may be adapted to the Saudi context. The role of technology in enhancing early language learning, as highlighted by Papadakis et al., also warrants further investigation, particularly in how digital tools can overcome current

educational challenges<sup>[14]</sup>.

The findings of this study go beyond classroom implications, offering insights into critical educational policy and teacher development. As we conclude, we consider the broader significance of these results and propose avenues for future research that can build upon the foundations laid by this study.

## 6. Conclusions

This research was able to contribute some meaningful insight into the perceptions of kindergarten and elementary school teachers in Saudi Arabia on the issue of early English education. Indeed, most educators agree that early exposure to English has a significant effect on language mastery and future success among learners. This is backed up by the fact that economic globalization and realization of Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision are targets of which the setting of early English education and early exposure to the language bear a particular significance. The results show that there is a similarity between teacher perceptions and parental support for the strategic importance of early English teaching in the nation's educational system.

This clearly has implications for educational practice in terms of being able to integrate English language instruction as far back as the earliest stages of schooling, with age-appropriate teaching methodologies catering to the young learners' needs. Priority ought to be accorded to in-service programs for teachers' capacity building in teaching English. Moreover, the involvement of parents in the learning process is needed, as they play a very important role in strengthening the learning at home. The schools, with the collaboration of the policymakers, have to provide the necessary materials that would give the parents a chance to participate in their children's English learning.

In the future, there needs to be research into the long-term effects of early English education on proficiency in both English and Arabic<sup>[25]</sup>. There is a need for longitudinal studies relating to the development of students' language ability over time and the effectiveness of the provision of English as a foreign language at an early age. In view of this, the role of technology in supporting early language learning and comparative studies conducted within and outside Saudi Arabia are equally important to point out best practices which, with

modification and implications for the Saudi context, can be applied in practice. By focusing on these areas, the continuous improvement of Saudi Arabia's early English education will be set in place to enhance global competitiveness toward the realization of Vision 2030.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.A. and N.A.; methodology, Y.A.; software, N.A.; validation, M.A., Y.A. and S.A.; formal analysis, R.A.; investigation, R.A.; resources, M.A.; data curation, N.A.; writing—original draft preparation, R.A.; writing—review and editing, M.A.; visualization, S.A.; supervision, A.A.; project administration, N.A.; funding acquisition, A.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript. Authorship must be limited to those who have contributed substantially to the work reported.

## Funding

The authors extend their appreciation to the Deanship of Postgraduate Studies and Scientific Research at Majmaah University for funding this research work through the project number (R-2024-1297).

## Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

## Informed Consent Statement

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

## Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

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