

English Language Teaching in Saudi Universities and Schools and the Impact of Teaching by Native Speakers and Difference by CELTA Qualified Non-Native Speakers

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Abstract

This research aims to explore how native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and CELTA-certificated non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) affect ELT practice in Saudi Arabia. Teachers trained in CELTA benefit from practical approaches to teaching, yet the prejudices of native speakerism and cultural misfit approach persevere. It further aims to analyses the advantages of NEST and NNEST alternatives to general shortcomings in the evaluation and recruitment of language teachers and the teaching approaches used.

Keywords: *English Language Teaching, Native Speakerism, CELTA, Saudi Arabia, Professional Development, Teacher Evaluation, Cultural Competence.*

Introduction

The use of English as an international language has placed it as an indispensable factor in educational systems in all countries, including Saudi Arabia. Education in Saudi universities and schools in English is a central facet in preparing the learners for the global economy (Alshammari, 2022) and (Tang, 2020). Amid rising market demands for individuals with efficient language skills, educational reforms and teachers' recruitment and training strategies, as well as classroom practices for the past two decades, have been influenced in the region. Of these, the use of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults-qualified non-native English-speaking teachers (CELTA-NNESTs) has become a focal issue of discussion (Alofi et al, 2022) and (Alhajji, 2020). This research study aims at investigating the effects of learning by native teachers and those who hold a CELTA qualification but are not native Arabs on English language learning in Saudi Arabia with regard to disparities and standards in the foreign nation.

It is commonly understood that teachers from first-language English-speaking countries have always been valued in ELT because of the presumed linguistic supremacy and when placed alongside the cultural credibility of the target language. An estimated 65% of all English language instructors in universities in Saudi Arabia are native English speakers, a clear display of native speakerism (Alshammari, 2022) and (Picard, 2018). This is most endemic in the post-colonial world, as the 'West' still holds sway in ELT programs globally, including Saudi Arabia (Alshammari, 2022). Critics of native speakerism claim that the concept continues to marginalize talent and deny the ability of effectively NNESTs who have proper education, professionalism, and cultural sensitivity (Atkinson, 2023) and (Almayez, 2024). Pupil-orientated native speakerism persists in Saudi Arabia, while the rest of the world is striving for fair treatment of English teachers. The prestige programs in Saudi Arabia consider native speakers more deserving than qualified NNESTs (Alshammari, 2022) and (Ahmad, 2023)

CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults), the most popular initial teacher training qualification, has enabled many NNESTs to overcome this deficit. Those employed in Saudi Arabia's English language programs comprised 40% of NNESTs who had CELTA certification, 60% mentioned that lesson planning had been sponsored, and 70% mentioned that student engagement had been funded due to their training (Alofi et al, 2022) and (Ganji et al., 2018). A number of studies demonstrate that the teachers, who have completed CELTA, applied the communicative approach and structure to the language

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teaching, including being comparably or even more effective than their less-trained native counterparts in lesson planning and classroom management (Alofi et al, 2022) (Anderson, 2020) and (Ganji et al., 2018). However, there is still a question about how these qualifications can be successfully implemented in the Saudi context, as the culture and education can differ from the western training models (Alsulami, 2022) and (Hersi. 2018). For example, one of the following reports stated that 55% of students in Saudi classrooms and 45% preferred native speakers because of the fluency and natural-sounding Arabic of native educators (Murtada et al., 2023) and (Ahmed, 2021).

Besides, the examples of conflicts of interest connected with teacher practices, matters of identity, and interculturality condition the processes in the Saudi Arabian classroom. As part of the population, NNESTs, and especially those with CELTA qualifications, have to straddle the professional and social realities, which the latter may not fully price the former (Alshammari, 2022) and (Ahmad et al., 2017). On the other hand, native speakers, despite their language fluency, face challenges in contextualizing their instructional practices with Saudi students' cultural and learning backgrounds (Picard, 2018) and (Kavanagh, 2023). As noted, 68% of the native-speaking teachers in Saudi Arabia have not been trained in cross-cultural training teaching, putting a gap between teachers and students (Almayez, 2024) and (Kavanagh, 2023). Given that Saudi Arabia plans on advancing its education system with a view to improving it using Vision 2030, this paper would also seek to evaluate the contribution of both Saudi-based and international teachers, especially in the development of students' language and cross-cultural competencies.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of native and non-native teacher recruitment in the Saudi universities and schools, particularly the CELTA-certified NNESTs. In evaluating these teachers based on the extent to which they support the intended and unintended curriculum, culture, and practices in the context of the overarching discourses of equity and effectiveness in the teaching and learning of English, the study seeks to add to knowledge and practice. Based on the findings of prior research, this endeavor assesses native speakerism and its implications, the preparedness of CELTA training, as well as teaching procedures adapted appropriately for Saudi learners.

Methods

Study Design

This work uses a systematic review approach to gather secondary data concerning the effects of native English speakers and CEILA/CELTA holders, NESTs, and CELTA-qualified NNESTs for English language learning in Saudi universities and schools. The relevant literature was searched using a systematic structure from a number of scholarly databases to ensure the proper selection of relevant materials. To maintain methodological rigour and credibility of the findings of the study, the research strictly observes the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

The systematic search covered only two large databases, PubMed and Google Scholar, to include the peer-reviewed articles of relevance. An initial search using the study's title returned zero results on PubMed and 379 articles on the Google Scholar database. Another search was done using the keywords on PubMed as follows:

- “English teaching in Saudi”
- “English Language in KSA”
- “English and native speakers in Saudi Arabia”
- “CELTA Qualified non-native speakers”

- “Non-native English speakers in KSA”

This search returned 13 articles. However, the present author detected that these studies contain rather generic information about English language teaching and learning and are not specific to the topic of the present research. Therefore, the search was carried out only in Google Scholar, as the search on this platform provided a more detailed focus. To focus on recent articles only, which are likely to be more relevant and up to date, the articles were filtered based on the year of publication (2021–2024); this resulted in 123 articles out of 379.

Screening and Selection Process

The choice of studies was informed by a systematic approach that sought to identify and enrol only the relevant studies that matched the research questions. First, the titles of the 123 articles received from Google Scholar were carefully analysed. This step is intended to filter out studies with direct association to the subject under investigation. Articles containing keywords such as “English teaching in Saudi,” “CELTA-qualified non-native speakers,” or related terms in their titles were considered for further review. Subsequently, on the basis of the identified focus of the present study, 21 articles were selected for further analysis.

After the title review, the full-text access of the identified articles was evaluated. Only those studies that provided abstracts and free full-text access were included to reduce the introduced bias and make the process reproducible. From the 21 publications first retrieved, 17 were accessible by open access means to their full text. From these identified articles, the author obtained their full-text versions and examined them more critically based on their content, their methodologies, results, as well as their applicability to the objectives of this research study.

The next step entailed a scrutiny of the 17 full-text articles in relation to the study’s goals and objectives. Each study had to be scrutinised with respect to the methodology employed, the findings of the study, and the context in which the study was carried out. Studies that presented literature reviews, conceptual papers, or gauges without giving substantive empirical data and did not involve Saudi Arabian settings were not considered. Further, papers that offered no comparative data in relation to native and non-native teachers with CELTA certification also had to be excluded. After this rigorous screening, the authors selected nine qualitative studies that were most relevant for the review.



Figure 1. Search Strategy and Screening Process

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

- Published between 2021 and 2024.
- Peer-reviewed articles.
- Studies focusing on English language teaching in Saudi Arabia.
- Articles addressing the roles of native speakers, CELTA-certified NNESTs, or comparisons between the two.
- Studies providing empirical data on teaching efficacy, student outcomes, or classroom dynamics.
- Articles available in full text.

Exclusion Criteria

- Studies published before 2021.
- Articles without explicit focus on the Saudi Arabian context.
- Theoretical or opinion-based studies without empirical evidence.

- Articles available only as abstracts or behind paywalls.
- Studies focusing on broader ELT topics unrelated to native or non-native teacher comparisons.

Data Analysis

The method employed for synthesising the findings for this study was a narrative synthesis, which is preferable when conducting an integrative review of heterogeneous studies. This method helped the study in sorting and analysing data thematically, thus aiding in the determination of order, connection, and occurrence in the selected studies. Thus, given the nature of the included studies employing qualitative forms of research, a method of narrative synthesis was chosen. It involved a critical review of all the studies selected for inclusion and their outcome, methods, and setting used. The results were sorted according to the topic-based applied classification to meet the aims and objectives of the current review of literature. The key areas that emerged were the comparative effectiveness of NESTs and CELTA-qualified NNESTs, students' perceptions of cultural and instructional competence, and the issues of NESTs as they struggle with biases grounded in native speakerism. In order to have an equal distribution of views, each study was evaluated based on the relevance of its findings to these themes.

There was also a focus on the context that is specific to KSA, including language policies and the student's preferences. Cohort factors were examined to determine their impact on the seen results and to attribute meaningful information about the application of NESTs and CELTA-certified NNESTs in Saudi universities and schools. The synthesis also revealed the possibility of overlooked research questions, for example concerning the long-term effects of CELTA training in non-Western regions or the relationship between cultural understanding and the effectiveness of instruction.

Ethical Considerations

All the ethical standards were practiced during the systematic review process as described in this study. Since the study was conducted using only secondary data, there were no interactions with actual human subjects or personal information used in the research, which made informed consent or institutional review board approval unnecessary. Also, to maintain the research's originality, data was not directly copied from the included studies; the findings were critically analysed and then paraphrased. Citation and referencing were done to acknowledge the original authors of the research articles. Besides, only articles that could be accessed publicly were used, eliminating cases of using material that is restricted or has copyrights. The inclusion criteria facilitated getting full texts of the selected studies to make the review replicable and available for others to validate. Since bias may affect which studies are chosen and how the results are analysed, a particular emphasis has been placed on reporting the search and screening method.

Results

It is noteworthy that the selected studies afford a broad understanding of the methodologies, outcomes, and implications of the research on the role of NESTs and CELTA-qualified NNESTs in relation to English language teaching in Saudi Arabia. The findings of the study are presented based on the related themes in order to provide a critical evaluation of the methodologies and the results of these investigations.

Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development

The assessment of the teachers and their professional development emerged as dominant in the development of English language teaching in Saudi Arabia. Ahmad (Ahmad, 2023) conducted a mixed-methods design study based on Fourth Generation Evaluation (FGE) to investigate the evaluation systems in a Saudi university. The study confirmed positive attitudes towards the criteria for evaluation but also pointed to systematic shortcomings, such as too formalized settings and lack of proper preparation of evaluators. This was in agreement with Elsaid Rashad's cross-sectional survey of over 400 school teachers, where they noted organisational resistance and a lack of support and appreciation for access to professional development. More notably, both studies suggest that context-specific evaluator training and institutional

reforms are imperative, although, to some extent, Ahmad (Ahmad, 2023) is more informative for policy reform than Elsaid Rashad; the latter delivers a comprehensive overview of challenges inherent in PD across multiple schools.

Khalil (Khalil, 2023) investigated a study of a DELTA-based Language Development for Teachers (LDT) course and noted that it can positively impact NNESTs' teaching ability, and also impotence was sensed by 82% of the participants. It filled some of those gaps, NEST/NNEST, so that representatives of both parties appreciated the importance of planned activity. Murtada and Alsuhaibani (Murtada et al., 2023) also found that stakeholders prefer teachers with a low accent and good pedagogical content knowledge over strict native kindergarten teachers, which implies that professional development should be orientated towards teaching rather than origin. Moreover, Kajos (Kajos, 2023) pursued the analysis of the experiences with CELTA in the international context by investigating the perceptions of Hungarian NNESTs and concluded that, while improving teaching skills and opening job opportunities, CELTA presented itself as a process that entailed specific adaptation to local contexts. This view is in concordance with Khalil's (Khalil, 2023) study; however, it differs Ahmad (Ahmad, 2023) and Elsaid Rashad since the CELTA program does not always accommodate cultural sensitivity due to its internationally standardized structure.

Therefore, together all these investigations underscore the significance of teacher appraisal and personal enhancement connected with systematic obstacles, which include insufficient organisational support and the requirement for culturally sensitive categories of professional development. Combining traditional and academic training practices such as DELTA and CELTA courses with more localised strategies can serve the needs of educators in Saudi Arabia and other countries.

Native Speakerism and Hiring Practices

The selected studies focus on hiring discrimination, employment attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs, and changes in the factors relevant to employment in ELT. Alshammari (Alshammari, 2022) conducted qualitative interviews with 18 teachers that focused on understanding how CELTA qualifications are viewed as substituting native speaker status in Saudi universities. However, the study labelled CELTA as imperialist in promoting ELT as it perpetuates colonialist structures since certifications bring in colonial pedagogy that support traditional teacher aerobic approaches to teaching. On the other hand, Atkinson (Atkinson, 2023) used a survey of 210 ESL teachers in Spain and the UK and got evidence of discrimination against NNESTs, especially in Spain. The results of this study suggest that native speakerism is a continuing phenomenon in various locations around the world, although its manifestations might differ.

Khalil (Khalil, 2023) had a different view of training as they assessed a DELTA-based training course for EDTA with the intention of minimizing differences between NESTs and NNESTs. The study discussed the idea that training interventions may help NNESTs to address teaching difficulty and self-efficacy, criticizing imposter syndrome, yet it revealed that the impacts of the training interventions remained confined to a narrow scale of changing the existing structural prejudice. In their studies, Murtada and Alsuhaibani (Murtada et al., 2023) conducted surveys and interviews that revealed Saudi stakeholders' preference of pedagogical skills over native speakerism, contradicting conventional hiring policy. Moreover, Kajos (Kajos, 2023), although not targeting Saudi Arabia, targeted the CELTA experiences of Hungarian NNESTs. Alshammari (Alshammari, 2022) discussed that it was effective in promoting the job opportunities for the learners yet not sensitive to the context while focusing on the same assertion about CELTA.

Combined, these studies suggest the need to move from language-identity-based concerns to skill-based concerns in hiring processes and for targeting the systemic barriers that hamper fair representation of NNESTs in ELT. Nevertheless, the preoccupation with those particular kinds of regions and the differences in the methods applied call for additional significant cross-sectional research.

Teaching Methodologies and Classroom Practices

The occurrence of prior research has focused on the capacities of particular teaching strategies, analysis effects of teaching-training curriculums, and difficulties of educators in translating methodologies into local environments. Alofi and Almalki (Alofi et al., 2022) employed an ethnographic study utilising a quantitative survey and qualitative interview in order to contrast the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) by CELTA and non-CELTA teachers in Saudi universities. Their result showed that both groups comprehended the CLT theory, but its implementation was a challenge, and so there is a need for more training on collaborative techniques such as pair and group work. Similarly, in a descriptive analysis, Khalil (Khalil, 2023) assessed a DELTA-based LDT course in which the NNESTs enhanced their classroom practices through speaking and listening, also in the foreign language program. This work revealed the importance of structured training but at the same time showed how transmissible such treatments are.

Alsulami (Alsulami, 2022) decided to use qualitative research to analyse the agents of culture in Saudi preparatory-year English textbooks with a focus on practices. The study identified the dominance of Western cultural icons in teaching and learning resources as a deficit in teaching culturally appropriate resource contents rooted in local and Islamic cultures. Murtada and Alsuhaibani (Murtada et al., 2023), via questionnaires and interviews, identified that stakeholders saw the pedagogical skills in teaching efficacy as important but did not elaborate on ways that these skills are manifested in classroom practices. Second, Kajos (Kajos, 2023) explored Hungarian NNESTs who completed CELTA and their classrooms; the author noted training effectiveness while noting difficulties with applicability in non-Western environments. This finding resonates with the difficulties highlighted by Alofi and Almalki (Alofi et al., 2022) and highlights the training-implementation divergence.

Altogether, these investigations suggest that, despite the fact that teacher training programs such as CELTA and DELTA enhance participants' theoretical knowledge and certain teaching abilities, the lack of the programs' flexibility regarding the cultural and institutional setting in which the teachers are going to work prevents effective practical application. Filling these gaps by employing localised and context-sensitive professional development for teachers is still proving relevant for bringing about change in practices of teachers in Saudi Arabia.

CELTA Training and Teacher Perceptions

The selected studies have identified the perceived advantage and disadvantage of the CELTA certification among the non-native English-speaking teachers and its implication in ELT. Khalil (Khalil, 2023) evaluated a DELTA accredited LDT course aimed at eliminating the differences between NNESTs and NESTs. They specifically acknowledged that the study demonstrated the benefits of the course in developing teaching competencies, as well as speaking and listening lessons and minimizing the levels of imposterism among NNESTs. However, there exists its limitation in the sense that it only works in Saudi and Egyptian contexts, hence limiting the study's generalization.

Alofi and Almalki (Alofi et al., 2022) compared the knowledge and practice of teachers trained locally and through the CELTA of CLT in the Saudi Arabia context. Their outcomes highlighted the fact that while the CELTA program delivered a theoretical certainty, it remained constricted in practice terms, suggesting a separation between training and practice. Alshammari (Alshammari, 2022) also criticized CELTA for reinforcing colonialism in ELT, whereby the language institution elevates the English curriculum of the global north at the detriment of NNESTs. Similarly, Kajos (Kajos, 2023) investigates its relevancy for Hungarian NNESTs where CELTA has been proved helpful to enhance teaching abilities and job prospects, though difficult to apply as a training model in non-western context. This is in line with Atkinson (Atkinson, 2023), who, by conducting self-completed surveys and interviews; found that CELTA qualifications do not assume sufficient elimination of systemic prejudice against NNESTs, including employment discrimination.

Altogether, these studies illustrate that the strengths of CELTA consist in its ability to establish basic

teaching skills and in increasing the employability of NNESTs. However, they also reveal important issues such as its non-aculturative approach, which perpetuates native speakerism, and the gap between the academic preparation of a teacher and the enactment of teaching practice in the classroom. If these gaps are addressed through culturally sensitive modifications of the CELTA framework and contextualized training programs, the model might better suit the diverse education systems around the world, including the Saudi Arabian context.

Discussion

The nine selected studies offered qualitative understandings of teacher evaluation, professional development, native speakerism, teaching approaches, and CELTA training in Saudi Arabia. As for the teacher evaluation and professional development, the selected studies, which included Ahmad (Ahmad, 2023) and Elsaid Rashad, reveal that strict systemization and lack of institutional support are the major issues. These findings are consistent with other discussions in the literature, including AlHarbi (AlHarbi, 2018), whereby she noted that there was an absence of integrated evaluation measures in Saudi higher learning institutions. In this regard, Ahmad (Ahmad, 2023) pointed to the poor alignment of the evaluation policies with the needs of teachers, and similarly, Elsaid Rashad. However, the selected studies vary in terms of the kind of professional development that is aimed at. Khalil (Khalil, 2023) synthesized psychological issues regarding teacher development, including imposter syndrome, hence an affirmation of the identity crisis identified by Alshammari (Alshammari, 2022) among NNESTs. Although the topic of culture in professional learning is also discussed by Safi (Safi, 2020), the practical ideas from Khalil's (Khalil, 2023) attempt to eliminate gaps between NESTs and NNESTs are more applicable. However, Khalil's (Khalil, 2023) study cannot be generalized to other countries because the study was conducted only among students from Saudi Arabia and Egypt, unlike Safi (Safi, 2020), who focuses on culturally appropriate teaching.

As for the native speakerism, it is still under discussion in the selected studies and the literature. Selective hiring based on colonial beliefs is discussed critically by Alshammari (Alshammari, 2022), wherein it echoes Picard (Picard, 2018), who elaborated on colonial influences in the Middle Eastern region. Likewise, Atkinson (Atkinson, 2023) documents current prejudice against NNESTs in Europe, as does Ahmed (Ahmed, 2021) with regard to the Kurdistan region. Both studies attempted to establish global rampant native speakerism but acknowledged regional differences; in Atkinson's study, native speakerism was more severe in Spain than in the UK in TESOL hiring. Furthermore, Murtada and Alsuhaibani (Murtada et al., 2023) questioned the stereotypes when they mentioned that attitudes are also a form of preference where stakeholder's preference is towards the teacher's educational skills. This corresponds with Ahmad (Ahmad, 2023), who also stressed the enlargement of the significance of professional development and didactical training in the context of Saudi Arabia. However, other types of studies, for example, Baniabdelrahman (Baniabdelrahman, 2013), still reveal tutors' preferences in favor of NESTs, which point once again to the fact that despite new institutional agendas, students often remain abreast of this issue.

Furthermore, the chosen studies, with particular reference to Alofi and Almalki (Alofi et al., 2022), present that the adoption of the CLT model is only expressed to some extent among teachers certified by CELTA and those who did not undergo the program. This finding is in support of Al-Issa (Al-Issa, 2020), who found the same challenges exist in the Sultanate of Oman, where managers suggested that theory and practice do not align. However, while Al-Issa (Al-Issa, 2020) blames this paucity for structural shortcomings, Alofi and Almalki (Alofi et al., 2022) urge the dissemination of improved teacher training related to collaborative learning. In line with Alsulami (Alsulami, 2022), who addressed the issues of adoption and use of Western cultural references in the Saudi text books, Alshammari (Alshammari, 2022) discussed how CELTA ivory tower neo-colonial standards. Also, Ahmed (Ahmad, 2023) urged for the adoption of glocalized methods that would incorporate both the local and the international curriculum. Nevertheless, the general literature provides diverse opinions in this regard. For example, Robert et al. suggested that the application of Western frameworks such as CEFR should be implemented globally, in contrast with Alsulami's (Alsulami, 2022) view that material should take culture into consideration.

Lastly, the priority being given to the engagement of CELTA training's strengths and limitations has

become the area of debate in the selected as well as other studies. Khalil (Khalil, 2023) and Kajos (Kajos, 2023) note that CELTA has improved teaching skills and minimized issues of confidence, as pointed out by Tang (Tang, 2020). However, both textbooks lament the general rigidity of CELTA and a lack of change for non-Western cultures, and Ahmad's (Ahmad, 2023) work echoed this by calling for cultural sensitivity and adjustments to CELTA in the Arabian Gulf. Researching prior literature provides two opposite views of the effectiveness of CELTA. For example, (Ganji et al. 2018) reported that CELTA was useful in the development of teaching confidence and preparedness for the job; however, these points are arrived at usually at the cost of culture inclusion. This supports Alshammari's (Alshammari, 2022) argument on the colonial essence of CELTA, therefore implicating the necessity of contextualised training schemes for the region. Further, Atkinson (Atkinson, 2023) and Picard (Picard, 2018) have pointed out that CELTA fails to address the impersonal prejudice against NNESTs, and there exists a lack of correspondence between certification and reasonable employment policies.

Conclusion

This scholarly study is a critical analysis of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and CELTA-qualified non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) and their influence on English language teaching (ELT) in Saudi Arabia, with a focus on nine selected studies and reference to movement literature. The analysis revealed several key insights: On the one hand, the CELTA and DELTA training programs help NNESTs develop their professional skills and confidence; on the other hand, these programs offer limited cultural sensitivity and fail to solve organisational prejudices. There is still an element of native speakerism in hiring, despite the fact that there is a new appreciation of the pedagogical skills over linguistic identity among the employers.

Two important fields of concern were identified as teacher evaluation and professional development. Appropriate evaluation frameworks and inadequate organisational encouragement greatly inhibit teacher development; on the other hand, sound professional development initiatives require cultural sensitivity and contextual relevance in order to close the gap between globalization and realism. Moreover, the tendency to use and reproduce western culture-related materials in textbooks and classroom practices also supports the need for globalized approaches to ELT in order to foster the national and cultural identity of learners while, at the same time, enhancing their intercultural communicative competence.

Hence it is high time to continue from where this study has left off in replacing colonial ideologies of education prevalent in ELT by valuing equality in hiring with appropriate emoluments to culturally sensitive teachers and proper professional training for them. These measures correlate with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 to foster globally relevant human capital enveloped in their Saudi culture to improve the performance of English language learners and instructors.

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