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Pre-school Teachers' Interaction with ICT in Language Learning in Saudi Arabia

Prepare

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Abstract:

The present research aimed to identify the status-quo of the interaction between pre-school teachers, and information and communication technology in relation to language instruction. The research made use of the qualitative approach for meeting such an end; moreover, a case study was employed for identifying all the sides of interaction between teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with ICT in Saudi Arabia. The research data were collected through conducting interviews with the teachers in the preschool to understand their perception, concerns and attitudes. The findings of the research confirmed the necessity of designing the right course content suitable for Saudi context and, second, equipping the teachers with skills and capabilities to interact and engage properly in using the ICT for teaching EFL. The findings also confirmed that teachers play a significant role in improving language learning skills and competencies among children. The research recommended identifying the problems faced by the teachers in preschools, and involving teachers in designing the course materials. The research also recommended including courses related to learning the use of tablets for the children.

Keywords: Interaction, ICT, Tablet.



Theoretical Significance of the Research

There has been a scarcity of findings related to the significance of ICT in early childhood education. There is a lack of findings that can support the integration and significance of ICT in a preschool setting (Stephen and Plowman, 2002). The criticism of the technology or the use of ICT in the preschool education is mainly due to the lack of empirical research (Couse and Chen, 2010; Schmidt and Vandewater, 2008; Yelland, 2008), where the results of the current studies have been drawn from some of the limited old research studies. According to the study of Plowman et al. (2010), it has been significantly discussed in the literature that opportunities and challenges posed by the technology must be effectively addressed for compulsory education.

The role of ICT for the older school children and those of university age who are going to enter the workforce soon have been discussed, but much less attention has been paid towards the significance of ICT for the young preschool children. According to Shore (2008), more research is required to find how children develop the learning skills with the use of technological tools and how the participation of the adults in the child's learning process can be effective. With some exceptions (i.e. Kirkorian et al., 2008; Marsh et al., 2017; Rideout 2007; Plowman et al., 2010), there has been a lack of full-fledged research of the use of technology by young children for the purpose of learning and education. Also, structured research on the area of use of ICT in preschool education in Saudi Arabia is currently very limited. This research is, thus, a valuable addition to the field.

Cognitive development of individuals is a path to the 'mastery of language' (Palaiologou, 2010). Using cognitive development in line with the theory of constructivism can help us understand how children may learn languages. This is the approach adopted in this research — the process of language development is assumed to initiate with the development of *Metacognitive* competencies which lead to the development of *core* competencies which eventually lead



to the development of *language* competencies. Using this approach is useful in that it helps us understand which Metacognitive competencies should be focused upon in order to initiate the process and how to track the progress of children's linguistic competencies.

Practical Significance of this Research

Introducing ICT into preschool education is not simple as adopting the policies and strategies similar to the integration of ICT for the education of older children (Plowman et al., 2010). In spite of the great developments in the field of technology, it must be considered that ICT tools have some limitations. These limitations are that technology cannot be used as the substitute for teachers; technology is not capable of fixing anything; and technology can be affected by the poor philosophy or underdeveloped educational practice (Ertmer, 2005; Niederhauser and Stoddart, 2001). The significance of ICT has been discussed in many countries including Australia, the UK, Finland and New Zealand (Cooper, 2005; Downes et al., 2005; Kankaanranta and Kangalasso, 2003; O'Hara, 2004; Plowman et al. 2010; Bain, 2006). These studies suggest that over the last few decades there has been a significant shift in the use of technology and preschool education. Computers and technologies have been commonly used by the preschool teachers and in the playroom activities. The studies have also found that there has been an increase in the political interest in the integration of ICT in preschool education. However, the changes in preschool education had not been equally implemented in comparison to changes in society and are mainly seen as the 'fun' activity tool. Technological devices like computers, touchscreen devices and other ICT tools are considered to be the source that drives the standards, as mentioned in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. However, it has not been significantly considered as important in preschool, as in the case of higher schools (Plowman et al., 2010). The literature has also explained that, in the context of preschools, the meaning of integration of ICT is still associated with the use of desktop computers but, for the practitioners, the use of more sophisticated tools of ICT in the preschool education remains challenging (McManis and Gunnewing, 2012; Plowman et al., 2010, Siraj-



Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2006).

ICT facilitates great access to information and knowledge and also provides the opportunity for multiple learning situations. Therefore, the ICT tools must be seen as powerful tools that can improve the process of teaching and learning. They also have the potential to fulfil the needs of the children towards growth and learning. Mioduser et al. (2000) have asserted that presence of the technology in the preschool can be considered as the 'hardware reality' that has not become the reality of the technically sound learning environment in preschools.

The changes in the educational system and integration of technology in education have led to changes in the teaching approaches and strategies; this is the reason that pedagogical approaches for the integration of ICT in preschools are still emerging. There has been a very slow change of pace in the integration of ICT according to one published report of Becta. In reference to the use of ICT in the schools rather than their integration in the preschools, this report states that:

“The development of new pedagogies can be a substantial professional challenge: teachers must learn new skills and rethink and refashion the teacher-learner relationship. Developing pedagogical approaches of active learner engagement, facilitating and scaffolding learning rather than transmitting knowledge, using new, more open, questioning techniques, and undertaking assessment for learning all provide significant challenges to a teacher’s role and identity. A lack of time, willingness or the resources to develop new pedagogical approaches is a major barrier to fully exploiting the educational potential of digital technology.” (Chowcat et al., 2008, p. 20)

Use of ICT tools is not easy, and is not similar to other subjects. The integration of ICT requires special efforts from the school administrations and teachers so that this integration can be successful. The teachers have to rethink the teaching process and the pedagogical approaches and also have to make an effort to follow through change in education (Kalas, 2013). There is the requirement



of concrete planning for the introduction of ICT in preschool education and for the teachers in preschools. The planning should be clearly grounded in the purpose, practices and social context of the early childhood education (O'Hara, 2004). For the direct integration of ICT, it is important that clear educational objectives should be made that can promote and make the process successful (Sugar et al., 2004). The objective of the education that encompasses the use of ICT is different from the normal preschool culture, and includes the professional practice, flexible curriculum, learning through play, and assessment process.

In Saudi Arabia, the journey of integrating ICT into preschool education is in its infancy and there is currently little evidence of any efforts to use ICT in preschool education. Part of it can be blamed on lack of Saudi policy towards the use of ICT in preschool education and the part can be blamed on lack of poor social awareness towards benefits of technology (Kalas, 2010; Plowman et al., 2010; Plowman, 2014; Taguma et al., 2012). Aldhafeeri et al. (2016) examined early childhood education teachers' views, aptitudes and attitudes towards digital technologies in their personal lives and in the classroom practices in Kuwait.

According to their findings, despite being competent users of technology, most teachers are still reluctant to embed these in curriculum practices. Learning about how preschool teachers interact with technology in the preschool environment will help us understand if and what reservations Saudi preschool teachers may have in embedding ICT tools such as Tablet in the preschool education curriculum.

The findings of the research will (1) contribute to enhancing the knowledge and boosting the already existing but limited research in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this research will also encourage further research in the field of preschool education in Saudi Arabia and how ICT can be integrated into early childhood education in a meaningful manner (2) The research will also provide significant information for the policy makers and the decision makers with detailed information regarding the appropriate use of ICT in the



context of Saudi teachers and preschool children and what issues teachers face in integrating ICT in preschools. (3) Present and future educational policies and curriculum guidelines can also be influenced by the recommendations and findings of the research and can provide information regarding the successful integration of ICT in teaching and learning EFL in preschools of Saudi Arabia.

The results from this research will also be beneficial for guiding the integration of ICT in the preschool education of the developed and developing nations. Many countries have developed or are in the process of developing the preschool guidelines for ICT integration in the preschool education; therefore, the findings of this research will provide the substantial lesson for the policies and curricula worldwide. The preschool settings, that have initiated the use of ICT, will benefit from the findings of the research. The findings will also provide recommendations that can revolutionise the current preschool education practices. Finally, the results and findings of the study are important for influencing the perspective of the policymakers to provide adequate training and support to the preschool teachers. This research can also be of particular significance to the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia.

Objectives of Study

The overarching aim of the study is to identify the challenges that preschool teachers face in using ICT to teach EFL to Saudi preschool children. Besides, it also aims to identify ways of improving the effectiveness of ICT in teaching EFL. The following research questions have been identified for this research

- How do teachers interact with ICT in relation to language learning?

Theoretical Framework of the Research

The new era is dominated by technology and computers in all fields. Various exciting applications and services are being provided by computer technology (Divaharan and Wong, 2003). The studies have also shown that technology is affecting the whole system of education in a very harmonious manner (Dennison et al., 1997).



Computer technology is affecting and changing the ways and content that teachers use to teach the children, which thereby change the method of learning and knowledge gaining by the children (Khezrlou, Ellis and Sadeghi, 2017). The computer-related learning offers many acronyms, which means that various applications, uses and facilities provided by computers are understood through these acronyms. One of the most important acronyms is ICT (Information and Communication Technology).

The term is used to refer to the process of including computers and technology in the process of education or learning (Ruiz-Madrid, 2005). ICT could also be considered as the umbrella term that covers the various communication devices used for the purpose of learning. These technological and communication devices included in ICT are mobile phones, computers, television, radio, network hardware and software, different applications and services associated with these devices, and satellite systems. Examples of the services could be video conference or online interaction with the teachers in distance learning system (Oster et al., 2006; Ruiz-Madrid, 2005).

The advent of the computer and advancement in technology has really taken the process of language learning to a new dimension. The role of computer technology in language learning is significant and essential for the teachers and children of this cyber age (Yunus and Suliman, 2014). There are various benefits of the computer technology, such as the supportive software and interactive programmes and application that can enhance the process of language learning. According to Bueno-Alastuey and López Pérez, (2014), the virtual platform facilitates the use of all different forms of ICT. The interactive processes and programs support the learning process because language learning through communication technology allows the learners to discover new dimensions, to explore and search new ideas and approaches to learning, and to respond to and receive feedback on their learning (Brett, 1996). In other words, it can be asserted that ICT provides a range of forms of interaction and technology-based learning environments (Yunus and Suliman, 2014).



Role of ICT in Early Childhood Education

In the field of ECE, there has been a very fierce debate about the role of technology in teaching and learning. The researchers, educators and parents have shown the concerns related to the detrimental effect of ICT in early childhood education. They are concerned about what negative effects ICT may have on preschool children (Laverick et al., 2008, Lynch and Warner, 2004). Some of the critical views towards the integration of ICT in preschools have stated that ICT in ECE will be an expensive and time-consuming tool and will take away the childhood of the children. This view comes from critics who believe that ICT could speed up the learning process, and according to some researchers, the focus on technology has taken away the traditional childhood experiences (e.g., Healy, 2004; Cordes and Miller, 2000). However, those in favour of technology believe that technology should be allowed because it can bring many new things to traditional learning approaches and the learning environment.

The critics and proponents of ICT have agreed that physical, social, linguistic, cognitive and emotional development of the children is very important. There has been much debate around understanding the needs of young children, how ICT can support those needs, and how it will encourage the developmental experiences. According to Plowman et al. (2010), there are three main categories of need that are mentioned in the literature; these are cognitive, wellbeing and socio-cultural needs of children. The cognitive concerns of the children are very high because the researchers are concerned that technology can have the negative impact on the cognitive development of children. The concerns about the physical harm are also high because children exposed to computer games for very long periods can become obsessed, and the lack of exercise can cause various physical problems (Plowman et al., 2010). However, it is also believed that technological activities can enhance the play activities and learning. The critics of technology are also concerned about the psychological effects of technology, which can result in increasing the chance of violence, sex crimes and gender stereotypes. The sociocultural concerns are also focused on



children's ability to take part in various social activities. However, a lack of social interaction can occur due to the digital age and children often use technology in isolation, which is also considered as detrimental to social development (Healy, 2004).

For the purpose of pedagogy, a numbers of attempts have been made to use ICT that can be classified in the various kinds of educational and learning practices, which can provide great benefit to the learners. ICT provides an entirely new learning environment for children and, therefore, requires specific skills of the teachers and children as well (Noor-Ul-Amin, 2013). ICT use is a great way of enhancing critical thinking skills, evaluation skills and researching skills. For the young learners, the process of learning and activities will be different in comparison to children from secondary or elementary levels (Noor-Ul-Amin, 2013). The integration of ICT through different attempts can be understood with examples like use of ICT in primary schools with the help of a tripartite classification of 'basic computer skills', which means development of the technical skills among the growing learners (Kennewell, Parkinson and Tanner, 2000).

Computers can be used with the information tools, which means they can be used to process and research information (Noor-Ul-Amin, 2013). Another significant use of computers is as a learning tool, where children can practice their knowledge and skills (Tondeur, Van Braak and Valcke, 2007). Newhouse and Clarkson (2008) classified justification for the use of ICT into 11 non-mutually exclusive purposes. These 11 classifications are associated with education in general and prove that ICT is appropriate for enhancing the learning and teaching experience in ECE. The study also suggests that even though ICT provides a virtual world, it also specifically investigates reality by collecting data and interpreting them. This process also facilitates problem-solving and generating new data. ICT has the great capability of building knowledge, as well as for transferring and receiving feedback on knowledge obtained (Tondeur et al., 2007).

Gaining and obtaining new knowledge can be a very important



process for learners and the active learning environment can be promoted by ICT that can authentically with the help of feedback from teachers and peers. The increased productivity can also be attained among the children with the processing speed of the technology. For the purpose of quality, the productivity of learning is very important, and ICT is very appropriate for supporting independent learning and a higher level of thinking. ICT also promotes collaboration and cooperation (Cross and Adam, 2007). ICT also has some of the specific intelligence tools that can be of great benefit for the learners who are physically disabled. It is found that these justifications can sometimes overlap according to Plowman et al. (2010), whose study focused on understanding the benefits of various intersections and overlaps. ICT can also help in developing the operational skills and allows to uses the existing knowledge of the world in various ways.

2.5.5 Use of Tablets in Education

In recent years, it has been found that children have increased the use of technology in homes and in schools (Endrizzi, 2012). Therefore, people believe that technology is the future of education (OECD, 2011). According to Livingstone (2012), technology has changed society from the top down, and mainly in terms of education. Google and many other search engines have flooded society with information. Teachers can also develop and enhance their educational skills through learning from Internet resources and can develop the skills of children through interactive smart boards (touchboards), laptops and Tablets. According to Serres (2012), the alarming technological shift in society is mainly due to the invention of writing as cautioned by Socrates.

However, some scholars fear the widespread use of technology in classrooms, as they believe that it will destroy the tradition interpersonal relations (Mouissset-Lacan, 2012). According to Dutta and Bilbao-Osorio (2012), the use of technology is considered as a good solution for improving children's education. Thibert (2012) asserts that young people are highly connected to the Internet, which can be beneficial for this age group. Technology offers limitless



opportunities in both formal and informal education (see Deschryver, 2010; Redecker and Punie, 2011). The techno-social changes have led to different ways to think about the digital divide; this is considered as the unequal access to the technology (Warschauer and Matuchniak, 2010). The technological imbalance is created due to the lack of technical skills in some, while others have good skills to effectively use emerging technologies. However, despite the many advantages of technology, it remains challenging to be introduced in the classrooms (Underwood and Dillon, 2011).

Literature has also found that there is a lack of pedagogical strategies that can influence the academic performance of children (Alluin, 2010; Thibert, 2012). A CEFRIO report (2011) states that use of technology by young people is mainly done for amusement, and not specifically for education or learning: The report also states that “*ICT is omnipresent in the lives of Quebec’s children, who use them continuously to amuse themselves, to contact their friends ...*” (p. 6). There have been many studies that have focused on the impact of technology on the lives of children and their academic performance (Livingstone, 2012), yet the importance of technology remains restricted to the technology that counts at the time, and not the complete system of technologies. Several studies agree with this stance (Fourgous, 2010; Paryono and Quito, 2010); these support the view that educators and teachers play significant roles in applying pedagogical integration of technologies.

According to the study of Thibert (2012), the impact of technologies should not be assessed on the outcomes but should be assessed on the basis of the learning environment in which the technologies are being used. The main issue in the current research is that realising the complete pedagogical potential of technologies for education is not clearly determined (Norris et al., 2012). According to Norris et al. (2012), it is important to realise the potential of the classroom teaching trends in three significant manners. The three ways of creating an interactive environment are promoting the use of smart boards, Tablets, and laptops. The studies have focused on these tools and assert that a combination of technology can be used in classrooms (Erstad and Arnseth, 2013; Türel and Johnson, 2012).

Elementary schools around the world have been invaded by Tablets in recent years; to date, no other previous invention has been that successful. According to Etherington (2013), over

10,000 children in Quebec use Tablets in their classrooms, and the number of children in the US using them exceeds 4.5 million. These examples explain the potential of technology in the education system, as it also motivates children towards learning (Underwood and Dillon, 2011). This device – the Tablet– has only been used in classrooms in recent years; therefore, there is a very limited body of literature present to explain the impact of Tablets in classrooms.

According to Johnson, Adams and Cummins (2012), Tablets are considered the most

The study of Profitt (2010) has also explained the potential benefits of Tablets. Tablets allow children to view the complete content of the school curricula (Profitt, 2010). The benefits and advantages of Tablets are only present in literature because of the lack of empirical evidence and findings, and the works of scholars are mainly based on the perceptions and ideological rhetoric. The gap in the literature and lack of sound empirical studies has been found despite the benefits of Tablets. This literature review provides the opportunity to understand some significant benefits of Tablets (Johnson et al., 2012); these are listed below:

- Tablets help in increasing motivation (Kinash, Brand and Mathew, 2012; Sachs and Bull, 2012);
- Tablets facilitate the sharing and management of, and access to, important information (Hahn and Bussell, 2012; Pamuk et al., 2013);
- Tablets foster the performance of learning of children (Churchill, Fox and King, 2012; Fernández-López, Rodríguez-Fórtiz, Rodríguez-Almendros and Martínez-Segura, 2013; Isabwe, 2012; Ostler and Topp, 2013);
- Tablets allow the application of a wider range of teaching

strategies (Fernández-López et al., 2013);

- Tablets also enable individualised learning (McClanahan, Williams, Kennedy and Tate, 2012);
- Tablets help in improving reading (Fernández-López et al., 2013; Zambarbieri and Carniglia, 2012);
- Tablets also help in encouraging and promoting collaboration among children, and also between teachers and children (Geist, 2011; Henderson and Yeow, 2012; Hutchison, Beschoner and Schmidt-Crawford, 2012);
- Tablets help in improving computer literacy skills (Karsenti and Fievez, 2013);
- Tablets are highly portable tools (Henderson and Yeow, 2012; Hill, Nuss, Middendorf, Cervero, and Gaines, 2012; Kinash, Brand, Mathew, and Kordyban, 2013);
- Tablet Improves the quality of pedagogical support (Murray and Olcese, 2011);
- tablet facilitates learning how to write (Murray and Olcese, 2011); The organisation of the school work and assignments become easy with Tablets (Churchill et al., 2012);
- Versatile presentations can be prepared by the children (Murray and Olcese, 2011);
- tablet can help the child to solve their learning problems (McClanahan et al., 2012).

Role of Teachers in using ICT for Teaching

The role of ICT has become significant in the process of language learning. Since teaching itself is an art, ICT can make this artistic process more significant. The teachers and educators have also acknowledged the changes taking place in the field of teaching. A shift has taken place in teaching methods from the traditional classroom teaching to more comprehensive and important teaching through technology. The main trend that has been found in the



literature states that the main attention is given to the curriculum subjects and teachers, in order to understand the proper function and role of ICT in the complex educational environment. One of the significant reasons is that teachers play an important role in enhancing the learning process for the children and they are also responsible for deciding what approach should be applied in the classrooms (Hattie, 2009). The teachers and educators experience many barriers to the successful integration of ICTs in the daily teaching approach. The literature has also focused on the significant concept of identifying the relationship between the beliefs, attitudes, personal values and competence of the teachers and their ability to integrate ICT into daily teaching. This is because teachers are considered as the key player in the education system (Mueller, Wood, Willoughby, Ross and Specht, 2008). The effective integration of the ICT tools in the language learning classrooms mainly depends on the skills of the host. The knowledge and skills of the teachers are also important for this integration. Teachers are the host, who can make the language learning process through ICT more influential and motivating. Zainal (2012) discussed the case study of four secondary school teachers who use ICT in teaching English as the second language. The study reports that “*use of technology is guided by the dynamic relationship between teachers’ technological, pedagogical and content knowledge*” (p. 234). It was found that the use of ICT by the teachers in schools for language learning is a very effective method of teaching. The study found many other benefits; for instance, the use of ICT enhanced the language learning awareness and language learning motivation among children.

Also, it has been found that there is a unique tendency in the literature to draw attention to technology, portraying it as the ‘new’ technology. Some of the evidence from the previous research has shown that it is very significant that teachers have positive experiences with ICT. The positive experience of the teachers with the subject, which they are looking forward to teaching in the class, is important for making use of the new technology (Mueller et al., 2008). Some of the evidence from the literature has shown that for

the successful assimilation of technology in the teaching and learning system, it is significant that the general pedagogical approach of the teachers must correspond with the specific characteristics of the technology (Zhao et al., 2002).

The common characteristic that is required for the successful projects is that the teacher finds a close connection between the curriculum and technology, and must accept that technology has an educational role, rather than being a technocentric approach. Some teachers may believe that use of ICT is just about the integration of technology in the educational or learning system; however, ICT has broader implications in the field of education. English language teachers may have various questions regarding the integration of ICT in the process; however, they must have clear knowledge and understanding of the process, so that they are able to support the learning abilities of the children (Yunus et al., 2010). The teacher may find the integration of ICT in the English language learning difficult for a number of reasons such as inadequate nature and delivery of the training to the teachers (Yunus et al., 2010).

This means that technology must be accepted to have the specific objective of the education, rather than considering the integration as merely a new approach, as it will be the end of technology if the teachers do not have the right approach towards the use of technology (Zhao et al., 2002). The findings of the previous studies have suggested that research should be focused on the important role of the teachers in integrating the new technology into the individual teaching environment and promoting the use of technology in children's learning (Hubbard, 2017).

The importance of the role of teachers has been not significantly discussed in the literature. However, teachers play the most important role in the whole process, as they are responsible for the delivery of the knowledge and skills to the children and also for increasing the competencies and learning abilities of the children. In the study of Hismanoglu (2012), the teachers who took part affirmed that they do not find themselves to be sufficiently competent for using ICT in the language learning classrooms. The results of the



study explain the lack of training among the teachers, which make them less confident about the delivery of the study material through ICT (Hismanoglu, 2012). Before the assimilation of ICT in the language learning classes, the teachers are required to be provided with in-depth knowledge and skills for the positive and effective delivery of language learning skills to the children. Sometimes the teachers may be stressed and overwhelmed by the use of ICT because of their limited awareness towards technology (Soussi, 2016). The only way to overcome this problem is to enhance the capabilities of the teacher and to develop a positive perception of the teachers towards the use of ICT in EFL classes.

The success of the project of integrating technology in education is also based on the fact that child desire to participate in new technology. Most of the teachers in EFL learning often complain about the children, who are very poor in speaking and communication skills. Such children find it difficult to communicate in English when they are asked to do so, as they become reluctant and simply do not dare to use English in the classroom (Levy, 2009). The evidence has shown that this reluctance of the children and lack of participation in second language learning is mainly due to the artificial environment of the class (O'Dowd, 2009). This is the reason why, when children are asked to communicate in English, they hesitate to communicate in the second language. For actual learning the children must be involved in the real situations and must be allowed to communicate about different situations so that the unnecessary fear of using English in the classroom can be easily eliminated (Levy, 2009).

The authentic and actual settings are required where the children can feel free to ask for the advice, can display their agreement or disagreement, can make decisions and can collaborate with their peers. The teachers can encourage the use of technology and computers by engaging and encouraging children to use technology for preparing an assignment, collecting research information, and other activities. Effective and efficient communication between the teachers and children is very important for seamless learning (Dörnyei, Henry and Muir, 2015). Thus, the teachers must promote



effective communication. Computers can be effectively used as the second language learning devices. Some of the other forms of technological equipment that are used in classrooms are VCR, tape recorders and CDs.

It is also significant that teachers must ensure they maintain the classroom learning environment and computers must not be turned into the centre of attention. Otherwise, this will distract the children from the main learning requirement. It has been found that in some circumstances, the computers can become the centre of attention, and this should be avoided (Moursund, 2007). Therefore, it has been found that more focused interventions in language learning through technology are required (Dörnyei et al., 2015). However, the approaches and strategies are required for preparing the more effective learning activities that can eliminate the computer as the centre of attention, and complete attention should be direct to the learning process. The language learning activities are to be designed creatively and innovatively so that children focus more on learning and less on the type of technology used in the classroom. ICT tools can make the classrooms more learner-centred and interactive, resulting in the successful knowledge transmission by the teachers.

The use of ICT and assimilating it into the language learning process can ensure the effective and successful learning experience. The teachers are also required to be aware of the ways through which learning can occur (Divaharan and Wong, 2003). According to the evidence presented in the work of Roschelle et al. (2000), technology has the potential to improve the teaching and learning processes. Through this process, children can learn with the help of active engagement and participation in the real-life situations (Roschelle et al., 2000). One important factor for the language educators is to understand the perception of the children. More research is required to prepare evidence-based studies that can include the perceptions and the needs of the children. This will help the educators and teachers to design more interactive activities through ICT in language learning classrooms.

Apart from knowing how the process of learning takes place among

children, teachers must also have good knowledge about the pedagogies through which children can learn the language and how this language learning can be enhanced with the help of ICT (Wilson, 2002). With the above evidence, it can be said that ICT can be very effective tool in enhancing the English language teaching and learning process and improving the experience of teachers and children, particularly in the case of EFL (Pedaste et al., 2015). The explosion of electronic devices has provided significant opportunities for teachers to select from the best available solutions that can suit the needs of the children and that can enhance their learning experience (Pang, 2016). The best available solutions can come from the empirical and evidence-based studies. EFL is a very important learning system all over the world. It is particularly important in the countries where English is used as the second language. The evidence about the children and learning interventions from such countries (like Saudi Arabia) can help the educators and teachers to design more comprehensive learning activities (Soussi, 2016).

When children interact with computers, they also develop their motor skills as the process of using the computers involves the physical actions that specifically also enhance their development. The children also learn to gain control over their actions. They have the control over their learning process, by deciding when the actions have to be taken or not. However, one main argument is refers to self-pacing skills of the children because all children cannot learn at the same speed. Therefore, innovation and creativity are required from the end of the teachers to develop the creative language learning activities that can suit the abilities of all the children (Pang, 2016). The language learning activities will require more support and guidance of the teachers or the facilitators, as it will help boost the confidence of children and enhance their learning experience.

According to the evidence found in the literature, when implementing ICT in teaching and learning English, it is important that ICT skills training should be provided. It is also important that teachers should be provided with enough time to attain the required computer skills, as the use of technology will affect the educational



performance of children (Samuel and Zitun, 2007). However, it has been found that, in many cases, required training is not provided; teachers are left to their own devices to figure out the process further. Such teachers have to get help from the online tutoring tools or the online practice community to attain the knowledge of technology before introducing it to their classrooms (Lave and Wenger, 1991). One advantage of this, though, is that these teachers create personal learning networks (PNLs) (Couros, 2008) and connect with other educators over the globe to share their problems with technology and to get solutions to the problem. PNLs can be beneficial in the development of skills and competencies among the teachers. Such teachers are more efficient in delivering and transmission of language learning knowledge among the children.

Personal learning networks (PLNs) are developed to enhance the idea of creating personal learning environment (PLE), which is created with the help of the various web tools that are owned and used by the learner. This is the way through which the process of learning is shifted from institution to the learner and the process of learning encompasses the production of content, and transfer of content (Downes, 2007). Since 2007, the focus of technology leaning has been shifted to PLNs, and most of the learning in this process is achieved through connecting to other people. A significant example of PLNs or the purpose of language teaching is aPLaNet project (www.aplanet-project.eu). This is an important project that helps teachers to form their own PLNs for their professional development.

According to Perkins (2002), the process of continuing professional development (CPD) is a kind of personal and excellent tool that displays the passion a teacher has for their profession. This is the way through which teachers can connect online with their colleagues and can be able to implement the technology in an effective manner. Through this process, the teachers are involved in the process of ICT training for themselves and their colleagues. The meaning of being part of the larger ICT network is that language teacher, who are using ICT can regularly stay updated with new information and can get updates about new classroom technologies. However, the

problem is that not all teachers have access to technology at their school, and this creates the situation of the digital divide (Pegrum, 2009). The teachers can overcome this problem of lack of technology by bringing their laptops to the schools or to the classrooms. One of the significant uses of ICT for helping children to learn a language through real-world situations outside the classrooms is called the process of tele-collaboration (Makaramani, 2015).

Research Methodology

This research aims mainly at identifying how the use of the Tablet affects Saudi preschool children's ability to learn EFL through teachers' delivery. Data for this research were obtained interviews with teachers. To complete any research, it is important to consider the role of the research questions to be able to provide guidance in the research process (Creswell, 2009). Bassey (1999: 67) defines research questions as "*the engine which drives the train of inquiry.*" Robinson and Lai (2006) also define these questions as the anchor for planning a research because they provide important clues on how to make research decisions. The questions identified for this research were formulated within the professional/personal contexts (Plowright, 2010); these are:

- How do teachers interact with ICT in relation to language learning?

The research question focuses on how teachers interact with ICT in order to supporting English language learning. The teachers may face unique challenges both in terms of their own skills as well as the skills and capabilities of the children. Knowing these challenges will help refine the implementation of ICT in early childhood education. This research question aims to signify the practical relevance of this research which is to help and contribute towards the development of an ICT integrated curriculum for Saudi preschool children.

Research methodology is driven by the research questions. The nature of research questions, as well as the author's perception of the data and their availability, also affects the choice of research



methods (Saunders et al., 2015). This research is looking at the experiences of the teachers and children in using a tablet for learning and teaching EFL. The experiences of the teachers are useful in understanding the possible challenges that may need to be overcome in order to successfully implement a Tablet-based curriculum in Saudi preschool education. Qualitative investigation was used to obtain in-depth insight into the perspectives of the teachers who can provide insights into their perceptions of how tablet use may be affecting children's language skills.

The researcher employed the quantitative approaches to measure the levels of engagement, and the qualitative approach to gain a deeper insight into what is observed so as to explore the similarities in the data collected. This enabled the researcher to delve further into a dataset to understand the nature of this research and to use one method to verify findings from the other method (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Furthermore, one of the weaknesses of qualitative research is the ability for the results to be easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases. The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to understand how to effectively use ICT for learning EFL. Semi-structured interviews were used to understand how teachers interact with Tablets; what challenges teachers face in using the tablet to teach EFL; and how a tablet can be integrated into the curriculum to make it more effective. Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews with the teachers.

A research design is the set of methods and procedures used in collecting and analysing measures of the variables specified in the research problem. There are three kinds of research designs: case study, experiments and surveys. The present research adopted a case study approach. Yin (1984, cited in Patton and Appelbaum, 2003:60) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that explores and investigates *"a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used."*



The setting of the research was ‘*Here to Grow*’, a private school located in the central urban part of Al Riyadh. The school uses a combination of American Curriculum and Arabic National Curriculum. The data collection methods used in this research was the interview.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews with the teachers:

EFL teachers were interviewed in order to learn about:

How teachers teach, and what the issues are that they face in teaching EFL to such young children.

Several suggestions made by the teachers were used to plan adequately for ICT intervention. For example, teachers suggested that instead of giving one tablet to each child it was better to arrange them in groups of three and give one tablet to each group. Another set of interviews was conducted with EFL teachers to learn about their experiences, challenges they faced, and the suggestions that they have for integrating ICT in preschool education.

Access and Sampling

The participants included teachers teaching EFL to preschool children at ‘*Here to Grow*’, a private school located in the central urban part of Al Riyadh. The school management was contacted, and their permission was obtained. After obtaining management’s permission, the permission of the teachers who were likely to participate were contacted, and their consent was obtained. None of the teachers or parents objected. With regards to sampling, it is important to mention here that, according to Saudi law, the workforce in kindergartens was composed of female teachers only; therefore, men were not allowed to access school due to cultural differences. Therefore, the sample comprised female teachers only.

Ethics

Ethical considerations relevant to the present research are centred on the following ethical issues: (1) the use of human participants in the study; (2) privacy for the participants and the confidentiality of the



information that they have provided; (3) data protection; (4) the requirement for informed consent of the participants; and (5) vulnerable populations.

Data Analysis

The first and foremost step in the analysis of interview data was the preparation of the data for analysis. Interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data. However, since not all respondents were fluent in English (even though they are English teachers), the interviews were conducted in Arabic. All of the respondents spoke fluent Arabic, as all of them are native Arabic speakers. A content translation — like faithful translation — produces the precise contextual meaning of the original discourse within the text and the constraints of the text's grammatical structures (Flick, 2007). However, this method is not suitable for this research since the Saudi dialect is substantially different from that of the Formal Arabic language (Farghal and Shunnaq, 1992). Another is the recognised translation method; in this method the translator normally uses the formal and generally accepted translation of any institutional term (Gruber, 1993). This method was considered; however, eliciting various perceptions from different interviews may prove tedious and requires huge time and effort.

Finally, the researcher instructed the translator to combine both idiomatic translations (Gruber, 1993) that normally reproduce the concept of the original. However, this method tends to omit noises or meaningless words (Mossop, 1990) by preferring colloquialisms and idioms where these noises or meaningless words are extracted from the original word. Communicative translation is a type of translation of the exact contextual meaning of the original (Gruber, 1993) such that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the audience (Jianzhong, 1998). Furthermore, the researcher discussed the research objectives and methodologies with the translator in order for the translator to produce a near cultural equivalent to the concepts and constructs of preschool children's learning.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. In the current study, specific questions were developed. The analysis was based on the questions set for the interviews. Therefore, codes were established based on the variables explained in the conceptual framework section at the end of the literature review. Consequently, the coding followed two procedures. The first was prior coding, where the categories were based on what has been obtained in the previous study. Second, open coding was used for the purpose of defining the new categories that arose during the examination of the data. As a result, it has created two new categories called the *teacher's role* and *ICT utilisation*.

Interview Analysis

Interviews were conducted with teachers teaching EFL in order to learn about their experiences as well as learn about what possible changes can be made to make use of the tablet in teaching EFL more effectively.

Impact of use of Tablet on Metacognitive Competencies of Children: First, teachers were asked how ICT affected the Metacognitive capabilities of the children.

Communication: The first and foremost Metacognitive skill that teachers discussed was communication. One of the teachers commented,

“Before we gave them the tablet I was always struggling to keep them quiet. They were always chatting, laughing and telling each other things. Then with Tablet, I saw them all so busy and occupied with their Tablet. They wouldn't talk. It kind of felt boring.” Similarly, another teacher noted:

“Before the Tablet, they wouldn't pay attention to me and not look at me unless I told them. Honestly, I liked that because you want the kids to play up a bit. But with Tablets, they were like all by themselves. No eye contact with their friends. It's kind of weird but that is what you expect. It is so absorbing for the kids.”

Recalling her experience, a third teacher commented:

“It was kind of good as most children seemed focused and busy. They understood the need to study and be instructed. I think this allowed them to have more controlled communication.”

The problem with this view is that children learn a great deal through casual interaction with their friends. Communication between children is critical because they learn a lot by interacting with their peers and the environment. At the same time focusing on lessons is quite critical too. It seems that children go from one extreme (of not focusing on instructions and communicating too much) to another (too absorbed with the task and not communicating at all).

One of the teachers commented,

“It is very much like our lives. Look at us. I talk to my friends and family members through social media, Facebook, Twitter and all. But I don’t find time to call them or meet them. I think these children will begin to grow into the same if we give them Tablets and access to the world out there.”

Indeed, with the use of technology the communication has transcended boundaries, become global but also digitalised to the extent that people have started to rely too much on digital communication. This was also evident in the children’s behaviour as they seemed to pay more attention to the Tablets than communicating with their friends.

One of the teachers in group B noted:

“There was little interaction among children. They were very quiet. If we would have divided children into groups and given one tablet to every group then probably the level of interaction would have been different.” Another teacher noted:

“I think what we need to do is design the exercise so that it requires children to communicate.”

One of the suggestions given to improve interaction and communication in Tablet-integrated education systems was to

design game-based exercises in which children are required to both use their devices as well as communicate with each other.

Self-development: The next Metacognitive competency discussed in the interviews was selfdevelopment. Teachers agreed that use of Tablets made the children more independent and consequently more in control of their development. For example, one of the teachers commented:

“I gave Tablets to the children and I noticed many of them were searching for things that they were interested in. These were not what I asked them to do, but once they got the hang of it, they were doing things on their own. This is self-development, isn't it?”

Other teachers also noticed that most of the children were using Tablets to pursue their own interests and this is something that they had noticed before. For example, one of the teachers commented:

“You remember that liger episode right? I remember when I asked them in the class before to write one paragraph on their favourite animal he wrote about the giraffe. But when he had the tablet he found liger. I asked him, and he told me that his favourite is actually both tiger and lion, but he wrote about giraffe because he found it easy.”

This episode indicates that using ICT may make children more self-dependent and it may aid their overall development because they are free to explore and learn about things that they are interested in. Another teacher commented,

“with ICT there is no limit to what the children can learn. It's endless. They can move from one thing to another getting as much information as they want. I have seen children learning things beyond what I have taught them in class.”

Language is very contextualised — different words may convey different meanings in different sentences and different contexts, and use of multimedia apps can help the children learn not only the language but also the contextualisation of how language can be used.

One teacher for Group B noted that

“I am not sure if the use of Tablets will lead to self-development. See, if you think the ability to use gadgets such as tablet is self-development then, of course, using Tablets will improve this. But if you think as self-development in general then I do not think tablet is a good idea. It makes people isolated, and gradually children tend to become introverts. Self-development is about confidence, ability to identify weaknesses and improve them selves.”

It is indeed one of the pressing issues of modern digitalised society where individuals tend to get confused between the digital world and the real world. Often people spend more time with their online friends as compared to their real-life friends. The strong overlap between digital and real worlds is indeed detrimental to the self-development of individuals. However, the researcher wanted to know if this means that we should keep children away from gadgets and not tell them the realities of the world they are going to live in. The respondent commented,

“I am not saying that. What I am saying use these just as one part of the curriculum. Not rely on it too much. Teach the children the need to have a balance in life. That for me is selfdevelopment when children know how to use technology to achieve things which will make their real life better.”

Use of Tablets did lead to better concentration and focus, but it also led to a threat of isolation. Children need to be taught how to utilise technology to achieve their objectives. In other words, when using Tablets for teaching EFL, the focus should be on learning EFL and not on using technology.

Creativity: Creativity is a critical thing for literature competency because children will have to develop the capability of using the words learnt in different sentences. Teachers agreed that the use of the tablet significantly improved the creative ability of children. One teacher from Group A commented:

“I think the children have become very creative after use of Tablet. Now they are learning how to make up words. Two children now

have learnt using verbs and his happened unconsciously. I believe that we learn language subconsciously and use of tablet based apps was useful.”

According to the respondents, tablet apps expose the child to creative and multiple ways of constructing their knowledge of the language and, thus, the tablet can be useful in improving creativity among children.

Most of the teachers noted that children were exploring new things using different apps on the Tablets. Some arts and crafts apps were deliberately installed on the Tablet. Many children who opened those apps worked on them. One of the teachers recollected watching a group of three to four children trying to listen to rhymes on the English language app and singing along with them. However, they did not notice any role play or imaginative play which could be because the children were quite young and did not know the full potential of the app.

According to one of the teachers,

“The tablet is useful because not only do the children learn English by using EFL apps but also by trying. To use most of the apps they need to know the English language. In order to use these apps, children tend to use their creativity and imagination to make up words. Like need is the mother of all inventions you will see that children tend to be creative in English in order to use Tablets.”

Another teacher commented,

“I think the tablet does help the children in being creative. I have noticed some children trying to join and make up words. It was interesting because they could do so of their own free will without me telling them. But this happened only two-three times, so I am not sure if other children learnt the same.”

Thus, the respondents, more or less, agreed that the tablet does help the children in being creative. They learn to construct language to meet their needs.

Problem-solving: In the interviews prior to the Tablet, most respondents agreed that problem-solving is one key Metacognitive competency that needs to be enhanced to boost the overall learning of the children. The respondents suggested that the problem-solving skills of the children did not show any marked improvement after use of the Tablet. As one of the respondents commented,

“there was no great improvement. I mean one or two children showed some improvement, but then it could be because we were teaching them and pushing them to learn those things”. Children did not show significant improvement in exercises involving matching spelling with images, or the pronunciation of words, etc. However, one of the teachers commented,

“Children were very interested and committed. When I gave them a task to do they were like trying to finish it first and show it to me. It was like they wanted to beat everyone. In class I have seen children, they generally tend to sit back, and I have to go to them to see if they have answered the question. But in this case, they were coming to me. The problem was that they were making a lot of mistakes.”

Other respondents also noticed a similar change in the behaviour of children. Most of the respondents noticed that while children were more interested in solving problems but the rate of errors went up. One respondent commented

“the time taken to come up with answers indeed went down, but there were quite a few mistakes. I think they were trying to rush through. I’m not sure why.”

Autonomy: All of the teachers agreed that use of Tablets improved the autonomy among children. According to one of the teachers,

“in the first two lessons I had to explain to the children what to do but by the third lesson they were all trying on their own.” Another teacher commented,

“the interesting thing was that when they did not understand anything I said they were asking their friends instead of asking me. I was really glad to see them working with their friends. Normally when they talk in class, it is only causing a disturbance”, and,

“it was really good to see the children being that energetic and interested in learning. They were all excited in the class. I saw them quite focused on doing what they were asked to do.”

Autonomy was indeed improved as children were seen to be interested in not only doing what they were asked to do but also even more in addition to that. This was observed by the researcher and also noticed by the teachers; as one of the teachers said,

“Children did not seem to be looking for the session to end. I mean even until the end they were seen working on Tablets. Normally you will see that children tend to look very tired and uninterested by the end of the lecture. But with the Tablets, they did not seem to notice that the session is coming to an end.”

Impact of use of Tablet on Core Competencies of Children

Respondents noticed that the task competency improved as a result of the use of Tablets. One of the respondents commented:

“Before I used to go to each and every child and used to help them in understanding what needs to be done. But with Tablets, I saw most of the children would complete what I asked them to do, and they would come to me. So they were able to complete the task given. It does not mean that what they did was right, but they were able to understand what they were asked to do.”

Other respondents also suggested noticing an improvement in children’s ability to complete the task given to them, albeit incorrectly.

In terms of process efficiency, the respondents believed that some of the children had indeed improved, but the improvement may not be measurable. As one of the teachers commented,

“I noticed some children had significantly improved. They could not understand what needs to be done. But not when we give them complex tasks. But these are young children, so it is expected.”

Other teachers also seemed unsure of whether they could conclusively say whether the use of the tablet improved the process competency of children.

Finally, the teachers talked about personal competencies of children. According to the teachers, skills such as the ability to take the initiative and staying focused and disciplined within the class seemed to improve significantly as a result of the use of the Tablet. However, at the same time, personal competencies such as team working seemed to somewhat diminish as the level of communication and interaction went down.

Impact of use of Tablet on Language Competencies of Children

Respondents noticed a marked improvement in the speaking ability of children. One teacher commented:

“I saw more confidence in children about speaking English words. Many children who were shy earlier were more confident to speak English words.”

According to the teachers, writing skills did not improve as a result of the use of Tablets. This could be because most tablet use did not involve any form of writing except writing of words. This was noted by one of the respondents who commented that

“I did not ask them to write anything on the Tablet. It was mainly reading, listening and speaking. These are very young children, so we do not ask them to write a lot. Also in writing, we focus on aspects such as handwriting, spellings, etc. These are not related to tablet use.”

In terms of reading, the views were mixed, with most teachers suggesting that ability to read improved with the use of Tablets. One of the teachers commented,

“I think the children’s ability to read definitely improved. Even in the class, I have seen children trying to read out what’s written on the screen. Their pronunciation has definitely improved, and they are far more comfortable in reading out the whole sentences.”

Another said,

“Children are now making fewer mistakes in reading out sentences. Improvement is quite noticeable from before tablet use to after tablet use.”

Issues faced in using Tablets for Teaching EFL

Respondents identified several different issues in using Tablets for teaching EFL. Firstly, a couple of teachers talked about the discrepancy in the knowledge of children regarding tablet use. One said,

“I noticed that some children were far more comfortable using Tablets probably because they use Tablets at home. On the other hand, some other children were not at all comfortable initially. I think if we have to use Tablets for EFL then we must first teach the children how to use Tablets so that this difference in their level of knowledge will not affect their ability to learn EFL.”

Other teachers, when asked, also agreed that some children were more confident in using tablet than other and that it might affect their ability to learn EFL through Tablet.

Another issue that the respondents raised was teachers’ own ability to teach using EFL. One of the teachers stated:

“I was not given any training on how to use Tablets for teaching English. If someone would train me on using the tablet for teaching English I am sure I will be able to make the best use of it and so would my children.”

Another teacher expressed a similar opinion:

“I didn’t know what to do with the Tablet. I mean I could not plan much apart from what we discussed such as using those apps for teaching English. I know we can do a lot more, but it needs to be planned.”

Thus, it would be useful to have an organised way of integrating the use of Tablets into the curriculum and instructing teachers on how to maximise the impact of Tablets on children’s learning of EFL.

One of the teachers also suggested that teachers need to be more involved and engaged in not only designing courses but also in deciding the content. They will then have greater flexibility and control in effectively utilising ICT tools such as Tablets for teaching EFL. As one of the teachers noted:

“Who is using the Tablet? It is used by the teachers and the children. Every teacher has a different teaching style, and technique and every child is somehow different from each other. If you do not give teacher any flexibility in using Tablets to teach then, it will be difficult for the teacher.”

This indicates that teachers need to be more involved in the whole process including deciding how to best utilise ICT tools such as Tablets for teaching children.

Improving Effectiveness of using Tablets for Teaching EFL

Teachers provided several suggestions regarding improving the effectiveness of Tablets in teaching EFL. The first one was regarding the involvement of teachers in deciding how to use ICT tools such as Tablets for teaching EFL. Regarding training, one of the teachers recommended,

“there should be the thorough training of teachers in how to best use Tablets for teaching. I mean I know how to use a Tablet, but I know that my children do not know that. So how do I handle his gap? How do I ensure that my children are utilising this?”

She further explained

“I think there should be an additional subject for children where they are taught how to use tablet or tables. This will be useful not only for EFL but for learning other subjects as well. If we are producing next-generation children, then we must equip them with knowledge of tools like this from an early age.”

Thus, the respondents indicated that there should be a broader plan for integrating ICT in early childhood education to equip the children with skills that they will need in future. In other words, the focus should not only be on instructing children but on guiding children to develop independent learning skills as proposed under the constructivist model of teaching.

One of the teachers commented that adequately designing courses is critical for effectiveness of Tablets;

“I think we should design curriculum with Tablets. For example, we

should have exercises which provide complete development of children. I mean help them learn how to communicate, how to share information with friends and how to learn from their team members.”

Thus, the respondent suggested a systematic integration of ICT into the curriculum so as to eliminate the gaps left by traditional models of classroom teaching.

Another teacher suggested that course designs should be improved. She commented,

“The tablet is quite useful because it gives us flexibility. I think what we should do is develop apps to teach our children in a manner which is most suitable for them. Use common Arabic names and words along with English to help them understand the content. As I mentioned before, just bringing curriculum and books from Cambridge will not help. Apps are very useful because we can easily develop apps which make it easy for Saudi children to understand and learn English.”

Another teacher had a similar suggestion:

“I think we should have more multimedia content as compared to books. I think the tablet is very useful because it gives multimedia content. Plus it makes children very interested in the lesson.”

Discussion

Teaching Skills and Children’s Interaction

The research found that teaching practice used by the teachers should be planned and emergent in order to support the child-led interest, enhance learning opportunities for the children, and foster an effective learning environment with the use of technology. The potential of the learning capacity and teaching through Tablets was more enhanced when the teachers have a clear and effective pedagogical framework and strategies to use it effectively in the learning environment. Teachers have identified various challenges that were hampering the process of teaching English as the second language. One of the key challenges was that lack of adequate



teaching material. With the appropriate teaching material and effective activities, it was found that Tablets can be seamlessly embedded into EFL learning and can enhance the whole process of teaching and learning for the teachers as well as for the children (Dhir, Gahwaji and Nyman, 2013). The teachers are more important in the process of teaching and providing the effective learning environment. Therefore, the teachers are required to have the accurate knowledge about the use of Tablets in the EFL. The lack of core competencies among the teachers and the lack of appropriate teaching strategies can restrict the process of English teaching and learning. Therefore, the research also explains the significance of technology in education and more specifically in the process of learning English as foreign language.

The research focused on identifying the importance of the use of ICT in EFL. With the changes in the society and delivery of education, the methods of teaching and learning have also changed. Technology has become an important element in the process of teaching and learning. Use of ICT has increased in the recent years and scholars are having a debate over the efficacy and significance of using ICT in for EFL learning. ICT tools are being utilised in the promotion and teaching English to young children (Dhir et al., 2013). According to the developmental stage, the phase of learning the communicative language of the preschool children is influenced by the various internal and external factors. The real-life situations and environment can provide a boost to the language learning process (Verenikina and Kervin, 2011).

The role and delivery of education attracts great debates among scholars because of the changing technology, access to information and transformation in the teaching and learning approaches. ICT education has now been accepted globally, because the organisations and educational institutions have acknowledged the importance of technology in education (Chowcat et al., 2008). The last decades have also witnessed the development of the new pedagogies related to use of technology in education. However, the system of technology based education among the preschool children is still emerging. The focus and attitudes of teachers are also changing



towards the use of technology and technological tools in the education system (Chowcat et al., 2008).

The research also found that teachers have acknowledged the importance of the Metacognitive competencies for the process of language learning among early learners. Metacognition is associated with the developing of self-awareness and self-development in the process of learning. The process of skill development is important in order for learning to take place. The development of learning skills will enhance the process of lifelong learning among the young learners. The non-human material or the tools, such as the technological tools, are connected with the humans; therefore, children and teachers are required to work together in the pedagogical environment to help children develop their competencies

Therefore, the research also includes the Social Constructivism Theory proposed by

Vygotsky (1978) that reflects the social aspects of learning. The 'Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory states the importance of the social interaction for learning. But, the most important part of learning is the teaching capability of the teachers. The teacher is the most significant person to enhance social interaction and learning. According to the data obtained from the research, the teachers found that it is easy to develop the core competencies in comparison to the development of personal competencies of learning. The core competencies are associated with type of subjects taught, and the interview of the teachers explained that every teacher uses different teaching methods for problem-solving.

The interviews with the teachers explained the current challenges they were facing in teaching English as a foreign language to the children in the Saudi Arabian preschool. The respondents explained that they had faced a few challenges in teaching EFL. The first problem is the language problem, as teachers have to use the Arabic language to explain some words when children are unable to understand them. Teachers find it difficult to teach English in the particular way they have to. These challenges faced by the teachers



have also been acknowledged by the literature. According to Mueller et al. (2008) the attitude and competency of the teachers is very significant for teaching EFL in preschools.

Technologies can also be considered as portable networked smart technologies, through which the teachers and educators are looking for the potential applications or influence that such technologies might be involved in the learning process of children. Therefore, the interviews with the teachers suggested that they also require some kind of specific direction with the use of technology. Teachers for preschool teaching are selected on behalf of their English knowledge, even if they do not have any kind of certification. Teachers in Saudi Arabia do not even receive specific English training for teaching children in preschools (Alghamdi, 2016). Although, according to the evidence, the English teachers are in very great demand in Saudi Arabia, the studies have identified that national certification is very important to equip the teachers for teaching preschool children using the developmentally appropriate practices (Alghamdi, 2016).

Research has also considered ICT as new and very powerful cultural and social tools that are valuable in creating and shaping the learning environment for young children. Therefore, it is said that young children in the current time can easily master the use of ICT tools. Therefore, the teachers in the preschool need more training for teaching English as a foreign language. The important aspect of teacher training that has found from the literature review is that it is extremely important for the success of the learning approach. The training will also help the teachers to closely connect with the curriculum and the use of Tablets (Yunus et al., 2010). The acceptance of technology among teachers is very positive. If the teachers have a sound understanding of the technology and are able to understand its benefits, then they will in a better position to use positive approaches in teaching. Teachers' training is also important so that they can understand that use of technology is not just to integrate the technological approach to teaching, but it is to make them understand that this technological approach is key for helping children to develop their Metacognitive competencies and to enable



them to learn English in a more effective and easy manner (Flewitt, Messer and Kucirkova, 2015).

The evidence in the literature has shown that some of the teachers do not have a very positive attitude towards the use of technology or ICT in EFL. However, the evidence has also shown that incorporation of the technology in the early childhood education is important. Training of the teachers is also very important because the teachers might have various questions regarding the appropriate use and integration of technology in the education of or teaching English to young children. The clear understanding and knowledge of the teachers will ensure proper teaching and the use of proper teaching strategies. For the development of the Metacognitive competencies of the children, the teachers must be well prepared and enthusiastic about the process. The findings of the research suggest that teachers interviewed considered that more training is required for the preschool teachers because they deal with young children who do not have any idea about English and who are just like blank books. Therefore, more efforts of the teacher and knowledge of the teachers will help children to enhance their personal skills and develop them into effective learners. The problem which the teachers are facing is that they do not know how train the young minds to be effective and competent learners. Yunus et al. (2010) also acknowledged the same concept and asserted that teachers can develop more learning abilities in children if they are well trained and equipped with appropriate knowledge. They research also found the same problem as discussed in the data analysis of this research; teachers are facing a lack of adequate training, appropriate delivery of training, and lack of resources.

The findings of the research suggest that teachers are concerned about the quality of teaching. They have recognised the importance of the quality of delivery of the curriculum. The teachers support the view that teaching content should be followed and designed according to the teachers because it is they who are best positioned to identify the skills and capabilities of the child; they spend most of their time with the children, which make them capable of understanding the learning needs of young children. Findings from



the interviews with the teachers suggest that teachers are keen to adopt their own ways of teaching. They acknowledge the importance of the books, but believe they should be free to teach the curriculum in the way they want to. There should be an objective of developing the capabilities among the children, and that should be achieved through the quality of the delivered content not the quantity.

The same findings are also reported in the literature. According to Zhao et al. (2002), the use and acceptance of the technology must be done according to a specific objective of delivering quality education, rather than considering it as a new educational approach. Also, according to Rahimi and Yadollahi (2011), ICT use in the English classes must be done by the teachers with a specific approach and objectives. Therefore, the importance of the role of the teachers must be understood for teaching EFL to young preschool children; teachers should be at the heart of the new approach to integrate technology in the educational and learning environment and to promote the further use of technology in EFL. Another important fact that has been recognised through the findings is that giving the right to the teachers to teach young children according to the teachers' choice, can be a useful suggestion, but this suggestion could not be practically applied because every individual has their own capabilities and style of teaching. The level of understanding and knowledge of the teachers will be different, which can result in discrepancy related to the type and level of knowledge given to the children. According to Al-Mogbel (2014), for the quality of education, the capability of the institutions to design the policies for accomplishing the task is also significant.

The accurate and flexible policies and procedures must be designed for the development of the innovative and creative learners. Such learners will be able to keep pace with the advancement and changes in the current educational system. As stated by Hussein (2005), this is very important for the quality assurance in the education system. It is also important that teachers and preschools accept the concept of quality education and achieve it through informed interaction among the teachers and positive experience of the teachers. For the success of the educational approach, it is important that delivery of

the knowledge should be similar for all the children. The teachers can have the flexibility of using the content, but content delivery should be similar in all the classes, so as to avoid any kind of knowledgebased discrepancy (Hussein, 2005). Therefore, this demands the development of a formalised system of education delivery, which will allow the teachers to use equal approaches, so that an equal quality of knowledge will be received by the learners.

The findings of the research suggest that use of Tablets can be very effective for teaching English. The teachers of the Saudi Arabian preschool have also reported that Tablets could be effective ICT tools for young children. Most of the teachers also agreed over the efficacy of integration of Tablets in EFL learning for young children; they believed that Tablets have the capability of increasing the language proficiency among the young children and can also enhance their engagement with the learning complete process.

The interviews with the teachers were conducted to understand their experience and perceptions, and how they feel they can contribute to making changes in the tablet learning process. Teachers agreed that ICT negatively affected the communication skills of the children. The teachers suggest that instead of the individual use of the Tablets, group use is more effective in increasing the communication and interaction among children. The self-development as noticed by the teachers was mainly individualised, as the children use Tablets according to their interest. This is because children use their knowledge according to the elevel of complexity and adapt what is easier for them. The evidence from the literature has shown that technology can isolate the children and can impact them negatively (Macaruso and Rodman, 2011). The same was found in the interviews, where the teachers observed that use of Tablets could isolate the child and restrict the process of self-development. Although the use of ICT can enhance concentration and focus, it also increases the threat of isolation.

Findings of the Research

The main research question focused on finding out — How do Saudi preschool teachers interact with ICT in relation to language



learning? Several issues have been found in using Tablets for EFL learning. The first challenge was the knowledge of the children related to the use of Tablets. Not every child was comfortable in using Tablets; while some children were comfortable in using it. Another challenge in using Tablets is associated with the skills and competency of the teachers. The teachers were not provided with any kind of the formal training before using Tablets. Teachers did not have the planned approach for the integration of Tablets in the class except some knowledge about a few educational applications. The lack of training for teachers is a very significant challenge for the success of the project. Lack of a planned approach and course material also challenged the use of Tablets in language learning. The different teaching styles and techniques used by the teachers for teaching EFL was also another factor which made the process more challenging (Inan and Lowther, 2010). Lack of flexibility in using Tablets restricts the proper integration of the ICT tool. The lack of training and lack of planned approach was determined in the teachers' practice. The lack of course material and support from the experts restricted the teachers from teaching new things to children.

For the integration of Tablets for teaching EFL in Saudi Arabian preschools, it is very important to acknowledge the importance of the role of teachers in the process. Teachers are the most important source for enhancing the teaching and learning process, so it is vital that they have the correct training. Therefore, before integration of Tablets in the classrooms, teachers must be provided with in-depth training (Laevers and Heylen, 2003). Teachers must know how to use Tablets and how to handle various educational and learning applications. For the use of Tablets, there should be the integration of a different subject that mainly focuses on providing information to children about the use of Tablets.

The teachers also expressed concerns about the unrestricted use of the Tablets as, with little involvement of the teachers, the children were free to use Tablets according to their interest. There was no appropriate planning about the lessons and exercises that could be used to engage children in the learning process, and autonomous learning of the children was unrestricted. The lack of effective



curriculum and knowledge about the new emerging pedagogical approaches restricted the teachers from motivating and empowering children. Teachers were not well equipped to use Tablets in a learning process that in turn restricted them from developing effective exercises and lessons for the children.

Equipping teachers and children with the necessary skills to use Tablets is very important for successful development of independent learning. Self-development of the children is also not clear with the use of Tablets. Therefore, it is important that there should be limitations and supervision to avoid problems of isolation and to enhance positive self-development. Another aspect that should be considered concerning the integration of Tablets in Saudi Arabian preschools for teaching EFL is to make improvements in the course material. Most of the interview respondents have considered that course material is not very interesting and it is different from what is taught in the class. Therefore, curriculum design for the use of Tablets should be enhanced.

Recommendations

One of the important recommendations of the research is to identify and address the problems faced by the teachers in preschools. The preschool children are very young to understand the learning process; therefore, more responsibility lies with the teachers to make the process of teaching and learning EFL effective. The problems faced by the teachers are found to be difficult for the integration of ICT in EFL learning as they lack the appropriate training and resources. Therefore, the process of integration of Tablets must first focus on empowering teachers with proper Tablet-using skills, training courses in English, training in using technology, and training for designing language-enhancing exercises and activities using Tablets. An interesting suggestion made by the teachers is their involvement in designing the course material. Another recommendation made by the respondents is to include a course related to learning the use of Tablets for the children so that every child is able to effectively use the tablet before starting EFL learning.



Suggestions for Further Research

The researcher suggests that there is scope for further investigation related to the type of learning and teaching material that can be used on Tablets. The research also provides the scope for the integration of more preschools in future work, and finding a larger data pool for analysis. Another suggestion for future research is to focus on enhancement of the writing skills of the children. This research does not provide significant information about the writing skill improvement in children with the use of Tablets; therefore, future research can focus on assessing whether there are improvements in the writing skills of children and types of writing activities on Tablets for EFL learning. It is important that the theoretical framework prepared for future work must combine the teachers, parents, children and system characteristics in a multilevel framework. The involvement of the parents and system characteristics can enhance the quality of the results and provide better practical implications.

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