

A Conceptual Paper of Personal and Cultural Factors in Improving English Language Proficiency Among Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT:

This paper presents a comprehensive framework aimed at addressing the personal and cultural factors affecting English language proficiency among Saudi Arabian undergraduates. Recognizing the significant role of English in achieving Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, the framework integrates key components such as fear of making mistakes, self-confidence, anxiety, motivation, attitude towards learning, and cultural and social barriers. By synthesizing recent literature and empirical studies, the framework offers a holistic approach to understanding the multifaceted challenges faced by EFL learners in Saudi Arabia. The proposed framework has profound implications for theory, practice, and policy. Theoretically, it enriches the understanding of language acquisition by incorporating socio-cultural and affective dimensions often overlooked in traditional models. Practically, it provides actionable insights for educators and curriculum developers to design more effective and supportive learning environments. For policymakers, the framework underscores the need for systemic changes in the educational landscape to foster English language proficiency. Validation of the framework through empirical testing and expert reviews is essential, and the paper discusses potential methods for this. It also identifies limitations and challenges in applying the framework, such as individual variability among students and resistance to change in teaching practices. The conclusion highlights the framework's contributions and suggests directions for future research, including empirical validation, adaptation to different cultural contexts, and the integration of technology in language learning. This framework offers a robust foundation for improving English language proficiency among Saudi Arabian undergraduates, aligning with the broader educational and economic goals of Vision 2030.

Keywords: English Language Proficiency, Personal Factors, Cultural Factors, Saudi Arabian Education, FL Learners

INTRODUCTION

In the process of learning a new language like English, either as a second (ESL) or foreign language (EFL), learners often find mastering speaking skills most challenging (Alqahtani, 2021). Nevertheless, speaking well is a crucial component of language learning and plays a significant role in achieving proficiency in the English language (Khan, 2022). Alrabai (2023) stated that those learning English believed that their proficiency in the language is determined by their ability to communicate with others. This view is corroborated by Ahmad (2022), who posited that a learner's ability to speak in English well allows them to attain their personal goals and academic objectives and engage in active discussion with peers and teachers. On the other hand, Al-Qahtani and Al-Saleh (2022) posited that Saudi Arabian students are still challenged when learning to communicate and speak in English. Mohammed and Shamsan (2022) also asserted that Saudi Arabian students' cultural upbringing could cause them to feel uncomfortable using the language communicatively due to fear of being ridiculed.

According to Alrasheedi (2023), such emotions could be attributed to the student's lack of exposure to the language used in social contexts. Moreover, as Arabic is their first language, they do not have the opportunity to use the language in a natural context, which would have enabled them to improve their language proficiency. As these students are insufficiently exposed to English outside the academic environment, the lack of exposure also restricts their opportunity to use the language to communicate orally and narratively with

those around them. However, the younger generation of Saudi Arabia has no choice but to equip themselves with good language skills, especially after the launch of Saudi Vision 2030 in 2016. The vision aims to reform the nation and sees the new generation as the catalyst for change. Therefore, the government promised the youth access to world-class education and training to ensure the future workforce has key skills to boost the economic sector.

The English language's prominent role in helping the country achieve Vision 2030, the language is no longer viewed as a subject required for academic progression (Althobaiti et al., 2020). Alharbi (2022) further explained that as the English language is considered the country's official foreign language, the government views the language as a crucial tool for international relations and scientific-technological improvement. Moreover, those with good English proficiency will have better career opportunities and professional advancements (Alnasser, 2022). In short, more Saudi Arabian students have become more interested in mastering the language as it will allow them to communicate with others from different countries and obtain employment in the public and private sectors.

With English being viewed as a global trade language (Khan, 2022), EFL learners strive to acquire four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing, but they struggle to speak English. Speaking is the productive form of the language, as learners are intimidated not only by the language's technicalities, such as pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, etc., but also by personal factors such as confidence, attitude, motivation, and language anxiety (Juhana, 2023). According to Huang and Lu (2023), language learners perceive speaking as daunting. They tend to feel anxious or apprehensive about speaking, especially when they believe they might make mistakes or be misunderstood. Therefore, as the students' poor spoken English is also believed to be personal, this study aims to investigate the effects of personal and cultural factors on Saudi Arabia's undergraduates' English language ability to provide better insight into these factors' influence on their language mastery. Speaking is challenging for most English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners as they rarely use it in social and professional contexts (Normawati, Nugrahaeni, & Susanto, 2023). As English is used dominantly in the classrooms, the learners are deprived of the opportunities that would necessitate them to communicate in English as often as they should. Despite English being recognized as a global lingua franca and the language for international communication and academic exchange, many Saudi Arabian EFL undergraduates encounter significant difficulties in achieving proficiency in spoken English. According to Elbashir (2023), Saudi Arabian EFL undergraduates' inability to communicate in English has impeded their ability to participate actively in classroom discussions, engage in meaningful interactions with native speakers, and compete in a global job market that often requires English proficiency.

Issues surrounding the undergraduates' low proficiency are multifaceted and manifest in various aspects, such as underexposure to the language used in real-life events, limited fluency, pronunciation problems, and a lack of confidence when conversing in English (Islam & Stapa, 2021). These views align with Lowie, Verspoor, and Dijk (2018), who attributed EFL speaking challenges to time and attention constraints that indirectly limited the learners' opportunity to practice using the language outside their classroom environment. Therefore, understanding the root causes of this problem and identifying effective strategies to improve English language abilities among EFL undergraduates is crucial to addressing this educational and career disadvantage.

According to Erdiana, Bahri, and Akhmal (2019), although speaking is one of the four language skills to master, the learners feel that expressing their views, emotions, and thoughts while engaging in a discussion or conversation is intimidating as they felt that their fear, anxiety, and poor confidence inhibited them from trying to speak or respond to others in English. Liu (2018) explained that EFL learners tend to feel that speaking is difficult due to the skill's interactive nature, where the speakers must produce verbal utterances to convey meaning. Therefore, speaking is a process that requires two or more people to deliver, receive and process information verbally. As a productive skill, Riswanto, Teferi, and Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim (2023) accentuated that EFL learners must have the opportunity to practice and use the language effectively. Researchers like Liu (2018), Juhana (2023), and Riswanto et al. (2023) believed that issues surrounding EFL learners' speaking performance are not only related to their knowledge of the language's mechanics. Their investigation showed that the learners are affected by personal factors such as anxiety, confidence, motivation, attitude, and cultural factors which discourage EFL undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia from practicing and improving their English language abilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature highlights the critical role of English language proficiency in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the context of the nation's Vision 2030 initiative. The Saudi Arabian curriculum offers English as a foreign language starting from Grade 7, yet students often perceive it merely as an academic requirement rather than a vital skill (Althobaiti, 2020). The emphasis on English proficiency is essential as the language is crucial for international communication, business, and education (Altalhab, 2023). Despite these educational reforms, challenges remain, especially regarding the practical application of English in real-world contexts (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). The education system in Saudi Arabia has historically been religious-based, focusing less on technical and language studies, leading to a reliance on expatriates for skilled positions (Darwish et al., 2022). Vision 2030 aims to address this by enhancing English language education to develop a competent workforce (Al-Malki et al., 2022).

Despite these efforts, many students still struggle with English proficiency, particularly in STEM fields, where poor language skills impact their academic performance (Alqahtani, 2019). The education system's focus on rote learning and examination preparation rather than communicative competence further exacerbates this issue (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020; Alsowat, 2022). The importance of English in the global context cannot be overstated. As a lingua franca, it facilitates international trade, diplomacy, and scientific collaboration (Rao, 2022). In Saudi Arabia, proficiency in English opens doors to better career opportunities and professional advancement, aligning with the goals of Vision 2030 to diversify the economy and reduce reliance on oil (Althobaiti et al., 2020). However, achieving these goals requires significant improvements in the way English is taught and learned in Saudi schools and universities.

Gap Identification

Despite recognizing the importance of English proficiency, significant gaps remain in understanding the personal and cultural factors influencing English language learning among Saudi Arabian students. Current literature points to several reasons behind the poor language skills of EFL students, including demotivation due to the education system's emphasis on technical rules over practical use (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020). Additionally, cultural attitudes towards English, such as associating it with Western lifestyles, further hinder motivation (Alsowat, 2022). Personal factors such as anxiety, confidence, and motivation are critical yet underexplored elements affecting language learning (Burhanuddin et al., 2023; Qureshi et al., 2020). Research indicates that EFL learners often feel inadequate in oral presentations and discussions due to these personal barriers (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020; Vadivel et al., 2022). The impact of personal factors on language fluency and accuracy, including the influence of pauses, linguistic elements, and discourse markers, remains insufficiently addressed (Chambers, 1997; Aprielieva et al., 2021).

While the negative impact of rote learning and examination-focused teaching methods on language acquisition is well-documented, there is a lack of research on how interactive and communicative teaching approaches could mitigate these issues. Effective language learning requires not only understanding the technical aspects of a language but also using it in real-life communicative contexts (Abrar et al., 2022; Bakhtiar & Suwandi, 2022). This calls for a shift from traditional methods to more interactive and student-centered learning environments. Language anxiety, particularly in speaking, is a significant barrier for many EFL learners. The fear of making mistakes, coupled with a lack of confidence, often leads to poor performance and reluctance to participate in language activities (Avhustiuk, 2021; Tari & Roslin, 2020).

In Saudi Arabia, cultural factors can exacerbate these issues. For instance, the strong association of English with Western culture can create resistance among students who view it as a threat to their cultural identity (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020). This cultural resistance, combined with limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, contributes to the low proficiency levels observed. Another critical gap is the lack of sufficient vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and pronunciation proficiency among EFL learners (Moses & Mohamad, 2019). These linguistic challenges are compounded by teaching methods that prioritize memorization over practical use. Students often learn grammar and vocabulary in isolation, without understanding how to apply them in real conversations (Zrekat & Al-Sohbani, 2022).

Pronunciation difficulties further hinder communication, as learners struggle to be understood despite having a good grasp of grammar and vocabulary (Nguyen et al., 2021). Exposure to authentic English language materials is another area where Saudi EFL learners face significant challenges. Limited access to English media, such as films, books, and interactive content, restricts their ability to hear and practice the language in context (Huang et al., 2022). Studies have shown that increased exposure to English through media and social interactions can significantly improve language skills, but such opportunities are often lacking in Saudi Arabia (Al-Zoubi, 2018).

Framework Development

The development of this framework was driven by the need to address the persistent challenges faced by Saudi Arabian EFL undergraduates in achieving English language proficiency. Building on the literature that highlights various personal and cultural factors impacting language learning, this framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of these influences and how they interact to affect students' language abilities. Recent studies have pointed to the significance of these factors, such as fear of making mistakes, self-confidence, anxiety, motivation to learn, attitude towards learning, and cultural and social barriers, in shaping language learning outcomes (Burhanuddin, Hudriati, & Jumaimah, 2023; Alrabai, 2023). The conceptualization process involved synthesizing findings from these studies to construct a cohesive model that captures the multifaceted nature of language learning in the Saudi context.

In developing this framework, the research considered the socio-cultural environment in Saudi Arabia, which plays a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes and behaviors towards English language learning. Vision 2030, the Saudi government's initiative to diversify the economy and improve education, underscores the importance of English proficiency as a critical skill for future workforce readiness (Althobaiti et al., 2020). Despite these efforts, many students continue to struggle with English, particularly in real-world applications outside the classroom. The framework, therefore, not only addresses individual learner differences but also contextual factors that influence language acquisition.

Components

The framework comprises six key components: fear of making mistakes, self-confidence, anxiety, motivation to learn, attitude towards learning, and cultural and social barriers. Each component represents a critical factor that influences English language proficiency among Saudi Arabian undergraduates.

Fear of Making Mistakes addresses the apprehension and fear students experience when they are likely to make errors while speaking or writing in English. This fear can significantly hinder their willingness to practice and improve their language skills. According to Abrar et al. (2022), fear of making mistakes is prevalent among EFL learners and can be attributed to the high stakes associated with language learning in academic settings. This fear is often exacerbated by negative past experiences and the pressure to perform well, leading to avoidance behaviors and reduced language practice.

Self-confidence is crucial for language learners as it affects their ability to communicate effectively and participate actively in learning activities. Higher levels of self-confidence are associated with better language performance and reduced anxiety (Yousefabadi & Ghafournia, 2023). Confidence allows learners to take risks in using the language, experiment with new vocabulary and structures, and engage more deeply with the learning process. Lack of self-confidence, on the other hand, can lead to reluctance to speak or participate in class, thus limiting opportunities for improvement.

Language learning anxiety can be debilitating, leading to avoidance behaviors and poor performance in language tasks. It is essential to understand the sources of anxiety and implement strategies to mitigate its effects. Rajitha and Alamelu (2020) highlight that anxiety in language learning can stem from various sources, including fear of negative evaluation, low self-esteem, and high expectations. Anxiety can create a mental block, making it difficult for learners to process and produce the language effectively.

Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, drives students to engage with the language learning process. Motivated learners are more likely to persist through challenges and achieve higher levels of proficiency. Ai, Pan, and Zhong (2021) emphasize that motivation is a key determinant of language learning success. Intrinsic motivation, which is driven by personal interest and enjoyment, tends to produce more sustained and effective learning outcomes compared to extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external rewards or pressures.

A positive attitude towards English learning can enhance students' engagement and willingness to participate in language activities. Conversely, a negative attitude can lead to resistance and lack of progress. Getie (2020) notes that attitudes towards learning are shaped by various factors, including previous learning experiences, cultural influences, and perceived relevance of the language. Positive attitudes can foster a more conducive learning environment, while negative attitudes can create barriers to effective learning.

These barriers include societal attitudes towards English and the cultural context in which students learn. Overcoming these barriers is critical for creating an environment conducive to language learning. Al-Qahtani and Al-Saleh (2022) discuss how cultural perceptions of English as a Western language can impact students' willingness to engage with it. In Saudi Arabia, where Arabic is deeply tied to cultural and religious identity, learning English can sometimes be seen as adopting foreign values, which may lead to resistance.

Relationships

The relationships between these components are intricate and dynamic. Understanding these interconnections is essential for developing effective strategies to enhance English language proficiency among Saudi EFL learners. Fear of making mistakes and anxiety are closely related; students who fear making mistakes are likely to experience higher levels of anxiety. This fear can negatively impact their self-confidence and overall motivation to learn (Avhustiuk, 2021). Anxiety exacerbates the fear of mistakes, creating a vicious cycle where students become increasingly reluctant to practice the language, further entrenching their anxiety and limiting their progress.

Conversely, higher self-confidence can mitigate anxiety and reduce the fear of making mistakes, creating a positive feedback loop that enhances language learning. Yousefabadi and Ghafournia (2023) found that self-confident learners are more likely to take risks, participate in class, and engage in conversations, which are critical for improving language proficiency. Building self-confidence involves providing supportive learning environments, positive reinforcement, and opportunities for successful language use.

Motivation to learn and attitude towards learning are also interconnected. Students with a positive attitude towards English are generally more motivated to engage with the language, while high motivation can reinforce a positive attitude (Ai, Pan, & Zhong, 2021). This bidirectional relationship suggests that interventions aimed at improving motivation can also positively affect attitudes, and vice versa. For instance, incorporating culturally relevant materials and topics of interest can make learning more engaging and relevant, thus boosting motivation and fostering positive attitudes.

Cultural and social barriers can influence all other components by shaping students' perceptions and experiences of learning English. For instance, societal attitudes towards English can impact students' motivation and anxiety levels, either facilitating or hindering their language acquisition process (Al-Qahtani & Al-Saleh, 2022). In environments where English is viewed positively and integrated into daily life, students are more likely to practice and improve their skills. Conversely, negative societal attitudes can create an atmosphere of resistance and discomfort, making it difficult for students to engage with the language.

An integrative approach that addresses multiple components simultaneously can be particularly effective. For example, creating a supportive classroom environment that reduces anxiety and fear of making mistakes can simultaneously boost self-confidence and motivation. Incorporating culturally relevant content and fostering positive attitudes towards English can further enhance these effects. Teachers play a crucial role in this integrative approach by adopting pedagogical strategies that are sensitive to students' personal and cultural contexts.

The practical implications of understanding these relationships are significant. Educators can design interventions that target specific components based on their interconnections. For instance, if a student exhibits high anxiety and low self-confidence, strategies to build confidence through positive reinforcement and gradual exposure to speaking tasks can help reduce anxiety. If cultural barriers are a significant issue, integrating culturally relevant materials and creating a classroom culture that values multilingualism can help mitigate these barriers.

By addressing the personal and cultural factors outlined in this framework, educators can create more effective and supportive language learning environments for Saudi Arabian EFL undergraduates. Understanding the intricate relationships between these components allows for targeted interventions that can significantly enhance students' English language proficiency, aligning with the broader educational and economic goals of Vision 2030.

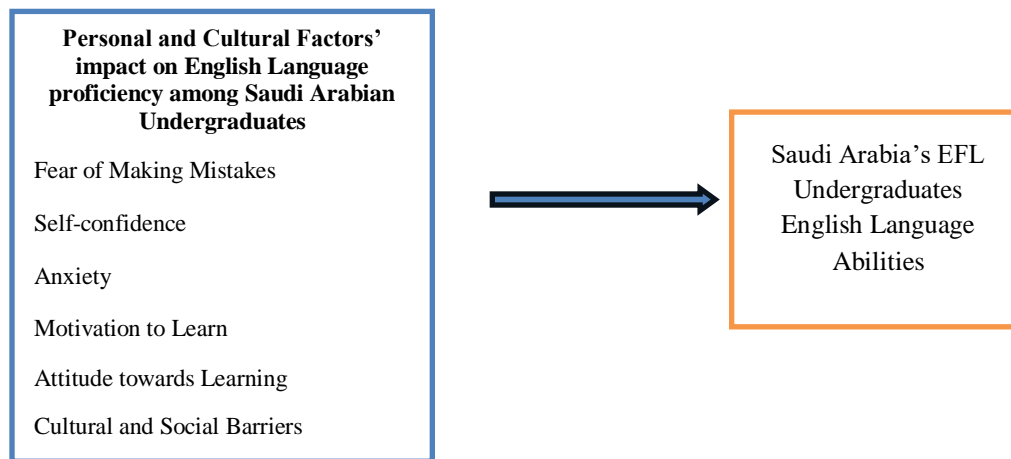


Figure 1 Proposed Framework

The application of the framework that examines personal and cultural factors affecting English language proficiency among Saudi Arabian undergraduates is multifaceted and can be integrated into various educational settings and practices. This framework can serve as a guideline for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers to create more effective and supportive learning environments that address the specific needs of EFL learners in Saudi Arabia. One practical example of applying this framework is seen in a case study conducted at a Saudi university, where the English language program was restructured to incorporate strategies addressing personal and cultural factors. The program included workshops on building self-confidence, activities to reduce language anxiety, and cultural exchange sessions to mitigate social and cultural barriers. According to Alzahrani (2023), these interventions led to significant improvements in students' English proficiency and their willingness to participate in class discussions and language activities. Another example is a high school in Riyadh that implemented a peer mentoring system, pairing students with higher English proficiency with those struggling with the language. This approach aimed to boost self-confidence and provide a supportive learning environment. The mentors received training on providing constructive feedback and encouragement, which helped reduce the fear of making mistakes among mentees. The results showed enhanced speaking and listening skills and a more positive attitude towards learning English (Hassan, 2022).

The framework can be utilized in various educational scenarios to enhance English language proficiency among EFL learners. In one scenario, a university might integrate this framework into its freshman orientation program, providing new students with workshops that focus on overcoming anxiety and building self-confidence. These sessions could include role-playing activities, stress management techniques, and opportunities for students to share their experiences and fears in a supportive environment. This proactive approach could help students start their academic journey with a positive mindset towards learning English (Alharbi, 2022). In another scenario, language instructors at a high school could use the framework to design their lesson plans, ensuring that each lesson addresses one or more of the personal and cultural factors identified. For example, teachers might start classes with motivational activities that relate to students' personal interests and future goals, thus enhancing their intrinsic motivation to learn. Additionally, lessons could

incorporate cultural elements relevant to both Saudi and English-speaking contexts, helping students see the practical benefits of bilingualism and reducing cultural resistance to learning English (Althobaiti, 2020). Furthermore, policymakers can apply this framework to reform national English language education policies. By recognizing the importance of personal and cultural factors, policies could mandate teacher training programs that equip educators with the skills to address these factors effectively. This could include professional development on managing classroom anxiety, fostering positive attitudes, and using culturally responsive teaching methods. Implementing such policies can create a more supportive and effective language learning environment nationwide (Al-Qahtani & Al-Saleh, 2022).

Evaluation validation and Challenges

To validate the framework that examines the personal and cultural factors affecting English language proficiency among Saudi Arabian undergraduates, a combination of empirical testing and expert reviews is recommended. Empirical testing can involve implementing the framework in various educational settings and measuring its impact on students' English language proficiency through pre- and post-intervention assessments. For instance, quantitative methods such as standardized language proficiency tests and surveys can be used to collect data on students' language skills, anxiety levels, self-confidence, and attitudes towards learning English before and after the framework's application (Hassan, 2022). Additionally, qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups can provide deeper insights into students' experiences and perceptions, offering a comprehensive understanding of the framework's effectiveness. Expert reviews are also crucial for validating the framework. This involves seeking feedback from language education specialists, curriculum developers, and experienced EFL teachers to assess the framework's relevance, feasibility, and comprehensiveness. Experts can evaluate the framework's theoretical foundations, its practical applicability in diverse educational contexts, and its potential to address the identified personal and cultural barriers. By incorporating expert feedback, the framework can be refined and adjusted to better meet the needs of Saudi Arabian EFL learners (Alqahtani, 2021).

Despite its potential benefits, the framework may face several limitations and challenges in its application. One significant limitation is the variability in individual student characteristics and educational contexts. Factors such as students' prior language exposure, socioeconomic background, and personal learning preferences can influence the effectiveness of the framework. This variability means that the framework may not yield uniform results across different student populations and educational settings, necessitating adaptations to cater to specific needs and contexts (Al-Qahtani & Al-Saleh, 2022). Another challenge is the potential resistance from educators and institutions accustomed to traditional teaching methods. Shifting from rote learning and examination-focused approaches to more interactive and communicative methods requires a substantial change in teaching practices and mindset. Teachers may need extensive training and support to effectively implement the framework, which could be resource-intensive and time-consuming. Additionally, institutional resistance to change may slow the adoption and integration of the framework into existing curricula (Althobaiti, 2020). Furthermore, addressing cultural and social barriers to English language learning can be particularly challenging in conservative environments where English is perceived as a threat to cultural identity. Overcoming these barriers requires not only educational interventions but also broader societal changes in attitudes towards English and its role in Saudi society. This process can be slow and complex, and the framework alone may not be sufficient to address deeply entrenched cultural attitudes (Alzahrani, 2023). Finally, continuous assessment and feedback are essential for the framework's success, but they also present logistical challenges. Regular monitoring and evaluation require additional time and resources, which may be limited in some educational institutions. Ensuring consistent and accurate data collection and analysis can also be demanding, especially in large-scale implementations.

DISCUSSION

The proposed framework examining the personal and cultural factors affecting English language proficiency among Saudi Arabian undergraduates offers significant implications for theory, practice, and future research. This framework provides a holistic understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by EFL learners and offers a structured approach to address these barriers.

Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this framework contributes to the existing body of knowledge by integrating personal and cultural dimensions of language learning. Traditionally, language acquisition theories have primarily focused on cognitive and linguistic aspects, often neglecting the socio-cultural and affective factors that play a crucial role in language proficiency (Alqahtani, 2021). By incorporating elements such as fear of making mistakes, self-confidence, anxiety, motivation, attitude towards learning, and cultural and social barriers, this framework presents a more comprehensive view of language learning. It aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize the importance of a learner's emotional and social context in the learning process. In practice, the framework offers valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers. Understanding the personal and cultural factors that influence English language learning can help educators design more effective teaching strategies and learning environments. For instance, addressing anxiety and building self-confidence can be achieved through supportive classroom practices, such as positive reinforcement and peer mentoring programs (Hassan, 2022). Incorporating culturally relevant content and promoting a positive attitude towards English can help overcome resistance and increase student engagement. Additionally, recognizing the role of motivation in language learning suggests that teachers should create learning experiences that are both enjoyable and relevant to students' lives and future goals (Alharbi, 2022). For policymakers, the framework underscores the need for systemic changes in the educational landscape to support English language proficiency. This includes revising national curricula to include interactive and communicative teaching methods, providing professional development for teachers, and fostering an educational culture that values language diversity and bilingualism. These changes can help create a more conducive learning environment that addresses both the personal and cultural challenges faced by Saudi EFL learners (Althobaiti, 2020).

Future research can build on this framework by empirically testing its components and relationships in various educational settings. Longitudinal studies could examine how interventions targeting these factors influence language proficiency over time. Additionally, research could explore the framework's applicability to other cultural contexts, potentially adapting and expanding it to understand language learning challenges in different regions. Comparative studies could also investigate the effectiveness of different strategies in addressing the identified factors, providing a deeper understanding of best practices in EFL education.

Comparisons

When compared to existing frameworks, the proposed framework stands out due to its comprehensive integration of personal and cultural factors. Traditional models of language learning, such as Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter Hypothesis, primarily focus on the input received by learners and the impact of emotional variables on language acquisition. While these theories highlight important aspects of language learning, they do not fully account for the broader socio-cultural context and the specific personal challenges faced by learners in different environments (Krashen, 1982). The Socio-Cultural Theory of Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural tools in cognitive development, including language learning. However, it primarily focuses on the social aspects and may not sufficiently address individual affective factors like anxiety and self-confidence (Vygotsky, 1978). The proposed framework builds on this by explicitly incorporating both personal and cultural dimensions, offering a more balanced approach that recognizes the interplay between these factors. Moreover, frameworks like Gardner's (1985) Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition stress the importance of integrative and instrumental motivation in language learning but may not provide detailed strategies to address cultural barriers and the fear of making mistakes (Gardner, 1985). The proposed framework not only highlights the importance of motivation but also provides practical recommendations for building self-confidence and reducing anxiety, making it more actionable for educators. In comparison to these existing models, the proposed framework's unique contribution lies in its dual focus on personal and cultural factors, and its application to the specific context of Saudi Arabian EFL learners. This context-specific approach ensures that the framework is relevant to the unique challenges faced by Saudi students, such as the cultural resistance to English and the impact of socio-economic factors on language learning (Alzahrani, 2023). Additionally, the proposed framework is designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing educators to tailor interventions to the specific needs of their students. This adaptability makes it a practical tool for improving English language

proficiency in diverse educational settings. By providing a clear structure for addressing personal and cultural barriers, the framework offers a comprehensive solution that can be integrated into existing educational practices and policies.

Future Work

Looking ahead, several directions for future research and further development of the framework can be identified. First, empirical testing across diverse educational settings is essential to validate the framework's effectiveness and adaptability. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into how interventions based on the framework impact language proficiency over time. Additionally, research should explore the framework's applicability in different cultural contexts, potentially adapting it to address language learning challenges in other regions. Comparative studies examining the effectiveness of various strategies in mitigating personal and cultural barriers would also be beneficial, offering a deeper understanding of best practices in EFL education. Moreover, the framework could be expanded to include technological integration, examining how digital tools and online learning platforms can support and enhance language learning. Investigating the role of technology in reducing anxiety, building self-confidence, and providing culturally relevant content could further enrich the framework. Additionally, exploring the impact of teacher training programs designed around the framework could provide insights into how educators can be better equipped to address the identified factors.

CONCLUSION

The proposed framework addressing the personal and cultural factors affecting English language proficiency among Saudi Arabian undergraduates represents a significant contribution to the field of language education. By integrating critical components such as fear of making mistakes, self-confidence, anxiety, motivation, attitude towards learning, and cultural and social barriers, the framework offers a comprehensive approach to understanding and improving English language learning. This holistic perspective aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize the importance of a learner's emotional and social context. The framework provides practical insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers, enabling them to design more effective teaching strategies and learning environments. Through empirical validation and expert reviews, the framework can be refined to better meet the needs of EFL learners, ultimately contributing to the broader goals of educational reform in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030.

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