



Analyzing Teachers' Perspectives Regarding Antonym-Based Instructions for Vocabulary Acquisition of Undergraduate ESL Saudi Students

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research is to analyze the ESL teachers' perspectives about using contrastive pair activities of antonyms in vocabulary acquisition strategies to undergraduate ESL students in different private and public colleges and universities in Jazan region of Saudi Arabia. The purpose is to prepare an objective evaluation of these perspectives to find gaps and subsequently suggest recommendations for increasing vocabulary. To address the main question, the study uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches with the structured interviews comprising 36 questions of 120 selected ESL teachers and recording observations of the live instructions in the classroom settings of the same teachers. The teachers have been categorized into more experienced and less experienced ones with equality in gender and experience both. MAXQDA and SPSS have been utilized to analyze qualitative and quantitative data respectively. The qualitative analysis shows that more experienced teachers have consistently expressed positivity about cognitive and other benefits despite having some reservations about barriers, while the majority of less experienced ones have expressed dissatisfaction about the same, indicating barriers with similar results from the quantification of the same. The significance of the study lies in assigning centrality to the teachers' opinion about using contrastive pair activities for enhancing the active vocabulary of the students in Jazan region. The data analysis and recommendations lead to a need for further longitudinal studies about students' engagement patterns and other related areas.

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1. Introduction

In the ESL domain, vocabulary instructions meant to develop language proficiency have gained much currency lately with various studies emerging one after the other done through multiple methods, approaches and student-centered strategies. However, not much attention has been paid to teachers, their perspectives and evaluation of their perceptions, specifically in the Saudi ESL settings. Based on the vocabulary and its detailed categories and learning strategies (Nation, 2001), methodologies for vocabulary acquisition and research (Schmitt, 2010), and teacher's perspectives and beliefs (Borg, 2003), the ESL setting has been explored in this study in Jazan, Saudi Arabia, to analyze the perspectives of the teachers involved in teaching undergraduate classes in different colleges. It is because of the Saudi government's *Vision 2030* has focused on transforming the educational landscape of the country with attention to education to transform Saudi human capital (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016) (pp. 13-14) and specific attention to educators, educational leaders and teachers (p. 34) with attention also being paid to motivating students to benefit from the global status of English (Alghamdi, 2025).

Although the development process in ESL adoption has been sluggish, institutional, pedagogical and adoption barriers also crop up from time to time (Ndiaye et al., 2024) including several others yet to be explored. Therefore, different approaches and strategies continued to

emerge in different regions within Saudi Arabia including the use of mobile apps and informal adoption of digital tools for vocabulary teaching and learning (Mohammed Saeed Mohammed & Kaid Mohammed Ali, 2021), and AI tools adoption for further expansion of vocabulary teaching practices with good success ratio (Alghamdi, 2025; Azi, 2023). It further picked up pace with a growing focus on teachers, as more studies highlight challenges and areas for improvement (Alamri & Awjah, 2023; Almusharraf, 2020). Despite good studies being published, there is a dearth of research on teaching vocabulary through antonym-based instructions/activities and specifically at the regional level. The Jazan region has rarely been the subject of such studies. Therefore, this research answers the key questions about the ways teachers perceive using antonym-based contrastive pairs comprising activities for teaching vocabulary to undergraduate students, how they perceive its impacts in the overall improvement in the standard of English of the students and what problems and bottlenecks they perceive as hindering them in their ESL context. This research discusses the purpose, the significance of the study in the Saudi ESL setting, followed by a literature review, identification of existing gaps, research methodology, design and specifications of the participants, data collection, analysis and results and offers recommendations for the Jazan region.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

1. First, the evaluating the perspectives of Jazani ESL teachers regarding the use of antonym-based contrastive pair activities in teaching undergraduate students for vocabulary acquisition
2. To qualitatively evaluate the impacts of antonym-based activities on the students vocabulary through the perspective of the teachers and live observation.
3. To compare and contrast qualitative findings with quantitative findings to identify main issues and problems and suggest recommendations with KPI for Jazan region.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This research study is important in the Saudi ESL setting for analyzing and highlighting the perspectives of the teachers engaged in teaching vocabulary using antonyms-based activities to undergraduate classes in both public and private colleges and universities. The data from 120 ESL university and college teachers and its thematic analysis done for this purpose demonstrates that differences in perspectives are not just linked to each teacher's personal experience but also to the instructional strategies used in the Jazani context. This difference also reflects the difference in the perceptions of experienced and less experienced teachers in terms of positive aspects and issues.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Foundation: Vocabulary Teaching in ESL Setting

The literature review comprises theoretical grounding for vocabulary learning in the second language, along with recent local research to evaluate the context of the Saudi ESL classroom setting where vocabulary learning activities are used. The importance of vocabulary learning and teachers' beliefs lie in the work done for ESL learners such as Nation (2001), Schmitt (2010), and Borg (2003). Whereas the first one deals with the learning of vocabulary, its goals, main themes, and the process of learning (pp. 1–9), the second one deals with research on vocabulary, its learning, teaching, methodology, and the analysis of the findings (2010), and the third one deals with teachers' cognition and beliefs (2003). Nation, for example, emphasized the importance of teaching vocabulary to second-language learners on the premise that it increases their working vocabulary (p. 9). Schmitt, on the other hand, gave the idea about issues, sampling, field studies, and research methods on vocabulary learning and its measurement, along with his argument that ESL learners need an adequate "amount of lexis necessary to enable various forms of communication in English" (Schmitt, 2010), and Borg further theorized teachers' perspectives (pp. 81–191).

2.2. Saudi ESL Context and Issues

Based on the theoretical foundations of Borg (2003); Nation (2001); Schmitt (2010), Saudi ESL objectives and policies seem to intend to increase the English language skills of students to bring them up to global standards by increasing their English competency through improvements in educational policy (Alqahtani, 2018). Therefore, it was natural that the Saudi policy on ESL focused more on teachers and their beliefs, for there is a need "to create an appropriate teaching environment" to teach required words, language skills, and active

vocabulary through EFL classroom improvements (Al-Ruwaili, 2023) (p. 352). Alamri and Awjah (2023) have also discussed the views of teachers about improving the vocabulary of Saudi students, focusing on the TPACK (Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge) model that includes the use of technology in pedagogy and content. Referring to the findings of previous studies, the researchers have recommended a comprehensive assessment of the classroom setting and the use of digital technology, along with its integration into teaching practices (pp. 348-552). However, issues in the Saudi ESL setting have emerged in other studies. These issues explored earlier include teachers' and students' preferences about vocabulary choice and error correction (Hamouda, 2011), teachers' use of L1 in L2 settings and the conflict and tension in their translation and vice versa practice (Alharbi, 2019), "learner autonomy" in classroom settings for fast learning (Almusharraf, 2020), cultural identities, relevance of material, and cultural sensitivities from the perspective of teachers (Safi, 2020, pp. 86-87). Some others include Saudi female EFL teachers' beliefs about online corrective feedback and its impact on their direct correction practices in the ESL setting (Aloud, 2022, p. 60), the huge number of students in classrooms (Al Mogeerah, 2023) (pp. 38-52), L1 intervention in L2 learning, low ESL proficiency, and lack of ICT integration (pp. 54-55), preferences for demonstrating dual pedagogical orientations in ESL instructions due to L1 intervention by teachers (Al-Ruwaili, 2023) (pp. 349-350), and approaches and expectations equating vocabulary and grammatical constructions for teaching vocabulary (Almusharraf, 2020)(pp. 5-6).

2.3. Research Gaps

This brief review of relevant studies demonstrates that specific research on the usage of contrastive pairs for antonym-based vocabulary teaching in ESL classrooms at the undergraduate level in Jazan region about the perspectives of teachers is non-existent specifically from the triangular theoretical framework of Borg (2003); Nation (2001); Schmitt (2010). This research, therefore, intends to explore the beliefs and perspectives of ESL teachers using and witnessing the impact of teaching antonyms using contrastive-pair activities at the undergraduate level in Jazan, Saudi Arabia to fill the gaps.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This research has been designed to use a concurrent mixed-method qualitative and quantitative design. The qualitative method has been given more weightage than the quantitative one because of the nature of the research, as it requires recording the impressions and perceptions of the teachers in writing. The qualitative method comprises two approaches: semi-structured interviews and direct classroom observations of live teaching instructions. The interview questions were carefully constructed around the contextual preferences based on teaching practices, with open-ended and targeted questions having an equal number for all, i.e., 36 (Creswell & Poth, 2016)(pp. 46-49). For example, about proficiency level, the teachers' perspectives were recorded asking "How does the proficiency level of your students impact the effectiveness of contrastive pair activities?". The questionnaire comprises carefully selected thematic patterns and, areas including cognitive impact, student engagement, language skill level and development, active vocabulary development, and formative and summative assessments by the teachers, their expectations, and actual results merged with the questions, along with oral explanation during the one-on-one interview. The questions were validated through expert review and a pilot study in the college of the researcher. This approach is appropriate for interviews to get individual perspectives (Yin, 2009)(pp. 41, 59). The duration spans over 1.5 years, due to the nature of the academic year and holidays in Saudi Arabia along with local holidays and availability of the teachers and pre-orchestrated classroom sizes and teaching duration. The number of teachers was 120 from public and private colleges and universities with an equal number of male and female for gender equality and institutions located in the Jazan region based on purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2016)(pp. 349-355).

The classroom observations were minutely recorded with the main points of the instructions, teachers' active participation and impact on the students, their engagement, and active participation in the classroom (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The observations followed a checklist proforma filled in by the researcher to record the number, grading, and format of antonym-based vocabulary activities and their use and practice in the classroom settings. The criteria given in the proforma recorded the type of activities, student-teacher interaction during the activity, active and passive participation of the students, and adaptation of the activities to suit the classroom context and requirements of the syllabi. These classroom observations were

intended to provide a detailed picture of the instructional strategies teachers practically used and the responses of the students. Observations were then compared with the analysis of the data gathered from interviews to validate findings by triangulating evidence from these two sources (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). This triangulation is expected to increase the credibility of the research by synchronizing the observational data with the analysis of the interview data to deduce common thematic patterns derived from the data (Patton, 2015). The qualitative dominant approach has been preferred to validate thematic categories and corroborate them with statistical analysis using MAXQDA and SPSS, respectively to give priority over inter-code reliability.

3.2. Participants

The study included 120 ESL teachers, an equal number of male and female participants from the Jazan region with equal numbers of experienced and less experienced ones involved in teaching undergraduate students in the first and second semesters during 2022–2024. The timing was selected with equal number of teaching sessions both from male and female categories to be interviewed in the first semester and same during the second semester. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevant experience in ESL. The selection criteria required teachers to have a minimum of five-year experience at the undergraduate level and to have a solid understanding of the benefits and issues in instructional strategies for learning outcomes for both male and female students with specific EFL certificate, or diploma, or both (Palinkas et al., 2015). They were further divided into two categories: those with 10–15 years of experience and those with 5–10 years of experience for specific selection for interviews and observations to reduce randomization and impact on the data results. The rationale for this selection is based on their background, required skills, and professional experience in ESL teaching. Purposive sampling targets participants with similar characteristics relevant to the research to facilitate the collection of diverse perspectives, gather a quality dataset, and enhance the generalization of findings through deduction. This selection criterion also ensures that participants have reasonable exposure, as shown through the experience of the teachers, to add depth to the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

3.3. Procedure and Data Collection

Both data collection methods were used simultaneously to validate the analysis. Each interview was scheduled for a duration of 20 to 25 minutes, comprising 36 structured questions. Besides interviews of individual teachers, an equal amount of time was reserved for personal observation of live teaching of the teachers using specific and pre-structured activities. This approach helped record impressions of the classroom setting and later assisted in the evaluation of the qualitative data to provide additional information on classroom usage, students' responses, size of the class, student engagement, teachers' attitudes, and their expected outcomes (Saldaña, 2021). Coding was applied to categorize and identify recurring patterns and thematic areas to interpret data and achieve generalization and further quantify the themes for statistical analysis. This process helps achieve objectivity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Systematic coding and thematic grouping also helped in understanding teachers' responses (Nowell et al., 2017). MAXQDA was used for the analysis of both datasets, with the selection of spoken words, phrases, and ideas derived from the interview transcriptions recorded on a digital voice recorder and manually written notes and points of observations supporting the themes. The deductive method was used for data analysis on MAXQDA. It was divided into ten categories, with some instances of teachers' expressions selected from the data, as given in the table below.

4. Analysis and Results

To further complement coding through MAXQDA, SPSS (version 26) was used to generate a description of the statistics. It was done to bring clarity to the comparison of themes and the perspectives of the teachers. The frequencies of the themes were tabulated and converted into percentage of the experienced (10–15 years) and less experienced (5–10 years) teachers, respectively. The same were used to show in the descriptive summary in Table 2 and Figure 2 to show contrasts between both groups where experienced teachers have demonstrated higher frequency in cognitive and engagement categories while the less experienced ones showed greater frequency of challenge-specific themes such as resource limitations and less support from institutions. This approach has reinforced the qualitative observation with quantitative representations of frequency and perspective.

Table 1: Themes and Supporting Ideas

Theme Category	Teachers Expressions (verbatim)
Cognitive Engagement and Retention	"They remember good when see both words", "If opposite, they don't forget easily", "Help them focus more", "They think more in class", "Stay in head longer", "They not just copy word, they understand", "They immediately use in their conversation."
Semantic Networks & Relational Understanding	"When they see opposite, they know meaning better", "Make connection between words", "This way they build word net", "Student say they feel English in mind", "Word not alone, come with brother"
Speeding Language Skills Learning	"They learn fast this way", "speak good using antonyms", "They use word on the same day", "Reading also get better", "They try speaking more", "Help in speedy word learning"
Engagement, Outcomes and Proficiency	"They like this style", "Much better than grammar", "I see more active class", "They write using these words", "Working together make fun", "They feel like learning and using with each other"
Antonym-Based Vocabulary Development	"Opposite words help big", "Student get idea quick", "They enjoy guess opposite", "Easy for teaching than only one word", "I make activity, they love it", "Two words better than one"
Student Proficiency Challenges	"Some student don't know basic", "They not follow me", "Need translate in Arabic always", "Hard for them to understand opposite", "They quiet in activity", "Weak English becomes problematic for them", "Take time in understanding ideas", "antonyms help learn ideas"
Duration and Resource Constraints	"Time not enough", "We have short class", "I have no material for this", "Need to do it myself", "Curriculum too full", "No digital support in my place"
Institutional Support Issues	"No training for such methods", "Department say follow book only", "No photocopies available", "No table/laptop for use", "No tools they give", "They want result but no help", "Principal don't care about method", "No new idea from head office", "Follow books"
Inclusivity and Instructional Flexibility	"Some student slow, some fast", "I make easy task for weak", "I use Arabic to help them", "Mix strong and weak in pairs", "Need more freedom to teach my way", "Can't use one way for all"
Abstract Concepts Comprehension	"They not understand words like honest/dishonest", "No picture, no learn", "I explain again and again", "They confuse with hard word", "Better to give simple word", "Too hard for low level"

The data were further analyzed quantitatively using SPSS to prioritize these categories for better understanding of the differences in perspectives. The analysis is based on experience and feedback from the classroom observations as given below in Table 2.

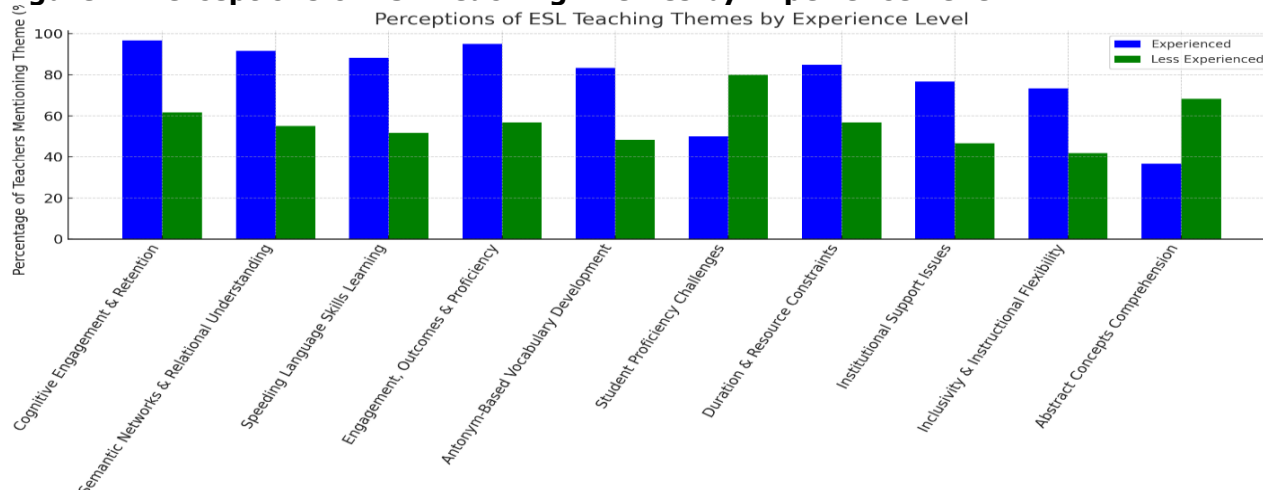
Table 2: Distribution of Thematic Frequencies by Teacher Experience (n=120)

Theme			Experienced Teachers (10–15 yrs) Frequency (n=60)	%	Less Experienced Teachers (5–10 yrs) Frequency (n=60)	%
Cognitive Retention	Engagement &		58	96.7%	37	61.7%
Semantic Networks	&		55	91.7%	33	55.0%
Relational Understanding						
Speeding Language Skills			53	88.3%	31	51.7%
Learning						
Engagement, Outcomes & Proficiency			57	95.0%	34	56.7%
Antonym-Based Vocabulary Development			50	83.3%	29	48.3%
Student Proficiency Challenges			30	50.0%	48	80.0%
Duration & Resource Constraints			34	56.7%	51	85.0%
Institutional Support Issues			28	46.7%	46	76.7%
Inclusivity & Instructional Flexibility			25	41.7%	44	73.3%
Abstract Concepts Comprehension			22	36.7%	41	68.3%

Table 2 clearly shows that teaching experience has led to positive outcomes in the first five categories such as 96.7% experienced reported increase in cognitive engagement and retention of the students, while only 61.7% less experienced teachers expressed the same.

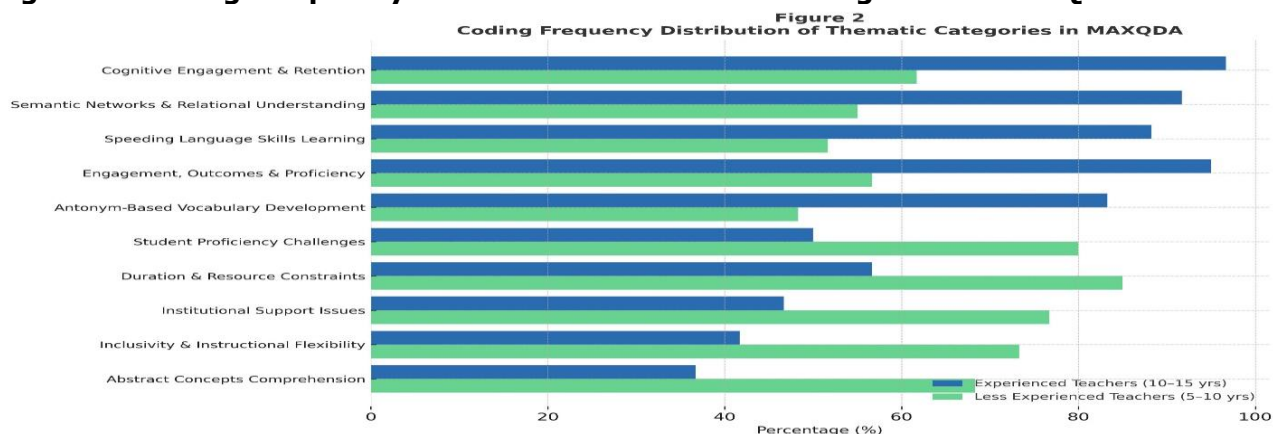
Similarly, 91.7% experienced ones emphasized the development of semantic networks and relational understanding contrary to just 55.0% less experienced. It is also that language skill acceleration shows 88.3% experienced while the 51.7% less experienced, and the same goes for student engagement with 95.0% and 56.7%, respectively. However, 80% less experienced teachers voiced against proficiency issues of the students as compared to the experienced teachers who were 50%, while class timing or duration and resource material shortage was reported by 85% of less experienced ones as compared to the experienced ones who were 56.7%. Similarly, almost the same goes about institutional support, inclusivity and flexibility in instructions and abstract concepts with 76.7%, 73% and 68.31% of the experienced teachers as compared to the less experienced who were respectively 46.3%, 41.7% and 36.7%. For clarity, the same data have been displayed through a bar graph showing the percentage of the experienced and less experienced teachers about their perspectives of different areas as outlined above have been given in blue and green color bars respectively.

Figure 1: Perceptions of ESL Teaching Themes by Experience Level



The legend shows blue bars to represent experienced teachers and green to represent teachers having less experience. The Y-axis shows the percentage while the X-axis shows thematic categories. Here again, the first categories on Y-axis line show the experienced teachers having good or positive perspectives and less experienced low percentage, while in the case of last five thematic categories on Y-axis line shows experienced teachers seem to have overcome barriers and challenges which also indicates that experience compensates for challenges of student proficiency, duration, resources, institutional backing, inclusivity, and instructional flexibility, and abstract concepts. To show the coding frequency in visual format, Figure 2 shows a clear distribution of thematic categories derived from MAXQDA analysis. The figure shows that the experienced teachers have consistently demonstrated higher frequencies in cognitive engagement, semantic understanding, and skill development categories. However, their counterparts, the less experienced teachers, have shown higher frequencies in challenge-related codes.

Figure 2: Coding Frequency Distribution of Thematic Categories in MAXQDA



5. Discussion

The qualitative analysis of the transcription of the interviews shows that some responses of the teachers are consensual about the expected positive outcomes. Although interviews did not comprise specific strategies and activities, the consensus that appears regarding first five categories from the experienced ones and last five from the less experienced ones. One of the teachers stated that *"antonym specific activities helped my students keep words longer than without antonyms", which clearly indicates the impact on the retention of the students and their active vocabulary increase. Detailed analysis of these categories in the graph is explained below with opinions of the concerned teachers.*

5.1. Increase in Cognitive Engagement and Retention of Vocabulary

The analysis shows that some activities have helped students make mental connections between words. One of the participants shared that it was like students were seeing an image and not just memorizing a single word, adding that this has helped the students keep words in their *"minds"* for longer. Another teacher, too, voiced similar views saying *"When they learn a word with its opposite in meanings, they remember it better after making connections of meanings in minds."* Some teachers have given opinion similar to those cited above using different words and phrases as cited in the Table 1 having recurring phrases and words related to memory and cognition. While they appreciated the inclusion of the contrastive pair exercises for student engagement and retaining vocabulary to help them improve their ability to use words in context, they also opined that it was more apparent when the words have concrete meanings related to their daily life and culture. Some teachers have also talked about the alertness of the students with the likelihood of them having discovered the usage of the taught words in their day-to-day ESL settings (Borg, 2003). This enhanced cognitive ability of keeping words in memory longer has helped students build semantic networks of words after understanding their relations. The analysis reflects that 58 out of 60 experienced teachers (96.7%) and 37 out of 60 less experienced teachers (61.7%) have agreed on it. However, it is more among the experienced ones and less among the less experienced ones.

5.2. Semantic Networks and Relational Understanding

Another category, semantic networks and building relational understanding of different words comes at the second about which one of the teachers said that it was like the construction of a *"web of meanings"*, while another one called it simply *"a network"*, and yet another called as if *"they were (words) brothers."* The reason, one teacher recalled, is that the networks of meanings support the students in reading comprehension, forcing them to *"think in English, rather than in their mother tongue."* This category continued emerging in several other ways as one of the teachers noted that students normally struggling with the retention and usage of new words found such activities facilitating in *"remembering meanings better and longer, when pairs come into relationship with each other."* Another teacher affirmed it saying that *"opposites give students something more solid than actual words taught in isolation."* The quantity analysis also supports it as it shows that with 55 of 60 experienced teachers (91.7%) and 33 out of 60 less experienced teachers (55.0%) referred to it using different phrases as given in the table above (Nation, 2001). It is suggestive of the experienced ones as more attuned to recognizing the contribution of contrastive pair activities in the development of interconnected word knowledge and relational thinking among the students.

5.3. Speeding Up Language Skills Learning

Another theme that recurrently emerged in the analysis was speed in English skills learning. Here, skills mean all four skills including speaking and listening along with writing and reading. For example, one teacher pointed it out referring to activities that it makes students aware of the lexical constructions and concepts on which the words are based (Schmitt, 2010). He stated, *"When students learn vocabulary with pairs, it becomes an idea in their minds."* Another teacher mentioned that it speeds up reading when students use the same words learned during these exercises. He specifically referred to *"group discussions"* where students apply these words. Classroom observations and simple question-and-answer sessions with students have also supported this view as one teacher noted that *"it enhances language flow in speaking."* Several phrases that constantly appear in the interviews have been grouped in the analysis. They show that 53 experienced teachers that make up 88.3% and 51.7% of the less experienced verify this. They suggest that while the experienced teachers are more prone to observing this speed in learning, less experienced have less percentage (Nation, 2001). Their impression supports the view that these activities help them improve language skills.

5.4. Engagement, Outcomes, and Proficiency

Some of the interviewees have expressed positive impressions about the engagement, assessment outcomes and proficiency of the students. They are of the opinion that in some cases, students have focused more on antonym-based activities than others. This is because these activities give them a sense of progress when they see their vocabulary being actively used in their writing pieces. One teacher stated that more interest of the students prompted him to give more such activities by which he meant activities based on contrastive pairs (Borg, 2003). Another teacher also expressed satisfaction with the increase in vocabulary stating that "*students learn more when they work in pairs on antonyms.*" Yet, one more teacher observed students using the same words in their conversations as he told that "*It has happened without intense memorization.*" Also, some teachers have pointed out that cooperation, coordination, and mutual support that students extend to each other when working in pairs. Regarding quantification of these perspectives, 47 of total 60 experienced teachers and 34 of total 60 less experienced ones have expressed these positive impacts making up a total 95% and 56.7% respectively. It suggests that senior teachers have a good realization of the positive impacts than their junior counterparts.

5.5. Observation Data Analysis and Confirmation

The analysis of observational data further confirmed that whereas the experienced teachers were concerned, their approach toward activities, preparation and delivery was innovative and problem solving. However, when it comes to the less experienced teachers, they did try to be innovative, but class size and material constraints did not give them any space (Schmitt, 2010). As its quantification was not the subject of this research, yet it confirms the advantages as well as challenges.

6. Challenges

Some parts of the analysis have also indicated some challenges. It has transpired through the collected data that it relies on the proficiency level of the students and hence varies from student to student. Some teachers have stated that sometimes "*pairing becomes difficult to understand*" while another explained that "*half of the class does not take instructions on their own.*" Abstract concepts and absence of visual aids used in these activities were also mentioned as one teacher commented "*some students find the contrastive pairs too abstract*" by which he means that teachers find it hard to explain the meanings of an abstract idea clearly. Around 50% experienced teachers have reported this issue while this percentage among the less experienced and junior teachers was 80%. These statistics are suggestive of the relationship of experience and its impact on students' learning. The gap between teachers' perspectives about these challenges shows the lack of training and absence or lack of the usage of digital or audio-visual tools in the classroom settings.

6.1. Classroom Duration and Resource Material

Other challenges are time, resources and availability. Here, times mean the duration of the class that is typically 45 minutes as stated by the participants, and most of it is wasted in preparation and explanation of instructions. One of the experienced teachers has expressed it explicitly mentioning that "*sometimes it extends to a full hour which is not possible in various cases.*" Several other senior teachers have also pointed out the issue of the timing of the class, expressing their concern of the extra pressure with for the completion of the syllabi. This adds further to their problem when they find themselves facing a shortage of material to engage the classes as it has been pointed out earlier that abstract concepts take extra time in explanations due to the poor or low proficiency level of the students. A total of 34 experienced teachers have expressed these issues which make up 56.7% which means they are better able to handle such issues as compared to their junior counterparts that are 85%. It also shows that although both groups indicate these three issues, the juniors are less adept at handling as compared to the experienced ones (Nation, 2001).

6.2. Institutional Support and Flexibility of Syllabi

Two other factors which constantly recurred in the analysis included the support from the institution and absence of flexibility in implementing the syllabi in class. It has been revealed that the institutions do not support the teachers in resolving issues such as by extending classroom timing, or providing necessary material or digital boards and tools and focus more on the completion of the given topics in the given timeframe at every cost. This means that the

syllabi are to be followed at every cost as *"curriculum is packed"* in the words of one teacher and *"too short time for too many topics"* in another teacher's words. Although the lack of proper training to handle such ESL situations and further support has constantly emerged but not much attention has been paid to them (Schmitt, 2010). It has been stated that there is either complete or more often silence and discouragement from the heads of the institutions with insistence on completing topics only. It has been expressed in the responses of 46.7% senior teachers and 76.7% juniors.

6.3. Problems for Beginners, Inclusivity and Instructional Flexibility

Some other problems include beginner level students, inclusivity, instructional issues and abstract concepts. One of the teachers has clearly intertwined the issue of beginners' level proficiency of the students with the abstract concepts, terming it the *"main hindrance"* while some have only indicated abstract concepts as too difficult, while some have pointed out the proficiency level of the students saying that they *"get confused when working in pairs of abstract nouns given in pairs."* Regarding inclusivity, senior teachers have expressed the absence of a standard level tests for the admission of the student, saying that every student has a different proficiency level, contrary to what is given in the syllabi (Schmitt, 2010). This has emerged as another issue in instructions as one teacher has stated that when they *"use Arabic for instructions, students understand it very easily."* That is why 25, or total 41.7% experienced teachers and 73.3%, or 44 juniors have indicated it. Almost the same goes for thematic category of abstract concepts with juniors 68.3% and seniors 36.7% which means that overall the seniors have compensated with their experience while the juniors have expressed dissatisfaction.

7. Conclusion

This study shows that although the teachers expressed support for using contrastive pair activities as flexible and effective at various stages of ESL teaching, some have indicated the problems. The analysis of the interviews and observation shows cognitive connections, semantic relations, students' engagement, type and preparation of activities among the main categories. The data has also demonstrated benefits for experienced teachers supporting, as mentioned earlier with less percentage of the teachers having less experience. The analysis of each thematic category lists the percentage of experienced and less experienced ones, which indicate that experience is a critical component in resolving issues pointed out by the less experienced teachers. Whereas less experienced teachers with 5 to 10 years' experience have reported concern over classroom issues related to students' proficiency, comprehension of abstract concepts, and inclusivity, others have attributed these difficulties to the absence of institutional support and lack of flexibility in implementing syllabi. It has also been observed in the findings that technological integration is still not properly utilized as only 38% of teachers seem to have expressed their inability to utilize it. The study also reveals that the background of students is also important in this connection which has been given less importance. Therefore, the research concludes with specific recommendations for teachers of Jazan region for using through contrastive pair activities for increasing vocabulary at undergraduate level as given below. The recommendations would have good for reforms in training and localized policy in ESL pedagogy in Saudi Arabia.

7.1. Recommendations

Table 3: Recommendations for Specific Areas

Focus Area	Recommendations	Expected Outcomes	KPI Indicators
Contrastive Pair Vocabulary-Activities	Prepare contrastive pairs, graded vocabulary exercises and worksheets using ICT tools	Continue to increase active vocabulary for different skills.	↑ Vocabulary test scores; % correct antonym usage in writing/speaking.
ICT Integration/Digital Pedagogical Enhancement	Introduce AI tools/ICT tools	Check for engagement and retention.	↑ Participation in digital tasks; ↑ retention of active vocabulary
Strategy Comparison	Compare different worksheets only activities.	Use the best ones	Showing % in teaching strategy.
Graded/Inclusive Materials	Design scaffolded antonym tasks for students' levels.	Check for improved access and outcomes in assessments.	% Beginner-level vocabulary increase and % of participation in next phase.

Cultural Relevance	Develop examples and abstract concepts.	Jazan-specific and abstract	Check motivation of the student due to context.	Check frequency in % of the localized activities.
Teacher Development	Integrate activities in training programs to integrate into area specific curriculum	contrastive pair	Implement tests for teachers.	# of teachers trained, participation rate and teacher self-efficacy scores.

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