

A Qualitative Case Study of Male Teachers' Challenges Teaching Reading in Elementary Classrooms in KSA (Part 3)

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CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

Many male students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) struggle to learn to read. Furthermore, their male teachers often struggle with how to teach them effectively. Traditionally, teachers in the KSA received a limited amount of training in terms of teaching reading. This study explored male teachers' perspectives and experiences teaching reading in order to better understand the environment and issues that affect how teachers teach and students learn to read in the KSA. The goal of this

study was to discover the challenges that the male teachers face while teaching reading, the teaching methods they use, reading progress assessment approaches, and how they support struggling reader inside the classroom.

* **Background: Teaching reading in KSA**

Teaching reading in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (henceforth the KSA) has traditionally been part of Arabic language teaching (Boyle, Alajjawi, & Xiang, 2014) and is taught in the predominant country's language, Arabic (Al-jarf, 2007). In the KSA, elementary (grades 1-3) teachers teach

reading to their pupils by using basal reading programs (Al-Jarf, 2007). In these three primary grades, the focus is teaching students to decode and comprehend text. Beginning with fourth grade, and continuing to the end of high school, the focus is on reading to learn across the curriculum and is taught by Arabic language teachers.

Reading proficiency plays an important role in students' learning (Koda & Zehler, 2007) because it provides foundation for learning (AlNooh, 2013), it improves students' thinking process, and expands their imagination (Sofsian, 2006). The ability to read and write influences students' success in all academic areas (Dagget & Hasselbring, 2007; Noursi, 2014) by broadening the level of the students' knowledge and skills (Ciampa, 2012). Moreover, skillful readers are more self-confident about their learning than non-skillful readers (International Reading Association, 2012). In addition to students' academic success, Kamil (2003) stated that skillful readers are more likely to be successful in information age that requires high level of literacy and ongoing job growth. Conversely, less

than proficient reading leads to weakness across academic areas (Meniado, 2016). Therefore, learning how to decode text and pronounce words is not enough. Teaching students to read strategically for comprehension and fluency is essential to learning in all academic areas (Koda & Zehler, 2007).

*** Research Problem**

The problem that prompts this research is that male elementary students' reading levels in the KSA are low according to *Progress in International Reading and Literacy Studies* (PIRLS) administered in 2011 and 2016 (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012; Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, 2017). According to Boyle, Alajjawi, and Xiang (2014), students in six Arabian countries (Morocco, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, and the KSA) lack basic and foundational skills in reading as a result of instructional methods and strategies used by their teachers. Likewise, PIRLS' (2011) results reveals that all the Arab speaking countries, including the KSA, scored the lowest on the scale in comparison with 45 other countries

worldwide (Boyle, Alajjawi, & Xiang, 2014).

On a scale divided by four reading levels (low, intermediate, advanced, and high), 35% of the K.S.A.'s fourth-grade students scored less than the low international benchmark (PIRLS, 2011). Moreover, 31% of the KSA students scored at the intermediate level. That means that 66% of the KSA's students are not proficient in reading according to PIRLS (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012). Similar results were found on a recent PIRLS (2016) assessment; around 63% of Saudi students who participated scored at the low benchmark (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, 2017). Due to non-proficiency in reading, approximately two-thirds of the KSA's students will likely face academic challenges (Meniado, 2016).

Western countries, such as England, the United States, and Australia, that have scored higher on PIRLS (2011; 2016), emphasize reading foundational skills including phonological awareness, fluency, word study and reading comprehension as well as comprehension strategies.

Alshumaimeri (2011) noted that the ability to understand and comprehend reading passages is an indication of the potential growth of students' academic learning. However, schools in the KSA tend not to focus on reading skills or strategies (Alsamadani, 2012). For example, reading comprehension and fluency are not clearly delineated in the reading curriculum in KSA (Al-Jarf, 2007). Furthermore, reading strategies are not emphasized until third grade or later during the early elementary years (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012). Therefore, students in the KSA are not taught to be effective and strategic readers (Boyle, Alajjawi, & Xiang, 2014, p. 60).

Within the last two decades, an overall concern regarding students' reading performance as compared to the Ministry of Education standard, was raised in the KSA because students in the KSA show a lack of reading fluency and reading comprehension skills. This concern led the Ministry of Education to conduct conferences in 1995 and 2000 to address the issue (Almoaiqel, 2014). The Ministry of Education attempted to address the problem of low

performance in reading. Increasing the number of reading classes' period for students was one of the most important recommendations as a result of these conferences. However, this problem continued in 2011 and 2016 according to PIRLS results (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012; Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, 2017).

Teachers are integral to students' academic performance (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). Teachers' methodology and pedagogical knowledge impacts students' learning and performance level (Clavel, Crespo, Méndez, & International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2016). Teachers play a crucial role in building strong learners by establishing students' lifelong reading strengths (Alelayan, 2001). Moreover, effective teachers are the key to reading achievement because their roles are viewed as the most important factor that affect the students' achievement in reading (Alelayan, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; Ashton & Webb, 1986).

*** Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how male elementary school educators in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) teach reading, the challenges they face regarding the teaching of reading, and how they assess their students' reading progress, as well as strategies that they use to support students who struggle with reading.

Assessing students' reading proficiency helps teachers to report the students' progress in the subject. International standardized tests such as PIRLS, national standardized tests, and progress monitoring are examples of different performance criteria that help to determine the students reading proficiency. In reading, there are more specific criteria for each skill that determine reading performance. For instance, counting how many words were read per minutes (WPM) is one way of evaluating the students' reading fluency (Young & Daly, 2016). Since KSA students have performed low in reading (PIRLS, 2011; 2016), it has become necessary to understand how Saudi teachers teach reading, the challenges they face, how they

evaluate their students reading progress, and how they help struggling readers inside the classroom.

*** Significance of the Study**

This study provided information about how the KSA's elementary male teachers teach reading, the challenges they face with regard to teaching reading, how they assess their students' reading progress, and how they help the struggling readers inside the classroom. In addition, the study provided information that may enable the KSA's education policy makers to develop professional development programs in teaching reading subject at elementary school level that may influence the efficacy of teaching reading. Third, the study may possibly benefit other researchers in Arab countries, who are also interested in improving how reading is taught. Furthermore, these findings provide insights into KSA teachers' challenges that may inform curriculum planners' perspectives with regard to the elementary reading curriculum. The results establish an important foundation for researchers, who are interested in contributing to the field of teaching reading, reading skills, and

reading strategies in the KSA and other similar countries and regions. Finally, the study will cover a part of the literature that has not addressed about how reading is taught at the elementary school level in Saudi Arabia.

*** Research Questions**

Current data regarding reading proficiency in Saudi Arabia indicate that elementary male students are reading below grade level and their male teachers struggle with how to support their reading development, therefore; the overarching research question that guided the study was:-

RQ1. What challenges do male elementary school reading teachers in the KSA encounter when teaching reading?

In order to explore the above overarching questions, it was imperative to also explore the following sub questions.

Sub Q1. How do male elementary school reading teachers teach reading in the KSA?

Sub Q2. How do male elementary school reading teachers in the KSA evaluate their students' reading proficiency?

Sub Q3. How do male elementary school reading teachers in the KSA help students who struggle with reading?

*** Limitations**

Limitations include components that are out of the control of the researcher. For this study, there are five limitations: (1) The participants were male teachers, and thus, the findings may not be applicable to female teachers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2) The focus of the study was solely on how teachers teach reading, reading progress evaluation methods, and their perceived challenges with teaching reading. (3) The research setting included a public school in the KSA; thus, results may not be applicable for private schools in the KSA's private schools. (4) Data collection was also limited because of distance: the targeted country of the study, Saudi Arabia is 7, 229 miles from TSU; therefore, data collection required flying overseas. (5) Data collection was also restricted to the limited time the researcher was allowed to be in the school. Further research would require additional

travel time and another set schedule for visiting each site.

*** Definitions**

The following are the terms as used in this study:-

1- Arabic Language Teachers These are teachers who have a degree in Arabic language. Teaching reading is part of their job with upper-grade students beginning with 4th level elementary schools in the KSA (Al-jarf, 2007).

2- Elementary Teachers These are teachers who teach primary grades level (1ST – 3RD) at elementary schools in the KSA (Al-Jarf, 2007).

Fluency Fluency refers to the ability to read with automaticity, prosody, and speed. (Rasinski, 2012).

3- Phonemic Awareness Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to identify speech sounds in words or the awareness that speech is made up of individual sounds. (NRP, 2000).

4- Phonics Phonics, also called phonological awareness, refers to connecting sounds with letters or *the sound-symbol relationship*. (Bowers, & Bowers, 2017; Rycik, & Rycik; 2007).

5- Primary Grades Primary grades refer to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades at elementary schools in the KSA (Al-Jarf, 2007).

6- Reading Reading is a complex process involving foundational skills (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) to help the reader decode and gain understanding of the written text (Berkeley, & Taboada Barber, 2015; Templeton, & Gehsmann, 2014).

7- Reading in the KSA Teaching reading in the KSA means teaching reading in students' first language which is Arabic language.

Upper Grades Upper grades refer to 4th, 5th, and 6th grades at elementary schools in the KSA.

8- Sun Letters are Arabic letters that do not allow the reader to sound out the letter "L" when it is the second letter in a word. These are considered irregular letters. The concept is like the words *know* and *knife* in English. The English speaker do not pronounce the letter "K" at the beginning of the word.

9- Moon Letters are Arabic letters that allow the reader to pronounce all letters in the word, which is different

than sun letters where one letter is not pronounced.

* METHODOLOGY

1.0 Introduction

This study aimed to explore how male elementary school educators in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) teach reading, the challenges they face regarding the teaching of reading, how they assess their students' reading progress, and the strategies that they use to support students who struggle with reading. The study was guided by the following questions:-

RQ1. What challenges do male elementary school reading teachers in the KSA encounter when teaching reading?

Sub Q1. How do male elementary school reading teachers teach reading in the KSA?

Sub Q2. How do male elementary school reading teachers in the KSA evaluate their students' reading proficiency?

Sub Q3. How do male elementary school reading teachers in the KSA help students who struggle with reading?

2.0 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study approach with multiple participants (Creswell, 2018). Because this study sought to explore male reading teachers' experiences of teaching reading in the KSA, a qualitative approach was appropriate to answer the research questions; collecting data directly from the participants' daily experiences. According to Yin (2003), case study can help researchers understand a bounded system; in this instance, the case study approach helped to explore elementary reading teachers' experiences. Creswell and Poth (2018) have stated that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (p. 7). Qualitative research seeks to better understand a problem or issue from participants' personal experiences. The case study was conducted in one school with five participants, all of whom were reading teachers at the school. In sum, the study was based upon the daily experiences of five male teachers who taught reading inside the

classroom in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

3.0 Participants

This study included five participants, an appropriate number for case study with multiple participants (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The participants included five male elementary school teachers, who taught reading from first to sixth grades in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Participants were chosen from all-boys' elementary schools in metropolitan city in the KSA.

Participants were selected through maximum variation to explore multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2018). The participants' responses represented different perspectives for several reasons: they (1) majored in different subjects, Arabic language and libraries; (2) had varied years of classroom experience ranging from ten to 29 years; (3) taught different grade levels and different classes; and (4) had different degree levels. The participants were chosen from a boys' elementary school in a large city. The city is one of the largest cities in the KSA and is known for being the most diverse city in the country. The

participants represented diverse group of teachers who come from multiple backgrounds and different parts of the country with varied educational training.

4.0 Selection Process

The following process was used to select participants:-

- 1- Participants were chosen from the elementary school whose principal allowed the researcher to collect data inside the school.
- 2- Participants were teachers who taught reading at the elementary level.

Participants were selected by the school principal based on two main factors: (1) each participant had to be a first through sixth grade reading teacher; (2) each participant had to have a high teaching evaluation from the previous year. In the KSA's education system, each teacher has an annual evaluation. This evaluation is completed by the school principal and the school supervisor. The evaluation form includes different criteria, such as knowledge about the subject, preparation, and teaching strategies. Total evaluation scores equal a percentage ranging from 0-100%. Consequently, the principal's chosen

participants have the highest evaluations as compared to their colleagues.

5.0 Setting and Access

The participants were chosen from one elementary school for several reasons. First, access to the school was granted by the school principal in advance. This was important because of the long distance between the researcher and the participants' country. Permission was obtained from the school's principal and the city education district to allow research with the school's teachers. Second, the location and the size of the school was ideal. The school represented the city's middle-class population. It is a medium-sized school, with approximately 550 students. Third, it is a public school that uses the country's mandated reading curriculum. Fourth, the proposed school was opened 27 years ago. Furthermore, the proposed school's teachers' years of experience varied, meaning that they used the curriculum for a long period of time. Such variance reflected each teacher's familiarity and knowledge about the curriculum.

Prior to the study, the researcher, participants, and school principal attended a meeting. During the meeting, the researcher explained the goal of the study, the interview protocol, the observation protocol, and the necessary artifacts. Then, each participant signed a consent form noting that they participated in the study by choice and that they were assured that their personal information would be confidential. Furthermore, participants were assured that all information they provide would be used for scientific research only.

Table 14. Demographic Information of the Participants

Name	Gender	Degree	Years of experience	Major	Evaluation
Ahmed	Male	Bachelor's	29 Years	Arabic language Teacher	97%
Badier	Male	Two years Diploma	29 years	Institution Librarians and information sciences	98%
Khaled	Male	Bachelor's	23 years	Arabic language	99%
Hani	Male	Bachelor's	Ten years	Arabic language	96%

Essam	Male	Bachelor's	Fifteen years	Arabic language	98%
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6.0 Data collection methods

Prior to data collection, an approval from Tennessee State University was obtained to receive permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), allowing the researcher to begin the data collection process.

Collected data included interviews, observations, and artifacts. Semi-structured individual interviews with each participant were conducted in person during the spring of the 2017-2018 school year inside the school library. Each participant was interviewed at the beginning of the study as suggested by Creswell (2018). In addition to interviews, the researcher conducted classroom observations of each teacher while he taught a reading lesson with students. Finally, the participants provided artifacts of their choice. Artifacts included lesson plans, students' work samples, and students' assessments.

6.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Creswell (2015) described interviews as an essential tool for qualitative research. An interview

occurs when the researcher asks participants open-ended questions and records their answers. A semi-structured interview allows the researcher to be flexible in asking sub-questions depending on what is revealed in the conversation (Creswell, & Poth; 2018). The researcher used a semi-structured interview to gain information from participants. The researcher followed the interview protocol and procedures as described by Creswell (2018, p.165). The researcher developed an interview protocol that helped to address the main research questions. Furthermore, the interview protocol questions were reviewed by one of the committee members, who is an expert in reading.

Each participant's interview for this study occurred inside the school library. Interview sessions ranged from fifteen to twenty-five minutes. Each interview was also audio-recorded. Interviews were conducted in Arabic because this is participants' primary language. Afterwards, each interview was transcribed to Arabic writing via Word document. Then, Arabic transcribed data were translated to English by an official agency. The

agency provided a certificate of translation as proof of credibility for translation (See Appendix D).

Sample interview questions follow:-

1- Please tell me about yourself? (Experience, education, teaching career).

2- How do you teach reading?

3- What challenges do you face teaching reading?

6.2 Observations

According to Creswell (2018, p.166), "observation is one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative research." Observation allows researchers to see things as they occur in their natural setting. The researcher designed the form for observation to help collect appropriate data to answer the research questions and support triangulation of data. The observation form was reviewed and approved by a professor from the dissertation committee who is an expert in reading and qualitative research (See Appendix C). The researcher was a non-participant observer (Creswell, & Poth; 2018). The researcher took notes and did not participate in the reading lesson. Observations of each participant teaching reading were

conducted for approximately 30 minutes. The researcher observed how the teacher assisted students during the lesson and how he interacted with his students.

6.3 Artifacts

According to Creswell (2015), artifacts “consist of public and private records that qualitative researchers obtained about the site or participants in a study” (p. 221) and are an important and valuable source of information in qualitative research (Creswell, 2015). For this study, artifacts included reading lessons, students’ work samples, assessments, and a case study for a student who identified as having a learning disability. Collecting artifacts helped to develop a full picture of teachers’ activities during the reading lesson. This third data source allowed for triangulation of the data and for validating the results during analysis. All artifacts are presented in chapter four with an explanation as well as attached in the appendices.

*** DATA ANALYSIS AND CODING PROCEDURES**

The researcher first used a Word document to transcribe the recorded

interviews, which were originally in Arabic language. Then, all transcribed data were sent to a translation agency, where the transcribed interviews were translated from Arabic to the English language. Next, the researcher read and familiarized himself with the different sorts of data. Later, data were coded by highlighting potential themes and using multiple colors. Coding is a widely used method in qualitative data analysis to organize textual data. The coded data were grouped into main themes enabling the researcher to create categories using the coding manual for qualitative researchers (Saldaña, 2016). Subsequently, reading and coding occurred simultaneously several times through data analysis.

Initially, the researcher analyzed interview, observation, and artifact data for each participant separately. After analyzing each participant’s data sources, the researcher wrote a full description of the analysis illustrating findings: Complete narratives of participants’ experiences teaching reading are found in chapter four. Next, the researcher compared and contrasted each participant’s data to

other participants to identify and synthesize common findings and differences among the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This stage of analysis allowed the researcher to develop categories from the major themes that were found across the data.

Five categories emerged as a result of the data analysis process: (1) teaching reading in elementary school in the KSA; (2) challenges that teachers face while teaching reading; (3) evaluation methods that teachers use to assess their students' progress in reading; (4) training teachers received to help them teach reading; (5) and strategies that teachers use to help students who are struggling readers. Each category included multiple themes, which are explained in detail in chapter four.

*** Data Management and Trustworthiness**

The data were stored in safe and secure place on the researcher's computer. There is no open access to anyone except the researcher and the committee. Data is not available at all for any person outside of the committee.

To ensure the validity, or trustworthiness and reliability of the current qualitative, case study, three methods were used as suggested by Creswell (2018). These methods include member checking, data triangulation, and clarifying the researcher's role.

Member Checking Member checking is a process whereby research participants are allowed to read and verify their responses from varied data sources (Creswell, 2018). In this study, all participants were allowed to confirm their transcribed interviews. Also, participants had the opportunity to view and compare the researcher's themes that were developed analysis of the teachers' interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Triangulation Researchers suggest gathering numerous sources of data to triangulate data and check results (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2001). Triangulation in this study occurred by collecting multiple sources of data. Three main sources of data were gathered for this study: observations, interviews, and artifacts. Comparing the collected data assisted in achieving triangulation.

The Researcher's Role and Subjectivity Finally, clarifying the researcher's role is the most important method to establish trustworthiness according to Creswell (2018). For this study, it is imperative that I recognize my background. I was born and raised in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where I received my education in public schools and at an undergraduate level. I have been passionate about teaching and learning since I was young. Choosing a college to attain an undergraduate degree in education was my first choice and one that I have never regretted. In fact, I am highly interested in improving education in the KSA because it is my home country where I was raised.

As researcher I may be biased for two reasons: (1) the country where my research took place is my home country, where I learned and attained my primary, secondary, and post-secondary education. (2) I have taught children with learning disabilities, which means that I have observed various reading problems. Both of these factors could have affected my point of view toward teachers and teaching reading in the KSA. I avoided

these biases by being neutral in my research without focusing on reading problems that students with learning disabilities make, as well as, not reflecting on the country that I researched as "my" country.

*** OVERVIEW**

The goal of this study was to explore the challenges male elementary teachers face regarding the teaching of reading. In order to understand the challenges, it was necessary to explore, first, how they teach reading, how they assess their students' reading progress, and the strategies that they use to support students who struggle with reading.

This chapter will provide an in-depth description of the findings from analyzed data. The collected data included interviews, classroom observations, and teacher-participants' artifacts. First, findings will be presented for each participant. Then, common findings among all participants will be presented.

There were five participants in this qualitative case study. They each participated in a semi-structured interview. In addition, the researcher observed each participant teaching a

reading lesson inside the classroom and completed an observation protocol form. After the interviews and observations were completed, each participant provided a classroom artifact related to teaching reading. As mentioned in Chapter three, each participant was given a pseudonym.

* **The Arabic Language and Terminology**

Arabic Language is substantially different from the English Language. There are 28 letters in the Arabic language and it is written in one format similar to cursive in English language. The participants used several terms in their interviews that are unique in their translation as they relate to teaching reading in the Arabic language. These terms include reference to sun letters and moon letters.

Sun Letters are Arabic letters that do not allow the reader to sound out the letter “L” when it is the second letter in a word. These are considered irregular letters. The concept is like the words *know* and *knife* in English. The English speaker do not pronounce the letter “K” at the beginning of the word.

Moon Letters are Arabic letters that allow the reader to pronounce all letters in the word, which is different than sun letters where one letter is not pronounced.

* **THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR STORIES**

1.0 AHMED

1.1 Interview

Ahmed’s interview was conducted in the school library. Ahmed is a first-grade teacher. He has taught for 29 years, with the majority being in elementary schools with first graders. He has a two-year diploma from a teacher institution in KSA. This two-year certificate has allowed him to teach at an elementary level. This kind of diploma no longer exists. It was offered 25-30 years ago due to the shortage of teachers in the KSA at that time. He completed his bachelor’s degree in Arabic language after eleven years of teaching. Earning an advanced degree helped him to increase his knowledge about teaching the Arabic language. Ahmed’s bachelor’s degree afforded him the opportunity to teach at a higher grade level; however, he chose to remain a first-grade teacher because he is passionate about reading.

He views it as the most important school subject because reading is the foundation for all other subjects.

Ahmed teaches twenty-five first grade males. According to him, the size of the class is ideal. His title is “classroom teacher,” meaning he remains with the same students throughout the school day. He teaches several subjects in addition to reading, such as math, science, and Quran. He teaches reading and writing daily. He uses the book that was designed by the KSA’s Ministry of Education entitled, *My Beautiful Language*. The book includes learning about letters, words, short passages, pictures, exercises, and writing. He follows the book’s instructions in order and with fidelity to move through the curriculum as requested by the Ministry of Education. He does not use any outside reading materials. Finally, he does not have a classroom assistant.

Ahmed described three main stages for teaching reading: “The first stage is helping the students to pronounce letters; next they will read simple words that have three letters, and then they read sentences or paragraphs” (Interview, L 18-19). For

him, the core of teaching reading is understanding sounds of letters. He said, “If the students could not learn these sounds perfectly, they would not be able to read” (Interview, L 14-15). He believes if students do not read well, then it could be due to their weak pronunciation and word sound. That means his main focus is on decoding.

He uses different strategies with students who struggle to read, such as beginning first with a simple task and then moving on to a more difficult one. During our interview, Ahmed said, “I help them gradually until they became able to read” (Interview, L 24-25) He focuses more on pronunciation, because according to him, “teachers should give more attention to the sounds of the letters” (Interview, L 26). He works with students to connect words and sentences together correctly because this is the main step, in his opinion, that supports students as they make meaning of words later.

According to Ahmed, he faces two challenges, “lack of collaboration with families and supporting students with learning disabilities” (Interview, L 30-31). In addition, he is concerned about some students who are not able

to interact with reading passages or read with expression. He stated, “I am concerned about interacting with the text itself such as raising the voice in some words and lower it when it needed” (Interview, L 47-49). Besides the required reading, he usually gives writing passages as homework. However, these assignments lead to another concern he has about students, which is completing writing assignments. He shared, “some students do not write the whole text that were assigned to write in class or at home” (Interview, L 57-58). Consequently, incomplete homework means more class instruction; however, he views working with students who are not able to read as taking up class time. He explained that “Those students consume time and daily effort” (Interview, L 67-68) because they need more time than others and there is no classroom assistant. Additionally, he views curriculum as an obstacle for working with struggling readers because the “curriculum was mainly designed for advanced students” (Interview, L 66-67). The Ministry of Education’s curriculum requires that he finish the

assigned book associated with the unit. For each academic year, there are two books; one book for the fall and a second book for spring semester. The book includes letters, words, passages, pictures, and exercises. Being limited to one book only is quite challenging because it may not serve all students. Some students may need extra work or outside resources to support their reading progress.

He also uses technology for classroom instruction. Classroom technology for him includes an overhead projector where he places the book or a passage to read. He uses “advanced technology that helps him a lot to zoom in for certain words and using different colors for important words to make it clear for the students” (Interview, L 41-43), meaning he tries to get the maximum benefit of the provided technology.

Ahmed assesses his students’ reading progress by asking them to read aloud directly from the assigned passages. These passages are from the school book that they study in the classroom. He says, “I assess my students in reading by letting them to read paragraph or selected sentences to

be sure that they are able to pronounce the letters and words correctly” (Interview, L 58-61). In general, a big percentage of his students can read. He stated that “he usually finds that 60% to 70% of the classroom are able to read with ease and the rest need more intensive effort” (Interview, L 53-55). (This percentage is based on his personal experiences, not on assessment data).

In our interview, Ahmed also revealed that he’s taken several professional development reading courses. Professional development in the KSA education system is optional for teachers and there is no external benefit. For example, teachers cannot accrue points for their evaluation and their salary is not impacted. Therefore, teachers who are eager to take training courses are educators who are intrinsically willing to improve themselves or improve their practices.

*** Classroom Observation**

The reading lesson observation session occurred during the first period of the school day. On the observation day, the classroom had a white board, teacher’s desk and chair, and a small table and chairs for students. The

classroom was arranged so that each student sat alone with a little bit of personal space. All students faced the white board. The classroom had two main windows. The alphabet was written on the wall of the classroom. The lesson was about the month of Ramadan, a special month for Muslims involving specific religious practice. The teacher started his lesson with an open question. The question was, “What is Ramadan?” Several students participated by answering. One student said, “It is the month that we fast in,” while another student said, “It is the month for the family to get together.” A third student responded, “It is the month that ends with the celebration.”

Next, the teacher opened his computer and turned on the projector. The computer read aloud a reading passage. The electronic version of the book allowed the teacher to display it while the students followed along in their assigned books. The passage was about the month of Ramadan. The students were to listen and follow along in their books word by word. At the same time, the teacher carefully observed his students as they read. He went to two students and directed them

to the correct lines. After the computer reading ended, the teacher asked several students to read aloud. The teacher considered reading aloud as an evaluation for his students (Interview, L: 58). After students finished reading, the teacher gave them quick feedback and words of encouragement. The feedback included correcting a few mistakes and reading difficult words aloud again. He did not add more information to the text.

*** Student Work Sample**

This participant provided a sample of a student work (Figure 1). For this assignment, students were required to correctly copy letters and words. The sample student copied letters and words correctly without any mistake. The student was able to write all letters and words correctly. So, the student grade was excellent on this worksheet.



Figure 1: Example of Student Work

*** Summary of Findings**

With 29 years of teaching experience, Ahmed’s focus is teaching students to decode letters and words and to read simple sentences, by pronouncing letters, reading simple words, and reading sentences. He assesses his students’ reading progress by listening to them read aloud. Based on the data collected, there is little attention to fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension.

His students were enthusiastic and excited to learn. They were engaged and actively participated in class. His students showed good behavior during the observed lesson and were actively engaged in their reading task. Ahmed encouraged his students with positive reinforcement through acknowledgement and praise.

Ahmed’s daily challenges as a reading teacher include having the following: (1) no classroom assistant, (2) few academic resources (e.g., no classroom library), (3) poor family collaboration, (4) time constraints, (5) struggling readers, (6) a strict curriculum, and (7) students who are not as engaged with classroom instruction or reading.

2.0 BADER

* Interview

Bader has 29 years of experience teaching first grade. He has a two-year diploma from a teachers' institution, allowing him to only teach at the elementary level. As of this interview, he had not attained a bachelor's degree. The interview was conducted with him in the school library.

Bader views planning and preparation prior to teaching reading as essential and believes it helps greatly during a reading lesson. He said, "before teaching reading, I must encourage students and prepare them. Preparation to be ready for receiving information, so the students would accept to learn from me" (Interview, L 9-12). His point of view derives from his teaching numerous unprepared students. With regards to his student demographic, Bader shared that "if you have 25 students, two or three in this neighborhood are prepared for school" (Interview, L 15-17). Furthermore, he believes students' lack of preparation is due to their family's low education level or lack of care about education. According to

Bader, "families of this neighborhood, maybe they are not educated. They do not have the passion for education" (Interview, L 19-20). In his interview, he went on to explain the challenges he's faced with some non-collaborative families who do not follow up at home with their children. He said, "if even explained once or twice and wrote comments on a student's journal, there would be no follow up at home. Mostly, students depend on your efforts here" (Interview, L 34-36).

Although he's taught many students who lack family support for academics, he has also experienced working with collaborative families who have helped prepare their children for school and the result was great: "I have a student now who is supposed to be in third grade. I even talked to the director about him. He reads any given reading passage fluently. This helps me so much when I start a lesson. This student is prepared perfectly" (Interview, L 28-31).

Another challenge Bader faces is the number of students he is assigned. "The fewer students are, the better I can do. For instance, if a class

has 32 students, it would be difficult. Otherwise, a class has twenty students. There is a huge difference” (Interview, L 48-50). Large first-grade classes without assistance can be complicated, especially if students lack readiness.

He uses the Ministry of Education’s required reading book and evaluates his students’ progress by asking them direct questions to read aloud or write. For example, He asks them to read each line, write the alphabet, and answer reading questions. Similarly, he evaluates reading skills, such as decoding irregular letters, “the sun or the moon letters” he notes (Interview, L 60). Moreover, he creates tests and exams that he gives his students, and says, “It is from my preparation; there is nothing from education” (Interview, L 64-65). In other words, he prepares all worksheets and creates questions that he wants his students to answer for all of his reading classes.

He tries his best with students who are struggling readers by giving them extra time and supporting them to move to a higher level. Bader stated, “I do my best without giving up on them, with highly intensive work, or seek

help from the school counselor” (Interview, L 74-75). Furthermore, he refers and transfers students for other diagnostic services, so that another educator can conduct an assessment to determine the child’s special needs, which could be related to a learning disability or hearing impairment.

Finally, Bader has taken multiple professional development courses “on thinking skills, primary classes skills, how to teach Arabic, and course in children growth” (Interview, L 80-81). He explained further that professional development has helped him to keep up to date on information and the current with teaching practices.

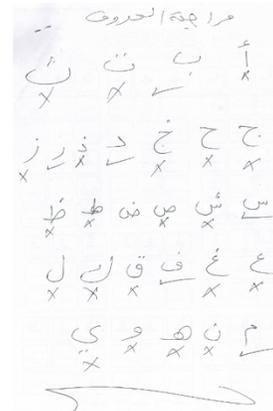
*** Classroom Observation**

Observation data were collected during fifth period of the school day. Bader’s classroom has a white board, teacher’s desk and chair, and small tables and chairs for students. Each student has his own personal space. All students face the white board. The classroom has two main windows. The alphabet is written on the classroom wall. The room was ready with the projector inside the classroom. The reading lesson focused on reading words. The teacher was teaching his

students how to pronounce the words, so they would know how to read them correctly. Some of these words included “bike,” “door,” and “hotel.” Bader evaluated his students by asking them direct questions regarding reading these words or letters on the board aloud. Moreover, he asked several students to write words or letters on the board. He asked a struggling reader (according to his teacher that he is struggling reader) to write what he had learned in class. The student could neither read, nor write correctly. During the observation, the teacher faced some challenges such as behavior problems from two students. Some students were talking at the same time, while others were not paying attention to the teacher during the lesson. On the other hand, there was no classroom assistant, even though there were 32 students. Moreover, there was no classroom library and no outside sources were utilized by the teacher.

*** Student Work Sample**

The participant provided two work samples from struggling readers who could neither read well, nor write the alphabet. The assignment required students to read and write letters.



The title is Letters Review. The X sign under each letters means was not read correctly.

Figure 2: Review for Arabic Letters with First-grade Struggling Reader

The above figure shows that the student could not read twenty-four letters. He was able to only read four letters correctly. This simple test was created by the teacher to know how many letters a student could recognize correctly.



The paperwork includes writing four letters with three different positions. In Arabic language some letters differ when they are written in a different part of the word.

Figure 3: Sample of Struggling Reader Writing at First Grade.

The student was not able to copy any letter correctly. He wrote all letters the same way as the B letter written in Arabic which is ب

* **Summary of Findings**

Bader has an experience of 29 years in teaching. In Bader's opinion, being well-prepared prior to school is the main reason that students learn to read and do well in school. He teaches reading by teaching students the alphabet. He evaluated his students' progress in reading by asking them directly to read or write. He also evaluated irregular skills, such as moon and sun letters.

Bader faces six challenges as a teacher: (1) few collaborative families, (2) the number of the students inside the classroom, (3) students' behavioral challenges, (4) no classroom assistant, (5) no classroom library, and (6) having no extra materials or outside sources that he could use inside the classroom. On a positive note, some students are enthusiastic and eager to participate by saying anything. Bader uses praise to encourage students. The teacher does practical work by asking students to write what they have learned on the board. Also, the teacher

looks for silent students to encourage them to participate in the lesson. He gives extra time to students who struggle to read. Furthermore, he seeks help from others in the school, such as the counselor or outside the school, such as the assessment services department. For example, he transfers the students who struggle to read to be evaluated by both of learning disability teacher and the school counselor in order to know if the student has learning disability.

3.0 KHALED

Khaled is a second-grade teacher, who has twenty-three years' experience. He teaches reading, Quran, and writing. His bachelor's degree is in Library and Information Science. He taught high school before teaching at the elementary school level. He also worked as a resources room teacher inside the school prior to teaching second grade. His job was to prepare the room for other teachers to use as well as to prepare required resources, such as papers and overhead projector.

* **Interview**

Khaled's interview was conducted inside the school's library. He believes reading is important for all

grades. He begins the school year by reviewing what his students learned in first grade; this review includes letters and simple words, “to enable them to recall the previous knowledge” (Interview, L 11-12). He teaches some skills such as irregular letters: “First, I do pay attention to the sun letters and the moon letters” (Interview, L 22-23). In addition, he focuses a great deal on pronouncing letters correctly. “I usually help students with that to pronounce them correctly” (Interview, L 25-26). He uses technology in his teaching by displaying the text on the white board and computers.

According to Khaled, “Students come after long summer vacation with nothing even letters” (Interview, L 10-11), and this can be challenging. Another difficulty is that the class population is large. “The number of students inside the classroom is 30. It is very hard to cover all those students in one class” (Interview, L 29-30). Moreover, he found there is very little family involvement or support, “In terms of family cooperation, 30% of them offer help and the rest no” (Interview, L 34-35). Another challenge that he noted is that students

seem to have low attention spans due to technology use at home. He stated that “distracters at home today disrupt students’ attention and time as well such as PlayStation and cell phones” (Interview, L 35-36).

Khaled uses multiple tactics to support struggling readers. First, he tries to modify the lesson for them. “I designed a specific course for students who struggle to read” (Interview, L 39). Furthermore, he transfers students to others in the school by sending “the students to the school counselor” (Interview, L 40-41) to get help. He also says, “there are several procedures and exams each student must go through before we send him to the teacher of learning difficulties” (Interview, L 42-44); therefore, he adjusts tests and exams to accommodate for these students’ needs. He also gives more attention to students who need help. Khaled says, “My style of teaching is focus more on weak students while I do not marginalize the good students” (Interview, L 55-57). Another strategy he uses is to work with struggling readers at a modified pace. “I start steadily from scratch, and slowly”

(Interview, L 60) to help the student. The final method he uses is “pair reading where I ask students to read in pairs and assess each other” (Interview, L 70-71).

He evaluates his students’ reading progress by testing them on what they have learned. He creates his own assessments. The tests require students to read and answer questions. The result of the tests reflects the student level. He said, “Based on the result, I assess the student” (Interview, L 46-47). He means that he knows his student’s level by knowing how they do on the test that he created and applied.

Khaled has strengthened his teaching with professional development. He says he “took courses in Arabic language, interactive reading, collaborative reading, and some sessions on reading skills” (Interview, L 66-67).

*** Classroom Observation**

Khaled’s observation was conducted during fourth period, while second-grade students participated in their reading lesson. The lesson was centered on the computer. The teacher taught in a different room called the

resources room. The room was prepared with multiple tables and the teacher divided students into six groups. Each group had seven students, including the group leader. The teacher began his lesson with an open discussion and question about computers. The question was *what is a computer?* The teacher showed the computer that he uses. In addition, he demonstrated different types of computers, such as personal or office. Then, the students read the reading passage, while the teacher evaluated their reading. The teacher used direct questions by asking students to read directly from line X to line X aloud. In general, students were enthusiastic to read. Moreover, the teacher used a lot of encouraging words, such as “excellent.”

The observation showed a few challenges. One is there were too many students for the resources room. Because of the number of students, there was a lack of time and all students weren’t allowed to read. Also, some students in the back paid less attention to the teacher. Even though there were many students, there was no classroom assistant. A second

challenge was that there were no extra books, materials, or outside sources used for classroom instruction. Instruction was teacher centered and all students were required to participate in the same reading lesson.

* Student Sample Work

The teacher provided a copy of what he deemed to be an “excellent” student writing. The student copied the reading lesson exactly the way it was written in the book.

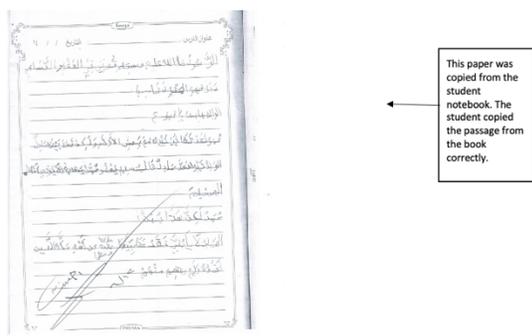


Figure 4: Example of Student Writing at Second Grade

The student copied the passage correctly. The teacher commented on it by writing, “You did well.” This type of writing is known in KSA for helping the students to improve their handwriting.

* Summary Findings

With twenty-three years of experience in teaching, Khaled views

reading as the most important subject for all grades. He teaches second-grade reading by reviewing what students have learned in first grade, and then by teaching them irregular skills. He evaluates his students’ reading progress by asking them to read directly from the passages in the book.

Khaled faces several challenges while teaching reading: (1) working with non-collaborative families who do not support their child’s learning at home, (2) teaching a heavy class load, (3) teaching distracted children, (4) supporting struggling readers, and (5) not having supplementary materials for students.

Even though there are challenges, he helps struggling readers by modifying reading lessons for them, seeking help from others in the school, such as the learning disability teacher, and pairing them with students who read well.