

## A Qualitative Case Study of Male Teachers' Challenges Teaching Reading in Elementary Classrooms in KSA (Part 2)

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### \* International Reading Studies about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In 2011, the KSA participated in The Progress International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) on fourth-grade reading measurement. The KSA was ranked number 45 out of 49 countries. Meaning, KSA was ranked near the bottom due to receiving a below average score of 430 points on the PIRLS scale. Other Arab countries at the lower end of the scale were countries such as Morocco, Qatar, and Egypt. The PIRLS median point score

was 500 points. Table 1 shows each levels' benchmark.

*Table 1. The Points of the Scale Level*

PIRLS Scale level	The scale point
Advanced level	625 points
High level	550 points
Intermediate level	475 points
Low level	400 points

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

*Table 2. The Distribution of Questions Type on the PIRLS exam*

Exam questions type	Percentage of the exam
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Explicit information	20% of the questions
Inferences	30% of the questions
Interpretation of different idea	30% of the questions
Evaluation of the content	20% of the questions

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

On the exam, twenty percent of the reading questions are about finding explicit information within passages. Thirty percent of the questions relate to making direct inferences from the reading. Another 30 % requires readers to interpret different ideas while reading. Twenty percent of the questions refer to examining and evaluating content and language.

**Table 3. Saudi Students' Gender on PIRLS**

The gender	The percentage
Female	52%
Male	48%

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

Fifty-two percent of Saudi participants were girls, while 48% of the Saudi participants were boys. Girls scored higher than boys by attaining

456 points compared to 402 points by the boys on the PIRLS scale. This differences between the Saudi genders matches the gender differences worldwide as generally females score higher than males (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012).

**Table 4. Saudi Students and Resources at Home**

Resources at home	The percentage of students
25 books at home	17% of the participants
100 books at home	20% of the participants
No books at home	63% of the participants

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

The PIRLS also found that Saudi students with more home learning resources scored higher than the students who have fewer resources at home. This international assessment also showed that 17% of the Saudi participants reported that they have approximately 25 books for children at home, while only 20% reported that they have around 100 books at home. This is a total of 37% of the

participants. Conversely, a staggering 63% did not report having books at home, which means a larger percentage of the students do not have access to home resources.

**Table 5. Saudi Schools' Principals and the Emphasis of Academic Success**

The emphasis of academic success level	The percentage reported by school principals
Very high emphasis on academic success	9% of the participants
High emphasis of academic success	59 % of the participants
Medium emphasis on academic success	32 % of the participants

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

The PIRLS report indicates that Saudi school principals ranked 15 out of 49 on the school's emphasis on academic success. Nine percent of school principals reported that their school put a very high emphasis on academic success, while 59 % put a

high emphasis on academic success, and only 32% put a medium emphasis on academic success.

**Table 6. Saudi Teachers and Emphasis of Academic Success**

The academic success level	The percentage of teachers
Very high emphasis on academic success	15% of participants
High emphasis on academic success	61% of participants
Medium emphasis on academic success	25 % of participants

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

On the other hand, Saudi teachers ranked 12<sup>th</sup> out of 49 countries in placing an emphasis on academic success. Fifteen percent of teachers put very high emphasis on academic success, 61% put a high emphasis on academic success, and only 25% of teachers put a medium emphasis on academic success.

**Table 7. The Emphasis of Reading Skills by Saudi School Principals**

The emphasis in early grades on reading skills	The percentage of school principals
Emphasis on 7% of the before or at participants second grade level	
Emphasis on 78% of the third grade level participants	
Emphasis at 15% of the fourth grade level or after participants	

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

The report indicated an emphasis in early grades on reading skills and strategies. School principals reported that 7% of the emphasis on reading skills took place prior to or at the second-grade level. Seventy-eight percent reported that the emphasis was on the third-grade level, and only 15% reported that the emphasis was at the fourth-grade level or later. From this indicator, it is noteworthy that the KSA did not put emphasis on early grades reading skills in comparison to other countries such as England and

the United States. The KSA is ranked 40 on this indicator (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker; 2012).

**Table 8. Saudi Teachers' Degree Level**

The degree level	The percentage of teachers
Postgraduate degree	0% of participants
Bachelor's degree	69% of participants
Two years degree	31% of participants

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

In the indicator of teacher's degree level, Saudi teachers reported that zero percent of teachers had postgraduate degrees, while 69% reported that they possess a bachelor's degree.

**Table 9. Saudi Teachers and Training**

Training in the last two years about reading	The percentage of teachers
More than 16 hours of training	22% of the participant

Less than 16 64% of the hours of participants training  
 Did not spend 14% of the any time on participants training

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

In the last two years, only 22% of Saudi teachers spent 16 hours of training and development related to reading. Sixty-four percent of teachers reported that they spent less than 16 hours in the last two years, and 14% of teachers did not spend any time on professional development for reading on the last two years. This report reinforces the idea that more teacher training is necessary in the K.S.A. (Alanasari, 2008; Alnassar, 2000). Likewise, studies show a positive relationship between teacher professional development and students' reading achievement (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Hill, & Grossman, 2013; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).

*Table 10. Saudi Students who Like Reading*

Reading preference level	The percentage of the students
like to read	26% of the participants
somewhat like to read	65 % of the participants
do not like to read	9% of participants

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

Twenty-six percent of Saudi students who reported that they like reading also have higher scores on reading achievement, with an average score of 464 points. Sixty-five percent of the students who reported that they somewhat like reading have an average achievement score of 421. Nine percent of the students who reported that they do not like reading have an average score of 400 points. These patterns demonstrate a relationship between the students who like reading and their achievement score in reading. This lends importance to Tarabishi's (2002) study which showed that pre-service teachers who were humanitarian

majors perceive reading for enjoyment as important.

**Table 11. Saudi Students' Motivation Toward Reading**

Motivation level toward reading	The percentage of the students
Motivated	83% of the participants
Somewhat motivated	14% of the participants
Not motivated	4% of the participants

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

In the indicator of students' motivation toward reading, 83% of Saudi students reported that they are motivated to read. However, the overall average reading achievement score is 443, which is low in comparison to other comparable countries. For example, Romanian and Russian students reported the same percentage (83%) who are motivated to read, but these students have higher average reading achievement scores with 512 and 571 points respectively. The report also indicates that students in the United States have fewer students who are

motivated to read, but higher reading scores than the KSA. Seventy-one percent (71%) of U.S students reported that they are motivated to read, with average reading achievement score garnering 560 points. Fourteen percent (14%) of Saudi students reported being somewhat motivated to read, with an average reading achievement score of 389 points. Only 4% of the Saudi students reported that they are not motivated to read, with an average achievement score of 340 points. This is an indication that Saudi students were not taught the benefits of reading as they should be (Boyle, Al Ajjawi, & Xiang, 2014). Saudi students are motivated to read (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012); however, either they do know enough about how to read, they do not benefit from reading, or their reading instruction did not emphasize appropriate reading skills, such as fluency and reading comprehension (Al-Jarf, 2007; Boyle, Al Ajjawi, & Xiang, 2014).

**Table 12. Saudi Students' Confidence Levels with Reading**

Confidence level	The percentage of the students
Confident	39% of the participants
Somewhat confident	53% of the participants
Not confident	8% of the participants

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

Saudi students who reported 39% confidence levels have an average achievement score of 478 points. Fifty-three percent of students who report being somewhat confident have an average achievement score of 406 points. The 8% who reported they are not confident yielded an average achievement score of 371 points. On the other hand, American students who reported that they are 40% confident have an average achievement score of 588 points. Forty-nine percent of Americans who reported that they are somewhat confident have an average achievement score of 545, and 11% who reported that they are not

confident have an average score of 503. The percentage is very similar between the Saudi students who reported that they are confident in reading (39%). American students score at the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile in this area. However, in the average achievement reading score, there is a significant difference. Saudi students scored 478 on the scale, while the American students scored 588. The difference is 110 points between the two groups (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012). This is another indication that Saudi students miss some basic reading skills, as mentioned by Al-Jarf (2007) and Boyle, Al Ajjawi, and Xiang (2014).

**Table 13. Saudi Students' Engagement in Reading Lessons**

The engagement level during reading lessons	The percentage of the students
Engaged	33% of the participants
Somewhat engaged	61% of the participants
Not engaged	6% of the participants

(Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012)

Thirty-three percent of Saudi students who reported that they are engaged also have an average reading achievement score of 438; sixty-one percent who report being somewhat engaged have an average reading achievement score of 431 points, and 6% who report not being engaged have an average score of 394 points. Australian students reported similar percentages, but scored differently on the assessment. Thirty-three percent of the Australian students who reported being engaged, scored an average reading achievement score of 538 points. Fifty-six percent who reported being somewhat engaged have an average reading achievement score of 526 points, and 11% of Australian students who reported not being engaged, scored an average of 509 achievement points. Though the percentages are similar, the achievement scores are very different between Saudi and Australian students.

In summary, the 2011 PIRLS results yielded data regarding Saudi

students' perceptions of their own reading motivations, confidence and performance levels compared to 49 other countries around the world. The PIRLS results revealed the importance of studying this area, specifically in the KSA to improve students' reading levels (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also participated in The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study in 2016. The KSA's students' results were the same, 430 points. These results further confirm that a large percent of Saudi students have poor reading and literacy rates (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, 2017)

According to Mullis, Martin, Foy, and Durcker (2012), many Middle Eastern countries' fourth graders scored below average or were at the bottom of the PIRLS' assessment. In response to low literacy rates, Boyle, Al Ajjawi, and Xiang (2014) researched early grade reading instruction among several Middle Eastern countries (Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Yemen, and Iraq), all of which speak and teach



Arabic language as the main language. The study was based on a systemic review of the literature. The researchers conducted interviews with five leaders within education sectors regarding literacy teaching to first through third-grade students.

One of the major findings of this study was that reading is not a single subject in the curriculum of the Arab countries including the KSA. Reading is taught as part of Arabic language classes. Reading classes are built around texts, where the class enables the teachers to teach other part of the language such as grammar. Furthermore, the study found that children are “not taught reading skills as they should be” (Boyle, Al Ajawi, & Xiang, 2014, p 60). Students lack important reading skills, such as phonological awareness, morphological knowledge, and sentence context. Another finding from this study was the role of diglossia and vocalization in teaching reading skills in Arabic-speaking countries. Diglossia is the term used to describe when the language that

student’s study in school is somewhat different than the spoken language outside of the school environment (Ferguson, 1959). Inside of the school setting, academic language is used, while outside students use spoken and local language. Vocalization refers to using short vowel diacritics, which is what the Arabic language emphasizes when teaching reading at early stages (Boyle, Al Ajawi, & Xiang, 2014).

The researchers found that Arabic countries had made good progress in education in the last few decades by addressing issues of educational quality. However, they suggest a “greater attention must be done toward how literacy (reading and writing) are taught” in Arabic-speaking countries (Boyle, Al Ajawi, & Xiang, 2014). The study highlighted several recommendations about teachers’ development and teaching reading, as well as the curriculum in general. First, teachers should be trained to improve their practices and improve their overall performance. For example, teachers should teach

reading components in explicit ways, in addition to using different methods and strategies (Boyle, Al Ajjawi, & Xiang, 2014). Also, teachers should use different activities and lessons to teach all of the reading skills. Pre-service teachers and in-service teachers should receive professional development focused on several skills that will enable them to improve the quality of their teaching practices, such time management, which will enable them to do a variety of activities during the lesson period (Boyle, Al Ajjawi, & Xiang, 2014). Secondly, research should be conducted in several aspects, such as reading strategies, teaching reading basic skills, action research inside the classroom, and using several resources for the reading activities. The study outlined two main points about research on teaching reading in Arabic: (1) research about teaching reading in Arabic is still nascent, and (2) there is a need for conducting research on how to teach reading in Arabic (Boyle, Al Ajjawi, & Xiang, 2014).

Although their study did not include or discuss the details of how reading is taught in the KSA, the researchers believed that the results would be similar based upon numerous cultural and linguistic factors and similar PIRLS results.

In 2016, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducted a comparison study among 20 countries, referred to as the Group of Twenty (G-20 countries). The G-20 countries group is comprised of the 20 largest economic countries in the world, and includes the KSA. The study compares several educational indicators among the 20 countries. These indicators include school-age population, enrollment in education, academic performance, students' attitudes, teachers in professional development, career satisfaction, salaries, and graduation rates. The data for this report are comprised of five different sources including PIRLS, Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), education databases that have annual data about the members' countries, Trends

in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which is an assessment for fourth and eighth grade, and the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which is an assessment that focus on adult competencies including literacy and problem solving.

In the NCES (2016) study, 77% of fourth-grade Saudi teachers reported that there is no availability of specialized reading professionals to help with students' reading. On the contrary, science teachers in the KSA reported that approximately 60% of them received professional training in their subject area, which helped them to improve their practice and teaching. This finding reflected the improvement plan that the Ministry of Education in the KSA began in 2004 (discussed earlier in the chapter). The Ministry of Education's plan was to focus on science and technology, which meant less attention was given to other necessary subjects, such as reading.

In summary, the G-20 study compared 20 countries around the world on several indicators. The two indicators that were discussed are the most relevant to this study, which are the KSA's teachers' perceptions and students' reading.

Al-Qaryouti, Ihmeideh, Al bustami, and Homidi (2016) conducted a comparison study to understand four Arab Gulf neighboring countries: the KSA, Oman, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates. These countries are similar in economy, education system, culture, and religion, which is appropriate for comparison studies. The researchers examined teachers' use of evidence-based strategies intended to support children's literacy. There were 644 kindergarten teachers, with 154 participants from the KSA, 105 from Qatar, 190 from Emirates, and 195 from Oman. The researchers' survey included five dimensions: phonological awareness, understating the written contexts, print awareness, knowledge of words, and writing. The study found that

teachers from all four countries reported lower use of the writing component at the kindergarten level.

The results of this study demonstrated that teachers in Emirates ranked higher in using literacy strategies. Conversely, the KSA's teachers reported the lowest use of literacy strategies. Two possible reasons for the KSA's teachers' lack of using literacy strategies could be because the curriculum they used dated back to the 1990s and they had not been introduced to modern teaching methods, as are most teachers in developing countries (Al-Qaryouti et al., 2016).

The researchers recommended several areas that could improve literacy development practices in the four countries. First, it is recommended that professional development be provided for kindergarten teachers, with an emphasis on literacy strategies in early years. Another recommendation was to improve these countries' university teacher preparation programs, by including modern

practices and evidence-based strategies.

The above study compared four regional countries that have similar characteristics. However, this study's findings have yielded results similar to previous quantitative studies (Alelayan, 2001; Almoaiqel, 2014; Alnassar, 2000; Aloqaili, 2001; Thouqan Saleem Yakoub, 2015), which is that Saudi reading teachers show a lack of practicing the modern methodologies in teaching reading.

To conclude the international reading studies section, a varied research has been conducted that discussed and compared the teaching of reading in the KSA with and among other countries. Studies range from regional comparisons with neighboring countries to a comparison with western countries. Each of these studies yielded similar results about reading and reading teachers in the KSA, which is that students' literacy rates are among the lowest and teachers require professional development to improve teaching reading.

### \* Summary of the Chapter

The literature review presented an overview about history of education in KSA. It viewed the components of reading as outlined by the National Reading Panel as well as teaching reading in the KSA. Finally, the chapter covered the researches that relate to reading in the KSA at different levels, which are locally, regionally, and internationally.

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