

Developing and Validating Professional Teaching Standards for Higher Education EFL Instructors in Saudi Arabia: A Delphi Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at developing and validating professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia. The Delphi technique was utilized to gain a consensus among the panel of experts through three rounds. In the first round, a survey was sent to 31 English language teaching and teacher education experts to select the appropriate standards and provide any additional standards. Ninety-six performance indicators were generated at the end of this round. In the second round, the survey was sent to 29 experts to rate their responses on a 5-point Likert scale. In the third round, the survey was sent back to the experts to review their responses and provide any modifications. By the end of the third round, eighty-one performance indicators were identified and categorized into seven standard fields: language, knowledge of learners, learning environments, instruction, technology use, assessment, and professionalism. The study reveals insight into the professional standards which are appropriate for higher education EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia. This framework will help improve faculty teaching practices and for their continuous professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a venerable human profession that provides learners with knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. It is viewed as an art and science. As an art, the imaginative and artistic abilities of the teacher create a worthwhile situation in the classroom to enable students to learn. As a science, it shows the logical and procedural steps to attain the learning outcomes (Rajagopalan, 2019). In a changing world, teaching is no longer a simple task limited to explaining and simplifying the content, but rather a work that needs adequate knowledge and skills to help learners maximize their learning and become independent and life-long learners. Today, “the teacher is not only a communicator but also a manager with the responsibility of creating the enabling environment for learning to occur” (Ababio, 2013, p. 47). Effective teaching equips learners with the necessary skills for how to learn and how to demonstrate their learning. Thus, it positively influences students’ learning, achievement, and academic performance (Hoge, 2016; Kane et al., 2011; Ritter & Shuls, 2012; Stronge et al., 2011).

English language teaching has been a vital concern due to the vast demand for learning English worldwide. In higher education, teaching English as a foreign language is a com-

plex duty based on a set of skills and attitudes that teachers should possess. The instructor plays a very crucial role in students learning. An effective language instructor should possess an adequate command of the subject matter, the ability to transmit knowledge easily, and motivate learners to do their best (Uygun, 2013). He should be familiar with the content he teaches, ELT pedagogy, learners’ needs, and the assessment approaches. Therefore, instructors’ effectiveness should be “identified, quantified, evaluated and replicated” (Hoge, 2016, p. 3).

Teaching quality is the essential factor in student learning; it is the catalyst that releases the standards to improve students’ achievement (Frey et al., 2013). Instructors are accountable for students learning since they are the most crucial element in the education process. Hence, accountability comes to ensure that instructors’ practices are effective and help students to learn. For accountability and quality assurance in language teaching, there is a need to set professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors to guide their teaching practices, to develop their performance in line with the global trends in teaching English as a foreign language, and to be used as a reference to evaluate their performance. Professional standards “pro-

vide a common set of professional expectations for teacher preparation programs, licensure, professional development outcomes, and job performance” (Apthorp et al., 2012, p. 2). In addition, they specify the quality of teaching and “define what teachers must know and be able to do to ensure that all students master challenging academic standards” (Frey et al., 2013, p. 3).

Statement of the Problem

English is the essential language today; it is one of the significant technological and scientific advances tools. In Saudi Arabia, English plays a significant role in higher education since it is the means of instruction in medicine, science, engineering, computer sciences, and other disciplines. However, despite the exerted enormous efforts to teach English in universities, most students face problems in learning the English language, and their English proficiency is unsatisfactory and below expectations, which negatively affect their academic performance (Albaiz, 2016; Al-Johani, 2009; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017; Khan, 2011a; Melibari, 2016). The main causes for the low English proficiency of university students include teacher-centered instruction, teachers’ traditional teaching methods, and students’ low motivation (Alkubaidi, 2014; Arabai, 2014; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). In addition, Albaiz (2016) concluded that the improper teaching of the English language in higher education institutions is due to ineffective quality assurance and evaluation methods.

Literature review showed that there were no specific professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia. Thus, higher education institutions must consider adequate professional teaching standards for EFL instructors to improve their teaching practices and professional development and as a basis for institutions evaluation and accreditation. Thus, this study tries to bridge the gap on lacking professional teaching standards for EFL instructors in higher education in Saudi Arabia through developing and validating rigorous EFL professional teaching standards in the light of the global trends in teaching English as a foreign language.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims at developing and validating professional teaching standards for EFL instructors in higher education in Saudi Arabia to guarantee quality assurance in language teaching. As English language teaching at Saudi universities faces many challenges, the most crucial challenge is lacking proficient teachers, which results in apparent weakness in students’ language proficiency. Thus, professional teaching standards based on international trends are required to help higher education EFL instructors to develop their teaching knowledge and skills. Therefore, this study addresses the following research question: “What are the professional teaching standard fields and performance standards for higher education EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia?”.

Significance of the Study

This study responds to the calls for implementing professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors and the demands to bring standards-based accountability to higher education (Rose, 2010). Due to the lack of teaching professional standards for higher education EFL instructors, this study would pave the way for developing teaching standards for teaching English, in particular, and teaching standards for all higher education disciplines, in general, in Saudi Arabia. The findings of this study would have deep insights into EFL teaching practices in higher education and would provide practitioners with evidence-based professional paths to improve EFL teaching. It is hoped that this study would contribute to drawing a roadmap for decision-makers to make sound decisions about preparing, training, and evaluating higher education English language instructors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Quality assurance in English Language Teaching in Higher Education

Quality assurance is still a relatively new term to education generally and higher education in particular (Ellis, 2019). Quality assurance in higher education is increasingly used to refer to the practices whereby academic standards are maintained and improved to enhance students learning outcomes as a sequence of their engagement in a particular educational program (Dill, 2010). The implementation of quality assurance has yielded outstanding improvements in higher institutions, including reforms in curricula, higher standards in student assessment, pedagogical upgrading programs for academic staff, and more stimuli for academic publications. Quality assurance in language education involves setting attainable standards for language teaching to achieve the teaching objectives and monitoring the attainment of the predetermined standards (Ayeni, 2011). These standards should cover a wide range of disciplines such as sound knowledge of the subject areas, effective lesson plans and teaching strategies, technology use, setting learning environments, adequate learners’ knowledge, monitoring and evaluating students, and keeping up-to-date professionalism. The global demand for English as a second or foreign language has resulted in a rising need for well-established education for English learners worldwide. Recently, higher education institutions are characterized by a substantial increase in universities that offer English as a medium of instruction. Reforms in educational systems “promote the need for students to master foreign languages, to be proficient in foreign languages, to develop their oral and written speech in a foreign language” (Hamidova et al., 2020, p. 193). Organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, the European Association of Higher Education, and the European Network for the Quality Assurance of Higher Education seek to develop students’ foreign language skills by establishing well-designed standards (Hamidova et al., 2020). This has resulted in extensive interest in the quality assurance and accreditation of the English language programs (Macaro et al., 2018; Staub, 2019).

Saudi Arabia, one of the largest countries in the Middle East, has an ambitious plan to internationalize the higher education system to enhance competitiveness nationally and internationally (Kirkgos, 2019). Policymakers strongly believe that English language education is the primary tool for improving the quality of teaching and learning in the country, so the Saudi government has nearly tripled the Ministry of Education (MoE) budget since 2004 to open new universities with international standards. The MoE should set a locally designed language education framework correlated to other international standards to enable higher education EFL learners to develop their language skills to pursue successful careers in a job market that considers the English language an essential tool for development and competition (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017). Quality assurance for English language education in Saudi Arabia has started recently. The initial evolution of Saudi higher education towards standards began with establishing the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) in 2004 (Al-bargi, 2019). The Ministry of Higher Education is “highly concerned with the pursuit of excellence in effective EFL teaching-learning in the arena of education, but it experiences tardy progress especially in college level” (Liton, 2012, p.1). Although the government of Saudi Arabia has spent billions of dollars to develop learners’ English language proficiency, the majority of learners are considered underachieving in the English language (Al-bargi, 2019). Nevertheless, EFL learning and teaching in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia face several barriers and difficulties to reach a high level of competence. These barriers include students’ lack of motivation and interest (Khan, 2011b; Liton, 2012), pedagogical factors such as teaching strategies, teaching resources, and administration (Al-Nasser, 2015; Khan, 2011b), lack of authentic assessment methods, inappropriate learning environments, over-reliance on Arabic language and inadequate use of technology (Al-Tamimi, 2019; Ashraf, 2018).

Quality Assurance in English Language Teacher Professional Development

English language teacher education (ELTE) is a recent issue that concerns those involved in teaching English worldwide. In any educational system, “the quality of education cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (Wakita, 2013, p. 1). Freeman (2020) mentioned a set of concerns that the ELT should address: the content, the teaching force, learners, pedagogy, and teacher education. Therefore, “quality teacher education is the key to quality education for learners” (Agudo, 2017, p.64). English language teacher development should meet today’s in-service ELTE standards to help teachers to become literate in teaching methodologies, assessment, technology, management, and research to make professional development a practiced-oriented approach (Ozturk & Aydin, 2019).

Most countries worldwide are currently focusing on reviewing language teacher education and teaching in general in response to the current challenges that require more efforts to develop students’ skills due to the vast array of educational, political, sociocultural, and institutional condi-

tions. In U.S. public schools, teachers are prepared to work effectively to meet the state standards. Across the European Union, teachers are trained to teach content and language integrated learning (CLIL), where subjects are taught to students in a foreign language (Johnson & Golombek, 2020). Recently, most European countries adopted quality teacher education at BA level colleges in the last three decades. This includes providing language teachers with professional training that embraces phonetics and grammar, EFL methodology, psychology, pedagogy, and reflective teaching practices (Komorowska, 2017; Wright, 2010).

In Saudi Arabia, ELTE has many drawbacks that negatively affect the reforms being considered to teach the English language. Pre-service teachers are expected to teach students at all levels, from primary level to college level. It is well-known that learners do not have similar characteristics, but most of the curriculums available for training are limited to public schools. So, this wide range of ages makes it difficult for novice teachers to teach college students effectively. In addition, pre-service teachers are not equipped with effective teaching strategies that cope with autonomous and differentiated learning needs. Although they study different psychology, administration, and class management courses, they cannot deal with at-risk students suffering from low motivation, language anxiety, negative attitudes, and learning disabilities. Besides, most teacher education programs are theory-oriented, lacking real-classroom experiences, so pre-service teachers have difficulties transforming theory into practice. Teachers are given only one term to practice teaching in schools. During this time, they lack effective assessment, supervision, guidance, and cooperation of experienced teachers. Moreover, Although English language content is essential, pre-service teachers are not equipped with 21st-century skills. Besides, pre-service programs do not emphasize soft skills such as self-confidence, patience, tolerance, kindness, creativity, enthusiasm, communication, teamwork, empathy, ethics, perseverance, courage, and leadership (Ozturk & Aydin, 2019). Assessment is a crucial component that modifies teaching a language since it helps teachers assess students’ learning outcomes. ELTE programs fail to equip in-service teachers with the most up-to-date assessment approaches, such as authentic assessment. Teachers lack the techniques to develop and choose the appropriate assessment tools, interpret assessment results, give corrective feedback, and make decisions upon assessment data. Technology integration and the implementation of ICT knowledge and skills in classrooms are obstacles that in-service teachers face. Pre-service ELTE programs are presented in a traditional way. Trainers of these programs themselves are not equipped with up-to-date technological innovations, making it very difficult for their students to use them effectively in classrooms. Another drawback of pre-service programs is the continuous adjustment in teacher preparation policy. The content, quality, and duration of ELTE programs differ from a university to another. Each university has its own programs, which makes it challenging to have a common thread of philosophy and develop national standards that direct the preparation and training of Saudi English language teachers (Al-Seghayer, 2014).

Regarding difficulties of in-service ELTE programs, teachers are not supported to begin their jobs successfully. Although universities provide various in-service professional development programs, attending these programs is not mandatory, so most teachers are not encouraged to attend for many reasons. The content of these programs is theoretical, which makes teachers reluctant to attend these programs. In addition, these programs are not designed to fulfill the training needs of teachers, and they lack actual classroom practices. The professional development of English language teachers in higher education needs more emphasis on professional development programs to meet the international requirements of teaching English as a foreign language. AlAsmari (2016) conducted a study to explore the perceptions and practices of professional development of 121 English language teachers at Taif University English Language Centre. The findings supported lifelong learning and experiential learning leading towards a learner-centered approach. Teachers perceived the CPD as a challenge to their existing knowledge and classroom practices. Besides, over 70% of the teachers deem themselves in need of English proficiency, teaching low-level students, technology, pedagogies, motivating students, assessment, and time management strategies (Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2017). Al-Shehri (2017) conducted a study to explore the obstacles faced by EFL teachers at the preparatory year program at King Khalid University. He concluded that teachers should go through intensive professional development programs that consider the learning environments, teaching methodologies and pedagogies, and instructional technologies. He added that strict learning and employment standards should be applied to hire teachers with high qualifications in English language instruction.

Professional Teaching Standards for Higher Education EFL Instructors

Every year in Saudi Arabia, thousands of students enroll in higher education institutions. They study general English language courses and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses as well. Improving students' knowledge, skills, and abilities depends substantially on their teachers' quality and effectiveness (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2012). In addition, for quality and accreditation of higher education EFL programs, there is a demand to prepare teachers to meet the need of their students and institutions. Besides, teacher development programs have shifted from providing content knowledge to providing the clinical experiences that prepare teachers for today's classrooms (Fenner & Kuhlman, 2012). Moreover, globalization, the internationalization of society, and the increasing demand for specialists in foreign languages put greater demands on the professional development of EFL teachers. To correspond to these demands, there must be specific competencies evaluated against well-defined and approved standards that determine the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge for EFL teachers (Sadovets & Bidyuk, 2018).

Many documents of English language professional teaching standards around the world were reviewed and utilized

as source material for constructing a framework for this study. Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) (2015) set standards for teachers working with English learners as Additional Language learners. These standards were grouped into seven core areas: the learner's knowledge, content, effective teaching and learning, learning environments, assessment, professional learning, and professionalism. In 2008, TESOL International Association developed Standards for ESL/EFL Teachers of Adults that offer performance indicators and evaluation tools for instructors. The standards were grouped into three core standards (planning, instructing, and assessing) and five additional standards (identity and context, language proficiency, learning, content, and commitment, and professionalism) (TESOL International Association, 2008). Two years later, TESOL International Association developed EFL Professional Teaching Standards, which included five domains: Language, Culture, Instruction, Assessment, and Professionalism (Fenner & Kuhlman, 2012). Recently, TESOL International Association (2019) published the updated version called Standards for Initial TESOL Pre-K–12 Teacher Preparation Programs which consisted of five domains: Knowledge about Language, ELLS in the Sociocultural Context, Planning and Implementing Instruction, Assessment and Evaluation, and Professionalism and Leadership. Commission on Teacher Credentialing (2012) developed standards for English Language Development Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Subject Matter Programs. They included five domains: Knowledge of English Learners, Applied Linguistics, Cultural Foundations, Foundations of English Learner Education in California and the United States, and Instruction and Assessment. In addition, the Michigan State Board of Education (2020) established standards for English language teachers called Standards for the Preparation of Teachers. These standards covered three main standard fields: Learner-Centered Supports, Ethics and Professional Growth, and Strategic Partnerships. Council of Chief State School Officers (2011) developed ten core standards for language teachers called Model Core Teaching Standards. These standards were grouped into four general categories: The Learner and the Learning (3 standards), Content (2 standards), Instructional Practice (3 standards), and Professional Responsibility (2 standards). Furthermore, studies conducted on establishing, implementing, and evaluating English language professional teaching standards were reviewed to gain a deep understanding of the standard-based professional development of English language teachers (e.g., Bahadir & Tuncer, 2020; DeLuca et al., 2016; Dogancay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2018; Kuhlman, 2010; Makarova et al., 2021; Sadovets & Bidyuk, 2018).

The professional teaching standard fields for English language teachers synthesized from the aforementioned documents and studies generally fall into seven broad categories (language, knowledge of learners, learning environments, instruction, technology use, assessment, and professionalism). Although these documents and studies identified the general professional teaching standard fields and the performance standards for EFL/ESL teachers, they did not par-

ticularly examine specific professional standards for EFL instructors at the university level. Furthermore, they were mainly developed for K-12 and/or for language teacher preparation except for the Standards for ESL/EFL Teachers of Adults, which were developed before 13 years, indicating that they are relatively old. Therefore, there is a demand to construct up-to-date professional teaching standards for EFL instructors by drawing on the available literature as a basis for this study.

METHOD

This study employed the Delphi technique to reach a consensus among experts about the professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia. The Delphi technique is a widely used method for achieving convergence of opinion about real-world knowledge from experts about certain topic areas (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). In addition, it is a communication structure used to produce critical examination and discussion, which is useful in educational settings to form guidelines and standards (Green, 2014). Implementing the Delphi technique involves a successive completion of survey forms by the experts. After each round, the results are shared with the experts, and they are asked to provide their responses and comments until a consensus is obtained. In this study, the Delphi technique included three rounds. At the end of the third round, the performance standards that received consensus were accepted as professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors.

Selection of the Experts

It is central to select participants who have a balance between the interest in the topic and commitment to multiple rounds of questions (Grisham, 2009). Choosing the appropriate participants is a crucial step related to the quality of results generated (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Participants should be specialized in knowledge related to the target issue, and it is preferred to be heterogeneous (Grime & Wright, 2016). To select the panel members, specific criteria were required to attain valid and reliable results. These criteria were considered in the selection of the experts: a) to have a Doctorate in English language education or teacher education, b) to have at least 15 years of experience, c) to work at the college of education, d) to participate in teacher education programs and e) to be a volunteer in participating in this study. A comprehensive search was carried out via the websites of the colleges of education in Saudi Arabia based on predetermined criteria. The search resulted in 52 experts. The experts were contacted via email to confirm their participation in the study. The invitation email included details about the aim of the study, the methodology, and the process of conducting the study, and 31 experts confirmed their participation in the study. The designated experts were heterogeneous in academic ranks, gender, experiences, and specializations. The panel members comprised: Professors (n=5), Associate professors (n=10), Assistant professors (n=16). Eighteen experts were male, and 13 were female, and their experi-

ences ranged from 15 to more than 25 years. A total of 20 experts were specialized in English language teaching, and 11 were teacher education specialists.

Delphi I

Traditionally, the first round begins with an open-ended questionnaire. However, it is acceptable as a common modification of the Delphi technique to form a structured questionnaire in round one based on an extensive review of the literature when information about the target topic is available (Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Lerner et al., 2021). In this study, an initial list of professional teaching standards for EFL instructors was constructed based on the literature review and the studies conducted in the study field. A pilot study was conducted to assess the validity of the initial list. Five experts who had more than 20 years of experience in English language teaching and teacher education were recruited to revise the initial list. They gave valuable comments and feedback, which enabled the researcher to make corrections, modifications, and changes to the initial list. All comments were revised to synthesize the round one survey. The survey was finalized, and the standards were grouped into seven standard fields according to the reviewers' views: 1) Language, 2) Knowledge of learners, 3) Learning environments, 4) Instruction and teaching strategies, 5) Technology use, 6) Assessment and evaluation and 7) Professionalism.

Delphi II

In Delphi II, experts were asked to rate their responses based on a 5-point Likert scale: Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly disagree (1). In addition, areas of agreement and disagreement were identified, and some experts were contacted to ask for more clarification for their ratings.

Delphi III

Data generated from Delphi II were delivered to the experts. The data included experts' responses as well as individual responses. Experts were asked to review group responses and compare them with their responses. They were informed that they had an opportunity to change their responses if needed.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study aimed to develop consensus regarding the professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia. The Delphi technique was utilized as the data collection tool for this study.

In Delphi I, the survey was delivered to 31 experts, and they were given three weeks to respond. They were asked to select the appropriate standards reached via the literature review (appropriate or inappropriate) and comment on the importance of each standard (important or not important). They were also allowed to provide their comments. In addition, they were given a space to add any essential standards

which were not included in the survey. The experts were reminded two days before the deadline. Twenty-nine experts provided feedback at the end of the deadline, and two experts did not respond. The response rate was 94%. Data generated from Delphi I were sorted and grouped based on the pre-determined standards fields. The researcher and four English language teaching and teacher education experts reviewed the Delphi I survey and made necessary corrections and modifications.

In Delphi II, the survey was delivered to 29 experts, and they were asked to rate their responses on a 5-point Likert scale. They were given two weeks to respond, and they all responded to the survey before the deadline. Their responses were entered in SPSS; means were calculated and ranked. It was hypothesized that consensus is obtained when the item reached ($M=4.00$).

In Delphi III, the survey, which included the group and individuals' responses derived from Delphi II, was delivered to 29 experts. Experts were asked to review their responses, and they had the opportunity to change their responses if necessary. They were given a week to respond, and all of them replied to the survey. Data obtained from Delphi III were analyzed using SPSS to calculate the arithmetic means for each item. The items that obtained less than (4.00) were dismissed and were not considered as performance indicators.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the results of the three rounds of the Delphi technique regarding the professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia.

Results of Delphi I

The purpose of this round was to generate a list of professional standards for Saudi higher education EFL instructors. First, a list of 104 professional teaching performance indicators was generated; 74 were generated via the literature review related to the topic area, and the experts' panel suggested 30 indicators. After experts' combination, separation, and correction of the initial list, eight performance indicators were deleted, and the remaining 96 performance indicators were selected and coded into seven standard fields to be used in round two.

Table 1 shows that the performance indicators were categorized into seven standard fields. The instruction and teaching field had the highest frequency ($n=19$) followed by assessment and evaluation ($n=16$) and language ($n=15$), which indicated the high importance of these fields in the EFL teaching profession. Fields of knowledge of learners, learning environments, technology use, and professionalism had frequencies ranged from 11 to 12. Delphi I resulted in 96 performance indicators selected to be used in Delphi II and Delphi III.

Results of Delphi II and Delphi II

The primary purpose of Delphi II was to explore the extent of consensus among experts on each performance standard. The Delphi II survey was sent to the experts to rate their responses and provide their comments. Arithmetic means

Table 1. The professional standard fields and performance indicators for EFL instructors

Standard fields	Literature search	Experts suggestions	Total
Language	10	5	15
Knowledge of learners	7	4	11
Learning environments	8	4	12
Instruction and teaching strategies	13	6	19
Technology use	7	5	12
Assessment and evaluation	9	7	16
Professionalism	7	4	11
Total	61 (63.5%)	35 (36.5%)	96

were calculated to rank the performance standards, and experts' comments were considered to modify some items. Out of 96 performance indicators, 82 indicators gained consensus in this round.

In Delphi III, the survey that contained a summary of the group and individual responses was sent to the experts to review the findings, and they were given the opportunity to change their responses. The frequencies of experts' changes were reported in Table 2, and the items that experts changed their opinions on were presented in Table 3.

Table 2 shows that the frequency of the changes by experts was 36. Out of the 29 experts who participated in the study, 14 experts did not change their opinions, while 15 experts changed their opinions in round three on various items. Of the experts who changed their opinions, the eleventh expert changed seven opinions, and the fifteenth expert changed four opinions, whereas the remaining 13 experts' changes of opinions ranged from one and three changes.

Table 3 shows the items that the experts changed their opinions on in Delphi III. The experts changed their opinions on 24 items which resulted in 36 changes. All the standard fields witnessed changes: five changes were in the language standard field, three were in knowledge of learners, six were in learning environments, nine changes were in instruction and teaching strategies, two were in technology use, four were in assessment and evaluation and seven were in professionalism standard field. Of the 36 changes, ten changes in six items were in the negative direction (1.11, 3 changes, 1.15, 1 change, 2.10, 2 changes, 3.12, 1 change, 4.16, 2 changes, and 4.17, 1 change).

At the end of Delphi III, arithmetic means were calculated, and items were ranked. Out of 96 performance indicators, 81 indicators reached consensus and were considered professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia. The results were presented in detail for the seven standard fields.

Table 4 presents the result of Delphi II and Delphi III for the performance indicators of the language standard field. The consensus of the experts on these indicators did

Table 2. Changes performed by the experts in the Delphi III survey

Expert #	Frequency of changes	Expert #	Frequency of changes	Expert #	Frequency of changes
1	0	11	7	21	0
2	2	12	0	22	0
3	0	13	2	23	3
4	1	14	2	24	2
5	3	15	4	25	2
6	0	16	0	26	0
7	0	17	0	27	1
8	2	18	0	28	0
9	1	19	0	29	1
10	3	20	0		

Table 3. Items changed by experts in the Delphi III survey

Item Number	Items	Changes by experts
1.4	Has extensive knowledge of words meaning and usage.	From 3 to 4
1.11	Has a thorough understanding of cognitive processes involved in L2 reading.	From 4 to 2 From 5 to 2 From 4 to 2
1.15	Maintains fluent use of the target language.	From 3 to 1
2.5	Takes responsibility for promoting learners' growth.	From 3 to 5
2.10	Uses his knowledge of the learners to make predictions about what might happen in the classroom.	From 5 to 2 From 4 to 2
3.3	Motivates learners to take responsibility for their learning.	From 3 to 5 From 3 to 4
3.9	Manages resources of time, space, and learners' attention.	From 2 to 5 From 3 to 4
3.11	Has effective communication skills.	From 4 to 5
3.12	Establishes predictable routines early in the year.	From 5 to 3
4.3	Selects activities that make learners independent and problem-solvers.	From 3 to 5
4.6	Has pedagogical knowledge of teaching reading, writing, speaking, and listening.	From 4 to 5
4.9	Provides explicit instruction in teaching vocabulary and reading comprehension.	From 3 to 4 From 4 to 5
4.14	Promotes higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in language teaching.	From 2 to 4 From 3 to 5
4.16	Develops appropriate sequencing of learning experiences.	From 5 to 4 From 3 to 2

Table 3. (Continued)

Item Number	Items	Changes by experts
4.17	Uses questions to construct lessons, units, and courses.	From 4 to 2
5.2	Creates online and blended learning environments.	From 4 to 5
5.6	Demonstrates knowledge of up-to-date technologies.	From 3 to 4
6.2	Designs and applies alternative assessment tools.	From 4 to 5
6.5	Administers diagnostic tests to determine learners' learning needs.	From 3 to 4
6.9	Understands rubrics, checklists, and test scores.	From 3 to 5 From 3 to 4
7.3	Seeks for partnership and membership of global language associations.	From 3 to 5 From 4 to 5
7.5	Shares his knowledge to strengthen the other's professional practice.	From 3 to 5
7.7	Seeks professional and technological resources within and outside the college.	From 2 to 4
7.9	Builds a plan for professional growth aligned with his needs as a growing professional.	From 2 to 4 From 3 to 5 From 2 to 3

not change. Fourteen indicators obtained consensus, and they had an average mean of 4.00 or more through the two rounds. The performance indicator "Maintains fluent use of the target language" did not obtain consensus after Delphi III ($M=3.517$), so it was dismissed.

Table 5 shows that the experts' responses for the performance indicators of knowledge of learners standard field in Delphi II and Delphi III. The experts' responses differentiated in "Uses his knowledge of the learners to make predictions about what might happen in the classroom" performance indicator. In Delphi II, experts reached a consensus, but

(Contd...)

Table 4. Means and ranking of Language performance indicators in Delphi II and III surveys

No.	Performance indicators	Delphi II Mean	Delphi III Mean	Delphi II Rank	Delphi III Rank
1.1	Has extensive knowledge of English orthography (e.g., alphabetic, sound symbol correspondence, spelling conventions).	4.655	4.655	1	1
1.2	Serves as a good language model for English language learners.	4.621	4.621	2	2
1.3	Understands how individuals and groups use languages in bilingual settings.	4.586	4.586	3	3
1.4	Has extensive knowledge of words meaning and usage.	4.517	4.552	4	4
1.5	Has extensive knowledge of direct and indirect speech acts (e.g., commands, questions, requests, complaints).	4.483	4.483	5	5
1.6	Has extensive knowledge of morphology (e.g., morphemes, roots and affixes, inflectional morphology, derivational morphology).	4.448	4.448	6	6
1.7	Has extensive knowledge of phonetics and phonology (e.g., phonemes and allophones, intonation patterns, pitch modulation, syllable structure).	4.414	4.414	7	7
1.8	Has extensive knowledge of syntax (e.g., grammatical classes and conventions, phrase and sentence structure, word order).	4.380	4.380	8	8
1.9	Demonstrates knowledge of English semantics (e.g., idiomatic expressions, homonyms, homophones, homographs, denotative vs. connotative meaning).	4.380	4.380	9	9
1.10	Demonstrates knowledge of second language acquisition including similarities and differences in language acquisition.	4.345	4.345	10	10
1.11	Has a thorough understanding of cognitive processes involved in L2 reading.	4.310	4.069	11	13
1.12	Has extensive knowledge of English sociolinguistics and pragmatics (e.g., (features of oral and written language, features of various discourse settings).	4.138	4.138	13	11
1.13	Demonstrates knowledge of disciplinary and interdisciplinary features of academic English used within and across various content areas.	4.103	4.103	13	12
1.14	Demonstrates knowledge of the role of the L1 in the acquisition of a new language (e.g., positive and negative transfer, nature and value of cognates, role of L1 literacy skills).	4.034	4.034	14	14
1.15	Maintains fluent use of the target language.	3.586	3.517*	15	15

* Excluded after Delphi III.

some changed their opinions, and the performance indicator did not reach the cut-point ($M=4.00$). “Helps low language proficiency and at-risk learners” performance indicator did not reach consensus through the two round. Thus, these two performance indicators were dismissed. Nine performance indicators gained consensus with an average mean ranged from ($M=4.241$ to $M=4.655$) in Delphi III.

In Table 6, it is obvious that the consensus of the experts for the performance indicators in the learning environments standard field did not change in Delphi II and Delphi III. The performance indicator “Establishes predictable routines early in the year” did not gain consensus throughout the two rounds, so it was excluded. Eleven performance indicators reached a consensus with an average mean ranged from ($M=4.103$ to $M=4.759$) in Delphi III.

Table 7 demonstrates that the consensus of the experts for the performance indicators in instruction and teaching strategies standard field did not change in Delphi II and Delphi III.

However, the performance indicators “Develops appropriate sequencing of learning experiences”, “Provides materials that incorporate listening, speaking, reading, and writing”, “Uses questions to construct lessons, units, and courses”, and “Applies autonomous and self-directed learning” did not gain consensus throughout the two rounds, so they were omitted. Fifteen performance indicators reached a consensus with an average mean ranged from ($M=4.276$ to $M=4.828$) in Delphi III.

Table 8 shows that the consensus of the experts for the performance indicators in the technology use standard field did not change in Delphi II and Delphi III. The performance indicators “Ensures fair and equitable access to technology in his classes” and “Prepares and uses digital content” did not obtain consensus throughout the two rounds, so they were omitted. Ten performance indicators reached a consensus with an average mean ranged from ($M=4.379$ to $M=4.759$) in Delphi III.

Table 5. Means and ranking of Knowledge of learners performance indicators in Delphi II and III surveys

No.	Performance indicators	Delphi II Mean	Delphi III Mean	Delphi II Rank	Delphi III Rank
2.1	Understands learners' needs.	4.655	4.655	1	1
2.2	Diagnoses and responds to learners' learning problems.	4.655	4.655	2	2
2.3	Provides learners with the opportunity to be autonomous learners.	4.621	4.621	3	3
2.4	Respects learners' individuality.	4.552	4.552	4	5
2.5	Takes responsibility for promoting learners' growth.	4.517	4.586	5	4
2.6	Maintains active learner involvement.	4.483	4.483	6	6
2.7	Demonstrate knowledge of cultural and linguistic characteristics of the learners.	4.379	4.379	7	7
2.8	Is familiar with typical learners' behaviors.	4.310	4.310	8	8
2.9	Advises learners on academic progress.	4.241	4.241	9	9
2.10	Uses his knowledge of the learners to make predictions about what might happen in the classroom.	4.138	3.966*	10	10
2.11	Helps low language proficiency and at-risk learners.	3.931	3.931*	11	11

* Excluded after Delphi III.

Table 6. Means and ranking of Learning environments performance indicators in Delphi II and III surveys

No.	Performance indicators	Delphi II Mean	Delphi III Mean	Delphi II Rank	Delphi III Rank
3.1	Plans a learner-centered environment that ensures learner's independence.	4.759	4.759	1	1
3.2	Teaches to the whole class - not just to the best learners.	4.724	4.724	2	3
3.3	Motivates learners to take responsibility for their learning.	4.655	4.759	3	2
3.4	Encourages positive interaction in the classroom.	4.621	4.621	4	4
3.5	Treats all learners fairly in a respectful, supportive and caring environment.	4.586	4.586	5	5
3.6	Helps learners work cooperatively and productively with each other.	4.552	4.552	6	6
3.7	Creates environments that support collaborative and individual learning.	4.483	4.483	7	8
3.8	Reflects on the learning environment to improve its effectiveness.	4.448	4.448	8	9
3.9	Manages resources of time, space, and learners' attention.	4.379	4.517	9	7
3.10	Encourages learning in physical spaces and virtual spaces.	4.345	4.345	10	10
3.11	Has effective communication skills.	4.069	4.103	11	11
3.12	Establishes predictable routines early in the year.	3.862	3.793*	12	12

* Excluded after Delphi III.

Table 9 illustrates that the consensus of the experts for the performance indicators in the assessment and evaluation standard field did not change in Delphi II and Delphi III. The performance indicators “Tests anxiety at a healthy level by helping learners understand that the pressure to perform tasks is a part of life”, “Engages learners in performing quality work” and “Balances between traditional and alternative assessment approaches” did not obtain consensus throughout the two rounds, so they were omitted. Thirteen performance indicators reached a consensus with an average mean ranged from (M=4.379 to M=4.724) in Delphi III.

Table 10 shows that the consensus of the experts for the performance indicators in the professionalism standard field did not change in Delphi II and Delphi III. The performance indicators “Advances the profession through writing articles, books, and research monographs” and “Participates in ongoing learning opportunities to develop his knowledge and skills” did not gain consensus throughout the two rounds, so they were omitted. Nine performance indicators reached a consensus with an average mean ranged from (M=4.379 to M=4.690) in Delphi III.

Table 7. Means and ranking of Instruction and teaching strategies performance indicators in Delphi II and III surveys

No.	Performance indicators	Delphi II Mean	Delphi III Mean	Delphi II Rank	Delphi III Rank
4.1	Uses appropriate strategies to adapt instruction to the learners' needs.	4.828	4.828	1	1
4.2	Varies his role in the teaching process (instructor, facilitator, coach).	4.793	4.793	2	3
4.3	Selects activities that make learners independent and problem-solvers.	4.759	4.828	3	2
4.4	Adjusts instruction to match learners' learning needs.	4.724	4.724	4	4
4.5	Understands the principles and strategies of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).	4.690	4.690	5	5
4.6	Has pedagogical knowledge of teaching reading, writing, speaking, and listening.	4.655	4.690	6	6
4.7	Creates learning experiences that are appropriate for language outcomes.	4.655	4.655	7	7
4.8	Presents the content in a logical sequence based on the learning outcomes.	4.621	4.621	8	8
4.9	Provides explicit instruction in teaching vocabulary and reading comprehension.	4.552	4.621	9	9
4.10	Uses tasks that engage learners in exploration, discovery, and hands-on activities.	4.517	4.517	10	10
4.11	Applies learning approaches (e.g., critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, memorization, and recall).	4.483	4.483	11	11
4.12	Applies instruction based on learner prior knowledge and interest.	4.448	4.448	12	13
4.13	Differentiates instruction for individuals and groups of learners.	4.414	4.414	13	14
4.14	Promotes higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in language teaching.	4.345	4.483	14	12
4.15	Maintains use of the target language in the classroom.	4.276	4.276	15	15
4.16	Develops appropriate sequencing of learning experiences.	3.966	3.897*	16	16
4.17	Provides materials that incorporate listening, speaking, reading, and writing.	3.931	3.862*	17	17
4.18	Uses questions to construct lessons, units, and courses.	3.724	3.724*	18	18
4.19	Applies autonomous and self-directed learning.	3.621	3.621*	19	19

* Excluded after Delphi III.

Table 8. Means and ranking of Technology use performance indicators in Delphi II and III surveys

No.	Performance indicators	Delphi II Mean	Delphi III Mean	Delphi II Rank	Delphi III Rank
5.1	Incorporates Learning Management System (LMS) to facilitate access to lectures, tests, and lessons.	4.759	4.759	1	1
5.2	Creates online and blended learning environments.	4.655	4.690	2	2
5.3	Uses technology to support instruction.	4.621	4.621	3	3
5.4	Integrates technology into language teaching.	4.586	4.586	4	4
5.5	Guides learners to apply technology in appropriate, safe, and effective ways.	4.552	4.552	5	6
5.6	Demonstrates knowledge of up-to-date technologies.	4.552	4.586	6	5
5.7	Makes content accessible to learners electronically.	4.483	4.483	7	7
5.8	Facilitates learners' individual and collaborative use of technology.	4.448	4.448	8	8
5.9	Helps learners use college computers and the Internet as ways toward digital equity.	4.448	4.448	9	9
5.10	Uses technology to assess learners' progress.	4.379	4.379	10	10
5.11	Ensures fair and equitable access to technology in his classes.	3.690	3.690*	11	11
5.12	Prepares and uses digital content.	3.552	3.552*	12	12

* Excluded after Delphi III.

Table 9. Means and ranking of Assessment and evaluation performance indicators in Delphi II and III surveys

No.	Performance indicators	Delphi II Mean	Delphi III Mean	Delphi II Rank	Delphi III Rank
6.1	Uses assessment to identify each learner's progress.	4.724	4.724	1	1
6.2	Designs and applies alternative assessment tools.	4.655	4.690	2	2
6.3	Analyzes assessment data to identify gaps in learning.	4.621	4.621	3	3
6.4	Balances between formative and summative assessment.	4.586	4.586	4	5
6.5	Administers diagnostic tests to determine learners' learning needs.	4.586	4.621	5	4
6.6	Uses assessment data to improve instruction and support learner success.	4.552	4.552	6	7
6.7	Designs assessments that match learning outcomes.	4.517	4.517	7	8
6.8	Provides formative and corrective feedback to learners about their performance.	4.482	4.482	8	9
6.9	Understands rubrics, checklists, and test scores.	4.482	4.586	9	6
6.10	Applies obvious criteria for both individual and group performance.	4.448	4.448	10	10
6.11	Helps learners engage in self-assessment.	4.414	4.414	11	11
6.12	Develops a range of assessment tools.	4.414	4.414	12	12
6.13	Uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their learning.	4.379	4.379	13	13
6.14	Tests anxiety at a healthy level by helping learners understand that the pressure to perform tasks is a part of life.	3.931	3.931*	14	14
6.15	Engages learners in performing quality work.	3.724	3.724*	15	15
6.16	Balances between traditional and alternative assessment approaches.	3.414	3.414*	16	16

* Excluded after Delphi III.

Table 10. Means and ranking of Professionalism performance indicators in Delphi II and III surveys

No.	Performance indicators	Delphi II Mean	Delphi III Mean	Delphi II Rank	Delphi III Rank
7.1	Adheres to professional and ethical standards of the teaching profession.	4.690	4.690	1	1
7.2	Engages in meaningful professional learning through ongoing study, self-reflection, and collaboration.	4.586	4.586	2	3
7.3	Seeks partnership and membership in global language associations.	4.552	4.655	3	2
7.4	Participates in collaboration with colleagues, other professionals, and community members.	4.517	4.517	4	5
7.5	Shares his knowledge to strengthen the other's professional practice.	4.483	4.552	5	4
7.6	Involves in academic research, action research, and self-study.	4.448	4.448	6	7
7.7	Seeks professional and technological resources within and outside the college.	4.414	4.483	7	6
7.8	Engages in supervised teaching to develop his professional practice using self-reflection and feedback.	4.345	4.345	8	9
7.9	Builds a plan for professional growth aligned with his needs as a growing professional.	4.207	4.379	9	8
7.10	Advances the profession through writing articles, books, and research monographs.	3.310	3.310*	10	10
7.11	Participates in ongoing learning opportunities to develop his knowledge and skills.	3.276	3.276*	11	11

* Excluded after Delphi III.

DISCUSSION

Up to date, very little research has been carried out to set professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors. The lack of empirical research in this area negatively affects teaching practices, professional development and training of EFL instructors. Thus, this study comes to identify and validate the professional teaching standards required for higher EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia. Delphi technique was utilized to synthesize the insights of 29 experts in English language teaching and teacher education. This resulted in a framework consisting of 81 performance indicators in seven broad standard fields.

Based on the experts' consensus on the performance standards under the language standard field, knowledge of English orthography, speech acts, lexicon, morphology, phonology, syntax, semantics, and sociolinguistics and pragmatics emerged as essential traits for higher education EFL instructors. Wilmore (2014) points out that a foreign language teacher must have a rock-solid knowledge of the language concepts such as phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, semantics, discourse, and pragmatics before effectively teaching them to students. This knowledge comprises concepts, theories, and disciplinary knowledge, considered important knowledge bases for EFL teachers (Rahimi & Pourshahbaz, 2019). Furthermore, experts stressed that the instructor should be a language model for EFL learners. Renandya (2017) supported this finding, indicating that a bilingual teacher should have a high level of proficiency to serve as a good language model. Experts highly agreed that understanding how a language is used in bilingual settings, the knowledge of second language acquisition, and the role of the L1 in acquiring a new language should be included in the language standard field. Teachers' knowledge of second language acquisition helps redirect their teaching to assist learners to find effective ways to communicate in different contexts (Dixon et al., 2012). In addition, previous research asserts that bilingual program structure and design, LI and English linguistics, and bilingualism/L2 acquisition are essential competencies to help teachers design instruction considering the impact of L1 on learning English as a foreign language and plan activities to transfer skills from L1 to L2 (Mora, 2008). Understanding of cognitive processes involved in L2 reading had a consensus among experts given that instructors' explicit understanding of these processes help them determine the features that distinguish skilled from less-skilled readers, the identification of strengths and weaknesses in reading, and the suitable teaching practices and instructional remedies for struggling students (Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Mesgarshahr & Alavi, 2019). Knowledge of disciplinary and interdisciplinary features of academic English within and across content areas is considered a crucial performance indicator of the language standard field. In the interdisciplinary approach, teachers should organize the language curriculum around common learning across disciplines to emphasize interdisciplinary skills and concepts (Helmane & Briska, 2017). In higher education institutions, interdisciplinary teaching is considered a key to gain 21st-century skills such as problem-solving, communica-

tion, critical thinking, teamwork, and creativity (Brassler & Dettmers, 2017). Therefore, higher education EFL instructors should gain adequate knowledge and skills of integrating language and content in the EFL contexts.

Most competencies in the knowledge of learners standard field gained a high consensus among the expert panel. These competencies included understanding learners' needs, behaviors, cultural and linguistic characteristics, responding to learners' learning problems, respecting learners' individuality, promoting learners' growth, autonomy and involvement, and advising learners on their academic progress. Teachers play a significant role in sparking learners' interest in learning and setting guidelines for their autonomous learning. Therefore, supporting a culture of teacher education towards learner autonomy and training teachers on these issues can improve learners' autonomy and attitudes to learn the language (Gach, 2020; Jimenez Raya & Vieira, 2015). Furthermore, considering learners' needs, characteristics and behaviors imply that university-based teacher education programs should embrace diverse learners and community-based teacher development (Nguyen & Dang, 2020). The findings of this study concur with Nurhayati's (2018) findings, which revealed that college teachers have to know the learners' preferences to align teaching strategies to generate learners' interest in language learning. The experts did not regard "Uses his knowledge of the learners to make predictions about what might happen in the classroom" as a performance indicator. The reason might be that the experts considered making predictions is hardly observed since performance standards should focus on the actual practices in the classroom. The experts also disagreed on "Helps low language proficiency and at-risk learners". They might believe that this predictor was already included in another performance indicator of this domain.

Experts rated the learning environments performance indicators as essential competencies for EFL instructors except "establishing predictable routines early in the year," which did not gain a consensus, and therefore was dismissed from this list. The leading indicators regarding learning environments were creating and improving learner-centered environments, promoting learners' independence, promoting positive interaction, establishing caring, supportive and cooperative learning environments, motivating learners to take responsibility for their learning, and having effective communication skills that enable teachers to deliver their lessons and manage classroom discussions. Designing effective learning environments that meet learners' needs, perceptions, and expectations strongly influences learners' outcomes, ensures effective communication, and plays an essential role in language learning classrooms (Goksu, 2015). This ensures the need for professional learning for EFL instructors in increasingly complex and diverse environments (Livingston, 2017). In addition, teachers' perceptions of the constructivist learning environment are positively related to 21st-century skills, so teachers are expected to provide effective learning environments that are more open to learner's inquiry and investigation to help learners arrange their own learning (Anagun, 2018).

Regarding instruction and teaching strategies standard field, many performance indicators had a consensus among the expert panel. The top-priority competencies were using appropriate strategies to adapt instruction, varying the instructor's role, selecting activities that promote learners' independence and problem-solving, and understanding the strategies of CLIL. Teachers need to use flexible and creative teaching approaches and methods based on the learners' needs (Wiens et al., 2018). To accomplish effective teaching, teachers must adapt, improve, modify instruction, and keep up-to-date with current research on best instructional practices (Espinosa, 2015). In addition, teachers are expected to set up pedagogical tasks and use various strategies and techniques to enable learners to work independently and cooperatively (Sulistiyo, 2016). An interesting finding was the importance of understanding CLIL principles and strategies to change teachers' practices from teacher-dominant structure to learner-centered structure. Kewara and Prabjandee (2018) point that "CLIL has been reported as an effective approach to foster learners' content and language knowledge, and it is now expanding to different parts of the world" (p. 96). Other competencies that had a consensus were having pedagogical knowledge of teaching reading, writing, speaking, and listening, providing explicit instruction in teaching vocabulary and reading comprehension, and applying learning approaches (e.g., critical and creative thinking, problem solving, memorization and recall). Specifically, teachers' knowledge of teaching the four skills, their familiarity with implicit and explicit instruction, and their awareness of learning approaches influence how they teach and positively impact the learners' language outcomes (Anil, 2017; Wiens et al., 2018). Using tasks and activities that engage learners in exploration, discovery, and hands-on activities had an agreement from the expert panel. This finding indicates that teachers should create activities that help learners reflect on their prior knowledge and experience and plan hands-on work (Mugambi et al., 2015). In addition, experts agreed that promoting higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) is essential in language teachers' practices since HOTS has become an essential topic among adult learners. Teachers are demanded to understand HOTS and integrate them in English language learning (Setyarini et al., 2018).

Among the central performance indicators directed at technology use standard field were incorporating Learning Management System (LMS) in language learning, creating online and blended learning environments to support instruction, guiding learners to apply technology in appropriate, safe, and effective ways, using technology as ways toward digital equity, and demonstrating knowledge of up-to-date technologies. Developing more technologically proficient teachers is a vital issue in the changing world. There has been an emphasis on preparing language teachers for teaching in distance learning, hybrid contexts, blended learning, and CALL. Therefore, teachers must create technology-based learning environments and promote learners' collaboration and participation (Kessler & Hubbard, 2017). Dogoriti (2015) suggested that more effective planning should be offered to design learning environments to accommodate

learners' needs and enhance language learning. Besides, the study of Martin et al. (2020) revealed that faculty rated the use of LMS in higher education as the highest in terms of importance and competence, and the technology use rating of faculty who teach for more than 15 years was lower compared to other faculty. They suggested offering professional support for faculty on using and integrating current digital technologies in higher education institutions. Another critical indicator was using technology to assess learners' progress. This finding goes in line with Jong and Tan (2021), which indicated that integrating technology-based assessment tools provides a platform for learner-centered environments and gives students a chance to practice and experience assessment through online learning platforms.

Statements regarding assessment and evaluation performance indicators that obtained a consensus among the experts mainly focused on designing and applying alternative assessment tools, analyzing assessment data to identify gaps in learning, providing formative and corrective feedback, understanding rubrics, checklists, and tests scores, and administering various assessment approaches. Assessment lies at the heart of teaching and the desired outcomes. Reforms in assessment shift from the traditional tests to more authentic methods performed by the learners, their peers, and their teachers (Nasab, 2015). Traditional assessment methods do not help learners achieve their full potentials. Therefore, alternative assessment methods, such as self-assessment, peer assessment, portfolio assessment, performance assessment, dynamic assessment, and authentic assessment, have emerged in language learning classrooms (Mansory, 2020). Thus, teachers should have the competency to use these approaches to ensure the effectiveness of assessment as a vital element in language teaching. Besides, previous literature supported this study since teachers are expected "to give feedback, instruct students how to self-assess to advance their learning, gather and analyze standardized testing data, and be competent in assessing for special purposes" (Havener, 2018, p. 18). Most EFL teachers could not perform authentic assessment because they were not complete in designing adequate assessment tools, so teachers should have the competencies to carry out the authentic assessment and design reliable and valid assessment tools (Adnan et al., 2019; Jannati, 2015).

The experts had a consensus on most of the suggested professionalism performance indicators. They included adhering to teaching professional and ethical standards, engaging in meaningful professional learning, seeking partnership and membership of global language associations, collaborating with colleagues and other professionals, and sharing knowledge to strengthen the other's professional practice. These findings are consistent with the findings of the Dogancay-Aktuna and Hardman (2018) study, which indicated that teachers should participate in classroom-based research and reflective activities to connect theory and practice. Reflective practice is an essential component of teachers' professionalism since it helps teachers develop their awareness and efficiency of teaching and learning practices (Tosriadi et al., 2018). Salehizadeh et al. (2020) confirmed

the importance of many indicators which had a consensus among the experts in the professionalism standard field such as being a member of teachers' communities, collaboration through working with other staff, sharing views regarding teaching issues and problems with colleagues, and sharing ideas with university teachers on the latest advances that can improve the teaching practices.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed at developing and validating professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors. The Delphi technique was adopted to gain a consensus among the expert panel. The framework drawn from this study comprises seven domain areas with eighty-one specific performance indicators categorized into seven standard fields: language, knowledge of learners, learning environments, instruction, technology use, assessment, and professionalism. This framework provides a starting point for higher education educators to improve English language teaching at universities. Hopefully, this study will pave the way for more research to develop effective practices for language teaching and provide professional development opportunities for EFL teachers.

Implications

The performance indicators obtained as a result of this study are expected to provide a framework for the professional development of higher education EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia. They may help design in-service training programs for EFL instructors, especially in these domains: language, knowledge of learners, learning environments, instruction and teaching strategies, technology, assessment and evaluation, and professionalism. Besides, these indicators may help pre-service teacher education programs set research-based competencies for prospective EFL instructors. In addition, these indicators may help assess and evaluate the performance of EFL instructors in higher education and serve as a basis for the accreditation and quality assurance of language institutions. Finally, EFL instructors may draw on these indicators in their self-evaluation to enhance their awareness regarding their continuous professional development (CPD).

Limitations

Like any study, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, the initial list of the professional teaching standards was based on previous literature. Valuable standards may be missed due to the difficulty of reviewing all related literature. Second, Therefore, the professional standards for EFL instructors were limited to the available literature. Second, most of the previous professional teaching standards were designed for K-12 contexts, so these standards were modified to align with the higher education context. Third, due to the time-consuming of the Delphi studies, this study is limited to the data obtained from the conducted three rounds. Fourth, all the participants of this study were academics specialized

in English language teaching and teacher education. Thus, practitioners might have different opinions that might result in additional standards.

Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study represent a starting point for establishing professional teaching standards for higher education EFL instructors. Both standard fields and specific performance indicators identified in this study should be examined in practical settings. Besides, detailed descriptions of the performance indicators are needed to identify suitable application methods in real classrooms. Moreover, subsequent quantitative studies are needed to assess the actual performance of EFL instructors based on these performance indicators. Further, more research is needed to explore the relationship between instructors' pre-service education and their commitment to these performance standards.

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