

## Understanding Teachers' Beliefs about Effective Vocabulary Instruction in the Saudi Tertiary EFL Context

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**Abstract:** This study sought to identify the beliefs of a group of teachers regarding effective vocabulary instruction practices in the Saudi tertiary EFL context. To accomplish this objective, a six-point Likert Scale survey containing 15 items belonging to different vocabulary teaching techniques was carried out on a diverse group of 45 EFL teachers. The results revealed that though implicit/incidental vocabulary teaching methods (e.g., in the context of reading or communicative tasks) were more favorable compared to explicit methods (e.g., presentation in isolation by realia or translation; practice by repetition or memorization), both approaches were endorsed significantly for the most part. Suggestions and recommendations are made for future research into how far the teachers put these beliefs into practice.

**Keywords:** beliefs, English, EFL teachers, teaching, vocabulary instructions

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### فهم معتقدات المعلمين حول التعليم الفعّال للمفردات في سياق اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في التعليم العالي السعودي

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مُلخِّصُ الدراسة: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى فهم معتقدات مجموعة من المعلمين فيما يتعلق باستخدام الإستراتيجيات الفعّالة في تدريس مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في التعليم العالي السعودي. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، تمّ استخدام مقياس ليكرت ذي الست نقاط من خلال استبانة تضمّنت خمسة عشر بنداً، تنتمي إلى إستراتيجيات تدريس مفردات مختلفة، وُزعت على 45 معلماً من مُدرّسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وقد بينت نتائج الدراسة أنه وبالرغم من أنّ طرق تدريس المفردات الضمنية (من خلال سياق القراءة أو المهارات التواصلية) كانت أكثر ملاءمة مقارنةً بطرق التدريس المباشر (كاستخدام النمذجة أو الترجمة المباشرة أو من خلال التكرار والحفظ)، إلا أن نسبة كبيره من المعلمين المشاركين أبدوا اهتمام واضح بإعتداد كلا المنهجين في عملية تدريس المفردات. وبناء على هذه النتائج، تم وضع مجموعة من التوصيات للدراسات القادمة في هذا المجال حول مدى دخول هذه المعتقدات مجال التطبيق.

كلمات مفتاحية: المعتقدات، اللغة الإنجليزية، مدرسو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التدريس، طرق تدريس المفردات.



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## 1. Introduction

English language contains numerous words and phrases, which pose major problems for both teachers and students alike. It is a well-known fact that vocabulary has a significant role in determining whether a student will be able to learn and communicate successfully in a language. Extensive vocabulary knowledge is desirable and essential in academic and corporate contexts (Al-khresheh & Al-Ruwaili, 2020). Proper vocabulary knowledge plays a huge role in honing the four macro language skills: writing, speaking, reading, and listening. Lack of an adequate vocabulary can be an annoying obstacle for foreign language teachers since it presents major difficulties in allowing people to express themselves in both writing and speaking (Al-Omairi, 2020).

To cross the minimum threshold level of vocabulary knowledge required to read even non-specialist authentic English texts without excessive distraction due to unknown words, a first-year university-level student will have to possess a vocabulary of not less than 5000 words (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010). Yet, achieving this milestone itself poses a major challenge. Quite notoriously, words in the English language cannot be learned by mastering a few general rules, like the rules used for developing progressive English verb forms. In reality, there is no choice but to understand each word in isolation and deploy them effectively. In the Saudi EFL context, it can be well established that most students do not typically leave school with a vocabulary size exceeding 5000 English words or even 1000 words. This, unfortunately, happens despite students undergoing a minimum of seven years of prior instruction in the English language in school (Alenezi, 2016). Even after a preparatory year of intensive English learning, English majors entering the first year of their bachelor's (BA) program tend to fall well short of this target. They may only achieve it four years later when they graduate (Alenezi, 2016). This means that they are severely handicapped in a B.A. program delivered and assessed in English throughout their B.A. study. Further English language courses are taken in the early semesters of the English B.A. program, devoted to remedying this unfortunate situation, Vocabulary Building being the prime focus of such courses. However, the issue of the best way to increase and enhance the depth of the learner's vocabulary looms large in this context.

Although numerous studies on vocabulary development have been conducted, the current academic literature suggests a considerable shortage of quality research studies on vocabulary instruction practices. In Saudi Arabia, English language teachers face substantial problems while teaching vocabulary to Saudi English majors. This might be because they may not possess enough knowledge about curial vocabulary instructions. Moreover, they tend not to teach explicit vocabulary learning strategies or methods to their students that can be implemented in real life to improve performance drastically. This might be because English vocabulary learning strategies have long been taken for granted by both teachers and students. Not many professional teacher-training courses impart effective vocabulary learning and teaching strategies to EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia.

### 1.1 Statement of the Study Problem

In light of what has been discussed in this introduction, this paper aims to conduct a comprehensive examination of such beliefs held by experienced language teachers in the Saudi tertiary EFL context. To achieve this objective, the following question is put forward: What beliefs do EFL teachers have regarding several popular vocabulary teaching techniques and strategies? In simple words, do they broadly espouse an explicit, word-focused approach, or is it an implicit, contextualized one?

### 2.Literature Review

Vocabulary is a significant factor dictating a learner's language proficiency levels. Consequently, a crucial important research area is how it is taught and how best it should be taught. Research studies analyzing vocabulary teaching methods and techniques have attracted significant attention and interest in the last few years. Many people have displayed an interest in this language domain. This interest cuts across researchers and instructors, all of whom have put in a considerable effort towards finding efficient methods of instruction that would enhance English vocabulary learning practices. Vocabulary is the core of English language teaching. Many studies have shown that a lack of adequate vocabulary would make it difficult for students to achieve even a basic level of proficiency in listening, speaking, or expressing and communicating their ideas to others (Alizadeh, 2016; Alqahtani, 2015).

The last few decades have seen a surge in interest levels in the field of teacher cognition. Researchers were previously dedicated to the study of teacher behavior, thus limiting the area of focus. Described as 'the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe and think' (Borg, 2003, p. 81), this cognition has now been recognized as a critical topic that was previously neglected in the field of English language teaching. While teacher cognition generally embraces a broader area than beliefs, the focus of different studies in language teaching has generally been on belief, which is often construed, as observed in the present study, as what the teacher believes should occur in the classroom. In other words, beliefs are often similar to topics researched under attitudes; another word used is perceptions. However, beliefs are distinct from knowledge, which is often defined as being objectively correct in all circumstances; however, experts believe it should happen in practice (Borg, 2001). Thus, if a teacher holds a view that vocabulary should be taught in the discourse, which language experts also endorse, then it can be said that not only does the teacher believe this view, they also possess knowledge of it. By contrast, beliefs may be erroneous and can yield ineffective practices or findings that are inconsistent with what research has shown to be appropriate (Peacock, 2001). Beliefs are often also compared with what the teacher does, called behaviors or practices. Unlike teacher behaviors, however, teacher beliefs and knowledge cannot be readily observed, thus necessitating the need for interviews or questionnaires to study this field in greater detail.

Before the surge in interest in the field of teacher cognition, teachers were sometimes regarded as simple conduits of pedagogy whose nature was not decided by them but by the syllabus providers, textbook writers, external examiners, and teacher trainers (Reed, 2000). The teacher cognition research area, in some ways, actually parallels other recent research areas in education by championing the autonomy and active role of individuals - both teachers and learners - in the teaching-learning process. It rejects the assumption that teachers and language instructors are essentially powerless (Freeman, 2002) or merely conditioned to teach in a certain way by their training. This is paralleled in the trend of teacher education, which emphasizes the role of teachers in learning to teach through reflection on experience and not simply being trained

by absorbing 'applied science' in lectures about teaching (Wallace & Bau, 1991). This revival of interest in teachers as active agents is being studied and observed in greater interest to discover their beliefs and opinions in greater detail, which is what this study is pursuing. The teacher cognition field has focused heavily on teachers' underlying beliefs and how they relate to their teaching 'practices', which could be construed as their basic teaching strategies and be observed in classrooms (Borg, 2003). Teacher beliefs are a major factor in influencing and determining their practices, but not the sole factor. For various reasons, their beliefs may not be precisely reflected in practices (Macalister, 2010). A common factor is the specific context of teaching. The nature of the students, or the conditions imposed on instruction by the authorities, may mean that the teacher's practices diverge significantly from their beliefs (Borg, 2006). Furthermore, as we mentioned, beliefs held by teachers may not always turn out to be correct either. Nevertheless, in the present study, we focus implicitly on assembling foundation information about what teacher beliefs in this area are, which we see as a prerequisite for later work on their connection with practices and correct knowledge. Language teacher beliefs have been explored in some contexts concerning grammar instruction (Phipps & Borg, 2009) and reading (Althewini, 2016). However, they have not been widely looked at for vocabulary teaching, which is the focus of attention in the present study. Furthermore, such studies have often been about teachers who are in their initial training stages rather than in continuous service, which is the context of the current study. Concerning what we know already about this, specifically in the Saudi context, the answer is that we know very little about teacher beliefs or knowledge about vocabulary teaching. Concerning teacher beliefs about vocabulary teaching, we have found only one specific study in the KSA. Alghamdi (2013) focused on teachers of technical vocabulary who were teaching non-English majors at university. The present study differs in that it focuses on teachers of English majors who, by and large, teach general English vocabulary, not specialist terminology. Other Saudi teacher belief studies exist, but they are primarily concerned with teaching grammar (Alghanmi & Shukri, 2016), focusing on EFL university teachers in Jeddah, and EFL reading strategies (Bamanger & Gashan, 2014), targeting intermediate and secondary school teachers

in Riyadh. Thus, the present study appears to be the first of its kind in the Saudi EFL context. Hence, we believe this study is timely.

### **2.1 Implicit vs. Explicit Vocabulary Instruction**

Vocabulary teaching (VT) involves many teaching techniques that have been extensively described in various standard works, such as Gairns and Redman (1986), Nation (2003), Thornbury (2002), and Schmitt (2000). There is no space to review all of them here. However, we selected the most prominent techniques used today from such sources, which teachers might be expected to have beliefs about. For example, we included repetition and memorization among practice techniques but did not ask them anything specifically about the keyword method. Psychologists have widely researched that technique and endorsed it as highly effective in several laboratory experiments (Campos et al., 2010). However, it remains a little-known or little-used teaching technique, and so was deemed unsuitable to be included in the current study, which could not necessarily ask teachers about all of the dozens of individual techniques that the books describe. However, in recent decades a broad division has emerged between the two general approaches to V.T., represented in this study by including specific techniques associated with each approach. Vocabulary instruction is no longer seen as being limited to strategies like mere rote-teaching of words sourced from a dictionary and getting students to employ them in a sentence successfully. As Al-Darayseh (2014) stated, vocabulary acquisition is done in two ways: 1) incidentally, which involves exposing students implicitly to new words in a specific context; and 2) intentionally, which involves explicit instruction to the students regarding the usage of specific words, and word-focussed learning strategies. In particular, the former approach recognizes that vocabulary knowledge is required, not as an end in itself but as a vital tool for accessing and communicating their background knowledge and thoughts. It is essential for communicating and expressing thoughts and ideas effectively and for learning new concepts. Vocabulary can be termed the glue that holds content, ideas, and stories together (Alqahtani, 2015). Implicit/incidental vocabulary instruction includes teaching constructive and important words simultaneously during reading activities to expand students' vocabulary, thus helping them understand written

texts and spoken language better. It may be utilized alongside explicit vocabulary instruction programs to enrich students' vocabulary knowledge. Supporters of the implicit instruction method argue against the formal teaching of rules to students as implicit instruction has been shown to help students acquire rules subconsciously in a roundabout manner (Hulstijn, 2005). Implicit vocabulary instruction is best done when students are made to read diverse texts that deal with the same subject. This provides them with various perspectives on important words since subject-specific vocabulary repeats itself multiple times throughout the text. Students, therefore, learn new words and broaden their vocabulary both via communicative activities and contextualized reading and listening materials. Thus, the implicit/incidental approach is often seen as more learner-centered than the explicit approach and resembles L1 acquisition in a natural way (Krashen, 1989). Indeed, an extreme version such as that of Krashen would favor little vocabulary teaching by teachers at all, with most of that work left to learners to do from extensive authentic but comprehensible input.

On the other side, explicit instruction methods have a more teacher-centric approach and focus on learning words consciously and out of context. Explicit VT strategies can nevertheless enable teachers to develop student-specific strategies that let them learn vocabulary quickly. Explicit instruction utilizes mnemonic, semantic, and visual strategies to help students identify and assess the rules from the input in structured teaching environments (Çiftçi & Üster, 2009). Furthermore, explicit teaching strategies involve the systematic and direct presentation of critical information to students by teachers. The explanation includes translation, demonstration, e.g., using realia, and practice, which are needed to increase students' vocabulary knowledge. As vocabulary teaching involves many complicated aspects of a language, teachers might find it more productive to provide explicit vocabulary instruction to their students (Huckin, 2000; Ellis, 2005).

Numerous researchers have studied the efficacy of both explicit and implicit instruction methods. For instance, it was found that students who were taught using explicit methods performed better compared to those using implicit methods. What is more, students who experienced implicit learning activities displayed superior speech-production performance compared to their peers who received traditional explicit word focussed

instruction. The conclusion drawn from these studies is that both language teaching strategies effectively promote language acquisition, subject to other factors (Alizadeh 2016; Archer & Hughes, 2011; Takač, 2008). Hence, in the present study, it is necessary to ascertain how far teachers believe in each approach and other individual V.T. techniques, and how many teachers believe in the same viewpoint.

Although explicit and implicit instruction strategies may seem like two opposing sides of the same coin, they may be viewed as complementary to each other to some extent (e.g., Nation, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial also to know how far teachers believe in both or choose one over the other.

Finally, it is notable that there have been a few studies of teacher beliefs about V.T. in contexts other than Saudi or Arab ones. These, however, focus almost entirely on explicit vocabulary training techniques and teacher beliefs that are most useful within that category. This again makes the present study groundbreaking in including implicit/incidental methods as well. Thus, Macalister (2012), for example, recorded pre-service teachers' beliefs about the importance of specific meaning presentation techniques (such as realia and pictures) and meaning practice methods (such as mind maps and labeling objects). Niu and Andrews (2012) investigated the similarities and discrepancies between second language (L2) teachers' V.T. beliefs and practices. They found teachers believe that definitions and exemplifications are considered foremost among the techniques for meaning presentation. However, they found teachers differed over use of first language (L1) (i.e., translation) and whether this technique should be limited to helping students who fail to understand the meaning of any English word by other means. Teachers also differed over the effectiveness of checking dictionaries in class. By contrast, Gao and Ma (2011) found teachers from mainland China believe that vocabulary practice is more important than presentation techniques for new words, especially memorization. However, none of these focused on incidental learning through reading or communicative activities.

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1 Participants of the Study

This quantitative study was carried out on a group of 45 male and female participants from a total of 150

EFL teachers across several campuses within one chosen university. They included teachers from countries other than Saudi Arabia whose various academic ranks ranged from lecturers to full professors. The participants were all working in the English language department at the time of this study, which occurred during the second semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. The assumption made by the researchers is that these participants may be regarded as a representative sample of the population of EFL teachers in provincial Saudi universities more widely.

The teachers were informed about the study's primary objectives before they completed the questionnaire to ensure a clear understanding of the study and avoid the pitfalls that sometimes come with using questionnaires. The EFL teachers responded to 15 questionnaire statements intended to elicit their perceptions of what they believed were the best vocabulary teaching methods. For ease and accuracy, the survey was carried out electronically, using Google Forms.

#### 3.2 Tool of the Study

The questionnaire items were adapted from Lu (2017) and used a six-point Likert scale for participants' answers (scale 0-5). Some items (as listed in Table 1) mainly focused on beliefs about techniques that favored explicit V.T. of words in isolation, such as presentation through translation or realia, maybe in frequency order; practice through repetition, or other forms of memorization. Others focused on techniques consistent with implicit/incidental teaching/learning of words not in isolation, such as reading, discourse context, communicative activities, and natural input. Furthermore, some items were negatively worded so that respondents needed to pay attention to the wording and could not fall into a response set of always choosing the same agreement option; E.g., agreement with 1. *It is necessary to translate vocabulary meaning to students' native language* shows favoring of translation while the agreement with 10. *It is negative for teachers to teach vocabulary by using bilingual vocabulary lists in class* shows the opposite. A few items (6, 8) mentioned one aspect of vocabulary teaching positively and another negatively within the same item, so they were included twice in some analyses.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis and Validation

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) ver-

sion 25 was used for analysis. Before any statistics were calculated, however, negatively worded items were re-scored in reverse so that on the 0-5 scale in the account of results, a higher rating always indicates greater support for a particular aspect of V.T. (e.g., use of translation, or implicit methods as a whole, etc.). The midpoint of the scale indicating no clear opinion in favor of or against some technique of VT is 2.5.

Regarding reliability, Cronbach's alpha was .761, which indicates high consistency among the responses issued to the items despite measuring a wide variety of different beliefs. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality (with Lilliefors correction) showed that none of the data was normally distributed ( $p < .005$ ). Therefore for any significance tests, non-parametric statistics were used. In particular, the binomial test was used to test whether significantly more teachers endorsed a particular V.T. technique than disagreed with it.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows that no beliefs were on average very strongly agreed with (4 or 5 on the scale) or very strongly

rejected (0 or 1), although individual respondents did record such extreme opinions. The two aspects of V.T. that were relatively most strongly endorsed, in four items all significantly approved above the neutral midpoint of the scale, were the ideas of teaching/learning through reading (items 12rev and 2) and communicative activities (items 4 and 14rev). Both those fall within the incidental/inexplicit approach, and one other item within that broad approach also found favor, one that referred to learning in context (item 6). Item 11, however, although with a mean slightly above 3, failed to be significantly positively endorsed. Possibly, this is because it referred to essentially the same idea as item 6 but used the word discourse rather than context, and unlike item 6, it did not couple the idea with the rejection of translation. The one item supporting the general idea of incidental/implicit learning that was not endorsed was 8, which referred to acquisition naturally. This term was possibly unfamiliar to the teachers, or perhaps their attention was distracted due to the other method mentioned in the same item, that of memorization. In any event, this item was endorsed with a mean not significantly below the midpoint of the scale.

**Table 1:**  
**Mean approval of each item in descending order**

Items	VT technique supported	Mean	SD	Binomial p
4. It is necessary to help students understand vocabulary through active interaction like role play, information gap	Communicative	3.60	1.684	002.
12rev. It is useful to ask students to learn new words from reading activity	Reading	3.49	1.817	036.
2. Teachers can have students notice and also acquire new vocabulary from reading activity	Reading	3.49	1.618	007.
9. It is important to offer students clear, unambiguous vocabulary instruction	Communicative	3.47	1.590	016.
14rev. Active interaction like role play and information gap is important while teaching vocabulary	Communicative	3.29	1.727	016.

5. Students must repeat new vocabulary after teachers to learn a word	Repetition	3.22	1.622	036.
7. It is useful to use word-frequency lists to teach vocabulary	Frequency	3.18	1.655	072.
13. Vocabulary should be taught through pantomiming, real-life objects, and other visual materials	Realia	3.16	1.581	072.
6. Vocabulary should be acquired like L1 in context without L2 translation	Context	3.16	1.623	016.
Students must memorize vocabulary .3	Memorization	3.11	1.812	072.
11. Vocabulary should be taught in discourse	Context	3.07	1.698	135.
10rev. It is positive for teachers to teach vocabulary by using bilingual vocabulary lists in class	Translation	2.91	1.819	233.
15rev. Repetition activities that teachers use in class to help students learn vocabulary are effective	Repetition	2.71	1.779	551.
8rev. There is a need to take time to memorize words because students cannot acquire vocabulary naturally	Memorization	2.67	1.692	551.
1. It is necessary to translate vocabulary meaning to students' native language	Translation	2.44	1.914	371.
8. There is no need to take time to memorize words because students can acquire vocabulary naturally	Natural	2.33	1.692	551.
6rev. Vocabulary should not be acquired like L1 in context but with-L2 translation	Translation	1.84	1.623	016.

**Note: Items with Binomial  $p < .05$  are endorsed significantly above or below the neutral scale midpoint of 2.5.**

Turning now to the items that are broadly associated with the explicit teaching of words in isolation, it could be seen that they returned lower means in Table 1. The most prominent item is item 9, which was significant-

ly approved: 'It is important to offer students clear, unambiguous vocabulary instruction.' This might be taken as expressing an overall view in favor of explicit teaching methods without mentioning any specific

aspect of that approach. However, it could be argued that it simply voices approval of all kinds of vocabulary teaching and so is neutral on the explicit-implicit distinction. In any event, the items which did explicitly mention various aspects of the explicit, word-centered approach fared less well. Repetition was approved significantly above the midpoint of the scale in 5 but not so in 15rev. Memorization, which was intended to have a broader meaning than repetition, included various association techniques. For example, similarly was approved rather more in 3 than 8rev, although neither was significantly different from the scale's midpoint (neither agree nor disagree).

None of the word-focused methods allied most strongly with the presentation of new vocabulary attracted support significantly above the scale's midpoint. Items 7 and 13, concerned with frequency-based word lists and the use of realia and images, both attracted some positive support, but not significantly so. The lowest approval of all was attracted

by translation, with one item significantly rejected (6rev) and two others not significantly different from neutral judgment (10rev and 1).

Table 1 also shows that the SDs are all 1.58 or greater, which is substantial for data findings measured on a short rating scale. Furthermore, they often exceed half the size of the mean itself. In some cases, this is due to the distribution of scores being bimodal. This is seen most clearly in item 1, where it can be seen that there is a significant difference of opinion between 15 teachers who strongly believe in translation and another 20 who strongly disagree. Some lesser pattern of this sort was found in responses to all items except 5, 6, 7, and 14, where a single mode is dominant. This, therefore, suggests that the teachers do not form a single group sharing the same beliefs but differ on many individual V.T. techniques. To obtain an overview of the two meta-approaches that we are interested in, two overall scores were calculated for each person across the relevant items (Table 2), omitting item 9.

**Table 2:**  
**Overall measures of belief in implicit and explicit VT**

<b>VT Belief</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Binomial p</b>
Implicit/incidental overall	71.	4.29	3.20	921.	001.>
Explicit overall	1.78	3.89	2.81	486.	001.

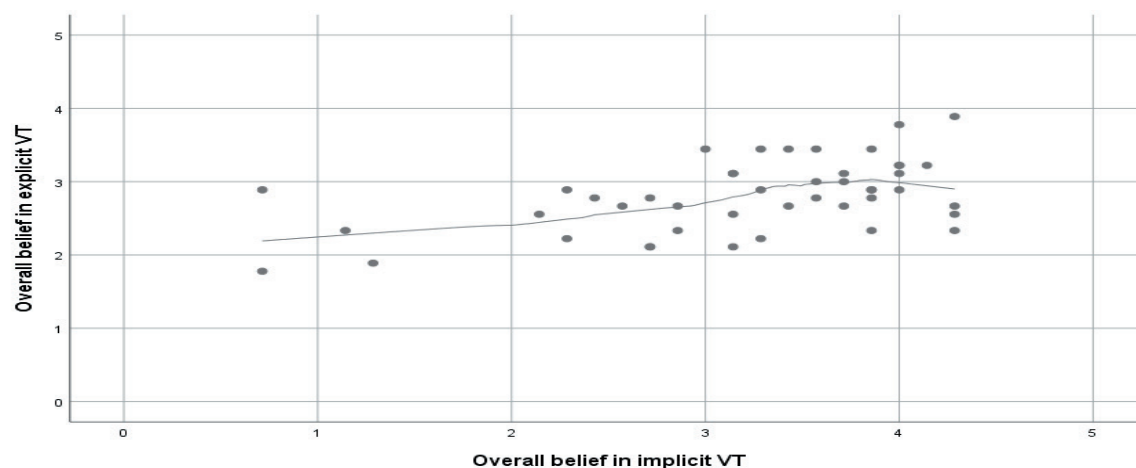
It can be seen that both approaches are endorsed significantly positively, above the midpoint of the scale. However, as expected from Table 1, belief in implicit/incidental V.T. methods is stronger than explicit word-focused V.T. methods. Indeed, that difference of .39 is significant (Wilcoxon  $z=-3.285$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Nevertheless, it is notable that it is not the case that the high endorsement of the implicit approach above the midpoint of the scale is not matched by a mean for explicit V.T. that falls below the midpoint but is also significantly above it. This means that, for the most part, teachers see benefits in both.

Furthermore, there is a positive correlation between the two measures (Pearson  $r = .503$ ; Figure 1). This indicates

that those who believe more strongly in one set of V.T. beliefs also believe more in the other. It is not a matter that the more a person believes in the implicit/incidental approach; the less they believe in the explicit word-centered approach.

In Table 2, for the composite measures, the SDs are smaller, but it is noticeable that the SD, and the maximum-minimum range, is much higher for the implicit belief measure than the explicit one. This is further illustrated by Figure 1 below, where it can be seen that the scores are more spread out for beliefs in implicit V.T. (horizontal) than explicit V.T. (vertical). Furthermore, there is visual evidence of a separate group of four teachers' shallow belief in implicit V.T.





**Figure 1: Correlation between overall belief in implicit and explicit V.T.**

Overall, the evidence reveals that the study's teachers are stronger advocates of implicit/incidental V.T. methods compared to explicit word-focused ones. In particular, they are more favorable towards communicative and reading-centered V.T. than translation and memorization. However, that does not mean that they reject explicit teaching completely - it is just that they agree with it less strongly than the implicit methods. They favor a combination of both methods, as can be observed from Nation (2003). Furthermore, they do not form one homogeneous group concerning their beliefs and vary widely in endorsing the implicit V.T. methods. This is possibly due to the variety of backgrounds found among EFL tertiary-level teachers in Saudi Arabia. They hail from different countries around the globe and not just Saudi Arabia. As a result, they have had quite a range of additional training and experience. The results of this study contrast notably with many other VT research belief studies the study has found. Those evidenced explicit, not implicit techniques, as being the focus of teacher belief, although this may have been in part a product of the questions the researchers chose to ask rather than the teachers' actual belief patterns. However, there was a similarity in that our teachers, like those of Niu and Andrews (2012), seemed to be divided on the value of translation. The findings also contrast with those of Alghamdi's

(2013), which was the closest we could find to the current study. That study found teachers' beliefs about suitable V.T. methods (reported in the interview) overwhelmingly favored explicit, word-focused, V.T. That is, however, perhaps to be expected when the vocabulary to be taught was the essential terminology of subjects such as engineering and economics, which was not a part of everyday general English vocabulary. Alghamdi found differences between teachers in the specific techniques they endorsed within the explicit approach, e.g., in the use of translations and antonyms. Nevertheless, this was related primarily to whether the teacher was an English teacher (of ESP) or a subject teacher (of engineering, etc.). That distinction does not exist between teachers in the current study, but rather within teachers since most of the teachers that this study included would have been both on different occasions. For example, a given teacher in the English department might teach Reading I, which is a student EFL improvement course, at level 1 of an English major. Also, 19th century English Novel or Sociolinguistics, which are subject courses of an English major at level 8, are delivered in English medium. An interesting future question to pursue would be whether teachers would favor the same V.T. methods in those two different kinds of courses (i.e. English improvement courses vs. English as a subject course) if they were asked about them separately.

It might be speculated that an astute teacher might endorse different uses for the implicit and explicit approaches in both language improvement and subject classes. Arguably, the explicit techniques are more suited to important high-frequency words (Nation, 2003) that the learners have not yet mastered but which arise in general language improvement classes, such as perhaps the word matter, and to essential terms in subject classes, such as the word diglossia in sociolinguistics, or the word fate when studying the novels of Thomas Hardy. They need to receive extra attention, like words, have their meaning(s) presented, and be explicitly practiced. However, that leaves a world of other words that do not need this attention and can be left to be guessed and understood from context incidentally to the reading or communication process whose primary focus is not on words but content/message. However, students need to be suitably trained to do this.

Finally, one should not misrepresent these findings as being solely related to teaching practices. Although beliefs are known to influence practices, as described earlier in this study, the present study could not reveal more details about the practices followed by these teachers during their actual vocabulary teaching sessions. Despite our findings of their beliefs favoring the implicit teaching approach, they could still, in fact, remain heavily reliant on explicit teaching techniques, including translation. However, this hypothesis could not be confirmed since the authors had not observed their actual classroom performance. The current hypothesis explains such a mismatch by telling us that the students are not proficient enough to engage in incidental learning through reading or communicative activities. However, that is mere speculation, which must await future research to be verified.

### **5. Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications**

After a thorough analysis of the current literature review and the findings of this study, it can be concluded that both implicit and explicit vocabulary instruction practices need to be integrated into a vigorous mix to create an appropriate teaching environment that provides ample encounters to build a better vocabulary, activating schemata, teaching much-needed words, and integration of vocabulary with the four language skills. English cannot be taught effectively without focusing on vocabulary and the value it contributes. It is essen-

tial to have a good grip over vocabulary to understand and improve one's comprehension, writing, reading, and speaking abilities in English, thus enhancing their communication skills simultaneously. Teachers need to implement suitable teaching strategies to ensure their students absorb ample English vocabulary during the classes. Both implicit and explicit teaching methods need to be considered while planning vocabulary teaching lessons. Inferring meanings from the context like a native speaker or a proficient English speaker, discarding unnecessary words whenever and wherever needed, deploying words in the right situation are all skills that the students can imbue, provided their teachers use fun and creative methods to do so. For instance, games like Word Bingo or Scrabble can help students learn different words and enhance their vocabulary drastically. Teachers should not limit themselves only to teaching hours but should motivate their students to read heavily. Teachers can do this by helping them understand the true potential and value gained in their lives by enhancing their vocabulary or offering a practical, real-life demonstration in the class itself. L2/FL learners need to consciously absorb and learn new words since many of them are unfortunately unaware that words can be understood without an explicit provision of their meanings. Students should embrace a positive mindset while coming across new lexical terms as well. Syllabification, spelling, pronunciation, and word repetition are valuable tools to help students use new words faster. By employing appropriate methods whenever the situation calls for it, students will eventually move to a system of autonomous learning. Such strategies can convert the process of vocabulary learning into an exciting adventure.

### **6. Conclusion**

This study attempted to ascertain the beliefs of a group of EFL teachers regarding effective vocabulary instruction practices in the Saudi tertiary EFL context. An investigation was also conducted into whether these beliefs broadly espouse an explicit, word-focused approach, or an implicit, contextualized one. Implicit/incidental V.T. methods were revealed to be more strongly believed and backed by the study participants than the explicit word-focused ones. Notably, translation and memorization V.T.s were discovered to be less favorable compared to communicative and reading ones.

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