



Self-Learning Strategies for EFL Acquisition among Saudi University Students

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Abstract

This study investigates self-learning strategies for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) acquisition among Saudi university students. Despite the importance of English proficiency, many Saudi students struggle to achieve the desired level of competence. This research aims to identify effective self-learning strategies that can empower students to enhance their EFL skills independently. Using focus groups and a questionnaire, the study explores the most common and inspiring self-learning strategies adopted by Saudi university students, as well as the reasons behind their preferences. The findings reveal that watching American movies and TV shows, taking online courses, and engaging with English-language media are among the most popular strategies. Traveling to English-speaking countries, watching American TV shows, and reading English stories are considered the most inspiring approaches. The study provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers to design more effective English language programs tailored to the needs and preferences of Saudi university students. By understanding and promoting these self-learning strategies, this research aims to contribute to improving EFL proficiency and empowering Saudi students to succeed in an increasingly globalized world.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving global landscape, the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has gained immense significance and has become a vital skill for individuals seeking success and competitiveness in various professional domains. The ability to communicate effectively in English not only facilitates international communication but also opens doors to educational and career opportunities worldwide. As such, it is imperative to examine the self-learning strategies employed by Saudi university students in their pursuit of English proficiency, as the level of English language proficiency among this demographic often falls short of expectations despite the availability of numerous resources and facilities. In Saudi Arabia, the need for English proficiency is underscored by the country's strategic educational reforms and international collaborations. Consequently, Saudi university students are increasingly seeking effective self-learning strategies to enhance their English language skills outside the traditional classroom setting.

Numerous factors contribute to the challenges faced by Saudi university students in acquiring EFL. Limited exposure to native English speakers, insufficient opportunities to utilize English in daily life, and a traditional emphasis on grammar and vocabulary in EFL instruction have all been identified as potential barriers to English language development. To address these challenges and enhance English language proficiency among Saudi university students, it is crucial to identify and promote the utilization of effective self-learning strategies. Self-learning strategies refer to the techniques and approaches learners employ to independently enhance their language skills without direct teacher guidance. These strategies can supplement classroom instruction or serve as independent learning pathways outside the traditional academic setting. Research has demonstrated that self-learning strategies can be a powerful tool for improving EFL proficiency.

Self-learning strategies are essential for language acquisition as they empower learners to take charge of their own learning process, enabling them to practice and improve their language skills in diverse and flexible contexts. There are many different ways that can help university students learn English on their own. Two popular options are online English courses and engaging with English-language media. Online English courses offer a structured learning environment with access to a wealth of resources (McMullen, 2009). This can be a great option for students who want to learn at their own pace and convenience. Online courses often include interactive activities, such as quizzes, games, and discussions, which can help to keep students engaged and motivated. On the other hand, engaging with English-Language Media can be a fun and practical way to immerse oneself in the language. Watching movies and TV shows, listening to music, and reading books and articles in English can expose students to natural language use and cultural nuances. This can help them to improve their listening comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Almusharraf, 2021).

Both online English courses and engaging with English-language media can be effective self-learning strategies. The best option will highly depend on the student's individual learning style and preferences. Self-studying English grammar and writing essays in English are traditional approaches that remain relevant, as they allow learners to systematically build their language foundation and express themselves in written form (AlQahtani, & Ahmed, 2018). Conversing with native English speakers through social media platforms and texting friends in English are interactive strategies that facilitate real-time language practice and enhance communicative competence. Traveling to English-speaking countries and immersing oneself in English literature and poetry provide deep cultural immersion and exposure to diverse linguistic styles (Aljurbua, 2021).

Listening to English books, podcasts, or songs is an effective way to improve listening skills and vocabulary acquisition, as it allows learners to engage with the language in various auditory contexts (Alzubi, & Singh, 2017). Practicing English with family and friends and changing electronic device language settings to English are practical strategies that integrate language learning into daily life, making it a constant and accessible part of the learner's environment (Alhaisoni, 2012). Staying

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updated with English news not only improves language skills but also broadens learners' global awareness and understanding of current events (Al Khaza'le, 2019). These self-learning strategies, when employed effectively, can lead to significant improvements in language proficiency and learner autonomy.

This research paper aims to explore the most inspiring self-learning strategies adopted by Saudi university students in their journey to acquire EFL. By delving into these strategies, we seek to contribute to the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and provide valuable insights that can inform and enhance English language education for Saudi students. This study builds upon existing research on EFL acquisition and self-learning strategies, incorporating findings from authentic studies conducted in similar contexts.

To achieve the research objective, a comprehensive research program was designed, incorporating guided focus groups with exceptional students who had demonstrated significant progress in their English language proficiency. Additionally, the expertise of experienced professionals in the field of language education was sought to inform the research process. Through these guided focus groups, potential self-learning strategies employed by Saudi university students to acquire EFL were identified and analyzed. Subsequently, the most inspiring and effective strategies were selected for further investigation. In order to augment the findings derived from the focus groups, a comprehensive questionnaire was developed and administered to a larger sample of Saudi university students.

The research will help educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers design English language programs that are tailored to the specific needs and learning styles of Saudi university students. By understanding the challenges they face and the strategies they find effective, educators can create programs that are more engaging, motivating, and ultimately more successful. The research will provide EFL teachers and curriculum designers with a deeper understanding of the factors that motivate Saudi university students to learn EFL. This knowledge will help them develop more effective teaching and learning materials, create a supportive learning environment, and address the specific challenges that students face in the language learning process. Ultimately, this research aims to empower Saudi university students to excel in English language proficiency. By providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge, this research will help them thrive in an increasingly interconnected and competitive global society, where English language proficiency is essential for success in many fields. In short, this research is not just about understanding how Saudi university students learn English. It's about using that understanding to create a better future for these students, a future where they can use their English language skills to achieve their goals and make a positive impact on the world.

Proceeding from what has previously been said, the following research questions (RQs) could be stated:

- 1- What potential self-learning strategies are adopted by Saudi university students to learn EFL?
- 2- Which of these strategies do Saudi university students consider the most inspiring?
- 3- Why do they consider such strategies the most inspiring?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's globalized world, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) proficiency has become increasingly crucial for university students seeking success and competitiveness in various professional domains. However, achieving proficiency can be challenging, particularly for students with limited exposure to native speakers and opportunities to practice the language outside the classroom. This highlights the need to explore effective self-learning strategies that can empower university students to enhance their EFL skills independently.

2.1. Challenges in EFL Acquisition for University Students

Several factors contribute to the challenges faced by university students in acquiring EFL proficiency. These include:

1. Limited exposure to native English speakers: A study by Al-Khaza'le (2019) conducted at Shaqra University in Saudi Arabia revealed that limited interaction with native speakers outside the classroom hinders the development of natural language fluency and pronunciation among EFL learners.
2. Insufficient opportunities to utilize English in daily life: Research by Alzubi and Singh (2017) in Saudi Arabia found that the limited use of English in daily communication outside the academic setting restricts students' practice and application of the language.
3. Traditional emphasis on grammar and vocabulary: A study by Alhaisoni (2012) in Saudi Arabia found that traditional EFL instruction often focuses heavily on grammar rules and vocabulary memorization, neglecting the development of communicative skills and fluency.
4. Lack of motivation and self-directed learning skills: Research by McMullen (2009) suggests that EFL learners may struggle to stay motivated and lack the necessary skills to manage their own learning effectively.

2.2. Self-Learning Strategies for EFL Acquisition

To address these challenges, university students are increasingly adopting various self-learning strategies to enhance their EFL skills. These strategies can be categorized into several categories:

2.2.1. Technology-Based Strategies

1. Online English courses: These courses provide structured learning environments with access to a wealth of resources and interactive activities, allowing students

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to learn at their own pace and convenience. A study by Almusharraf (2021) in Saudi Arabia found that online English courses can be an effective tool for improving EFL proficiency.

2. Engaging with English-language media: Watching movies, TV shows, and listening to music in English exposes students to natural language use, cultural nuances, and diverse accents. Research by Aljurbua (2021) in Saudi Arabia suggests that engaging with English-language media can improve listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and pronunciation.

3. Social media and texting: Conversing with native speakers through social media platforms and texting friends in English provides real-time language practice and enhances communication skills. A study by AlQahtani and Ahmed (2018) in Saudi Arabia found that social media and texting can be effective strategies for improving communicative competence.

4. Electronic device language settings: Changing device settings to English integrates language learning into daily life, making it a constant and accessible part of the learning process. Research by McMullen (2009) suggests that changing device language settings can be a practical strategy for improving vocabulary acquisition and grammar accuracy.

2.2.2. Traditional Learning Strategies

1. Self-studying English grammar: This approach allows students to systematically build their language foundation and understanding of grammatical rules. Research by Al-Khaza'le (2019) suggests that self-studying English grammar can be an effective strategy for improving grammar accuracy and writing skills.

2. Writing essays in English: This strategy helps students develop their writing skills, vocabulary, and ability to express complex ideas in written form. A study by AlQahtani and Ahmed (2018) found that writing essays in English can be an effective strategy for improving writing skills and vocabulary acquisition.

3. Reading English literature and poetry: Immersing oneself in classic and contemporary English literature exposes students to diverse writing styles, vocabulary, and cultural references. Research by Almusharraf (2021) suggests that reading English literature and poetry can improve reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

2.2.3. Immersion and Travel

1. Traveling to English-speaking countries: This provides an immersive experience, exposing students to the language and culture firsthand, and facilitating natural language acquisition. A study by Aljurbua (2021) found that traveling to English-speaking countries can significantly improve EFL proficiency.

2. Listening to English books, podcasts, or songs: This strategy improves listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and pronunciation by engaging students with the language in various auditory contexts. Research by Alzubi and Singh (2017) suggests that listening to English books, podcasts, or songs can be an effective strategy for improving listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

2.2.4. Practical Strategies

1. Practicing English with family and friends: This creates a comfortable environment for practicing speaking and listening skills in a supportive setting. Research by Alhaisoni (2012) suggests that practicing English with family and friends can improve speaking fluency and communication skills.

2. Staying updated with English news: This not only improves language skills but also broadens students' global awareness and understanding of current events. A study by Al-Khaza'le (2019) found that staying updated with English news can improve reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

3. Self-regulated holistic approach: The most effective self-regulated strategy development techniques for enhancing Saudi English majors' reading comprehension skills include a combination of cognitive, motivational, and metacognitive strategies. Research has shown that self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) significantly improves reading comprehension and self-efficacy among Saudi female students. For instance, a study conducted at Imam University demonstrated that students taught using SRSD outperformed those taught with traditional methods, showing significant improvements in both reading comprehension skills and self-efficacy (Alreshoud & Abdelhalim, 2022). Additionally, incorporating motivational strategies into reading instruction has been found to enhance reading performance by making students more positive and enthusiastic about their learning (Al-Qahtani & Alwaheebi, 2023). Furthermore, the use of metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's reading process, has proven effective in improving reading comprehension, particularly among underachieving students (Momdjian, 2023). These findings suggest that a holistic approach that integrates cognitive, motivational, and metacognitive strategies can be highly effective in developing the reading skills of Saudi female English majors.

Research suggests that self-learning strategies can be highly effective in improving EFL proficiency when employed effectively. Studies have shown that these strategies can lead to significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition, grammar accuracy, reading comprehension, listening skills, and overall communicative competence.

3. METHODOLOGY

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To qualitatively search for and intensely identify the potential self-learning strategies Saudi university students adopt to acquire EFL, concisely explore the most inspiring ones they consider, and specify why they believe these strategies are the most effective, the researchers formed two focus groups: one consisting of 5 active EFL university students and another of 3 EFL professors. To deliberately select the 3 EFL professors who were interested in self-learning strategies, a seminar consisting of 10 teachers who teach the IE200 course (a course focusing on acquiring the two productive English skills, speaking and writing, taken by EFL students in the Faculty of Engineering at King Abdulaziz University) was held about the subject matter. At the end of the seminar, the two researchers selected the 3 most enthusiastic teachers based on a checklist prepared in advance. Each teacher was invited to hold the same seminar and purposely choose 5 students (a total of 15 students) who actively use self-learning strategies, based on a checklist prepared beforehand. Five students were randomly chosen from the 15 students.

Considering the 3 RQs of the study and using the brainstorming technique, these focus groups helped in creating the targeted questionnaire items. The questionnaire was used as a data collection tool as it was the easiest and most effective way to achieve the objective of this study. The dynamic nature of the focus groups and brainstorming technique allowed the group members to develop and generate items that they might not have thought of in an individual interview. A total of 11 self-learning strategies were identified by the two focus groups. These strategies were collected, structured, and used to build the first draft of the questionnaire. For consistency and accuracy purposes, survey reliability and validity were established. Concerning validity, the first draft was pre-tested with a group of 3 referees, and a modified version was developed. Regarding reliability, the valid version of the questionnaire (See Appendix A) was retested and showed high internal consistency.

Receiving the questionnaire via WhatsApp groups, a sample of 63 Saudi university students responded to this survey. The data received was analyzed using Google Forms, which has the option of showing charts and tabular results of the data collected, as well as scrutinized by Excel sheets for a more detailed view of the quantitative results, mainly the number of participants out of 63 and mean values. Each chart or table was followed by a description using language quantifiers and expressions to simplify the results and make it easy for readers to understand, and ended with a kind of conclusion that summarizes that description.

4. RESULTS

The primary purpose of this study is to specify the common self-learning strategies adopted by Saudi university students for learning EFL and identify which strategies are considered the most inspiring and why. To reach this aim, the study's survey data was analyzed using Google Forms to provide charts and Excel sheets for more detailed statistics. Initially, a pie chart is used to confirm that there is a problem that deserves investigation. Then, this chapter is divided into three subheadings, one for each research question (RQ).

To start with, the following pie chart shows how much Saudi university students ask about how they can easily learn EFL.

Research problem chart

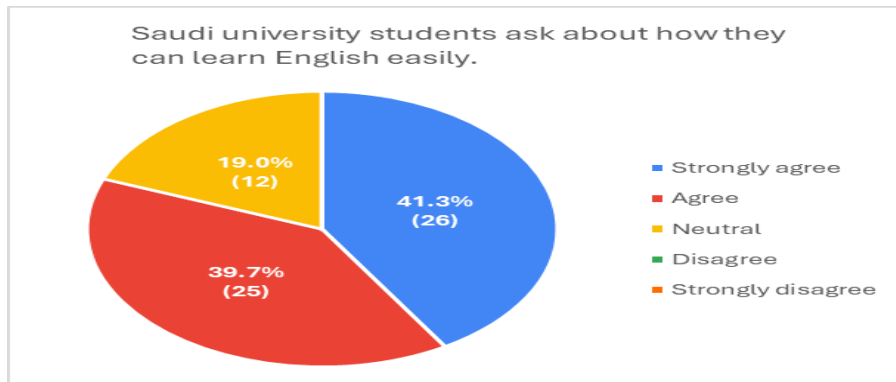


Figure 1: How much Saudi university students ask about how to learn EFL easily

As can be clearly seen, Figure 1 above shows that there is a real need for helping Saudi university students learn EFL easily. The vast majority of the respondents (just above four-fifths) strongly agreed and agreed that students ask about how they can learn EFL easily, while no respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. So, there is a real problem that deserves investigation.

4.1. RQ1: What potential self-learning strategies are adopted by Saudi university students to learn EFL?

The following bar chart is used to answer the first question of this study.

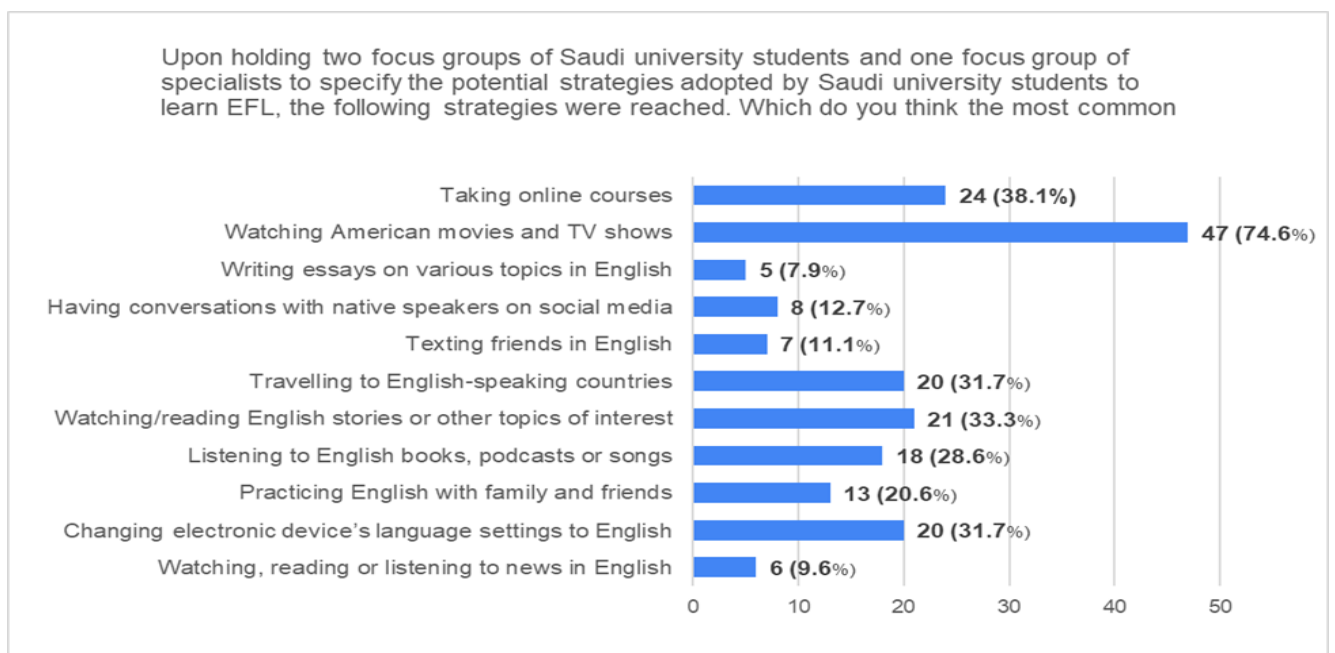


Figure 2: The common strategies adopted by Saudi university students to easily learn EFL

Figure 2 above displays the percentages of the potential learning strategies adopted by Saudi university students to learn EFL. The participants were asked to choose 3 out of 11 strategies suggested by the focus groups in order to specify the most common ones. As can be obviously realized, "Watching American movies and TV shows" far exceeds all other options, with just under three-quarters (47 out of 63 participants) agreeing on this learning strategy. "Taking online courses" comes second with approximately just under two-fifths. "Watching/reading English stories or other topics of interest," "Traveling to English-speaking countries," "Changing electronic device's language settings to English," and "Listening to English books, podcasts or songs" were almost close to each other and chosen by around a third of the respondents. In conclusion, it could be considered that the above 6 mentioned strategies are commonly used, whereas the other 5 strategies are not.

4.2..RQ2: Which self-learning strategies do Saudi university students consider the most inspiring?

The next two charts are used to answer the second question of this study.

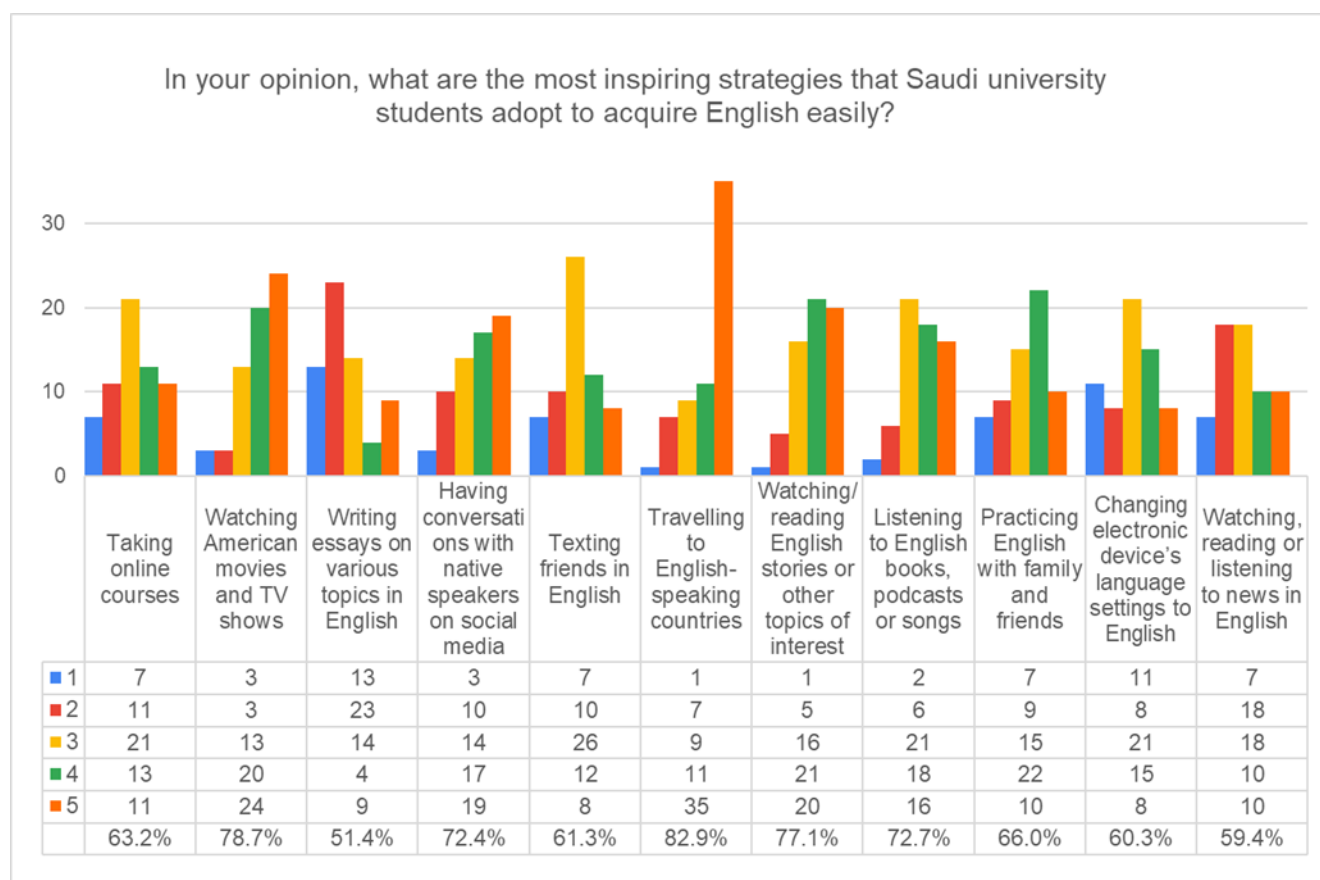


Figure 3: The most inspiring strategies adopted by Saudi university students to easily acquire EFL

Figure 3 above displays the percentages and number of respondents who considered each strategy the most inspiring. The respondents were asked to rate each strategy from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most inspiring. The full mark can be calculated as follows: 63 respondents multiplied by 5, the highest mark, equals 315, divided by 315 equals 100%. As shown in the figure above, "Traveling to English-speaking countries" with just above four-fifths, "Watching American TV shows" and "Watching/reading English stories or other topics of interest" with both just under four-fifths outperformed the rest of the strategies. The second most inspiring group of EFL learning strategies in the respondents' opinion were "Listening to English books, podcasts or songs" and "Having conversations with native speakers on social media," both just under three-quarters. Next comes "Practicing English with family and friends," with two-thirds, and "Taking online courses," with just under two-thirds. "Texting friends in English," "Changing electronic device's language settings to English," and "Watching, reading or listening to news in English" were all around three-fifths. "Writing essays on various topics in English" was an odd strategy that hardly passed with just above a half.

To sum up, all strategies got over 50% and passed. However, there were significant differences between the four groups mentioned above, ranging from four-fifths to three-quarters, to two-thirds, and finally to three-fifths.

To end up, the following pie chart displays an overall opinion on adopting a group of inspiring strategies and its effectiveness in helping students acquire EFL easily.

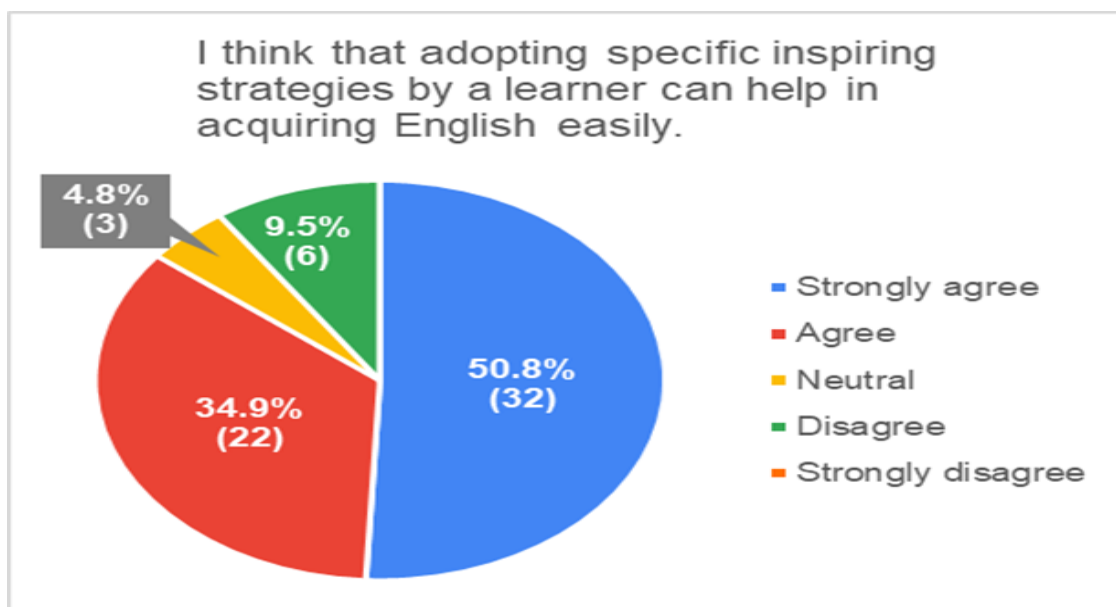


Figure 4: Students’ opinion concerning the effectiveness of adopting specific inspiring strategies to acquire EFL easily

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Figure 4 above shows the percentages of adopting a group of specific inspiring strategies to acquire EFL easily. As can be clearly noticed, the vast majority (just under four-fifths) strongly agreed and agreed that adopting a group of specific inspiring strategies can help students acquire EFL easily. This means that such adoption is an effective way of learning EFL.

4.3.RQ3: Why do Saudi university students consider these self-learning strategies the most inspiring?

The following table is used to answer the third question of this study.

Table 1: Reasons why Saudi university students consider some self-learning strategies the most inspiring

Strategy	Why inspiring
Taking online courses (5 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-The most serious compared to other strategies;-Teachers can know the learners' needs and help them improve their language;-Requires commitment, more professional and provides specialized teachers;-Available, inexpensive and flexible;-Helps learners be committed
Watching American movies and TV shows (12 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Requires learners to understand what they listen to and watch at the same time;-Easier and funnier than the other strategies;-Learners can have fun and learn at the same time;-Helps in improving oral English skills;-Very useful for developing English language;-Puts the watcher in a learning situation;-Simulates the way of speaking in reality;-Helps in understanding grammar and acquiring more words;-Immerses learners in authentic language contexts;-Provides cultural insights that enhance language comprehension and fluency;-Enriches English knowledge;-Exciting and attractive
Writing essays on various topics in English (Zero responses)	No responses
Having conversations with native speakers on social media (5 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Helps in improving communication skills especially speaking;-Improves English language;-Helps strongly in acquiring vocabulary and grammar in a spontaneous way;-Obliges learners to think in English and generate English sentences;-Easily accessed, authentic
Texting friends in English (Zero responses)	No responses
Travelling to English-speaking countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-All people speak English, so learners must use English, also develops self-reliance and love of discovery and learning;

(25 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The most effective way since it gives learners motivation and fun to learn from other cultures; -Learners can practice and learn from native speakers; -Living in an English-speaking society helps a lot; -Learners don't have any other choice but to use English; -Provides fun and motivation; -Obliges the learner to use the language and not worry about mistakes; -Practicing the language with native speakers and not using the mother tongue; -The most useful; -Motivating because of living the language; -Speaking directly with natives is the best way to practice English; -Need for speaking in English all the time helps in removing fear of making mistakes; -Talking with natives every day; -Encourages learners to learn English fluently and skillfully; -Interacting with native speakers makes you learn faster and better; -A rich environment for learning English; -A way of learning through real communication; -Motivates students to learn the language; -An excellent strategy because it is really interesting to learn a new culture; -Everything around is in English, so language could be absorbed faster; -Having authentic and real situations for learning English; -Living the language; -Practicing new experience while learning English; -Helps in living the language and exploring a new culture; -Having all types of communication in English, whether verbal or written
Watching/reading English stories or other topics of interest (7 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Easy to take and exciting; -Makes learning easier; -Interesting and practical use of language; -Entertaining and helps in understanding the language; -Enjoyable and gives rich information; -Requires high level of focus thus develops the English language more quickly; -Improves both grammar and vocabulary
Listening to English books, podcasts or songs (3 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -More exposure to language; -Enjoyable and interesting; -Listening is the first step for learning any language
Practicing English with family and friends (3 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Available; -Could be practiced daily; -They can understand my low level of English and encourage me continue learning
Changing electronic device's language settings to English (1 response)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Accessible and frequently used
Watching, reading or listening to news in English (2 responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Exposure to frequently used words and expressions; -Diverse of topics discussed in news

Table 1 shows the number of students who considered each self-learning strategy as the most inspiring and the reasons why each strategy was chosen. As shown in the table above, statistically speaking, "Traveling to English-speaking countries" comes first. 25 out of 63 respondents voted for this strategy, followed by "Watching American movies and TV shows" with a sharp drop to 12 responses, which was about half compared to "Traveling...". "Watching/reading English stories or other topics of interest", "Having conversations with native speakers on social media", and "Taking online courses" got 7, 5, and 5 responses, respectively. Four strategies achieved a very low number of responses: 3, 2, and 1 response, while the two remaining strategies got zero responses.

Concerning the reasons for choosing self-learning strategies as the most inspiring, each strategy has its own reasons, as shown in Table 1, which depend on its special nature. However, a closer look can reveal a set of common reasons related to various strategies. The most common reasons given by the respondents were related to concepts or terms like flexibility, accessibility, easiness, fun, entertainment, interest, excitement, motivation, reality, authenticity, attractiveness, commitment, availability, rich learning environment, new culture, new experience, native speakers, exposure to language, and frequency.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this investigation provide significant perceptions into the potential EFL self-learning strategies, specify the most inspiring ones among these strategies and answer why such strategies are considered so.

The focus groups convened come up with 11 potential EFL self-learning strategies, some of which are suggested by EFL university students and the others by EFL professors, 6 of which are considered the most common ones. "Watching American movies and TV shows" comes first, "Taking online courses" second, and "Watching/reading English stories or other topics of interest", "Traveling to English-speaking countries", "Changing electronic device's language settings to English" and "Listening to English books, podcasts or songs" third.

Both "Watching American movies and TV shows" and "Taking online courses" emerged as popular self-learning strategies. This aligns with Almusharraf's findings that highlight the effectiveness of online English courses and engaging with English-language media for improving EFL proficiency in Saudi Arabia. The popularity of watching American movies and TV shows and taking online courses aligns with Almusharraf's (2021) findings, highlighting their effectiveness in improving EFL proficiency. The appeal of online courses likely stems from their structured learning environment, offering learners the flexibility to progress at their own pace and revisit materials as needed. Additionally, many online platforms incorporate interactive exercises, quizzes, and diverse content, which can enhance engagement and motivation. Similarly, engaging with English-language media like movies and TV shows provides authentic language exposure, allowing learners to encounter natural language use, idioms, and cultural

nuances in context. This immersive experience can be particularly beneficial for improving listening comprehension, expanding vocabulary, and developing a feel for the rhythm and intonation of the language.

Concerning the most inspiring EFL self-learning strategies, items 3 and 5 in the questionnaire (See Appendix A below.) which are reflected in Figure 3 and Table 1 (See the Results above.) show that “Traveling to English-speaking countries”, “Watching American TV shows” and “Watching/reading English stories or other topics of interest” outperform the other strategies. Aljurbua's research supports this by demonstrating the significant positive impact of traveling to English-speaking countries on EFL proficiency. Similarly, the study found engaging with English-language media, such as TV shows and stories, to be beneficial for language acquisition.

The fact that "Traveling to English-speaking countries" was ranked as the most inspiring strategy aligns with Aljurbua's (2021) research, which demonstrates its significant positive impact on EFL proficiency. This preference likely stems from the immersive nature of living in an English-speaking environment, where learners are constantly exposed to the language in authentic contexts. Daily interactions with native speakers, navigating everyday situations, and absorbing the cultural nuances firsthand contribute to accelerated language acquisition. The high ranking of "Watching American TV shows" suggests a preference for specific media types. This could be attributed to factors like the widespread availability of American television programs, their engaging storylines, and the use of colloquial language that learners might find relevant to their interests. Further research could explore whether specific genres, themes, or characters within American TV shows resonate more strongly with Saudi EFL learners.

The second most inspiring group of EFL learning strategies considered are “Having conversations with native speakers on social media”, “Practicing English with family and friends”, “Listening to English books, podcasts or songs”, and “Taking online courses”.

"Having conversations with native speakers on social media" was considered relatively inspiring, while "Writing essays on various topics in English" received a surprisingly low score. AlQahtani & Ahmed's study suggests that social media and texting can be effective for improving communicative competence, aligning with the positive perception of social media conversations. However, the low ranking of essay writing contradicts their finding that it benefits writing skills and vocabulary.

While AlQahtani and Ahmed (2018) found both social media use and essay writing beneficial for language acquisition, this study revealed contrasting perceptions among students. The positive view of "Having conversations with native speakers on social media" aligns with the study's findings, suggesting that the informal, interactive nature of these platforms facilitates communicative competence. Students might find it less intimidating to practice their English in a less formal setting, and the immediate feedback from native speakers can be highly valuable. However, the surprisingly low ranking of "Writing essays on various topics in English" presents a compelling point for discussion. This could be attributed to several factors. Students might feel intimidated by the formal structure and academic tone of essays, especially if they lack confidence in their writing abilities. The perceived lack of immediate feedback,

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compared to the real-time interaction of social media, could also contribute to its lower appeal. Exploring alternative writing activities, such as blogging, creative writing, or online forum discussions, that offer a less formal and more interactive experience, might be more engaging for some learners.

"Listening to English books, podcasts, or songs" received a moderately positive response as an inspiring strategy. This aligns with Alzubi & Singh's research, which highlights the effectiveness of listening to English audio materials for improving listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

The moderate popularity of "Listening to English books, podcasts, or songs" aligns with Alzubi and Singh's (2017) research, emphasizing the effectiveness of diverse audio materials for language learning. Each format offers unique benefits. Audiobooks expose learners to a wide range of vocabulary, grammar structures, and narrative styles. Podcasts provide authentic listening practice, featuring natural conversations, discussions, and interviews on various topics. Songs, on the other hand, can enhance pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation while making language learning more enjoyable. The accessibility and convenience of these materials in the digital age likely contribute to their appeal. Learners can easily access vast libraries of audiobooks, podcasts, and music through platforms like Spotify, Audible, and YouTube, allowing them to incorporate English listening practice into their daily routines.

"Practicing English with family and friends" received a moderately positive response. This finding aligns with Alhaisoni's research, which suggests that practicing English in informal settings with family and friends can improve speaking fluency and communication skills.

While "Practicing English with family and friends" received a moderately positive response, aligning with Alhaisoni's (2012) findings on its benefits for fluency and communication, several factors can influence its effectiveness. The English proficiency level of family and friends plays a crucial role. If they have limited English skills, learners might not receive accurate feedback or sufficient opportunities for extended conversation. The frequency and consistency of practice are also vital. Occasional, brief exchanges might not be sufficient for significant improvement. Creating regular opportunities for more extended conversations on various topics is crucial. Finally, the learner's comfort level in speaking English in these settings can impact their willingness to practice. If learners feel self-conscious or fear making mistakes in front of family and friends, they might be less likely to engage in meaningful practice. Creating a supportive and encouraging environment where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities is essential.

As clearly noticed above, there is primarily a high consistency between the most common and the most inspiring EFL strategies; namely, students commonly use what they believe are the most effective and inspiring strategies. Commonly using the most inspiring strategies indicates that Saudi university students are aware of their EFL self-learning and have some kind of metacognition; they intentionally recognize and understand how to learn EFL.

The heart of this discussion is to interpret why students consider a set of EFL self-learning strategies as most inspiring. Scientifically speaking, considering students' thoughts and feelings as reflected in the survey (See Appendix A below) and Results chapter is the right and most appropriate way

to answer such a question. Students are those who struggle to acquire EFL, and no one can answer on their behalf but themselves and EFL experts who live and share their problem.

Regarding the reasons for choosing EFL self-learning strategies as the most inspiring, each strategy has its own reasons, which depend on its special nature. However, a closer look at students' responses can reveal the following set of categories of common reasons which are related to connected concepts or associated terms like: 1) flexibility, availability, accessibility, and easiness; 2) fun, entertainment, interest, attractiveness, excitement, and motivation; 3) rich learning environment, new culture, new experience, and native speakers; 4) reality and authenticity; 5) commitment, exposure to language, and frequency. A researcher can notice never-ending reciprocal internal (among each category's concepts) and external (among these categories) relations among these categories' concepts and terms. A mixture of these relations can enrich the EFL learning environment and lead to adopting appropriate self-learning strategies that can improve and develop EFL acquisition. To reach a highly motivated EFL learning environment, researchers are invited to explore and discover more EFL self-learning strategies and reasons why students adopt these strategies. More importantly, to pave the way for students and teachers to practically apply and utilize self-learning strategies, investigations into the interrelationships between these strategies and reasons are highly recommended.

What this research reveals about a central self-learning strategy like "Taking online English courses" is in line with what is stated by McMullen (2009), as this strategy offers a structured learning environment with access to a wealth of resources. Considering students' own pace and convenience and including interactive activities are two possible and probable reasons for choosing this strategy as an effective and inspiring one. In general, using strategies related to English-Language Media like "Watching American TV shows," "Watching/reading English stories or other topics of interest," "Having conversations with native speakers on social media," and "Listening to English books, podcasts or songs" can be a fun and practical way to immerse oneself in the language and expose students to natural language use and cultural nuances. This can help them improve their listening comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Almusharraf, 2021). "Practicing English with family and friends" and "Changing electronic device's language settings to English" are two practical strategies that integrate language learning into daily life, making it a constant and accessible part of the learner's environment (Alhaisoni, 2012). "Traveling to English-speaking countries" can provide an immersive experience, exposing students to the language and culture firsthand, and facilitating natural language acquisition. A study by Aljurbua (2021) found that traveling to English-speaking countries can significantly improve EFL proficiency.

In conclusion, to deal with undesirable factors that negatively affect students' EFL proficiency like limited exposure to native English speakers, insufficient opportunities to utilize English in daily life, traditional emphasis on grammar and vocabulary, and lack of motivation and self-directed learning skills, generally common and particularly inspiring strategies must be deeply investigated, practically examined, and reasonably specified. Studying, investigating, and making use of the categories of reasons that stand behind choosing EFL self-learning strategies as inspiring identified in this research (1) flexibility,

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availability, accessibility, and easiness; 2) fun, entertainment, interest, attractiveness, excitement, and motivation; 3) rich learning environment, new culture, new experience, and native speakers; 4) reality and authenticity; 5) commitment, exposure to language, and frequency) are probably of great importance to overcome students' deficiency in EFL.

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Appendix A

Self-Learning Strategies for EFL Acquisition among Saudi University Students

The objective of this research is **to scrutinize the most inspiring strategies** Saudi university students adopt to acquire English as a foreign language (EFL). After specifying the potential strategies by holding guided focus groups, choosing the most inspiring ones was the subject of this survey. Please take a moment and answer the following questions.

1- Saudi university students ask about how they can learn English easily. (Circle one answer.)

- Strongly agree - Agree - Neutral - Disagree - Strongly disagree

2- Upon holding two focus groups of Saudi university students and one focus group of specialists to specify the potential strategies adopted by Saudi university students to learn EFL, the following strategies were reached. (Which do you think the most common strategies are? Choose only 3.)

- Taking online courses ()
- Watching American movies and TV shows ()
- Writing essays on various topics in English ()
- Having conversations with native speakers on social media ()
- Texting friends in English ()
- Travelling to English-speaking countries ()
- Watching/reading English stories or other topics of interest ()
- Listening to English books, podcasts or songs ()
- Practicing English with family and friends ()
- Changing electronic device’s language settings to English ()
- Watching, reading or listening to news in English ()

3- In your opinion, what are the most inspiring strategies that Saudi university students adopt to acquire English easily? (Rate each strategy 1 to 5, 1 is the least inspiring & 5 is the most inspiring.)

Strategy	Rate				
	1	2	3	4	5
Taking online courses					
Watching American movies and TV shows					
Writing essays on various topics in English					
Having conversations with native speakers on social media					

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Texting friends in English					
Travelling to English-speaking countries					
Watching/reading English stories or other topics of interest					
Listening to English books, podcasts or songs					
Practicing English with family and friends					
Changing electronic device's language settings to English					
Watching, reading or listening to news in English					

4- I think that adopting specific inspiring strategies by a learner can help in acquiring English easily. (Circle one answer.)

- Strongly agree - Agree - Neutral - Disagree - Strongly disagree

5- In your opinion, which strategy is the most inspiring?

6- Referring to the previous question, briefly in a statement or two, say why you consider it the most inspiring.
