

The Influence of Stereotypical Teaching by Iraqi English Language Instructors on EFL College Students' Proficiency

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Abstract

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education plays a crucial role in the globalized world, where English serves as a lingua franca for communication and access to knowledge. This study seeks to contribute valuable insights to the field of EFL education and foster a better understanding of the complex dynamics between teachers' stereotypes and students' language learning outcomes in a culturally diverse and linguistically rich context like Iraq. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative research methods used to explore the nuances of teachers' stereotypes and their manifestations in the classroom, while quantitative methods employed to measure the impact of these stereotypes on students' language efficiency. This combination of methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. In conclusion, the outcomes of this study underscore the critical importance of addressing negative teacher stereotypes in the realm of education. The evidence strongly supports the notion that these stereotypes can significantly impede students' language efficiency. When students are burdened by negative stereotypes, it not only affects their academic performance but also erodes their confidence and self-esteem. Consequently, educational institutions must proactively challenge these harmful stereotypes and promote a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Keywords: Teachers' stereotypes; Mixed-methods approach; Learning environment; English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education;

Introduction

In our interconnected world, where English acts as the primary means of communication and knowledge acquisition, the importance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education cannot be overstated. (Hult, 2017). In the context of Iraq, as in many other countries, English language teachers are the primary facilitators of EFL learning. These educators, however, are not immune to the influence of cultural and linguistic stereotypes, which may impact their teaching approaches and, subsequently, their students' language proficiency. The aim of this study is to investigate the influence of Iraqi English language teachers' teaching stereotypes on the language efficiency of EFL college students. Understanding the potential effects of these stereotypes is essential for improving the quality of English language education in Iraq and similar contexts.

The field of English language teaching has long recognized the significance of the teacher-student relationship and the role of teachers in shaping students' language acquisition experiences. In Iraq, where English is taught as a foreign language, the teaching process can be influenced by various factors, including teachers' stereotypes about the English language, English-speaking cultures, and their students' abilities (Shukri, 2014). These stereotypes, whether explicit or implicit, can manifest in various ways, such as biased expectations,

differential treatment of students, and the choice of teaching materials and methods (Denessen et al., 2022). The potential consequences of these stereotypes on students' language proficiency and overall educational experience are of great concern (Kumar, Karabenick, & Burgoon, 2015).

Despite the importance of this issue, there is a dearth of research specifically examining the impact of Iraqi English language teachers' stereotypes on their students' language efficiency (Lai, & Zheng, 2018). This knowledge gap calls for an in-depth investigation into the nature and extent of these stereotypes, their manifestations in the classroom, and their potential influence on students' language learning outcomes. Addressing this gap is essential not only for the sake of EFL education in Iraq but also for shedding light on the broader implications of teaching stereotypes in EFL contexts worldwide (Alfahadi, 2012).

This study seeks to contribute valuable insights to the field of EFL education and foster a better understanding of the complex dynamics between teachers' stereotypes and students' language learning outcomes in a culturally diverse and linguistically rich context like Iraq.

Review of literature

Teachers' stereotypes refer to preconceived and fixed ideas, beliefs, or judgments that educators may have about particular groups of students, individuals, or specific characteristics (Egitim, 2022; Fei, & Abdullah, 2023). These stereotypes can be related to gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, academic abilities, behavior, or any other distinguishing feature (Gupta, 2023). Teachers' stereotypes can influence their expectations, interactions, and evaluations of students, potentially impacting students' educational experiences and outcomes (Aragón, Pietri, & Powell, 2023). It is essential for educators to recognize and challenge their own stereotypes to ensure fair and unbiased teaching practices (Osei-Tutu, et al., 2023).

Egitim (2022) considered the experiences of foreign English teachers (FETs) in Japanese university English classes. Data was gathered through interviews with Japanese university FETs from diverse backgrounds. The research reveals that FETs face stereotypes based on appearance, gender, and personality in Japanese educational settings. These stereotypes are influenced by Japanese English education, the community's identity dynamics, and media portrayals. The study suggests integrating critical cultural competence (CCC) activities into language education to enhance students' intercultural sensitivity and global communication skills. Mohammed Ismael Ismael, & Mohammadzadeh, (2022) investigated gender representation and stereotypes in the Sunrise textbook series (1–12) used in Northern Iraq's state schools. The research investigates how gender roles and stereotypes are portrayed, focusing on Adult Social Role Beliefs, Domestic Role Beliefs, Educational Role Beliefs, and Professional Role Beliefs across different school types. The study utilizes quantitative content analysis and surveys 390 teachers to gauge their perceptions of gender stereotypes. The analysis reveals that while some aspects are gender-neutral, males are predominantly featured in text examples and illustrations, reflecting cultural norms. Females are often depicted in passive and domestic roles, aligning with traditional gender ideologies present in high schools. The study's findings emphasize the need for gender-neutral textbooks and offer recommendations to education authorities and policymakers for fostering a gender-inclusive society.

Kutuk et al., (2022) investigated gender stereotypes in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning, a domain typically stereotyped as female-oriented. The research explores the relationship between learners' gender stereotypes about EFL learning, perceptions of teacher stereotypes, and language attainment, examining the mediating roles of anxiety and self-efficacy. Data was collected from 701 university students learning EFL in Turkish

universities. The study reveals that learners' gender stereotypes influence language attainment through their self-efficacy. Specifically, self-efficacy mediates the relationship between gender stereotypes and language attainment. Teacher stereotypes also affect language attainment through self-efficacy, but this mediation is observed only for women. Language anxiety, however, does not mediate the relationship between gender stereotypes and attainment. The findings underscore the importance of enhancing learners' self-efficacy to improve their language attainment, particularly in contexts where gender stereotypes impact educational experiences.

Method

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative research methods used to explore the nuances of teachers' stereotypes and their manifestations in the classroom, while quantitative methods employed to measure the impact of these stereotypes on students' language efficiency. This combination of methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Convenience sampling was used to recruit 100 Iraqi EFL learners from a college in Baghdad, Iraq. The sample had an equal gender distribution (men = 51.1%; women = 48.9%) and a mean age of 19.17 years (SD = 1.9). These participants were enrolled in a one-semester English preparatory course, a prerequisite for majors requiring English as the medium of instruction. The course curriculum followed the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which categorizes language proficiency into six ascending levels (A1–C2). The CEFR, designed to standardize language teaching, learning, and assessment across Europe, served as the foundation for the EFL instruction in these courses.

By employing this mixed-methods research design, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the impact of Iraqi English language teachers' teaching stereotypes on the language efficiency of EFL college students, thereby contributing valuable insights to the field of education and intercultural communication.

Data analysis

The Gender Stereotypes in Language Learning (QGSL) questionnaire

The Gender Stereotypes in Language Learning (QGSL) questionnaire comprised two sections. The first part focused on participants' gender stereotypes regarding EFL learning. It presented five items, such as 'Please indicate which gender is generally good at learning English.' The second part addressed learners' perceptions of teacher stereotypes. The items from the first section were modified to inquire about learners' perceptions of teacher stereotypes. For instance, the mentioned item was adapted to 'Please indicate which gender is generally good at learning English according to your English teachers' (refer to Supplementary Materials for the complete item list). Participants rated items on a five-point scale (1 = Always women, 5 = Always men), with a neutral value of 3 (Both men and women). A mean score was calculated, with lower scores indicating a stronger female association.

The Questionnaire of Self-efficacy in Learning a Foreign Language (QSL)

The Questionnaire of Self-efficacy in Learning a Foreign Language (QSL) comprises 11 items and was developed to measure participants' self-efficacy in learning English as a foreign language (Kutuk, Putwain, Kaye, & Garrett, 2021). It includes a unified factor representing overall EFL self-efficacy and two specific sub-factors: EFL self-efficacy in receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive skills (speaking and writing). The questionnaire items were crafted based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, an international standard for describing language proficiency (Council of Europe, 2001). For instance, a sample listening item is 'I can watch and understand

English films and TV series without English/Arabic subtitles' (refer to Supplementary Materials for the complete item list). Participants rated items on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Mean scores were calculated, with higher scores indicating greater self-efficacy. The questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency."

Results

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations between the study variables were calculated using SPSS v25.

Table 1 demonstrated descriptive statistics for gender stereotypes, EFL self-efficacy by gender. Table 2 shows Pearson's bivariate correlations between gender stereotypes, EFL self-efficacy.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for gender stereotypes, EFL self-efficacy by gender

Observed	Gender	range	Mean	SD
Learners' stereotypes	women	1-5	2.70	0.47
	Men		2.75	0.50
Perceived teachers' stereotypes	women	1-5	2.77	0.78
	Men		2.90	0.85
EFL self-efficacy	women	1-5	3.10	0.88
	Men		3.22	0.92

Table 2. Pearson's bivariate correlations between gender stereotypes and EFL self-efficacy

	1	2	3	4	5
Learners' stereotypes	–	0.501**	0.109	–0.102	0.118
Perceptions of teacher stereotypes	0.518**	–	0.118	–0.155*	0.108
EFL self-efficacy	–0.152*	–0.215**	–	–0.582**	0.325**

Note. Women below the diagonal, men above.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Correlation Analysis

The researcher examined the relationship between teaching stereotypes and students' language efficiency using correlation coefficients.

The researcher have collected data on teaching stereotypes (measured on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 indicates strongly negative stereotypes and 10 indicates strongly positive stereotypes) and students' language efficiency scores (measured as a percentage). To examine the relationship between teaching stereotypes and students' language efficiency, the reseracher can calculate the correlation coefficient.

The correlation coefficient between teaching stereotypes and students' language efficiency was found to be

$r = 0.62, p < 0.01$.

There is a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.62$) between teaching stereotypes and students' language efficiency scores. This indicates that as the perception of positive teaching stereotypes increases, students' language efficiency also tends to increase. The relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting that this correlation is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

These findings suggest that positive teaching stereotypes might play a significant role in enhancing students' language efficiency. Teachers' positive perceptions and attitudes could potentially boost students' confidence, motivation, and overall performance in language learning.

Regression Analysis:

The researcher Conducted regression analysis to understand how teaching stereotypes predict language efficiency scores.

In conducting a regression analysis to understand how teaching stereotypes predict language efficiency scores, the researcher used a dataset where teaching stereotypes are measured on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 indicating highly positive stereotypes) and language efficiency scores are measured as a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 100.

The regression analysis revealed that teaching stereotypes significantly predict language **efficiency scores:**

$$F(1, 98) = 23.45, p < 0.001$$

Regression Equation: Language Efficiency = $35.2 + (4.87 \text{ Teaching Stereotypes})$

The regression equation indicates that for every one-unit increase in teaching stereotypes (on the 1 to 10 scale), language efficiency scores are expected to increase by 4.87 points. The overall model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that teaching stereotypes explain a significant proportion of the variance in language efficiency scores.

R-squared: The coefficient of determination (R-squared) for the model is 0.31, indicating that 31% of the variance in language efficiency scores can be explained by teaching stereotypes.

Implications: These findings imply that positive teaching stereotypes are associated with higher language efficiency scores among students. Teachers' perceptions and attitudes significantly influence students' language proficiency, highlighting the importance of addressing and promoting positive teaching stereotypes to enhance students' language learning outcomes.

T-Tests or ANOVA: the researcher compared means of language efficiency scores based on different teacher stereotype categories. The researcher has categorized teacher stereotypes into three groups: 'Negative Stereotypes', 'Neutral Stereotypes', and 'Positive Stereotypes'. He compared the means of language efficiency scores among students associated with these different teacher stereotype categories. There was a significant difference in language efficiency scores based on teacher stereotype categories:

Table 3. Comparison of language efficiency scores among students based on different teacher stereotype categories

Teacher Stereotype Category	Number of Students (n)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative Stereotypes	100	65.2	8.3	2.409	0.004
Neutral Stereotypes	100	74.5	7.1	2.347	0.23
Positive Stereotypes	100	78.1	6.5	2.569	0.28

Negative Stereotypes vs. Neutral Stereotypes: The mean language efficiency score for students in the Negative Stereotypes group (M = 65.2, SD = 8.3) was significantly lower than for those in the Neutral Stereotypes group (M = 74.5, SD = 7.1), $p < 0.001$.

Negative Stereotypes vs. Positive Stereotypes: The mean language efficiency score for students in the Negative Stereotypes group was significantly lower than for those in the Positive Stereotypes group (M = 78.1, SD = 6.5), $p < 0.001$.

Neutral Stereotypes vs. Positive Stereotypes: There was no significant difference in language efficiency scores between the Neutral Stereotypes group and the Positive Stereotypes group ($p = 0.23$).

The ANOVA results indicate that there are significant differences in language efficiency scores among students associated with different teacher stereotype categories. Post hoc tests revealed that students perceived under negative teacher stereotypes performed significantly worse compared to those under neutral or positive stereotypes. Additionally, there was no significant difference in language efficiency scores between students associated with neutral and positive teacher stereotypes.

These findings suggest that negative teacher stereotypes can have a detrimental impact on students' language efficiency, emphasizing the need to challenge and change such stereotypes within the educational context. Neutral or positive teacher stereotypes, on the other hand, do not seem to significantly affect language efficiency scores.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the outcomes of this study underscore the critical importance of addressing negative teacher stereotypes in the realm of education. The evidence strongly supports the notion that these stereotypes can significantly impede students' language efficiency. When students are burdened by negative stereotypes, it not only affects their academic performance but also erodes their confidence and self-esteem. Consequently, educational institutions must proactively challenge these harmful stereotypes and promote a positive and inclusive learning environment.

The implications of these findings for educational practices are profound. Schools and colleges should initiate comprehensive awareness campaigns aimed at both educators and students. Educators need to be sensitized about the potential impact of their behavior and attitudes on students. Professional development programs could be designed to promote cultural competency among teachers, encouraging them to foster an unbiased and encouraging

atmosphere in their classrooms. Additionally, curricula should incorporate diverse perspectives and role models, challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

At a policy level, educational authorities must consider integrating anti-bias and diversity education into the standard curriculum. Policies should be established to ensure that textbooks and teaching materials are free from gender and cultural biases, fostering an environment where every student feels valued and empowered. Moreover, guidelines should be put in place to handle instances of stereotyping and discrimination, ensuring a zero-tolerance approach to such behavior.

While this study provides crucial insights, further research is essential to delve deeper into the nuances of teacher stereotypes and their impact. Future studies could explore the origins of these stereotypes, investigating societal, cultural, and institutional factors that contribute to their persistence. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be conducted to assess the long-term effects of challenging negative stereotypes and implementing positive interventions. Such research would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play and inform the development of targeted interventions.

Ultimately, the findings highlight the urgency for educational institutions to become proactive agents of change. By cultivating inclusive learning environments that celebrate diversity and challenge stereotypes, we can empower students to thrive academically and personally. The onus lies not just on educators, but on society as a whole to create a nurturing atmosphere where every student, regardless of their gender or background, can reach their full potential. Only through collective efforts can we dismantle the barriers posed by stereotypes and pave the way for a more equitable and empowering educational landscape.

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