
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Inadequate Staffing and Large Class Sizes in Saudi EFL and Translation Programs: An Integrative Analysis of Empirical Studies

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| ABSTRACT

Although a plethora of studies investigated the issues of teacher shortage and large class sizes, few studies explicitly connected teacher shortages with large class sizes in higher education language and translation programs, particularly within the Saudi context. This gap is significant because inadequate staffing and large enrolments are not isolated issues, but they form a structural cycle that directly affects instructional quality, student achievement, and faculty workload. To address this gap, this study conducted an integrative analysis of four empirical studies by the author, published between 2004 and 2008, which collectively investigate the issues of inadequate staffing and large class sizes in Saudi EFL and translation programs. These studies provided a unique longitudinal perspective on a persistent problem that continues to shape instructional conditions in the 2020's. Three studies investigated the staffing of language and translation departments 2004 to 2008 at 7 universities and one study on large student enrolments in the language and translation at King Saud University. The integrative analysis revealed that All studies documented inadequate staffing in language and translation departments, with faculty–student ratios exceeding recommended international benchmarks. Departments were found to rely heavily on part time or temporary instructors, particularly in high demand skills courses. Enrolment data showed large class sizes, especially in General English and core language skills courses, where enrolments frequently exceeded 1,000 students across multiple sections. Specialized translation courses also faced sustained pressure, with median enrolments above 100 students per course. These findings demonstrate that the structural challenges identified in the mid 2000s, began to improve towards 2018 and in the 2020's largely due to the King Abdullah Scholarship Program. Here, two notable shifts occurred: class sizes declined, mainly due to COVID-related instructional restructuring, and the increasing number of Saudi faculty returning from graduate studies abroad. These developments contributed to gradual improvements in staffing and enrolment conditions. The study gave several recommendations to help create sustainable instructional environments that support effective language and translation pedagogy. Further studies about the current staffing and student enrolment status at language and translation programs at state and private universities in the Saudi context are still open for further investigation in the future.

| KEYWORDS

understaffing, faculty shortage, EFL and translation programs, faculty recruiting, large class sizes, large student enrolments, staffing policies, remote recruiting, remote teaching, recruitment management and planning

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Understaffing in educational institutions¹ is a critical, worsening, global problem, with an estimated 50 million additional teachers needed worldwide. Driven by low pay, burnout, declining interest in the teaching profession, this shortage forces institutions to operate with larger class sizes and fewer specialized programs, and reduced instructional quality. These significantly impact student

¹ <https://edustaff.org/blog/teacher-staffing-shortages-in-schools/>

learning and teacher well-being. In the USA, about 50% of public-school leaders reported being understaffed as of October 2024, with 35% reported at least one teaching vacancy. As of late 2024 and 2025, nearly 1 in 8 teaching positions were either unfilled or occupied by teachers not fully certified for their assignments. In 2026, understaffing in educational institutions² remains a critical global issue, characterized by high vacancy rates, under-certified personnel, and severe impacts on student achievement. Staff shortage is caused by high workloads and lack of support, inadequate salaries and benefits, and fewer new teachers entering the teaching profession. Staff shortage results in larger class sizes, reduced individual attention for students, program cuts, and increased workload for the remaining staff who are often forced to cover for absences, and perform higher-level responsibilities without appropriate compensation.

Although a plethora of studies investigated the issues of understaffing and large class sizes in educational institutions, a review of the literature revealed a few systematic reviews (SRs) and meta-analyses (MAs) that synthesized research studies on the effect of class size and enrolment in higher education, primary and secondary schools and early childhood education. These include a focused literature review of enrolment performance in higher education (Zicheng & Teo, 2025); a systematic literature review of university student enrolment from 2020 to 2023 (Yan et al., 2024); a systematic review of the effects of small class sizes on students' academic achievement, socioemotional development and well-being in special education (Bondebjerg, et al., 2023); a systematic review of small class sizes for improving student achievement in primary and secondary schools (Filges, Sonne-Schmidt & Nielsen, 2018); a meta-analysis of class sizes and ratios in early childhood education programs (Bowne, et al., 2017); a meta-analysis of class size and student achievement in the United States (Shin & Chung, 2009); a meta-analysis using multilevel models applied in the study of class size effects (Goldstein, et al., 2000). Earlier SA and MA studies in the 1980's & 1970's explored the relationship between class size and teacher satisfaction and achievement (McGiverin, Gilman & Tillitski, 1978), and a meta-analysis of the relationship of class-size to classroom processes, teacher satisfaction and pupil affect (Smith & Glass, 1979).

Similarly, a small number of SA and MA studies addressed the effect of understaffing as a teacher shortage measures and their effectiveness in developed countries (van Breukelen & Theelen, 2026); a systematic narrative review of nursing students' perceptions of inadequate nurse staffing in the clinical learning environment (Oshodi & Sookhoo, 2025); a literature review of important aspects of teacher shortage in schools (Lindqvist & Gidlund, 2025); a systematic literature review of the causes and consequences of teacher shortages (Theelen & van Breukelen, 2025); and a systematic review of the literature on teacher attrition and school-related factors that affect it (Doherty, 2020).

Despite this body of work, there remains a clear gap in the literature: few studies explicitly connect teacher shortages with large class sizes in higher-education language and translation programs, particularly within the Saudi context. This gap is significant because understaffing and large enrolments are not isolated issues, but they form a structural cycle that directly affects instructional quality, student achievement, and faculty workload.

To address this gap, the present study aims to conduct an integrative analysis of four empirical studies by the author, published between 2004 and 2008, which collectively investigate the issues of inadequate staffing and large class sizes in Saudi EFL and translation programs. These studies provide a unique longitudinal perspective on a persistent problem that continues to shape instructional conditions more than two decades later.

This study is significant because it provides one of the few evidence-based explanations of why large class sizes persist in Saudi EFL and translation programs. It demonstrates that these conditions are not accidental or temporary, but the predictable outcome of chronic understaffing, limited faculty recruitment, and long-standing structural constraints. By synthesizing findings from four empirical investigations—three of which examined staffing practices across seven Saudi institutions, and one that documented large student enrolments and section sizes at King Saud University—this research reveals a coherent causal chain: insufficient faculty leads to fewer available sections, which forces inflated enrolments, increases teaching load, reduces instructional quality, and ultimately affects student achievement and program outcomes. This long-term, internally consistent body of evidence fills a major gap in the literature, which typically treats teacher shortages and class size as separate issues. The synthesis presented here shows that they are inseparable, systemic, and still partially resolved after two decades, making this study both timely and foundational for policy reform in Saudi higher education.

Finally, the current SR is also part of a broader series of SR/MA projects by the author, that has so far included an SR of studies on pronunciation instruction and practice in L2 (2005-2025 (Al-Jarf, 2026a); English–Arabic and Arabic–English translation error studies (Al-Jarf, 2026b); Arabic–English transliteration of personal names and public signage (Al-Jarf, 2026c); children's language acquisition in Saudi Arabia (Al-Jarf, 2026d); a systematic review of classroom practices, writing enhancement and creativity among

² [Learning policy institute](#)

EFL struggling students (Al-Jarf, 2026e); innovative word formation and pluralization processes in Arabic (Al-Jarf, 2026f); and AI-assisted Arabic translation, linguistics, and pedagogy (Al-Jarf, 2026g).

2. Background/Context

2.1 Staffing and Student Enrolment Status 2004-2008

During the early and mid-2000s, Saudi EFL and translation programs experienced rapid and sustained growth in student enrolments, particularly in women's campuses. Freshman numbers in some programs quadrupled within four years, pushing class sizes from approximately 40 students per section to 65–75 students. The number of course sections expanded accordingly, yet without proportional increases in faculty, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, delayed course offerings, and significant strain on instructional quality, assessment practices, and resource utilization. These enrolment pressures lead to declining achievement, high attrition and repeater rates, and persistent challenges in managing large, skills-based courses (as listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar), conditions that form a central part of the institutional context for the four empirical studies synthesized in this article (Al-Jarf, 2004a; Al-Jarf, 2006).

Across the same period, EFL and translation departments faced inadequate staffing driven by factors such as open admission policies, limited funding, restrictive employment regulations, inefficient manpower planning, and inadequate recruitment practices. Programs struggled to retain experienced instructors and to recruit qualified replacements, especially in women's departments, which often relied on locally recruited B.A. and M.A. holders with limited specialization or experience in translation or applied linguistics. Departments coped by merging classes, raising teaching loads to 20–30 hours per week, and depending on temporary hourly staff, leading to faculty exhaustion, low morale, and misalignment between instructor expertise and course assignment. The lack of technological infrastructure for advertising vacancies further restricted the pool of qualified applicants. Collectively, these conditions illustrate the structural nature of the staffing crisis that shaped the environment in which the four empirical studies were conducted, making them uniquely positioned to document the causes and consequences of inadequate staffing and large class sizes in Saudi EFL and translation programs (Al-Jarf, 2004b; Al-Jarf, 2008).

2.2 The King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP)

Beginning in 2005, the launch of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) (برنامج خادم الحرمين الشريفين للابتعاث الخارجي), marked a major shift in Saudi higher-education policy, providing large numbers of Saudi students with full scholarship opportunities to pursue their graduate studies abroad. In response to the understaffing and the heavy reliance on non-Saudi instructors, the College of Languages and Translation (now called College of Language Sciences) actively encouraged its male and female teaching assistants (B.A. holders) and lecturers (M.A. holders) to take advantage of this program to obtain advanced degrees overseas. This initiative aimed to build a sustainable pool of qualified Saudi faculty, reduce long-term dependence on expatriate instructors, and strengthen specialization in language teaching, translation, linguistics, literature, and other language-related fields. The return of these scholarship recipients in subsequent years contributed to gradual improvements in faculty qualifications, although the structural pressures documented in the earlier studies remained significant during the period under investigation.

The College of Languages and Translation mandated that all teaching assistants with a B.A. degree and lecturers with an M.A. degree pursue graduate studies to qualify for future academic appointments. For those unable to travel abroad by joining the KASP program, the college supported enrolment in the *Joint Supervision Program* (برنامج الإشراف المشترك), which allowed faculty members to complete their degrees through coordinated supervision between Saudi universities and international institutions. The college also allowed its faculty to join the MA and Ph.D. programs at King Saud University or any other university in the Kingdom. These initiatives reflected a strategic institutional effort to reduce long-term dependence on non-Saudi instructors, expand the pool of qualified Saudi faculty, and strengthen specialization across linguistics, literature, translation, and modern language programs. These policies contributed to gradual improvements in faculty qualifications in subsequent years.

According to the 1441H (2019/2020) Annual Report, the College of Language Sciences had 23 male and female doctoral and 9 MA candidates pursuing a degree in English, French, Chinese, Turkish, Spanish, Persian languages, and 5 studying in the Kingdom. Those were sent to universities in the UK, USA, France, China, Japan, and Tajikistan between 2015-2020, and were expected return in 2021- 2023. This reflects a strategic effort to build future academic capacity and address long-term staffing needs.

The KASP enabled the college to sponsor several cohorts of postgraduate students long before the 2015–2023 group documented in this study. Although complete statistics for the pre-2015 cohorts are not available to the author, it is known that some scholars returned as early as 2011, with others following in subsequent years.

According to the Annual Report, in the 2019/2020 academic year, the ratio of Saudi to expatriate faculty in the English department was 83% to 17% in the men's English department and 90% to 10% in the women's department. This means that the number of Saudi faculty significantly increased as a result of the KASP program.

2.3 Student Enrolment in 2010

In the academic year 2010, the total course enrolment (all sections) was as follows: in the General English course, the median number of enrollees was 152 and the range 93-1765. In the ESP courses, the median was 113 and the range 35 to 539. In the language skills courses (Listening1, Listening2, Listening3, Listening4, Speaking1, Speaking2, Speaking3, Speaking4, Reading1, Reading2, Reading3, Reading4, Writing1, Writing2, Writing3, Writing4, Grammar1, Grammar2, Grammar3, Vocabulary1, Vocabulary2, Dictionary skills), the median was 135 and the range 90 to 232. In the Culture1, Culture2, Introduction to Translation, Stylistics, Text Linguistics, the median was 143 and the range 80 to 219. In the specialized translation courses (Security Translation, Agriculture Translation, Computer Translation, Legal Translation, Problems in Translation, Literary Translation, Simultaneous Interpreting, Summary Translation, Commercial Translation, Political Translation, Liaison Interpreting 2, Media, Petroleum Translation, Business Translation, Translation Project, Education Translation, Medical Translation, Culture 3, Arabization, Engineering Translation, Sociology Translation, Islamic Translation, Liaison Interpreting 1, Consecutive Interpreting 2, Military Translation, Consecutive Interpreting 1, Sight Interpreting, Natural Sciences Translation, Humanities Translation) the median was 107, the range 75 to 175 (Al-Jarf, 2022b).

2.4 Staffing and Student Enrolment Status in 2017

Further evidence of structural imbalance in student–faculty ratios can be found in the College of Languages Science’s 2017 Annual Report, which provides detailed enrolment and staffing data across language programs. According to the report, the average number of students has reached 63 students per faculty member holding a doctorate, and 72 students for lecturers, teaching assistants, and language instructors. At the English Language Department, the average number of female students reached 170 per female faculty member, while the average number of male students in the same department reached 62 per faculty member. At the French Language Department, the average number of female students reached 102 per female faculty member, while the average number of male students in the same department reached 72 per faculty member. This discrepancy is likely due to the increase in the number of female students in the college compared to the number of male students. In several cases, departments relied heavily on lecturers, teaching assistants, and language instructors to absorb excess enrolment, with ratios ranging from 75 to 167 students per non-tenured staff member. Teaching loads varied widely, with faculty in smaller programs such as Persian, Russian, and Turkish carrying up to 25–28 hours per week due to limited staffing. The report also revealed that 41% of faculty members were non-Saudis, with some programs, such as Chinese, Japanese, and German, entirely staffed by expatriates. These statistics reinforce the findings of earlier studies and illustrate the enduring impact of large enrolments, uneven staffing, and reliance on non-Saudi instructors across the college’s language programs.

2.5 Student Enrolment in 2018- 2021 (COVID Era)

In the period between Fall 2018- Fall 2021, there was a clear reduction in section sizes is visible across the 5 semesters, particularly during the COVID period. In Fall 2018, the Reading sections had a median size of 28 and a range of 18–34. In Fall 2019, the Reading and Writing sections showed a median of 28 with a wider range of 24–55. In Spring 2020, the Listening and Speaking sections had a median of 15 range 2–16); the Reading and Writing sections had a median of 17 (range 2–20); the Writing sections had a median of 31 (range 24–34); and the Semantics and Pragmatics sections had a median of 29 (range 28–31). In Fall 2020, the Semantics and Pragmatics sections were stable with a median of 33 and a range of 33–33. In Spring 2021, the Listening and Speaking sections had a median of 16 (range 16–16), the single Reading section enrolled 32 students, the Writing sections had a median of 24 (range 19–26), and the Translation Project enrolled 13 students. In Fall 2021, the Academic Writing sections had a median of 31 (range 30–33), while the Introduction to Translation Studies sections had a median of 24 (range 22–29) (Al-Jarf, 2022a).

The decline in section sizes from 2018 to 2021 is primarily the result of COVID-19–related instructional restructuring and the increasing number of graduates returning from abroad. Before the pandemic (Fall 2018 and Fall 2019), section sizes were relatively large, with medians around 28 and ranges extending up to 55 students. When COVID-19 began in Spring 2020, universities shifted abruptly to remote instruction, which required breaking large sections into multiple smaller online groups to manage attendance, assessment, and synchronous teaching. This produced unusually small “micro-sections,” some enrolling only 2–5 students, as these sections were leftovers from the old program. Even in the new college program, course medians dropped to 15–17, reflecting emergency scheduling rather than reduced demand. Specialized courses also contracted during this period, with medians falling from 29–33 pre-COVID to 13–24 in later semesters. By Spring 2021 and Fall 2021, section sizes began to rise again but did not return to pre-pandemic levels, indicating a transitional phase as universities moved from emergency remote teaching back to hybrid or in-person formats.

3. Overview of the Studies Included

Study 1: Staffing EFL Programs in Saudi Arabia: Issues and Challenges (Al-Jarf, 2004b)

This study examined the staffing status of English and translation departments across seven Saudi universities, focusing on faculty numbers, qualifications, nationalities, teaching loads, student enrolments, section offerings, and section sizes. Demographic data were complemented by interviews with department heads and ESL coordinators to identify staffing needs, causes of faculty

shortages, and strategies used to cover them. The study highlighted severe understaffing—particularly in women’s departments—linked to open admission policies, weak communication between departments and decision makers, limited recruitment channels, insufficient funding, and inefficient manpower planning. It also noted the minimal use of technology in advertising vacancies and conducting hiring processes.

Study 2: Do English Departments Search Optimally in Faculty Recruiting? (Al-Jarf, 2004a)

This study evaluated faculty recruitment practices in English departments and language centers at seven Saudi institutions. Using established standards for EFL and translation faculty recruitment, the study analyzed demographic data on faculty qualifications, teaching loads, course assignments, and student–teacher ratios, alongside interviews with department heads and coordinators. Findings revealed widespread understaffing—again more pronounced in women’s departments—resulting in merged classes, heavy teaching loads, reliance on inadequately qualified local recruits, and delayed course offerings. Structural causes included open admission policies, limited funding, restrictive employment regulations, inadequate advertising methods, inefficient manpower planning, and competition from neighboring countries.

Study 3: Benchmarks for Staffing Language and Translation Departments in Saudi Arabia (Al-Jarf, 2008)

This study investigated staffing conditions in translation departments at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, and established benchmarks for instructor qualifications, specialization, and course distribution. Data revealed chronic shortages addressed through merged classes, increased teaching loads, and reliance on local B.A. holders, many working on a temporary hourly basis. Class sizes frequently reached 50–75 students, and faculty were responsible for supervising multiple large translation projects. The study documented misalignment between instructor specialization and course assignment and proposed benchmarks to ensure adequate staffing and quality in translator preparation programs.

Study 4: Large Student Enrolments in EFL Programs: Challenges and Consequences (Al-Jarf, 2006)

This study analyzed the effects of rapidly increasing female freshman enrolments at COLT, King Saud University, using enrolment statistics, section sizes, attrition and repeater rates, grammar test scores, faculty demographic data, and teaching-load records across six semesters. Student and instructor questionnaires and interviews with program coordinators provided additional insights into instructional, managerial, and assessment challenges. The study documented how rising enrolments strained staffing capacity, increased faculty workload, reduced student achievement, and placed pressure on classroom instruction, assessment practices, and resource utilization.

4. Integrated Findings

The combined evidence from the four studies reveals a coherent and mutually reinforcing set of structural problems linking inadequate recruitment, chronic understaffing, and large student enrolments in Saudi EFL and translation programs. The integrated findings can be organized into six interrelated themes.

Theme 1: Chronic Understaffing as a Systemic Condition (Root Cause)

Across all four studies, chronic understaffing emerges as the central structural issue shaping program capacity and instructional quality. Women’s departments were consistently more understaffed than men’s, and departments lacked sufficient numbers of qualified instructors—particularly specialists in translation. High turnover, difficulty retaining native-speaking faculty, and limited recruitment pipelines further exacerbated shortages. Universities relied heavily on BA-holders and temporary hourly instructors, while administrative and policy constraints—such as open admission policies, slow hiring processes, and limited funding—prevented departments from maintaining adequate staffing levels. This theme establishes the foundational cause from which all subsequent challenges arise.

A study by Al-Jarf (1999) on unemployed female translators shows that many female graduates are unable or unwilling to accept translation positions due to inadequate preparation, unsuitable working conditions, and social constraints. These factors further reduce the pool of qualified candidates available to women’s translation departments, reinforcing the chronic understaffing documented across the four studies.

Theme 2: Ineffective Recruitment and Manpower Planning

Findings from the recruitment studies (Al-Jarf, 2004a; Al-Jarf, 2004b) and the benchmarks study (2008) converge on a pattern of ineffective and outdated recruitment practices. Job vacancies were rarely advertised online, email communication was limited, and teleconferencing was not used for interviews. Departments lacked long-term manpower planning or prediction studies, and communication between departments and decision makers was weak. Competition from Gulf countries and private institutions further reduced the pool of qualified applicants. Administrative delays in visa processing, approvals, and paperwork often resulted in instructors arriving weeks after the semester had begun. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that understaffing was not incidental but structurally produced.

Additional evidence from a recent study on the pandemic job market (Al-Jarf, 2021) indicates that language and translation graduates continue to enter the workforce without adequate preparation in digital, interpersonal, or job-search skills. Universities have not adapted their curricula or training programs to meet evolving labour-market demands, which further limits the pool of qualified candidates available for academic positions. This continuity reinforces the long-standing structural challenges in recruitment and contributes to persistent understaffing in women's language and translation departments (Al-Jarf, 2022c; Al-Jarf, 2021).

Theme 3: Program Capacity Strained by Rapid Enrolment Growth

The large-enrolment study (Al-Jarf, 2006) and the staffing studies show that rapid increases in student numbers placed significant pressure on program capacity. Enrolments quadrupled within four years, yet faculty numbers did not increase proportionally. Admission policies frequently ignored departmental quotas, leaving departments unable to open sufficient sections. Some courses began 4–6 weeks late, while others were delivered through closed-circuit television due to instructor shortages. Classroom and laboratory facilities were unable to accommodate the growing student population. This theme illustrates how chronic understaffing directly constrained program capacity.

Theme 4: Large Class Sizes as a Direct Consequence of Understaffing

All four studies document the same outcomes: class sizes routinely reached 50–75 students, and in some cases exceeded 120. Sections were merged to compensate for missing instructors, and teaching loads rose to 20–30 hours per week, far above international norms. Faculty reported exhaustion, stress, and overwhelming workloads. In translation programs, instructors supervised multiple 25,000-word projects simultaneously, further stretching their capacity. This theme represents the middle of the causal chain: fewer instructors > fewer sections > larger classes.

Theme 5: Impact on Instructional Quality, Achievement, and Student Outcomes

The integrated evidence shows clear consequences for teaching and learning. Student achievement declined as class size increased, a pattern confirmed by ANCOVA results. Attrition and repeater rates rose sharply, contributing to further overcrowding in subsequent semesters. Overcrowded classes reduced opportunities for individual attention and weakened instructional quality. Misalignment between instructor specialization and course assignment further undermined program effectiveness. Faculty morale declined due to excessive workloads, stress, and lack of institutional support. This theme represents the final link in the causal chain: large classes > lower instructional quality > weaker student outcomes.

Theme 6: A Persistent Structural Cycle

Viewed together, the four studies reveal a self-reinforcing structural cycle: chronic understaffing > insufficient sections > large section sizes > declining achievement and rising repeaters > even larger class sized the following semester > further strain on faculty and resources > continued difficulty attracting qualified instructors. This cycle persisted across institutions and across years, demonstrating that the problem is systemic rather than episodic.

5. Discussion

1. Interpretation of the Six Themes

The integrated findings demonstrate that inadequate staffing in Saudi EFL and translation programs is not a temporary administrative challenge but a deeply embedded structural condition, recruitment systems, and institutional culture. Large class sizes, therefore, are not merely a response to rising demand; they are the predictable and recurring outcome of systemic understaffing. The cycle identified across the four studies, inadequate staffing, insufficient sections, overcrowded classes, declining achievement, and further strain, reveals a self-reinforcing pattern that cannot be resolved through short-term or reactive measures.

2. Comparison with Global Literature

The results of this integrative analysis align with international research findings which show that large classes negatively affect student achievement, instructional quality, and teacher morale. However, the present synthesis contributes two distinctive insights to the global literature. First, it highlights a persistent gendered staffing imbalance, with women's departments experiencing more shortages. Second, it documents the unique constraints of Saudi hiring systems, including centralized admission policies, slow recruitment processes. These contextual factors extend the global conversation by illustrating how structural and cultural conditions shape staffing patterns in non-Western higher education systems.

3. Contribution of the Integrative Analysis

This synthesis of four empirical studies conducted between 2004 and 2008 offers a rare and valuable longitudinal perspective on staffing and enrolment pressures in Saudi EFL and translation programs. The studies provide empirical evidence from women's campuses, an area often underrepresented in the literature, and capture a critical historical moment when student enrolment

expanded rapidly while faculty numbers remained the same or shrunk. By documenting the structural causes of inadequate staffing, including recruitment systems, manpower planning, and policy constraints, the analysis reveals a systemic cycle that remains relevant nearly two decades later. This positions the author's research program as an important foundation for understanding ongoing staffing challenges in the region.

4. Implications for Staffing and Class-Size Policy and Practice

The integrated findings point to several implications for policy and practice. Universities need long-term manpower planning rather than reactive, semester-by-semester hiring. Recruitment processes must be modernized through online advertising, streamlined communication, and faster administrative processing. Admission policies should be aligned with departmental capacity to prevent chronic overcrowding. Translation programs, in particular, need specialized staffing benchmarks to ensure adequate coverage of technical and professional courses. Finally, women's departments require targeted support to address persistent inequities in staffing, resources, and recruitment opportunities. These implications offer a roadmap for decision makers seeking to improve instructional quality and program sustainability.

5. Limitations

The studies included in this integrative analysis were conducted during a specific historical period (2000–2008), and conditions may have dramatically changed since then. The data were drawn from selected state universities. Staffing patterns in private institutions may differ. In addition, some variables, such as student and instructor attitudes, were based on self-reported data, which may introduce bias. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. It is noteworthy to say that updated staffing and enrolment statistics for 2025–2026 were not accessible, the difficulty in obtaining such data is itself indicative of the difficulties the author had in obtaining data documented in the earlier studies. Formal requests often face delays or incomplete responses, conditions identical to those encountered during the author's 2004–2008 research.

6. Directions for Future Research

Future research could examine the current staffing status in 2026 to determine whether the return of graduates on a scholarship from abroad and recent recruitment reforms have improved the staffing status and class sizes. Comparative studies of men's and women's campuses would shed light on persistent gendered disparities. Additional research is needed on the impact of digital and remote recruitment practices, particularly in the post-pandemic era. Finally, studies focusing on translation programs could explore how staffing levels and instructor specialization influence student outcomes and professional readiness.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, which document inadequate staffing, high student–faculty ratios, and large course enrolments across language, linguistics, and translation courses, this study recommends the following to improve instructional quality and ensure sustainable program development in Saudi universities:

- (i) Setting a maximum section size for skills-based courses such as listening, speaking, writing, and translation which require intensive interaction and individualized feedback rather than lecturing. It is recommended that section sizes for these courses not exceed 25 students, in line with international standards for skills-based instruction.
- (ii) Establishing a centralized database for enrolment and staffing data to record number of sections, number of students per section, faculty teaching loads, class size trends over time. Such a system would support evidence-based decision-making and prevent the recurrence of chronic overcrowding.
- (iii) Encouraging further research on class size and learning outcomes to examine the impact of class size on student performance, differences across disciplines and the relationship between teaching load and assessment quality. Such studies would deepen understanding of the structural issues affecting language and translation programs.
- (iv) Universities should conduct prediction studies using enrolment trends from previous semesters, recruitment status and faculty availability and projected graduation and retention rates. Such predictive models would allow departments to plan months in advance, rather than a few weeks before the start of the academic year, ensuring adequate staffing and preventing overcrowded sections.
- (v) To expand staffing options, language and translation programs can utilize remote recruitment, remote interviews for international candidates, and remote or hybrid teaching arrangements which can serve as a practical, cost-effective solution to chronic understaffing, especially in specialized courses.
- (vi) To prevent the current language and translation faculty attrition, the college should adopt a structured retention strategy that includes balanced workloads for early-career returnees, transparent promotion pathways, competitive incentives, and proactive integration into academic roles. Such measures would reduce attrition to external public and private sectors and help stabilize long-term staffing capacity.

7. Conclusion

This integrative analysis provides a comprehensive examination of inadequate staffing and large student enrolments in language, linguistics, and translation programs in Saudi universities. The findings reveal a persistent pattern that has remained largely unchanged over many years: student numbers continue to grow while faculty resources remain inadequate, resulting in overcrowded course sections, heavy teaching loads, and uneven assessment practices. These structural pressures have direct implications for instructional quality, student learning outcomes, and the overall effectiveness of academic programs. This integrative analysis demonstrates that large class sizes, particularly in English language skills courses such as Writing, Speaking, and Translation, limit opportunities for interaction, individualized feedback, and authentic assessment. At the same time, understaffing forces departments to distribute teaching loads in ways that compromise both pedagogical depth and faculty well-being. The combination of these factors creates a cycle in which instructional challenges are reproduced one semester after another, despite ongoing efforts by departments and instructors to mitigate their effects.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for coordinated institutional action. Addressing inadequate staffing, aligning admissions with departmental capacity, and establishing clear limits on section sizes are essential steps toward improving the quality of language and translation education. Without such measures, the challenges documented in this study are likely to persist, affecting both faculty performance and student achievement. By documenting these issues with clarity and longitudinal insight, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the structural factors shaping language education in Saudi universities and provides a foundation for future policy development and research.

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