

Chapter15: The Enrichment of English Language Curricula for Saudi Elementary Students

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Abstract: This proposal outlines the problem that Saudi students are studying English for nine years in the early grades at schools without developing the ability to speak English fluently. In addition, this proposal aims to enhance English curricula in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This plan could contribute to the attainment of the 2020 Vision in Saudi Arabia of thinking and marketing the country globally. Moreover, it illustrates how to teach English as a language, (as opposed to a subject) by focusing on listening and speaking more than reading and writing in the early grades. To achieve this goal, educators in Saudi Arabia should work cooperatively with the companies that are developing the curricula for the country. This plan suggests a percentage of language skills sequence table that could help create effective communicative curricula for elementary grades. Such a plan would help to ensure that students will be able to use English in practical ways in their lives. To evaluate the worth and effectiveness of this plan, several quantitative and qualitative methods will be applied. In consequence, if this plan succeeds with first graders, the development of English for all grades will be completed.

1Introduction

Nowadays, English is the most widespread language and the language of science and technology. Therefore, English **has** been taught in Saudi Arabia since 1927. It started to be taught in middle schools and high schools, and later, also in elementary schools from 4th grade.

However, there is evidence that the English classes are not as effective as they need to be. According to the English Proficiency Index (EPI) report issued by English First (EF) in 2019, 9th edition, Saudi Arabia came in 98 out of 100 countries included in the study about the world's largest ranking of countries and regions by English skills.

The Ministry of Education has many goals for 2030 Vision. One of them is developing curricula and methods of education. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is spending a lot of money on English and its curricula to reach their goals, but a high percentage of students graduate from high school without knowing how to speak or even write a sentence. This means that the way English is being taught is not effectively working in that the students are unable to use it as needed in real life. The issue is that our curricula are based on the grammatical approach, which means learners can only acquire the grammar, but they cannot apply their skills when trying to communicate. The grammar approach focuses on language rules and on academic knowledge more than students' communicative skills. For example, in 4th grade, the first-year students start to learn English, the English curricula in schools start with vocabulary and grammar, but they don't practice authentic dialogues.

Further indications of a need for improvement can be observed in the students' general attitude toward the English classes in schools. It has been noticed that my students are not interested in our English lessons because they feel our curricula put too much pressure on them. We teach too much grammar and required vocabularies which are not useful and meaningful to their lives. Many students think that they will not get any benefit from learning English at school.

So, they plan to take English lessons in private language learning institutions outside the school, which is much easier and helpful for improving their English communication skills.

In summary, our current English curricula in schools is not sufficient enough to develop students' English learning motivation, and truly teach our students to be fluent and confident English speakers. We must rethink how English needs to be taught in the Kingdom. As a teacher,

I observed the English classrooms in the schools in the U.S. and I see a possible solution to the problem. English teachers in the U.S. begin teaching the English as a second language (ESL) students with the sounds of the letters. Students listen to their classmates speaking and they can start to speak only after they feel comfortable with the language. Later, they will start to read and write with grammar instructions. This sequence in teaching English helps the students to improve their language step by step without pressure. In this proposal, I am going to present a plan for developing English as a second language curricula for Saudi students.

2 Literature Review

English Curricula in Saudi Arabia

The discovery of oil improved the socioeconomic conditions in Saudi Arabia. Several of Saudi's ministries like the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources designed English language programs for their employees. The purpose was for employees to become fluent in English and to communicate internationally.

Given the concern about education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since its establishment, the Ministry of Education saw the impact of teaching English to their students to keep pace with the universal development. English as an educational subject was introduced in the late 1950s

(Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Since then, English is the only compulsory foreign language taught in Saudi Arabian schools. It was originally taught only in intermediate and secondary grades, and later taught to elementary fourth graders in 2012. The Ministry of Education has recently planned to implement English curricula as early as in first grade.

English education in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undergone several changes and modifications. The first English textbook *Living English for the Arab World* was targeted to all Arab countries, but in 1982 the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia replaced it with a new curricula *Saudi Arabian School English* designed in collaboration with Macmillan to meet the community needs. In the late 1990s, it was changed to another series called *English for Saudi Arabia*. Faruk (2013) mentioned that in 2013, the ministry provided a global coursebook *Traveler* as a pilot edition (p. 51). In 2014, the Ministry of Education used American and British international companies to design English curricula.

Current Teaching Pedagogies on English as a Second Language

One of the Ministry's most important achievements is the allocation of the *English Language Curricula Development Project* (ELDP) in 2013. This project is based on the principle of consultation in the field and curricula development. The project's administration approved the use of three different curricula from three different international American and British educational companies (Mcmillan, MM Publication, & Pearson) . According to Saudi Press Agency (SPA, 2018), some English language supervisors and teachers praise these curricula as

they use the communicative and constructive approach. These curricula were designed for Saudi students in order to meet the Ministry of Education's general objectives of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in the schools of Saudi Arabia. However, Al-Seghayer (2014) found that "the current curriculum lacks a clear link between its content and the teaching methods and the assessment measures that it employs. Furthermore, it seems that the curriculum is developed

without an assessment or analysis of the students' needs at each school level" (p.22). The current curricula at the elementary level tend to focus on things that do not help students achieve the objectives of teaching English.

Another project of the Ministry was the establishment of *the Center of English*

Language (CEL) in 2017. This project has a Vision aligned with the Saudi Vision 2030 which states that "The Vision of the Center for English Language CEL aspires to be a pioneer in providing quality initiatives and comprehensive solutions in the field of English language teaching and learning. The Center will coordinate the development of initiatives and comprehensive solutions to ensure that they are delivered efficiently and in line with the aims of the National Transformation Program (NTP) 2020 and Vision 2030". At the International Conference on Teaching English, the importance of improving English Language Learning according to the 2030 Vision was highlighted.

Bilingualism

In 2018 **Chumbes** posted an article about the importance of bilingualism in education.

She stated, "Bilingual people have more advanced cognitive skills than those who speak only one language; additionally, they develop multicultural skills to be able to thrive in an increasingly diverse society." This means that bilingual students are more multicultural than other students. **Ghonsooly** (2012) did a study on the effect of foreign language learning upon creativity. She found that there is a relationship between bilingualism and cognitive developments. Moreover, bilingual students achieve a higher level of cognition when the brain is processing more than one language. This means that when their brain switches from one language to another, it gives their brains more flexibility and requires thinking at a faster rate.

Bilingual students can also draw a **connection** between the two languages.

Motivation

The Oxford Dictionary of English defines motivation as "the reason why somebody does something or behaves in a particular way". Valerio (2012) said that "Motivation is a fundamental element of students' learning." (p.30). Student motivation is an essential component of learning in the classroom environment and education. Their desire to communicate using the English language increases their motivation. The more students converse in English the more they learn from others. This will help them feel more comfortable when using the language. Consequently, having interesting curricula will encourage students to engage. Thus, they are more likely to be motivated to learn and interact in class. Also, when learning new things, students need to merge their background knowledge to new learning and new experiences.

Second Language Skills Acquisition Sequence

The Ministry of Education has stated the general objectives of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in schools. The first three objectives are to enable students to acquire basic language skills (i.e., writing, reading, listening and speaking), to enable students to achieve the important linguistic competence needed in different life situations, and to enable students to achieve the important linguistic competence needed in various professions. (Alrashidi & Huy Phan, 2015). Moreover, a majority of students in Saudi Arabia do not achieve these objectives because of the lack of interesting content in the current curricula. Therefore, they deal with English as a subject, not as a language. They are only memorizing the information to pass the exams in English grammar. As a result, there is a strong need to change the content of the current curricula to meet the students' interests. Before asking the student to speak and write

grammatically, they need to feel more comfortable with the language. It is equally important that students listen to the language continuously at the beginning and learn how to read it fluently.

Listening. Many studies emphasize the necessity to motivate students by making ESL classes more attractive. Theoretically, students' love of stories and movies could be an effective way to learn a new language in the classroom. Teachers can start discussions about the stories they are hearing and the movies

they are watching. Therefore, blending the listening skill with something students like could attract their attention to focus, try to understand, and acquire the language (Somdee & Suppasetsee, 2012). Another way that could help young learners acquire English vocabulary and pronunciation is by listening to educational songs. Tri (2017) states that songs can improve listening skills because songs are easy to find, and our ears are trained to listen to them. ESL students learn more and more by hearing the target language, even when they do not understand what is being to say.

Reading. Phonics is a basic reading skill and it is one of the most important mechanics to teach young learners. It helps them to be more confident about language literacy skills. Learning phonics helps to build their learning capacity to read. Sitthitikul (2014) confirmed that "the phonics approach tends to build up the solid foundation of the sound system in English for beginning learners to internalize" (p.122). If students learn how to pronounce the sounds of the letter, this improves their ability to read words. Then students will start reading with correct pronunciation and become more fluent. Therefore, they will feel more confident with reading which will encourage them to read more. Woodall (2012) declared that "The more learners read in the L2, the more fluent they will become" (p.198). Researchers and theories in second language acquisition have consistently argued that reading for pleasure is an important source of natural input for acquisition.

Writing. Not only will phonics enable students to read fluently, but it will also improve their spelling. If students know the sound of each letter, it will help them learn how to write. This will encourage them to **write** more and more. From there, students can begin to form grammatically correct sentences. This, in turn, will lead to a proper story and essay writing as they progress through the school levels.

Speaking. The main objective of teaching a foreign language is to help students communicate effectively and fluently in the target language. Having the confidence to speak a foreign language is not an easy task. ESL classes should encourage and improve students' speaking skills. There are many studies indicative of language learning skills, which skill improves the

other or which one goes side by side with the other. For example, one study illustrated the relationship **between** writing and speaking showing that “there is a strong correlation between writing and speaking at varied proficiency levels (intermediate and advanced). However, the beginner's level revealed a noticeable difference in terms of writing and speaking proficiencies. Some of these learners indicated better improvement in writing compared to speaking and vice versa” (Naser. Lattif, Yunus, and Alderean, 2019, p.11). Since there is a strong relationship between writing and speaking, both skills are needed to increase language acquisition.

Communicative Approach

Chang (2011) referred to Howatt (1984) in his research about the communicative approach in teaching English in Taiwan: “Communicative Language Teaching stresses the importance of

providing learners with **opportunities** to use English for communicative purposes and attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching.” (p.16) This means that the communicative approach is based on the idea that effectively learning a language comes from having the ability to communicate in this language. People learn a language best when using it to do things rather than through studying how language works and practice rules. This means that ESL students should learn the four language skills (writing, reading, listening and speaking) in

meaningful activities that involve real communication. The goal of communicative language learning is accuracy and fluency.

In conclusion, English should be taught as a language and not as a subject. Learning English as a second language should start with more focus on listening, speaking, and learning the letters and sounds for the first step. This would lead the learners to know how to read and pronounce the words correctly. Finally, they can go deeper with writing and grammar. This means that language skills build on one another. In the United States, ESL students listen to their classmates until they feel comfortable to engage in the language. Also, the curricula used in the U.S. are more interesting than the curricula used in Saudi Arabia. This is why they are more successful in teaching ESL students.

Implementation Plan

English curricula at elementary schools in Saudi Arabia need to be enhanced into effective communicative curricula. The first problem of the current curricula is that it doesn't include foundation skills like phonetics and basic greeting communications. The second problem is that the topics are not related to their daily lives. For example, students should study words related to the country such as flag, the capital city, map, and so forth during the week of Saudi National day, study occasion words like celebrating, decorate...etc. before Eids' vacations and so on.

Because the Ministry of Education has many goals for the 2030 Vision, educators should work cooperatively with the companies developing the curricula for our country. By establishing a partnership with these companies there will be more buy-in from the teachers teaching the curricula. This can only further our students' language acquisition in a positive way for an ever-changing world. It is important for our students to feel successful.

The chart below shows a suggested percentage of language skill sequences that could help to create effective communicative curricula for elementary grades from first to sixth grade. We notice that students who study abroad acquire the language quickly due to the surrounding

environment where they listen to English all day long. Saudi students spend most of their time speaking and listening to Arabic. Therefore, English curricula in the kingdom must take into account that listening is the most important basic skill to acquire in learning a new language.

Chart 1: Progression of Skills Focus by Percentage.

Grade	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
First	50% of class time. Examples: greeting, simple conversations, stories, movies, songs, and poems.	Throughout class time.	40% of class time. Examples: phonics, words, and short stories that contain repeated words.	10% of class time. Examples: words, and sentences which describe pictures.
Second	40% of class time. Same examples as above.	Throughout class time.	40% of class time. Examples: words, simple sentences, and short stories.	20% of class time. Examples: basic grammatical rules, sentences which describe pictures, and small paragraphs.
Third	30% of class time. Same examples as above.	Throughout class time.	50% of class time. Examples: sentences and stories	20% of class time. Examples: grammatical rules, sentences and paragraphs which describe pictures,
Fourth	30% of class time. Same examples as above.	Throughout class time.	50% of class time. Examples: sentences and stories.	20% of class time. Examples: advanced grammatical rules, sentences and paragraphs which describe

				pictures,
Fifth	20% of class time. Same examples as above.	Throughout class time.	50% of class time. Examples: sentences, and stories.	30% of class time. Examples: advanced grammatical rules and multiple paragraphs
Sixth	20% of class time. Same examples as above.	Throughout class time.	50% of class time. Examples: sentences and stories.	30% of class time. Examples: advanced grammatical rules, multiple paragraphs.

The overarching goal of this project is to enhance English curriculums at elementary schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to meet its objectives of teaching English in schools.

Chart 2: Implementation Plan.

Timeline	Objectives	Activities	Main person	Time Period
First month In July 2020	Cooperate/ connect with the Ministry	The scholar will send a letter or set a meeting with the Ministry and Tatweer Education Holding Company	The scholar	Two-hour meeting

One semester In August through November 2020	Provide/design effective curricula	Cooperation between a group of English teachers, Tatweer Education Holding Company and the curricula companies to create the basic lessons and the foundations of English language skills for first grade curricula derived from Manhattan Kansas ESL, kindergarten, and first grade curricula	English teachers and the Curricula developing department at the Ministry of Education	One semester (four months)
One week In January 2021	Provide professional development for new curricula	Create workshops and seminars to train English teachers in the new curricula	Curricula trainers and English supervisors	Five Days: 4 hr. sessions each day
One year In August 2021 through May 2022	Implement new language skills starting in 1 st grade	Start teaching the new English curricula starting in first grade at sample schools as school begins	English teachers	4 classes per week (currently only taught 2 days a week)
One year In August 2021 through May 2022	Evaluation/ Assessment of students in new curricula	Evaluate the outcomes of the students through different kinds of assessments (written, verbal, or observations)	Curriculum directors and English teachers	Each class/ each unit / at the end of each semester/ at the end of the year

In conclusion, the way of thinking, that English is a subject, does not enable our students to be as successful, especially when compared to students learning English in other countries.

We need to progress our way of thinking and teaching to become more globally marketable. More and more of our population is traveling and working outside of our country. Everyone needs to communicate effectively because English is a global language.

Evaluation Plan

The main goal for this capstone is to enhance English curricula in elementary schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to meet its objectives of teaching English in schools. To reach this goal we need to work hard on designing English curricula in an effective communicative

method, where students learn English as a global language that they need in their lives. Then, evaluating these curricula depending on the students outcomes and achievements. However, to evaluate the inputs and outcomes of this project, formal and informal evaluation will be used.

Formal evaluations, which are mostly quantitative, are systematic, data-based tests that measure what and how well the students have learned. They determine the students' improvement. However, qualitative and quantitative tools will be applied. Such as: (1) A checklist will be used to ensure that these curricula meet the Ministry's objectives for teaching English. (2) Summative assessments, such as final exams, midterm exams, and projects will be used to evaluate the outcomes. These tests are more easily compared which makes them an important measure used by teachers, schools, and the Ministry to mentor and evaluate their students' performance against a common standard. (3) A workshop survey will help to determine the outcomes, measure the utility and success of the training, and whether it is useful for them or not. (4) A post-implementation survey will investigate each teacher's attitude and perspective

toward these curricula.

Informal evaluations, which are mostly qualitative, are those spontaneous forms of assessment that can easily be incorporated in the day-to-day classroom activities and that measure the students' performance and progress. For example (1) formative assessments, like quizzes, observations, and tasks, will be used to collect detailed information that can help to improve instruction and student learning during the school year. These assessments refer to a wide variety

of methods that teachers use to conduct in-process evaluations of student comprehension, learning needs, and academic progress during a lesson, unit, or course. (2) selfreflections will reveal students' behavior, values, knowledge, and growth towards the curricula.

Objective	Activities	Method	Timeline	Target	Role
To evaluate the designed/ provided curricula	Use the objectives of teaching English in elementary schools and the general objectives of teaching English in Saudi Arabia to make sure that these curricula meet them	Check list (Appendix A)	One week	curricula	The curricula development team at Ministry of Education
To evaluate the provided professional development for the new curricula	Design selfreflection evaluation for teachers who are going to be trained for the new curricula	Workshop survey (Appendix B)	An hour at the last day of training	English teachers	Curricula trainers and English supervisors

To evaluate the new implemented language skills	Establish different types of tests for students to show the effectiveness of these curricula	Summative and Formative assessment	Throughout the school year	Students	The Ministry of Education and English teachers
	Provide a survey for teachers after implementing these curricula	Post implementation survey (Appendix C)	At the end of each semester	English teachers	The Ministry of Education and English supervisors
	Provide students self-assessment	Self-reflection (Appendix D)	At the end of each semester	Students	English teachers

In brief, every new curriculum needs to be evaluated by several methods. Methods can be formal, informal, qualitative or quantitative. Curriculum evaluation refers to an ongoing process of collecting, analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting information to aid in understanding its effectiveness. Therefore, these evaluation methods will produce results and curriculum developers can use them with confidence when evaluating a new curriculum for use in Saudi Arabia.

3 Results

This study aims to help the Ministry of Education develop more effective English as a second language curricula. To do this, the new curricula would utilize a more communicative approach. Since the students in Saudi Arabia are falling behind other countries in English levels, the detailed implementation plan provided in the study may improve students' English.

Considering the findings of this project, positive results are expected such as: (1) summative and formative assessments that measure the improvement of the students' abilities in English, (2) teacher surveys that reveal the effectiveness of the project, (3) student selfreflections that will show their satisfaction with the curricula. When these expected results are finalized, the Ministry of Education can extend the program into second grade and beyond.

There is always the possibility that this project will not have the expected positive results. If this happens, several aspects of the study should be reviewed such as: (1) the summative and formative assessment may not measure the skills that had been taught, (2) teachers may not have received adequate training for the new curricula. Rather than only

having one training session at the beginning, perhaps teachers would benefit from receiving ongoing training throughout the year, (3) the content of the curricula may not have been appropriate for students and may need to be improved.

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, recent data has revealed the need to find out why students in Saudi Arabia are not able to communicate verbally in English after several years of study in school. This study will contribute to that body of research and help to plan for ways to improve how English as a second language is currently being taught. Since one of the Saudi Vision 2030 goals are looking to more innovative educational curricula, this project leads the journey to achieve this goal.

4 Conclusions

Currently, a high percentage of students graduate from high school without having the ability to speak English fluently. This indicates that the current English curricula are not sufficient to develop students' English learning. However, English education in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undergone several changes and modifications, which means that the Ministry of Education is working hard to accomplish its goals in teaching English.

Supporting the goals for Saudi Vision 2030, this proposal aims to enhance English curricula in elementary schools starting with first grade. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, students need to learn English as a global language for their lives rather than as a subject. The researcher provides recommended percentages for language skill sequences, focusing on listening and speaking more than reading and writing in the first grades. This project will be evaluated using qualitative and quantitative tools. The results of this proposed plan are expected to yield enhanced English curricula in Saudi Arabia and students' increased ability to speak English fluently.

Overall, English should not be treated as a subject anymore; it should be treated as a living language to communicate with others and exchange knowledge. This is the first step to enable our students to be successful in English learning. It is hoped that this project will flourish and

that students who participate in the new English curricula will achieve the new objectives. The data resulting from this research will lead future researchers to extend it to enhance English language curricula in intermediate and secondary grades. As prince Mohammed bin Salman said, "We will not look at what we lost yesterday or today, but we must always move forward".

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Appendix A

Check List for General Objectives of Teaching English in Saudi Arabia

No.	General Objectives of Teaching English	Applied	
		Yes	No
1	Develop the students' intellectual, personal and professional abilities.		
2	Acquire a level of proficiency in language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) that enables them to communicate with speakers of English.		
3	Acquire the linguistic competence necessarily required in various life situations.		
4	Acquire the linguistic competence required in different professions.		
5	Develop their awareness of the importance of English as a means of international communication.		

6	Develop positive attitudes towards learning English.		
7	Develop the linguistic competence that enables them to be aware of the cultural, economic, and social issues of their society in order to contribute in giving solutions.		
8	Develop the linguistic competence that enables them, in the future, to present and explain Islamic concepts and issues, and participate in spreading Islam.		
9	Develop the linguistic competence that enables them, in the future, to present the culture and civilization of their nation.		
10	Benefit from English-speaking nations, in order to enhance the concept of international cooperation that develop understanding and respect of cultural differences among nations.		
11	Acquire the linguistic bases that enable them to participate in transferring scientific and technological advances of other nations to their nation.		
12	Acquire the linguistic bases that enable them to present and explain Islamic concepts and issues and participate in different Islamic programs.		

Check List for Objectives of Teaching English at Elementary Stage in Saudi Arabia

No.	Objectives of teaching English at elementary schools	Applied	
		Yes	No
1	Learn the basics of the English language that would form the foundation for its mastery in the future.		
2	Use the basic structures of English sentences		
3	Learn the core vocabulary assigned for this stage.		
4	Listen to and understand simple English.		
5	Express themselves orally using simple English.		
6	Read and understand simple written English materials.		
7	Write simple guided sentences in English.		
8	Develop an awareness of the importance of the English language as an international mean of communication in order to be able to introduce Islam, the Islamic nation's culture and the cultural achievements of Muslims to other nations.		
9	Develop an awareness of the importance of the English language as an international mean of communication in order to benefit from the achievements of other cultures in accordance to the precepts of Islam.		

Appendix B
Workshop Evaluation Survey for English Teachers

No.	Question	Degree of Satisfaction				
1	Workshop objectives were stated clearly and met.					
2	The workshop was well organized.					
3	The workshop helped me to learn how to work effectively with this curricula					
4	The information and/or skills presented were relevant and useful					
5	The presenter(s) provided adequate time for questions and answered them satisfactorily.					
6	The presenter(s) modeled learning strategies and techniques.					
7	This workshop increased my knowledge and skills in teaching English.					
8	The workshop as presented was congruent with the workshop description.					
9	The presenter(s) allowed me to work with and learn from others.					
10	The presenter(s) suggested ways to follow up the training.					
11	The materials provided were useful.					
12	The materials were appropriate for the program.					
13	How would you rate this workshop? (5 is highest)					

Appendix C
Post Implementation Survey for English Teachers

No.	Question	Answer		
		Yes	No	Notes
	Content			
1	Is the content as up-to-date as possible?			
2	Are there any gaps in the content that need to be addressed?			

3	I can participate in English at my class					
Listening						
1	I can understand English speakers					
2	I can listen to audio stories and songs					
3	I can listen to English cartoons					
Reading						
1	I can read words					
2	I can read simple sentences					
3	I can read short stories					
Writing						
1	I can spell words correctly					
2	I can write a sentence					
3	I can capitalize and punctuate my sentence					

Author Biography

Adhwaa Al-HAjri, is an English teacher at Ebragyah schools, located in Afif, in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. She holds a master's degree in English translation and an educational bachelor's degree in English language. She has been teaching English for all grade levels since 2013. She is a scholar in the Khbrat Program; Building Leadership for Change through School Immersion at Kansas State University in the United States. She is interested in developing English curricula and teaching it as a language rather than as a subject. Her project is focused on developing English curricula starting in first grade and creating a recommended set of skills to be taught in sequence throughout all grade levels.