Chapter 32: Effective and appropriate pedagogy: Developing English Language skills in elementary schools in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: Learning English as a second language in Saudi Arabia is a challenging task. English in Saudi Arabian schools is taught as a subject among other regular subjects that the students take every and not as a language. English must be part of every student's daily life if we want our future generation to master English as a second language. Improving our students' English is not a difficult mission. Teachers and administrators need to create a good learning environment in the best interest of the students. English in Saudi schools should be taught as language that students need to master and not just a subject that needs to be taught in order to move to the next grade. We have excellent students in Saudi Arabia who require us to give them the chance to discover their abilities and give them the opportunity to obtain English in their everyday lives in and outside of the classroom. The project focuses on how we can improve our students' level of proficiency in English. The benefits of teaching English at an early age will be discussed. As a researcher, I will also make suggestions regarding the importance of increasing the English classes periods in Saudi schools. I will explain the differences between communicative and grammar teaching approaches. Finally, I will talk about the importance of including technology into the English teaching process.

1 Introduction

Learning English as a second language in Saudi Arabia is a challenging task. The official language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic, and it is used for business and all government transactions. There are some considerable linguistic differences between the Arabic and English languages and that makes it even harder for many people to improve their English proficiency. As an elementary English teacher, I face many obstacles that prevent me from elevating my students' level in English.

English in Saudi Arabian schools has been taught as a subject among other regular subjects that the students take every day which may be a big mistake. English must be part of every student's daily life if we want our future generation to master English as a second language. Let us take teaching English language at the elementary stage as an example of how teaching English language in Saudi schools might not be effective in helping Saudi students develop their knowledge of it.

Nowadays, students begin studying English in the fourth grade. Every week, there are about 30 periods in every school's schedule and only two of them are allocated for English. How can students develop their knowledge of English if they start learning it in the fourth grade and they only have two periods a week? That's practically impossible. Moreover, most schools don't have technology or English laboratories that allow students to listen to native speakers of English. If we plan to improve our students' comprehension skills in English, then we need to create the environment that allows them to reach their goals and objectives. Most students only learn and use English when they are in school and, once the classes are over, they use Arabic for the rest of their day. So, giving them more English classes and creating the environment that gives them the opportunity to enhance their proficiency of English is the key to having a new generation of citizens who can speak English fluently.

Developing our students' level in learning English is not a difficult task. Teachers and administrators need to create a good learning environment in the best interest of the students. English in Saudi schools should be a vehicle of learning and not just a subject that needs to be taught in order to move to the next grade. We have brilliant students in Saudi Arabia who require us to give them the ability to explore their minds and give them a chance to acquire English in their everyday lives in and outside of the classroom. The scholarly literature on this topic covers the ways to develop English Language skills in elementary schools in Saudi Arabia. This project will focus on the time/exposure necessary to learning a language, the grammatical vs. communicative aspect of learning English, and the application of the target language in and outside of the classroom.

2 Literature Review

Time /Exposure to Language

Of the three main concerns, time/exposure to language is the first one we need to address. Elementary school age is known as the best age to learn a foreign language. Impersonating capabilities of a child, natural inquisitiveness and requisite for new knowledge contribute to the mechanism of coping with the challenges of foreign language learning (Stankanova & Tollstikhina, 2014). Therefore, it is beneficial to start teaching English at an early age.

Initially, Saudi schools started teaching English in the middle grades only. Later, they began teaching English starting from the sixth grade. Currently, Saudi students start learning English from the fourth grade. English is being taught as a subject in Saudi Arabian schools and the Ministry of Education has yet to find solutions on how to make learning English in schools a necessity rather than just a subject.

As it has already been mentioned above, students in Saudi Arabia start learning English when they are in the fourth grade. Time assigned for teaching English in public schools is not enough to provide students with the skills needed for communication, reading and writing (Alsowat, 2017). In the elementary grade time allocated for teaching English is 90 minutes per week divided into two periods. In Arabic-speaking environment, where the Arabic language is totally different from English, the time allocated for students to learn English should be longer. Every week, elementary students have about 30 periods to study and all the subjects are being taught in Arabic except for the English classes. So, having only two periods a week out of 30 is too little and it's not giving the students the time they need to learn and practice English.

Some researchers proved that teaching English from early ages is much better for non-native students who seek to learn English. Gawi (2012) mentioned that those who learn a language early in life will acquire higher level of proficiency than those who begin late. Similarly, other researchers also support the idea that teaching a foreign language to young learners is beneficial. Stankanova & Tollstikhina (2014) asserted that "elementary grade is the most favorable for learning a language." They go on to discuss how children are more eager and curious than adolescents and adults to overcome new challenges and learn new things that come with a new language.

3 Grammatical vs. Communicative Approach

The grammatical approach was endorsed during the times when the teacher was seen as the center of the class; all the class turned around him to learn the language (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Liu & Shi, 2007). With this approach, the teacher was the only source of information,

consequently, he/she needed to have an insightful acquaintance with the target language. The student had no prospects to vigorously contribute to his/her learning process. He/she only had to listen to the teacher, memorize grammar structures, vocabulary, translate, and finish the assignments given by his instructor.

Even though Saudi students study English for nine years at schools, they have a low level of achievement and proficiency, and can hardly communicate properly. About 70% Saudi students declared that the cause for their low level in English is because of the defective middle and high schooling where English was not taught actively (Alsowat, 2017). There are other factors influencing their language proficiency.

One of the biggest issues lies in the curriculum of English learning in Saudi Arabia. The curriculums focus on teaching grammar rather than teaching the students how to practice and use the language. In the grammatical approach, students are required to improve reading and writing skills and information on sentence structure in the target language. To accomplish this goal, students generally utilized books as the base for the interpretation of words, expressions, or complete writings starting with one language then onto the next (Natsir & Sanjaya, 2014). This has not been efficient.

The process of language acquisition is much faster than formal instruction by the textbook. "The process of learning a second language must be similar to learning the first language, where listening goes before speaking." (Stankanova & Tollstikhina, 2014, p. 146). This proves that communication skills grow naturally, and they are the base in learning a language.

According to my own experiential evidence, at Frank Bergman Elementary school in the USA, teachers deal with the non-native students by using the communicative methods. They talk and interact with students and blend them in with the class environment so that they wouldn't feel isolated from the class. There is a Saudi student in the 3rd grade who developed and began to interact with his teachers and colleagues in English. He has managed to acquire some skills in English without the need to study grammar. Speakers ought to be worried about the messages they were passing on and understanding rather than the type of their expressions. They must be able to communicate and make their points clear and not worry about sentences being grammatically correct (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

Teachers usually don't realize that they speak more than their students in the class and that affects the students' ability to practice the language. Pujiastuti (2013) claimed that many language teachers were flabbergasted of the amount of talk they do in the classroom. Nearly 70 to 80 percent out of class time was spent regularly by teacher talk. She concluded by asserting that the supremacy of teacher talk in young learner's classroom communication seems to be irrelevant in foreign language teaching since it does not offer appropriate opportunities for students to practice the language. Teachers should give more time to their students to speak English and practice using it in the classroom in order for them to get acquainted to it.

4The application of the target language in and outside of the classroom

With the revolution of technology, learning a language is easier than it used to be. There is a growing need to use technology in language learning for young learners. Technology can be one of the ways to create genuine and gratifying atmosphere for young language learners when it is used properly and efficiently. Technology lets young language learners increase language skills outside the classroom when they interact actively (ilter, 2015).

 Kids spend a lot of time on their phones or tablets or laptops and they need to be taught how to use this gift of technology in learning English. Research and studies in foreign language area for young learners specify that technology is very effective in learning a new language. Technology, internet and some

computer games could support language learning positively if they are used appropriately. ilter (2015) indicated that students elevate their language consciousness by using on-site games, discussion in different social and cultural context. Technology provides this chance to young learners and offers them unlimited resources. He also mentioned the influence of computers and internet-based activities and adds that teachers should inspire the students to find useful activities to learn any language successfully.

In American schools, it has been observed that teachers used iPads to interact with students who don't understand English. By doing this, the students do not feel isolated from the class and, they feel confident to grow their knowledge in English autonomously. In my experience, I have noticed that many students who started to use their iPads improved their English greatly. Ferlazzo (2017) asserted that he encouraged his students to use Google Translate as a dictionary to look-up word meanings instead of translating the sentences they write. Students seem to easily understand and accept that idea. They understand that they won't be reprimanded by their teacher for defective word use and grammar, on the contrary, they will be acclaimed by their teacher for trying to construct sentences themselves. He concluded by saying that they understand the need for them to practice and be able to construct sentences on their own if they truly are aiming to master writing in English.

Gawi (2012) stated that the starting age for learning a language will have the same effects on students who are learning a foreign language, if they are only exposed to their teacher who is not usually a native speaker of the target language. Based on what is mentioned previously, teachers and administrates need to work on including technology in all schools and have specific laboratories to teach English. Students need to listen to native speakers and be in an environment that only speaks English. By having these labs, students will be motivated to learn English. From my own experiences with my students, I have noticed that their level in English has improved enormously after I managed to prepare an English lab. Even their enthusiasm and love for English has grown deeply which has increased their passion to obtain English language skills.

To conclude, the scholars agree about merits of the need of giving students more time and exposure to the language. They also describe the differences between grammatical and communicative approaches and the benefits of using technology in the English teaching classrooms. The next section will cover how it can be implemented in the context of Saudi Arabia.

5 Implementation Plan

Saudi elementary students show low level of achievement in English. This is because they do not have enough time to practice the language in school. They start learning English in

the fourth grade and they only have two English classes a week for a total of 90 minutes is not enough to help these students develop their English. They need to have more time to practice the language and that will only happen if they have more periods a week and started learning English from an early age. Students also need to have from 4-5 periods a week so they can get used to the language and listen to it every day. Also, traditional classroom instruction does not motivate them to learn because it only depends on rote memorization and results in a boring environment. We also need to include more technology in our English teaching process, so students get the opportunity to listen to native speakers and learn the accurate pronunciation of words. We must encourage students to benefit from the revolution of technology by using their own phones and

tablets to increase their knowledge of English. They can do that by downloading English educational applications that can help them improve their level of proficiency in English.

The proposed project is guided by the following goals.

1. Begin teaching English in Saudi schools from an early age. Students have more ability to learn the language fast and easy when they are young.
2. Increase the English periods per week so students get more time to listen and practice English.
3. Incorporate more technology in our English teaching process by establishing more laboratories in our schools and use the various educational applications that can be beneficial to our students in the classroom.

My aim is to have a two-year plan to start teaching English in my school as a beginning phase and then try to reach the ultimate goal which is teaching English from early ages all over the country as shown in Table 1 below. I also have a 1-year plan to increase the number of English periods that students have currently in our schools. I want the students to have from 4-5 English periods a week as shown in Table 1. My final objective is to include technology in the teaching process and the timeline for this objective is 2 years. This is how we should learn the language and use it to communicate. Language is not information to be studied and examined in, it is much more. Many schools lack the modern technology devices and equipment that help learning English well with a more enjoyable and effective way. The learners should see and hear how language is exactly used in real situations. They should watch, hear and imitate the language not look at textbooks talking about the language. The activities and the timeline are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Implementation Plan.

Goals	Objectives	Activities	Role of parties	Timeline
Goal 1: Begin teaching English in Saudi schools from an early age	Students need to start learning English from the first grade. Young learners have more ability to learn and understand the language easily.	1- Hold monthly meetings with representatives of Education in Saudi Arabia for a year to discuss the benefits of starting to teach English in early ages. 2-hold weekly workshops for a	The Ministry of Education representatives will be responsible on finding ways to teach English from early ages. They will try to figure out solution on how to change the current education system. They will begin	1- 2-hour monthly meetings starting from October 1st, 2020 and ending in October first, 2021. 2- 1-hour session every week for a year, starting from October 8th, 2021 and ending in October 8th, 2022.

		year to train teachers on how to teach English for young learners.	with specific schools to ease the transition and not rush into things. After that they see the results, they will work on expanding the number of schools that teach English in early ages until they cover the whole country.	

Goals	Objectives	Activities	Role of parties	Timeline
Goal 2: Increase the English periods per week so students get more time to listen and practice English.	Students need to have more time to practice the language and that will only happen if they have more periods a week and started learning English from an early age. Students also need to have from 4-5 periods a week so they can get used to the language and listen to it every day.	1- Hold weekly meetings with school districts to work on a plan to increase the English classes in the Saudi schools. 2- Have weekly meetings and monthly seminars with English teachers to train them on how they can use the extra classes to improve the level of English for their students.	The school district will work with thee schools to try to come with solution on how to increase the English periods in their schools. They will try to reduce of the periods of some subjects and replace them with extra English classes.	1- 1-hour meeting for six months, starting from November 10th, 2022, and ending in May 10th, 2023. 2- 2-hour meetings once a week and 3-hour seminars once a month for a total of six months, starting from the of May 17th, 2023, and ending in November 17th,2 023.

Goals	Activities	Objectives	Role of parties	Timeline
Goal 3: Incorporate more technology in our English teaching process by establishing more laboratories in our schools and use the various educational applications that can be beneficial to our students in	Many schools lack the modern technology devices and equipment that help learning English well with a more enjoyable and effective way. The learners should see and hear how language is exactly used in	1- Hold monthly meeting with representative from the Ministry of Education and with some businessmen to help establishing English laboratories in all the Saudi schools. 2- Hold weekly meeting with	The Ministry of Education will present proposal to the government of Saudi Arabia, asking them to increase the budget assigned for education and invest it into establishing new laboratories in the schools. The Ministry of	1- 1- hour monthly meetings for a year, starting from November 25th, 2023 and ending in November 25th, 2024. 2- 1-hour weekly meetings for a year, starting from December

the classroom.	real situations. They should watch, hear and imitate the language not look at textbooks talking about the language.	teachers to train them on how to use the technology to increase their students' in English.	Education will also work with businessmen to provide schools with all the technology with low costs or donations.	16th, 2024, and ending in December 16th, 2025.

In conclusion, by implementing all the goals mentioned above, I hope we will reach the main aim which is increasing the Saudi students' level of proficiency in English. We have brilliant

students in Saudi Arabia, and by giving them more time to learn and practice English, I believe they can master learning English easily. Also starting from early ages will create a new generation of students who will hopefully be able to be fluent in English by the end of their school year. Finally, technology will help boosting our students' level in English because they will have many sources and opportunities to listen to the language and practice using it. The next section on this paper will evaluate the plan that I mentioned above and whether if implementing it will be beneficial for the teaching English in Saudi Arabian schools or not.

6 Evaluation plan

The main goal of this paper is to find ways to improve Saudi students' level in English.

The website EF Education First Ltd provided the statistical data on English language proficiency in Asia. The Figure 1 below shows the current situation.

Rank	Country	Score	Level
9	Malaysia	55.54	High Proficiency
12	Hong Kong	54.44	Moderate Proficiency
13	South Korea	54.19	Moderate Proficiency
14	Japan	54.17	Moderate Proficiency
25	Taiwan	48.93	Low Proficiency
26	Saudi Arabia	48.05	Low Proficiency
29	China	47.62	Low Proficiency
30	India	47.35	Low Proficiency
32	Russia	45.79	Low Proficiency
34	Indonesia	44.78	Very Low Proficiency
39	Vietnam	44.32	Very Low Proficiency
42	Thailand	39.41	Very Low Proficiency
44	Kazakhstan	31.74	Very Low Proficiency

Fig.1: English Proficiency Index: Asia.

As we see in the Figure 1 above, the level of Saudi students' in English is very low. To reach this goal, we need to start teaching English in an early age and increasing the periods of English classes in elementary schools will help Saudi students to improve their level of proficiency. To evaluate the outcomes of this project, qualitative and quantitative tools will be used. I will run a survey on some parents and English teachers about whether they believe that teaching English in early ages will help students to develop their English or not (Table 2). The

majority agreed and encouraged the Ministry of Education (MOE) to start teaching English at an early age.

Table 2: Survey on early start of teaching English.

Survey questions	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
1-Do you believe that teaching English in first grade is a good idea to help students improve their English?			
2- Do you agree with idea that we need to have more English periods in the elementary grades?			
3- Do you believe that English is best learned by communicative and not by teaching grammar?			
4-Do you think that technology is helpful in teaching and learning English?			

I will also run tests on students who study English in early ages in some private schools in Saudi Arabia and compare the results with the students who started studying English in the fourth grade. I will have students take these tests twice in every semester to see their progress. The results of these tests will help MOE to have a better understanding of why teaching English in an early age and increasing the periods of English classes are important for the Saudi students. Moreover, I will give my students 10 minutes in each class to see some YouTube videos related to the subjects they have in their English curriculum to give them the opportunity to listen to native speakers. I will also encourage them to do the same at home. At the end of each semester I will test them and see their progress in English. The results will help MOE to see the benefits of technology in improving students' achievement on English.

To conclude, the anticipated finding of this study is to improve Saudi students' level in English. Saudi students' need more exposure to the language in order to master it. Starting from the fourth grade is too late for them to learn the language. Moreover, having only two periods a week is not enough for them to improve their English. We also need to implement more technology in our English teaching process and give our students the ability to listen to native speakers of English.

7 Results

The main purpose of this project is to raise Saudi students' level in English. Saudi students in elementary grade don't have enough time to study English. So, my aim is to find ways to increase their level of exposure to English in order to improve their level in English.

The results of my project are oriented at helping students improve their level of English. The Ministry of Education (MOE) needs to act fast and increase the number of

English classes in our schools. The more our students have exposure to English, the better their level will become in the future. So, by having more English classes a week and using more technology in the English teaching process, I believe that in the nearest future, we will have thousands of students who are fluent in English. Moreover, teachers need to encourage their students to speak and practice English without fear of making some grammatical mistakes.

There are some probable limitations that may be anticipated in my project. One of these limitations is the lack of English teachers in Saudi Arabia. We need to recruit more English teachers if we want to increase the number of English classes. Another limitation to the project might be of financial nature. Although the Saudi government spends billions of Saudi riyals on education yearly, the fact is that almost 60% of the education budget goes to the teachers' salaries. So, we might not have enough funds to establish English laboratories in our schools. Finally, having more than 35 students in a class is one of the biggest limitations that as a researcher, I may face in my project. The number of students in the class should be reduced so

that teachers can work on developing their students' level in English. Also, the students will not have fair opportunities to practice English in a class that has 35-40 students in it. These limitations are not insurmountable with careful planning and communication with colleagues and administrators.

The next steps, if the expected results are met, might be to track the progress that students make in English classes. After getting the expected results in the classroom, the project could then be extended to the rest of the schools in the district, and later on to all the schools in Saudi Arabia. Effective dissemination of the project findings might also involve publications in scholarly journals in Saudi Arabia and worldwide. The participation in professional conferences would likewise take this research project finding to the people who can make use of new ideas that will maximize large-scale benefit of the project.

8 Conclusion

Learning English as a second language in Saudi Arabia is a challenging task. The official language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic, and English is considered as a foreign language there. There are some significant linguistic differences between the Arabic and English languages and that makes it difficult for many people to develop their English proficiency. As an elementary English teacher, I face many difficulties that prevent me from improving my students' level in English.

Time allocated for teaching English in public schools is not enough to raise the Saudi students' level in English. In the elementary grade time assigned for teaching English is 90 minutes per week divided into two periods. In an Arabic-speaking environment, where the Arabic language is totally different from English, the time allocated for students to learn English should be longer. Saudi elementary students show low level of accomplishment in English. They need to have more time to practice the language and that will only happen if they have more periods a week and started learning English from an early age. Students also need to have from 4-5 periods a week so they can get used to the language and listen to it every day.

The project focuses on how we can increase our students' level of proficiency in English. The advantages of teaching English at an early age will be discussed. I will clarify the differences

between communicative and grammar teaching approaches. I will focus more on using the communicative approach to help my students increase their general understanding of the language. Quantitative and qualitative measures will be used to evaluate the students' progress. I will also explain the benefits of including technology into the English teaching process. Students will listen to native speakers in the classroom through the use of technology and they will also be encouraged to do the same on their own when they go home. Hopefully, all these steps will help improve the level of English language proficiency of Saudi students, which is a great investment into their future and success.

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