In the Arab States, globalization and economic development have had a significant effect on education. Serious concerns have been expressed over the state of education in the Arab world. Even in the oil-rich Gulf States, with over 200 higher education institutions, education is problematic with a notable lack of emphasis on specialized science and innovative learning. The Gulf States are in a race to become ‘knowledge economies’ and, as a result, they are promoting educational reforms such as the application of bilingual education models and curricula adopted from the West. This book provides a collection of studies on the state of education in Arab countries with a special focus on the Arabian Gulf, where currently there is increased activity and investment in education. The book is composed of three major sections. The first section is a collection of nine papers on current practices and challenges in education in the Arab world. The second major section is devoted to the educational reforms that are being implemented in the Arabian Gulf. The third and final section is a collection of papers describing new approaches to teaching and learning in the Arab world.

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Teaching and Learning in the Arab World
Teaching and Learning in the Arab World

Christina Gitsaki (ed.)
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This book is dedicated to His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qassimi, Ruler of Sharjah and Member of the Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates, for his financial support of the UNESCO Chair Program at the Sharjah Higher Colleges of Technology, and for his unwavering commitment to the development of education in the Arab world.
Preface

Education is undergoing significant change globally and locally. In the Arab States, globalization and economic development have had a significant effect on education. The *Arab Knowledge Report* (2009) by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) expressed serious concerns over the state of education in the Arab world which has resulted in the lack of a critical mass of highly skilled professionals capable of responding to the needs of the 21st century marketplace. Even in the oil-rich Gulf States, with over 200 higher education institutions, education is problematic with a notable lack of emphasis on specialized science and innovative learning. The Gulf States are in a race to become ‘knowledge economies’ and as a result they are promoting educational reforms such as the application of bilingual education models and education curricula adopted from the west. However, ‘the lack of extensive public debate in Arab countries, together and individually, on the nature, goal and challenges of education reform, and the dearth of published studies, research, and documents on these issues have caused reform efforts to turn in on themselves, exposing them to the dangers of oversimplification’ (MBRF & UNDP/RBAS, 2009:129). This book is an attempt to fill this gap by providing a collection of studies on the state of education in Arab countries with a special focus on the Arabian Gulf where currently there is increased activity and investment in education.

There are three major sections in the book. The first section is a collection of nine papers on current practices and challenges in education in the Arab world. In the first chapter Abbad Alabbad with Christina Gitsaki provide an in-depth investigation of Arab students’ attitudes towards learning English and the negative effects of the traditional English teaching practices used across most of the government schools in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. In
chapter two, Michael Fields, prompted by the poor language learning outcomes of Arab students, describes his study of learner motivation and language learning strategy use by Arab university students. Chapter three deals with the problem of school drop out rates especially among Arab male students. Georgia Daleure delves into the factors that contribute to male persistence with post-secondary education in the United Arab Emirates. In chapter four, Rana Raddawi addresses the issue of critical thinking skills among Arab university students and foregrounds cultural and pedagogical factors that may impede the teaching of such skills to Arab students. Chapter five documents how an undergraduate research project headed by Lauren Stephenson and Barbara Harold led to the development of leadership skills among Emirati university students. In chapter 6, Khawlah Ahmed raises the issue of the Arabic culture being marginalised in the English curriculum in the United Arab Emirates and poses important questions pertaining to the English language domination in Arab countries. The wide-spread use of English in the Arabian Gulf is also the topic of chapter seven, where Keith Kennetz, Melanie van den Hoven, and Scott Parkman describe their study of Arab students’ attitudes towards different varieties of English and the effects of these attitudes on students’ education. The last two chapters in the first section of the book address educational issues from the teachers’ perspective. In chapter eight Ahmad Al-Issa with Aida Abou Eissa provide an investigation of teachers’ attitudes and their current practices towards providing feedback to Arab students’ writing, while in chapter nine Jonathan Aubrey and Christine Coombe discuss the issue of occupational stressors among EFL teachers in the United Arab Emirates and their repertoire of coping strategies.

The second major section in the book is devoted to the educational reforms that are being implemented in the Arabian Gulf. Chapter ten provides an overview of the Madares Al Ghad model applied to schools in the United Arab Emirates and Robin Dada discusses the challenges and issues faced in the first three years of the model. In chapter eleven Nettie Boivin provides a critical perspective
of the educational reforms in Qatar and other Gulf states, while in chapter twelve Stephanie Knight and her colleagues provide a description of the educational reforms implemented in Qatari elementary schools and a thorough investigation of the outcomes of those reforms. In chapter thirteen, Iqtidar Ali Shah and Neeta Baporikar question the suitability of the imported education curricula used widely in Omani tertiary institutions. The last two chapters in the second section of the book provide examples of teacher education programs adopted in Bahrain and Palestine in an effort to facilitate attempts for educational reform in these countries. In chapter fourteen Mary Ellis, Anitha Devi Pillai and Ali Al Raba’i describe the development and implementation of the new bilingual teacher education program adopted at the Bahrain Teachers’ College, while in chapter fifteen, Hala Al-Yamani discusses the use of drama-based techniques in teacher training in Palestine in an effort to help teachers develop constructivist approaches to classroom teaching.

The third and final section of this book is a collection of papers describing new approaches to teaching and learning in the Arab world. In chapter sixteen Rida Blaik Hourani, Ibrahima Diallo and Aleya Said provide a convincing argument for the deconstruction of the current educational model in Arab countries that emphasizes rote learning and passive transmission of knowledge. They then propose a constructivist model for education using the study of subjects in the field of humanities as an example. In chapter seventeen, Mick King discusses the outcomes of the implementation of problem-based learning with university students in Qatar, while, in chapter eighteen, Sabina Ostrowska investigates the effects of the introduction of local materials on student motivation in the Emirates. In chapter nineteen Melanie Gobert documents a teaching approach designed to increase Arab EFL students’ phonological and orthographic awareness and in chapter twenty Katherine Hall provides best practice examples for teaching composition and rhetoric to Arab learners. Finally, in the last chapter Josephine O’Brien provides a series of arguments for the development of a pedagogical grammar for Arab learners of English.
While the collection of papers in this book is not an exhaustive account of the whole spectrum of educational issues in the Arab world, it does provide an overview of the kinds of issues and challenges that need to be addressed in any public discussion of educational reforms in the Arab states. Given the breadth and scope of the research studies included in this book, it is my intention that these papers make a significant contribution to the field as it continues to grow and evolve.

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References

Part I: Current Practices and Challenges in Teaching and Learning in the Arab World
Chapter 1
Attitudes toward Learning English: A Case Study of University Students in Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This chapter discusses Saudi students’ attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and their satisfaction with the current teaching methods used by teachers of English. Data were collected from 215 university students using an attitudinal questionnaire. Seventeen students from the subjects who completed the questionnaire participated in semi-structured interviews to discuss in detail their concerns and suggestions about the current EFL teaching method in Saudi Arabia. The findings revealed the students’ negative attitudes toward learning English largely due to the didactic, teacher-centred approach and the limited use of teaching aids in the classroom. Student suggestions and recommendations confirmed that it is necessary to take practical steps to move from passive learning approaches towards a more learner-centred approach incorporating modern digital technologies.

Introduction

Teachers and researchers in countries where traditional English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching methods are practised have been
calling for a change in classroom teaching practices. For example, in China (Jin, 2007; Ling, 2008), in Iran (Hayati, 2008), and in Japan (Cooker & Torpey, 2004; Tanaka & Stapleton, 2007), investigations are being directed towards replacing the traditional, didactic, teacher-centred approaches with practices that accommodate learners’ communicative objectives in language learning. In learning environments that still adhere to the traditional teaching methods, such as the grammar-translation method and the audio-lingual approach, students are seen merely as recipients of the information taught to them, and one of their highest motivations to learn is to pass examinations (Chang, 2002). Since the emphasis in such traditional teaching methods is primarily on the forms of the language rather than their functions in real life communication (Cooker & Torpey, 2004), the students end up with poor speaking (Lu, 2005) and listening abilities (Ling, 2008), which are important skills needed for effective communication in the target language.

One country which has experienced similar drawbacks in EFL outcomes is Saudi Arabia. There is a common perception among educators that teaching English in Saudi Arabia is a fairly unsatisfactory process (Al-Ahaydib, 1986; Al-Hajailan, 2003; Alhamdan, 2008), while students in Saudi Arabia consider learning English as one of the most difficult subjects to study in school.

This chapter discusses the extent of the inadequacy of the current instructional language teaching approaches in Saudi Arabia, and explores the impact of traditional teaching approaches to student attitudes towards learning English.

Background

The English language has a significant status in Saudi Arabia as it is the medium of instruction in many academic programs (Abalhassan, 2002). There is also a growing emphasis on English proficiency as a
requirement for employment by most of the major companies in Saudi Arabia. EFL in Saudi Arabia has, therefore, received significant attention from the Ministry of Education (MoE) as an essential subject in schools. In 1930, the MoE initiated the teaching of EFL in elementary schools. This was revised in 1942 to start EFL teaching in the newly created intermediate and secondary school programs (Alfallaj, 1995). From 1942 until 2006, EFL continued to be an essential part of the education system from Grade 7 until Grade 12. In 2006, the MoE decided to start EFL earlier, in the 5th Grade. During intermediate and secondary education, students receive four 45-minute sessions of EFL each week. By the time they enter university, students have completed between six to eight years of studying EFL.

At the tertiary level, all students must complete one compulsory EFL course during their four years of Bachelor’s degree study. This compulsory EFL course is completed in one semester, with students attending a 50-minute lecture three times a week over 15-17 weeks. The course is purely instructional and focuses on grammar skills and short reading passages followed by comprehension questions. The common teaching method in this course, as in all the other EFL courses in the Saudi government education system, is either the grammar-translation or the audio-lingual method.

While students’ unsatisfactory achievements in EFL education in Saudi Arabia are well documented in the literature (Al-Hajailan, 2003; Alhamdan, 2008) and the Saudi media (Aldakheel, 2009; Alisa, 2004), studies that have explored the problems of EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia are limited to secondary education and not directed toward finding a remedy. There is still uncertainty as to what causes the unsatisfactory EFL achievement of Saudi students, with studies pointing to factors such as teachers’ skills inadequacy and the students’ late start in EFL learning (Alshaer, 2007). For decades, researchers in Saudi Arabia have highlighted the serious shortfall in EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. A quarter of a century ago, for example, Al-Shammary (1984) pointed out that after six years of EFL study in public secondary schools, the Saudi students
were still unable to express themselves in correct English. Still, after many years, things have not changed as Saudi researchers continue to investigate the shortcomings of the current EFL teaching practices, and indicate that despite the time and effort dedicated to EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia, students’ achievements are still not satisfactory (Al-Hajailan, 2003; Alhamdan, 2008). It was not only the Saudi researchers who were worried about the inadequate EFL achievement by Saudi students; parents and members of the public were also concerned about this, with this concern being repeatedly raised in the Saudi media. Seventeen years ago Okaz newspaper pointed out:

After thirty years of introducing the teaching of English in the country, the Ministry of Education in the studies that it conducts, discovers the weakness of the achievement of students. [Even]…after six years spent in learning English, students may not be able to write their names in English. (Okaz, 1991, p. 16)

A decade and a half later, the media still complain about the unsatisfactory situation of EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia (Aldakheel, 2009; Alisa, 2004; Asiri, 2009). One of the Saudi journalists, in Alriyadh newspaper, remarks:

[…] most of the students graduate from the secondary schools with almost no results in English proficiency although they have been studying English for six years. This fact is known by everybody who had access to the acceptance results in the higher education institutes. (Alisa, 2004, p. 23)

In some of the early studies in Saudi Arabia, the students’ unsatisfactory performance in their EFL studies were related to their low motivation and their negative attitudes toward learning EFL (Al-Ahaydib, 1986; Zaid, 1993). Al-Bassam (1987) and Alfallaj (1995) found a relationship between the students’ EFL achievement and their instrumental motivation scores, but they did not directly investigate the factors influencing such attitudes. Surur (1981) also found that Saudi students were critical of the teachers’ quality, the teaching methodology, and the content of the EFL program. In a
study that investigated the textbook used in secondary schools (AlShumaimeri, 1999), it was found that the most important reason for studying English was for passing the final exam and the most significant skills needed to accomplish this objective were grammar and writing.

What these early studies of EFL in Saudi Arabia have shown is that, for the past three decades, Saudi secondary students have had negative attitudes and low motivation towards learning EFL mainly due to poor teaching methodology. These results are not surprising given that the dominant language teaching approaches in Saudi Arabia have been the audio-lingual and the grammar-translation methods (Al-Kamookh, 1983; Al-Mazroou, 1988; Rabab'ah, 2005; Zaid, 1993). How can a teaching method that focuses mainly on grammar or on drill and practice exercises, and which neglects other language skills and authentic communication, produce learners who are effective communicators in the target language? Alawad (2000) related students’ low achievement in EFL learning to the lack of computer-based resources and the explicit focus on passing EFL examinations. As a result of the intensive focus on form and grammar instruction, students in the Saudi context and in other Arab countries score well in grammar tests, but they have serious communication problems in the target language (Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2007; Rabab'ah, 2005). This small number of research studies on the effectiveness of English language teaching in Saudi Arabia were conducted mostly in the secondary education context. It would be useful to investigate the current teaching methods in a tertiary EFL context, exploring students’ attitudes toward EFL and the contributing factors toward such attitudes. The results of such a study could then be used to help improve EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia and in similar contexts.
The Study

The main research question underpinning this study was:

- How does the current teaching methodology in Saudi Arabian universities affect students’ attitudes toward learning EFL?

This study utilized a quantitative research methodology that was supported by qualitative measures. Quantitative data were collected through an attitudinal questionnaire. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Both instruments were administered in Arabic.

The study was conducted at a major university in Riyadh, in Saudi Arabia, which was established approximately 50 years ago, and is one of the largest universities in the country, with 75,000 students enrolled across 33 different departments (Almarshad, 2008). Like most universities in Saudi Arabia, it is a government-funded body, and as such it is representative of the government education system in Saudi Arabia.

The sample was obtained through the School of Languages and Translation, which is the school responsible for teaching the compulsory English course, i.e. Eng 101, to all the undergraduate students in the university. All subjects were male, similar in age (18-20 years old), and were fairly similar in their English proficiency level. They had all studied English during their secondary (Grades 7-9) and high school (Grades 10-12) education. The attitudinal questionnaire was distributed to 250 students and 215 of them responded. Among the 215 respondents, 17 subjects volunteered to participate in the semi-structured interviews.
Attitudes toward Learning English

Attitudinal Questionnaire

The attitudinal questionnaire contained three parts.

- Part 1 comprised twenty-two statements and students were asked to evaluate them using a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
- Part 2 included fifteen multiple choice items. Each item provided three statements from which the subjects chose one as their response. Responses were coded from 1-3 according to how positive (Code 3) or negative (Code 1) they were.
- Part 3 contained four open-ended questions.

Interviews

Among the 215 subjects who responded to the questionnaire, 17 respondents volunteered to be interviewed about their attitudes towards learning English at university. The purpose of the interviews was to explore how students evaluated the pedagogy used in teaching EFL and their suggestions to remedy the situation. The individual interviews were semi-structured, with eight starting questions, which highlighted three main categories: a) attitudes towards learning English; b) factors affecting students’ EFL performance; and c) their view towards a better EFL teaching methodology. The length of each interview was between 10 and 20 minutes.

Results

Together, the two instruments (the Attitudinal Questionnaire and the Interviews) used for the data collection yielded important findings.
They helped to provide an in-depth explanation for the students’ attitudes toward the current teaching methodology. The results of the students’ responses to the Attitudinal Questionnaire are given below. Table 1 provides the means and standard deviations to the Likert-scale questionnaire items, while Table 2 provides the results to the multiple choice items.

Table 1. Attitudinal Questionnaire – Likert scale items - Means and standard deviations (n=215)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Items (Likert Scale)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students’ attitudes toward learning EFL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 English is an important part of the school program.</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I feel happy when I come to the English class.</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I plan to continue studying English further after this course whether inside or outside the university.</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Learning English is difficult for me.</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I would rather spend my time on subjects other than English.</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 I think learning English is boring.</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 I think we should not dedicate much time and effort for learning English because it is not worth it.</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 When I finish studying the compulsory English courses, I have no intention to take more English courses.</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Students’ attitudes toward the course</strong></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 I feel that the current design of the content of the course Eng 101 makes learning English effective.</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 During this course I achieved the language-learning goals that I hoped to achieve.</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 I think that the contents of the course do not reflect the real use of the foreign language.</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 If I had the opportunity to choose a different method of learning English (e.g. computer based or multimedia based),</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I would choose a method that is different from the current one.

13 I didn’t get much benefit from the course. 3.54 1.36
14 I feel that the materials used in the course are not interesting. 4.20 1.05
15 I feel that the contents of the course’s textbook are not related to each other (coherent) in a way that helps me remember them. 3.29 1.16
16 I am happy with the teaching method of the course. 2.31 1.20
17 I think that the number of contact hours is enough for the course. 3.49 1.25

### Students’ attitudes toward Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Even if I work hard in the English course, I will still be scared of failing or getting low grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I prefer that there were better assessment methods (e.g. assignments, collaborative projects, self-learning tasks, etc.) other than the current traditional paper-based tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I think I can pass the course by simply focusing on the sample questions of the previous final exams.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Students’ attitudes toward Task-based learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I wish that there were an opportunity for task-based learning activities in this course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>I wish we had a chance to work in groups in this course.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= not sure, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree

Table 2. Attitudinal Questionnaire – Multiple Choice Items – Means and standard deviations (n=215)

### Multiple Choice Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ motivational intensity</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If English were not taught in school, I would:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 1) not bother learning English at all</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) try to obtain lessons in English somewhere else</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3) try to practise speaking English whenever possible (i.e. read English printed materials, speak it in hospitals, on the Internet, in the airport and wherever I can)

**When it comes to English homework, I:**

1) just skim over it  
2) put some effort into it, but not as much as I could  
3) work very carefully, making sure I understand everything

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Considering how I study English, I can honestly say that I**

1) will pass on the basis of sheer luck or intelligence because I do very little work  
2) do just enough work to pass the course  
3) really try to learn English regardless of the exam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**My aim in the English course is to**

1) pass the final exam  
2) get a good academic score to help raise my GPA  
3) benefit as much as I can from this opportunity to learn English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

**If my teacher wanted someone to do an extra English assignment (which is not graded), I would:**

1) definitely not volunteer  
2) only do it if the teacher asked me directly  
3) definitely volunteer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**When I am in the English class, I**

1) never say anything  
2) answer only the easier questions  
3) volunteer answers as much as possible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Students’ desire to learn English**

**During English classes, I would like:**

1) to have more Arabic spoken than English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2) to have a combination of speaking in English and Arabic
3) to have as much English spoken as possible

**Compared to my other compulsory courses (e.g. Arabic, Islamic studies) I like English:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1) least of all</th>
<th>2) not different from the other subjects</th>
<th>3) the most</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Compared to my major’s courses (e.g. statistics, math, administration, law) I like English:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1) least of all</th>
<th>2) as much as the other subjects</th>
<th>3) the most</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**If there were an English club in my school, I would:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1) definitely not join</th>
<th>2) attend meetings once in a while</th>
<th>3) be most interested in joining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**If it was up to me whether or not to select studying English, I:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1) would definitely not select it</th>
<th>2) do not know whether I would select it or not</th>
<th>3) would definitely select it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**If the opportunity arose and I knew enough English, I would watch English TV programs:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1) never</th>
<th>2) sometimes</th>
<th>3) as often as possible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**If I had the opportunity, I would read English magazines and newspapers:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1) never</th>
<th>2) not very often</th>
<th>3) as often as I could</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ orientation</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std Deviation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If English was not important in getting a good job:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) I would never be keen on learning it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) I would learn it only if I had extra time and money</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) I would learn English even if it was not important in getting a job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The current methodology in teaching English has made me:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) hate learning English, and therefore, it has negatively affected my performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) teaching methodology has had no impact on my attitude toward English or on my performance</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) love learning English and am keen on acquiring it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Scale: 1= Negative, 2= Neutral, 3= Positive

The open-ended questions and the interview data were coded and analysed thematically. The issues that emerged from the data analysis are discussed in the following section.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate Saudi university students’ attitudes toward the current English language teaching methodology and elicit their suggestions on how to improve it. The most significant issues that emerged from the study were the inadequacy of the current teaching method, teacher competency, and the lack of resources and teaching materials. Each of these issues is addressed in the following sections. The final section discusses the students’ suggestions and recommendations.
Students’ Concerns about the Current Teaching Methodology

The majority of the students in the present study complained that the current method of teaching English was inadequate for supporting them in the achievement of their language learning goals. The current language teaching method that is used widely in Saudi Arabia corresponds to a large extent to the grammar-translation method. This is a textbook-centered method of working out the grammatical system of the language with little or no emphasis on the speaking of the target language or on listening to authentic speech. The learner is expected to study, memorize, and master rules and examples of grammar structure. All interviewed subjects commented on their total dissatisfaction with the current teaching method. One of the students reported:

In fact, the teaching of English has never been satisfactory during all my English studies starting from secondary school until university level. Believe me, if the native speakers of English knew that we studied English like this they would be disappointed. (Student 5, Interview, Lines: 10-13)

The current English teaching method also failed to motivate the students to learn the target language, with over a third of the subjects (36.2%) reporting that English is boring. As one of the students put it:

I like English as a language and I like learning English in general, but the thing that my classmates and I do not like is how the language is being taught to us. It is boring and not beneficial. (Student 6, Interview, Lines: 12-14)

More than half of the subjects criticized the traditional teaching method as mainly focusing on grammar and giving only minor attention to the other language skills. Students were frustrated that the current teaching method gave little attention to oral communication skills, as one of the subjects pointed out:

One of the main factors that has caused the current teaching method to be unsatisfactory is its over-focus on grammar and its neglect of the other
language skills, like conversations. The student studies the Present-simple Tense and the Past Tense along with the other grammatical rules but he does not know how to read properly. Giving the students chances for conversations and discussion is more important in learning than injecting the grammatical rules. (Student 2, Interview, Lines: 12-17)

The other major concern about the current teaching method was that it did not reflect the real use of the target language. This was apparent from the students’ answers in the questionnaire (Table 1, Items 11, 13, 14) and from the interviews. Students commented that despite the years they had spent learning English they still could not express themselves in the target language. They knew how to answer the examination questions about grammar and other drill and practice activities, but they were unable to participate in conversations using English. They even felt that watching movies in the target language outside the classroom was more helpful for learning real-life English than attending English classes. This excerpt from a student interview reflects these views:

Our problem is not with studying the foreign language itself, however, our real problem is with the content we study in the English courses. We merely study the language rules which are irrelevant to the real goal of language learning. Our way of learning is similar to bringing an English speaker who wants to learn Arabic and you give him the grammar of Arabic. How would this learner use the language for communication without knowing any language skills beyond the grammar rules? The results we get from watching English-speaking TV channels and English movies are more beneficial than the English courses at the university. (Student 12, Interview, Lines: 8-16)

The learners’ passive role was repeatedly mentioned by the students as a major drawback of the current teaching method. The lack of learner engagement and the teacher-centred classroom are among the features of the grammar-translation method (Jin, Singh, & Li, 2005; Li & Li, 2004). In a didactic classroom the students are passive listeners to the teacher’s instruction and have limited interaction opportunities. This is exactly what the study found the traditional classroom in the Saudi university to be. The majority of the subjects
(76%) complained about being passive in the classroom. The learners in the English classroom would take notes and often photocopy other students’ notebooks that summarized the lesson’s grammar rules in a way that they could be easily memorized and regurgitated in the final examination. One of the students reported that:

The problem with the teaching method that we have been using is that it is just injecting the information into our heads and this has created negative results, and made the students hate the course. (Student 6, Interview, Lines: 17-20)

However, the present study also found that the students wanted to be able to use not only grammar but also to put into practice the other language skills as much as possible. They mentioned 42 times in the open-ended questions that they wanted to have conversations in the classroom since they thought that would be the best way to practise their speaking and listening skills in authentic contexts. In fact, effective language learning cannot be accomplished unless students have an active role in learning, where they effectively participate in the learning process and negotiate meanings to complete classroom activities (Littlewood, 2007). EFL learners need sufficient opportunities to achieve their communicative objectives in the classroom.

From the discussion above it is clear that the grammar-translation teaching method that Saudi students encounter in their language learning has failed to motivate them and enhance their communication skills in the target language. An over-reliance on grammar teaching, a didactic teaching style, and passive learning in the classroom are the key factors that led to the students’ dissatisfaction with the traditional teaching method in Saudi Arabia. The main cause of the problem with current teaching was the saturation of the students with language forms without providing corresponding practical situations on how to use those forms in daily life. As previous research found, studying the structure of the language for more than six years does not help the students much in gaining the skills needed for effective communication in the target language.
An issue that emerged from the data was the students’ concern about the competency of their English teachers. 54 subjects indicated that their English teachers were incompetent: ‘…The quality of the teachers is poor’ reported one of the subjects (Student 24, Attitudinal Questionnaire, Open-Ended Questions). As the data were collected from different groups who were taught by different teachers, this indicates that the perceived teacher incompetence was a common problem across different classes. It is true that there could be instances where teachers were incompetent in language teaching. However, the generalization that the teachers’ incompetence was the cause for the shortfall of the current teaching method may not be completely accurate.

Most of the English teachers at the School of Languages and Translation at the university have a MA degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) or in Linguistics, and there are also others who have a doctorate in TESOL. The subjects’ assumption that the teachers were not adequately qualified, however, can be explained in several ways. First, the English curriculum is not flexible in terms of content and teaching methodology. At the institutional level all teachers must follow the predetermined course objectives and help their students pass the final examination, which is designed and administered centrally by the University Examination Committee. Most of the teachers will not, therefore, risk skipping or not covering all the units in the textbook from which the questions of the final examination are drawn. This policy gives teachers little room to provide learning opportunities beyond the textbook or to focus on other language skills such as oral conversation. The lack of course flexibility coupled with the limited teaching resources at the teachers’ disposal may be legitimate explanations as to how the students developed the idea that their teachers were incompetent. This, however, does not exclude the possibility that some teachers may indeed be incompetent or poorly trained in language teaching.
Teaching Resources

About one third of the students reported that the traditional teaching method used limited teaching aids, such as computer programs and multimedia. The teaching resources in the traditional classroom are the textbook, the blackboard, and the chalk. Some of the teachers would write the new vocabulary and the irregular verbs on sheets of paper and distribute these as handouts to their students. The students, on the other hand, reported seeing the rapid development of new technologies and their use in their daily lives without seeing any application of such technologies in their classrooms. From the 215 subjects, 165 (77%) mentioned in the Attitudinal Questionnaire (Table 1, Item 12) that they would like a different teaching methodology where more teaching aids and resources are used. As one student commented:

> There has been a great development in modern learning aids beyond the traditional textbook and the blackboard. There are modern teaching aids that can help better in teaching such as projector presentations, and real conversation in simulation using computer programs. (Student 7, Interview, Lines: 27-30)

Not only did the lack of resources affect their language proficiency development, but it also affected their attitudes and motivation to learn the language. As one of the subjects pointed out:

> I personally like to learn English, but there are no motivational tools for learning and there are no modern aids for learning beyond the traditional chalk and board. (Student 48, Attitudinal Questionnaire, Open-Ended Questions)

Students were confident that introducing more teaching aids and new technologies into the English classroom would enhance their learning experience and would increase their motivation to learn the target language.

An interesting question may be raised at this point as to why the teachers did not use more resources and teaching aids, such as
computers and the Internet, in language teaching in the context of the study. One of the reasons could be the lack of computer literacy or sufficient training to allow the teachers to implement technology into their classrooms. The lack of computer skills or inappropriate training styles can result in low levels of technology use by the teachers (Becta, 2004; Preston, Cox, & Cox, 2000). However, even when the teachers have sufficient knowledge of the computer applications, there are still other possible factors that may negatively affect the proper implementation of these technologies in the classroom. Dawes and Selwyn (1999), for instance, found that a major barrier to the use of computers by teachers was the teachers’ anxiety and fear that their students may possess more knowledge of computers than they do, or the suspicion that they could be replaced by computers in the future (Darus & Luin, 2008). Resistance to change could also be a deterrent to the integration of technology in language teaching by the teachers and the institutions alike. The teachers may be unwilling to change their teaching practice, while the institutions may also find that the new technologies are difficult to implement in terms of infrastructure and organization which could be beyond their ability (Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Peck, 2001).

There are also possible social factors that could have affected the use of technology by teachers in the study context. Being a Muslim country with strong religious norms, Saudi Arabia is culturally and religiously different from the English-speaking countries in the world. The content and the materials presented to the students are carefully selected so that they do not violate cultural and religious restrictions, such as exposing the female body. These restrictions, which are well-known to be delicate in the Saudi context, may have also hindered the teachers in Saudi Arabia from using the materials available on the Internet or in computer programs for teaching English.
Students’ Suggestions and Expectations

During the interviews, students were asked to provide suggestions and solutions to improve their attitudes toward learning English. Many of the students saw the use of multimedia, computers and other audiovisual aids as key elements to improving students’ attitudes. More than one third of the interviewees suggested changing the whole curriculum and the teaching methodology and trying different teaching methods as a solution. One of the students commented:

I wish that the decision makers would respond to our requests and change the curriculum and the teaching method in high schools and universities as well, so that we could achieve our language learning goals. The current teaching method, however, is merely a waste of money and effort and the outcome is not satisfactory. (Student 17, Interview, Lines: 20-24)

In the discussion about the possibility of having collaboration and group-work integrated into the EFL course, the overwhelming majority of the subjects (82%) supported the idea and they reported that they would be excited to have such activities as part of the course (see also Table 1, Items 21 & 22). One of the major advantages of group-work that students mentioned was that they would be able to exchange information and learn from each other. More than one third of the students expected that they would feel more comfortable to ask each other questions about what they do not know than to ask the teacher directly. An additional advantage of group work mentioned by the students was the possibility for peer-editing where students would correct each others’ mistakes. Some of the respondents thought working in groups was easier than working individually. Other students mentioned advantages not directly related to learning, such as increasing their feeling of responsibility and enhancing the relationship among the group members. Overall, the students expected that group-work would add excitement and be more enjoyable than the traditional way of learning. Other subjects stated that it would not only add joy to learning, but it would also allow them to have a better chance to practise speaking the target
language. The participants also expected the student’s role to be more active using this mode of learning. One of the participants illustrated:

There are many benefits in group-work. The student will have the chance to take an active role in the class, which we do not get in the traditional classroom. They will also be more excited to practise using the target language than in the passive learning mode. (Student 7, Interview, Lines: 39-42)

The interview also sought to explore the students’ views regarding substituting the traditional test-based evaluation with a task-based assessment. The majority of the subjects (82%) favoured task-based assessment over traditional tests (see Table 1, Item 19). About one third of the students thought that the new assessment method would keep students in a continuous learning process, in contrast to the test-based evaluation method where students do not study seriously until just before the examinations. The subjects also suggested that this mode of assessment would allow for longer retention of what had been learnt in class. A further advantage mentioned by the students was that the new assessment method would make the students use the target language more frequently.

The last issue addressed during the interviews was related to the students’ perspectives towards the use of technology for learning English. Subjects expressed a positive attitude towards the introduction of computers and the Internet in the EFL classroom and reported the advantages that they expected from the integration of such technologies and resources in their lessons. Students suggested that they would be excited to use chat programs to enhance their learning. About one quarter of the interviewees thought that searching the web in the target language would be a great way to learn English. A similar number of subjects suggested exchanging emails in English for learning the target language. Participating in games in the target language was also seen as helpful.

With regard to how the use of technology would improve their language skills, the subjects reported the following ideas. More than one third stated that they would improve their reading skills by browsing websites in the target language. One quarter of the subjects
thought that using word processing programs would enhance their writing. A subject suggested that word processing programs might improve their spelling as well. Browsing English websites could also increase the students’ vocabulary acquisition according to some participants. Students also reported that not only would the use of technology have practical effects on the acquisition of different language skills but it would also make learning more enjoyable compared to the traditional teaching method. Another feature that computers and the Internet were expected to offer was that learning could take place beyond the time and space of the regular classroom, allowing students to learn anywhere and at any time. One student also expected technology to provide better opportunities for authentic use of the target language. An important point raised by another student was the ability to learn beyond the curriculum and to open new learning opportunities for the students through the use of technology:

I think that the biggest advantage of this new technology is that it would be real practice of what we learn. Also we would be able to get more learning opportunities outside the book, and get to know new things beyond the curriculum. (Student 11, Interview, Lines: 38-41)

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effects of the current teaching method used in traditional EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia on the students’ attitudes towards language learning. Upon analysing the students’ responses on the Attitudinal Questionnaire and the interviews, it became apparent that university students in Saudi Arabia overwhelmingly held negative attitudes toward the current EFL teaching method. They attributed the causes of this negative attitude to several factors, such as the lack of resources and teaching aids, the didactic teaching method, the focus on grammar
and the complete disregard for oral communication skills. Major concerns of the students regarding the current teaching method were the passive learner role and the reliance mainly on the instructor to teach the language. Students felt that their English class was boring and lacked enjoyment, which had negative effects on their motivation to learn English.

The students’ suggestions were to change the current grammar-translation approach to another teaching method that would allow students to become active in the classroom and to practise a range of language skills. They also needed to move from learning the abstract grammar rules of the language to the practical application of these rules in authentic language learning situations. They thought that collaboration and group-work would improve language learning. Finally, the adoption of new technological learning aids, such as computers and the Internet was another important suggestion that the students discussed. They thought that computers and the Internet with their infinite capabilities would provide the language learner with a wide range of learning opportunities that are beyond the time and space of the traditional classroom.

Even though the study was conducted at one particular university in Saudi Arabia, the findings reflect the current status of EFL teaching in the government education system. Saudi Arabian schools and universities still use the didactic teacher-centred approach, which advocates a passive learner role in the learning process and focuses mainly on grammar and how to prepare students for exams, rather than on teaching communication skills that the students really need in order to communicate effectively in the target language. The findings of the study provided further evidence to why Saudi students cannot express themselves in the target language after years of EFL education at school and at university.

The unsatisfactory results in EFL by Arab students (Aldakheel, 2009; Alisa, 2004) are an indication that there is no point in persisting with the instructional grammar-based teaching approach any longer. Even though the current teaching methodology has been used in Saudi Arabia for a long time, this does not justify preserving
such teaching practices, particularly after it has become apparent that their effectiveness does not go beyond training the students to pass their examination, and does little to enable them to express themselves or communicate properly in the target language. There is a need for a thorough evaluation and revision of current EFL teaching methods in terms of the objectives they intend to achieve and the needs of the students. On a larger scale, the findings of the study provide insights and implications for other Arab contexts where EFL classroom teaching follows similar didactic approaches.

Acknowledgement

This project received assistance from King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

References


Almarshad, A. (2008, March 3). 75,000 is the number of students enrolled in King Saud University and 50 contracts with international research centres. *Alriyadh*.


Research 'Creative Dissent: Constructive Solutions', the Australian Association for Research in Education.


Chapter 2
Learner Motivation and Strategy Use among University Students in the United Arab Emirates

Abstract

Students in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), before commencing their undergraduate degree, are required to demonstrate adequate English proficiency by obtaining a score of Band 5-6 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam. Many students fail to achieve the required score, and are often criticised for lacking motivation and appropriate study skills. This is a serious issue not only in the UAE but also other countries in the Gulf region where students are taught in Arabic at school and then have to attend university through the medium of English. The study described in this chapter used semi-structured interviews with five Emirati students who scored 6 on the IELTS exam to explore the issue of learner motivation and strategy use among Arab university students. Results showed that participants were mainly instrumentally motivated, seeing English as a tool that is necessary for study and work in the UAE. In terms of learner strategies, participants showed developed social/affective strategies, learning through using language in authentic situations, and by speaking with teachers and colleagues. Cognitive strategies appeared to be limited to language practice in authentic situations, such as reading the English press and watching films. Metacognitive strategies were largely absent. Students put little
effort into formal study, and there was little evidence of the use of strategies for learning grammar or developing reading and writing skills.

Introduction

Motivation and learner strategies are generally considered to be the most important individual differences that influence success in language learning. They are far more important than age, aptitude, past success, and the effects of the teacher, the physical environment or study materials (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1996). Most universities in the UAE and the rest of the Gulf States are English medium. In order to begin a university course, students must qualify by attaining a Band of 6 on IELTS. While some students achieve this, many do not. Average band scores in 2008 for the IELTS academic module were 5.0 for the UAE, 5.26 in Saudi Arabia, 5.33 in Kuwait, and 4.81 in Qatar (IELTS Test-taker Performance, 2008). Teachers often complain that students are unmotivated and have no study skills, though little research has been done to determine the type of motivation and the strategies used by students who do succeed in passing their IELTS test. To address this gap, this research study used semi-structured interviews with five Emirati university students who achieved Band 6 on IELTS, in order to examine their motivation and employment of learner strategies.
Background

Motivation

Motivation has been defined as ‘effort expended to achieve the goal, desire to achieve the goal, and attitudes toward the activities involved in achieving the goal’ (Gardner, 1985, p. 51). The classic motivational model in second language learning was proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner (1985). This model holds that motivation has two orientations: integrative and instrumental. Integrative orientation is the desire by learners to identify with the target language community, develop an interest in the people and the culture, and take on their speech habits. This is seen as a stronger motivation than instrumental orientation, which originates in the desire to attain good marks or to benefit professionally by using the language (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

There has recently been much criticism of Gardner’s model. Most of the research was done in Canada, using English speakers learning French. The need to learn a foreign language in a bilingual society is a special case which cannot be generalised to most other language-learning situations (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Dornyei (1990), Oxford and Shearin (1994), and Warden and Lin (2000) have suggested that integrative motivation is less important than instrumental motivation in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). A more general criticism is that motivational research is ‘largely dominated by a Euro-Anglo English as a Second Language perspective’, while other contexts, especially EFL contexts in Asia, have not been adequately researched (Gan, Humphries, & Hamp-Lyons, 2004, p. 231).

Ushioda (1996) distinguished *intrinsic* motivation from Gardner’s integrative and instrumental orientations. Intrinsic motivation is the desire to learn created by the enjoyment of the learning process itself. While both of Gardner’s orientations relate to the ultimate use of language, Ushioda posited that most learners in
classroom situations have no motivation whatsoever, other than what can be created by the teacher. Intrinsic motivation can increase interest in tasks, so that students will become good language learners. Integrative or instrumental motivation may occur later, when language proficiency is well enough developed that there is potential for real-life use.

Furthermore, the concept of integrative motivation has been reappraised in the era of globalisation. Lamb (2004) argued that a young generation is emerging around the world which is bicultural: both rooted in the local culture and having a global identity, which includes speaking English to communicate with other global citizens. Motivation to learn English is integrative, but not toward any particular Anglophone society. Rather, learners wish to integrate with both English-speaking global citizens in their local culture (most likely in the urban middle class), and English-speaking members of the global culture around the world. Dornyei (2005) has added that the lines between types of motivation may be blurred by today’s globalised generation. He defined Intrinsic-Instrumental-Integrative Motivation as a general international orientation. Today many people learn English because it is enjoyable to communicate with others all over the world and use the internet (intrinsic). They also have opportunities to work or study abroad (instrumental) and wish to develop a cosmopolitan, globalised world-citizen identity (integrative). Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004), in a study on young Japanese learners of English, stated that ‘Those who are conscious of how they relate themselves to the world tend to be more motivated to study English as they probably visualize “English-using selves” clearly’ (p. 119).

Since 2001, a new paradigm has been developed, mainly through the work of Dornyei and Ushioda. Dornyei (2001) argued that motivation is dynamic over time, not static as Gardner’s theory implied. The teacher’s behaviour is the single most important factor in influencing motivation. Ushioda (2001) developed a model of the Ideal L2 Self, the person the learner would like to become who speaks a foreign language (L2). Ushioda (2001) and Dornyei (2005)