The Four Most Common Constraints Affecting English Teaching in Saudi Arabia

Khalid Al-Seghayer[1]

[1] Al Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Correspondence: Khalid Al-Seghayer, Al Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. E-mail: alseghayer@yahoo.com

Abstract

The central issue to be addressed in this paper pertains to the current major and persistent constraints facing English education in Saudi Arabia. These constraints are observed in several areas, including students' beliefs, aspects of curriculum, pedagogy, and administrative processes. Addressing these considerations will enable the people involved to continue to advance in the right direction, and will also enlighten them to the fact that identifying, analyzing, and suggesting corrective action for the existing problems or issues would be beneficial in bringing about much-needed curriculum reform. This awareness will also pave the way for, and aid in, the acquisition of resources to ensure a better future for English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, kindling bright hopes for the country and enhancing the country's ability to actively participate in the international community.

Keywords: constraints, English education, students' beliefs, components of curriculum, pedagogical and administrative constraints

1. Introduction

It is believed that the teaching of English as a foreign language was actually introduced into the Saudi Arabian educational system in 1928, a few years after the establishment of the Directorate of Education in 1923 (Al-Seghayer, 2011). Since then, the education process has undergone several changes and modifications. English currently asserts several functions and enjoys an eminent status in various sectors at all levels within Saudi Arabia. This perceived growing position of English is in response to the development of Saudi Arabia in a variety of ways, including the number of the founded social establishments and the rapid changes that the social fabric has witnessed in recent years. There is an expansion of education at all levels; the economy of the country is growing rapidly, as is its industrial and commercial base. The flux of foreign manpower and the ever-evolving attitudes of the Saudi people toward English, as well as the presence of various media sources, cannot all be left out if an accurate picture of the current status of the English language on the soil of Saudi Arabia is to be presented.

English has a strong and palpable presence in the Saudi educational system due to a range of considerations. It is the only foreign language taught in Saudi Arabian public schools. English is also taught in private schools, universities, and a variety of several industrial and government institutions.

The status and functions of English are assumed to be shaped by attitude of the people of Saud Arabia. In general, as indicated by Faruk (2013), Saudis' attitudes toward English are highly positive; most Saudi people believe that English is vital to the country's future prosperity and that it is significantly needed in various domains.

Regardless of such status, functions, and exerted efforts, Saudi English education continue to seriously suffer on all aspects and that the outcome has not been satisfying or, to state the least, is not up to the mark.Specifically, the English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' proficiency level in English remains inadequate and below expectation.This performance seems to be attributed to four major constraints, as shown in Figure 1, including beliefs, components of curriculum, and pedagogical and administrative constraints. In this introspective essay, I will provide an in-depth discussion of each one of these EFL teaching constraints in a Saudi context, thus aiming to reveal its manifestations and track its causes and consequences.
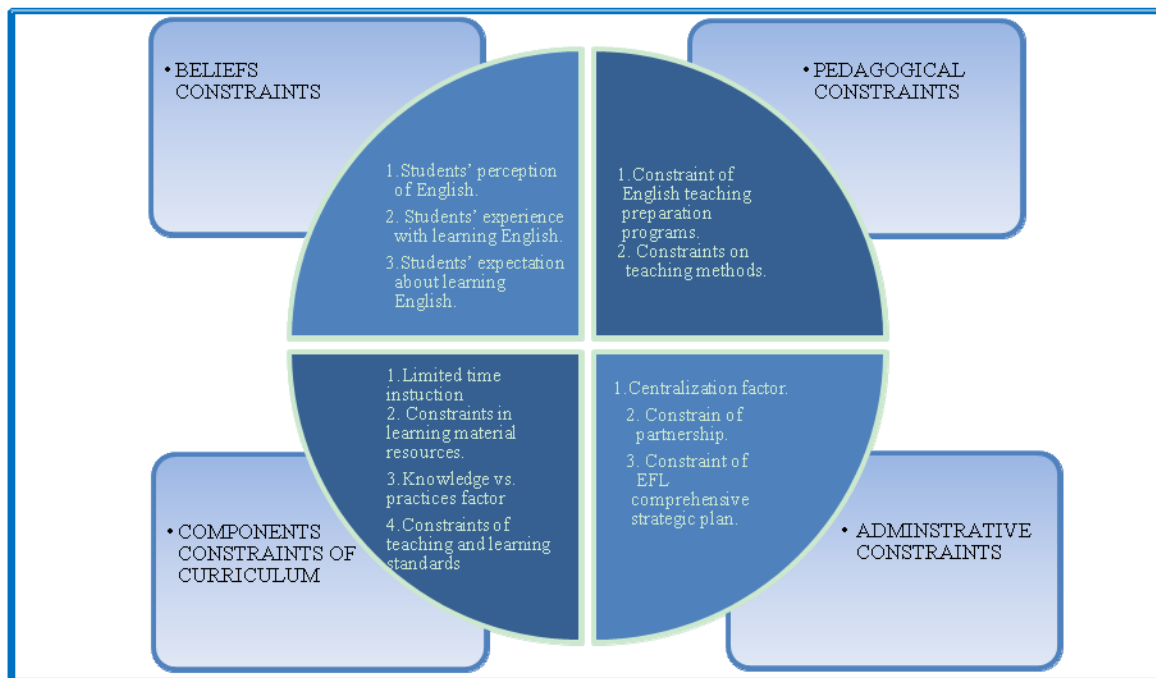
Figure 1. The four most significant constraints facing English teaching in Saudi Arabia

2. Beliefs Constraints

Beliefs about foreign language learning are central constructs and, thus, play a major role in the success or failure of the teaching-learning process of English. Indeed, the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that students bring with them to the English classrooms are significant contributory factors in the language learning processes and their ultimate success. Saudi students hold certain beliefs about learning EFL, which are byproducts of a number of internal and external contributing factors, including poor student attitude and low motivation, both of which are governed by different sources of determiners and adversely affect their classroom performance. These include (a) students' perceptions of English; (b) their experience with learning English; and (c) their expectations about studying English.

Since English is not immediately relevant to their needs, students usually do not pay serious attention to learning the language as a subject matter. Their efforts are devoted to acquiring the minimal competency needed to pass to the next grade level and pay no attention to other aspects of learning. As a result, they tend to memorize grammatical rules, passages of written English, and vocabulary (Jan, 1984; Zaid, 1993). Elyas and Picard (2010) maintained that secondary-school-level students are asked to memorize four to five written passages as part of their preparation for the final written test in English. Maherzi (2011) noted that Saudi learners of English often ask themselves why they are studying English, as they see no link between their efforts and the desired goal, which is to become competent in the English language.

It seems, as pointed out by Al-Seghayer (2011), that the key ingredient missing for most Saudi students is intrinsic motivation. The fuel that feebly propels them through their study of English comes from an outer source, not inner resources. It is the extrinsic influence of the educational system that encourages them, not any personal interest within.

Saudi students' lack of intrinsic motivation for learning and speaking English extends beyond the language classroom (Liton, 2012). They have no real purpose for or opportunity to use English outside of the classroom. It is as if teachers have been teaching students to swim by placing them in a bathtub and giving to them lots of rules, but little water. Thus, teachers doubt that students use English beyond the classroom in any meaningful way. This assertion was confirmed by the result of a recent study by Javid, Al-Asmari, and Farooq (2012), which showed that Saudi undergraduate EFL students exhibited higher extrinsic, as opposed to intrinsic, motivation.

This stance demonstrates the existing gap between the ultimate aim that policymakers present pertaining to teaching English, which centers around the notion of enabling Saudi EFL learners to communicate using English to function in social or other situations, as well as in educational pursuit, and the fact that learners themselves regard the process of learning English as merely a means to pass the English final exam because it is a required

subject matter. This all can be summed with the contention that since the only reason for Saudi learners to learn English is external pressure, internal motivation is minimal and their general attitudes toward learning English is negative, as put forth by Shehdeh (2010) and Khan (2011) and echoed by Shah, Hussain and Nassef (2013).

Additionally, a considerable number of Saudi students believe that learning English is beyond their reach. They perceive English as a dry and boring subject learned for instrumental purposes, chiefly to pass an examination. In the view of the majority of Saudi students, English remains largely an academic exercise, and they have little motivation to learn more than what is required in order to pass a test. Therefore, they view English as just a passive subject. This, as a result, limits the amount of interaction that takes place in the classroom. In actual classroom practice, there is very little interaction unless the teacher asks a question or instructs the students to complete a grammar exercise. The role of English teachers in the current English classroom is seen narrowly as the provider of knowledge. Students, on the other hand, dutifully but passively assimilate the teachers' explanations, work through the textbook, and read the text verbatim. Such an environment bores the students and they no longer have enthusiasm or motivation for learning English. Furthermore, they tend, according to Khan (2011), to experience feelings of incompetence and, as such, they feel incapable of reaching the desired outcome; that is, learning English as a foreign language.

A further crucial factor that deeply affects, in a negative sense, Saudi students' feelings about learning English appears in language anxiety. When advancing to the sixth grade, a significant number of Saudi students anticipate, with trepidation, the prospect of learning English. Students are afraid of English and carry this fear and reluctance into intermediate and secondary schools, believing that English is very difficult, if not impossible, to learn. As a result, it seems to many of them to be an obstacle in their schooling journey. Based on the obtained result, Al-Zahrani (2008) stated that a considerable number of those who took part in his study of the secondary Saudi students stressed that if they were given a choice, they would not select English as a subject of study. Al-Zahrani maintained that such a preference accurately reflects the fear and difficulties that Saudi students encounter when studying English as a foreign language course that they have to take.

Additionally, the students' desire to learn English is adversely affected by the weak encouragement and support that they receive from their parents (i.e., especially those whom are uneducated) (Shah, Hussain, & Nassef, 2013; Khand, 2012). A further hindrance that negatively affects the continuation of studying the English language with enthusiasm and desire is the fluctuation that is noticeable in the concept of teaching English, as well as the importance of the environment surrounding the student, including school administrators, teachers, peers, and relatives.

3. Curriculum Constraints

A close analysis of the Saudi EFL curriculum reveals various constraints that impede the process of teaching EFL, including limited time for instruction, a lack of learning material resources, the imparting of knowledge, and the constraints of the teaching methodology.

3.1 Constraint of Limited Time for Instruction

Throughout each grade level, intermediate and secondary students are taught English during four 45-minute class periods per week. However, sixth-grade elementary students receive only two 90-minute class periods per week of English instruction.

The high expectations placed on the English curriculum require that more time be allocated for teaching English, simply because students are exposed to the English language only during the periods in which the English classes are held; no sufficient reinforcing environment is available outside the school. Moreover, given the large average class enrollment size of 40 to 50 students and the fact that classes are held only twice per week for Grade 6 and four times per week for the intermediate and secondary levels, students are not given ample and equal opportunity to practice the English that they learned in the classroom (Shah, Hussain, & Nassef, 2013).

Currently, English learners receive little exposure to communicative situations which, in turn, leads to poor results of the overall teaching-learning activities. Faced with such large student enrollment and with current classtime constraints, teachers find it difficult to cover all of the course material and effectively teach language skills. If we take, for example, the textbook for all three grades at the intermediate level, each is broken into 7 units, plus a review, and each unit is divided into 4 lessons. With only 4 periods of 45 minutes each available to them per week, teachers must cover one lesson per day in order to get through the entire book in one semester.

This amount of time is insufficient, since some of the lesson materials and associated class activities cannot be completed in a single lesson. This constraint leads to ineffective language teaching and learning experiences. Teachers' goal, as a result, centers around finding ways to cover all of the textbook's units at the expense of

delivering effective language instruction with individualized teaching, along with the provision of frequent, substantive feedback for students' efforts and work. Students also will not be given enough time to absorb the lesson and do not receive ample opportunities to practice the newly taught material. As a result, they entertain impoverished or insufficient input in the target language: English.

What exacerbates the situation is the fact that students often have such tight academic schedules that they study various subjects throughout the school day. Consequently, they have little time outside of class to reflect on the lesson learned that day or to study and prepare for their next English lesson. Thus, in order to make English teaching more effective and efficient, and to create a more meaningful learning environment with more opportunities for participation, greater individual attention, and improved instruction, the class size and contact hours need to be reconsidered so that the development of students' communicative skills in particular and learning English in general is achieved. This can be accomplished via increasing the intensity of the learning time or the number of teaching sessions available to learners and reducing the size of English classes to 20 to 25 students per class.

3.2 Constraints in Learning Material Resources

Another hindering compounding factor that negatively affects the process of teaching and learning English in Saudi Arabia is the unavailability and inadequate diverse, selective, and appropriate teaching resources. A visitor to an English classroom will observe the absence of any teaching aids on the walls. Furthermore, schools are simply not provided with relevant teaching resources, including wall charts, flash cards, posters, audio and visual aids, language software, e-learning resources, a well-equipped language computer laboratory, and other facilities (Shehdeh, 2010). The resources that are supplied, such as posters and audio cassettes, are either in poor condition, of low quality, or are outdated and match those in the current textbook. Furthermore, they are designed with the assumption that the students will all benefit from them to the same degree, regardless of their individual differences, varying learning styles, or language proficiency levels that they bring with them to the English classroom.

The unavailability of such adequate teaching resources result in (a) Saudi English teachers failing to consider the use of teaching aids in their classroom; (b) teachers relying heavily and solely on textbooks and blackboards during the class period; (c) teachers often choosing to read to their students when a listening segment in the lesson is to be delivered to them, especially the first lesson in all of the English textbooks for all school stages; and (d) some teachers undertaking to design their own teaching aid materials which, since they lack a professional touch, are less effective than they could be. Additionally, undertaking the development of one's own teaching material diverts the English teachers' energies from the central task of teaching (Al-Seghayer, 2014).

There are numerous negative consequences of not making suitable teaching resources available to teachers. For one thing, it means that Saudi English students are not sufficiently exposed to authentic reading and listening materials and their interest in learning English is not stimulated. As a result, as emphasized by Liton (2012), such an ineffective practice fails to engage and facilitate students' motivation.

3.3 The Knowledge vs. Practices Factor

The currently employed English textbooks emphasize imparting knowledge at the expense of teaching skills. Specifically, the content seems to be concerned with presenting the information to learners, rather than giving them ample opportunities to practice the given information and materials. To put it into perspective, because of the type of English textbooks utilized, Saudi English learners are exposed to grammar, vocabulary, and reading passages, but they have little exposure to communicative situations or communication functions in lifelike situations that enable them to participate in a wide range of tasks for diverse contexts. Rehmand and Alhaisoni (2013) stressed that, because of such practices, students are not required to actively use English in the classroom or better yet, for communicative interaction. This results in learners who are incapable of expressing themselves freely or talking about events that take place outside the classrooms, yet can sometimes take part in language exercises, such as drill, dialogues, or role-play, since textbooks provide language that is primarily used in learning situations.

Teaching and learning in Saudi EFL English classrooms is generally characterized by a focus on knowledge transmission; classroom interaction is largely dominated by the teachers. Thus, English teaching is based on a teacher-centered transmission model. During English lessons, teacher-fronted presentations and explanations of new language items are predominant, and offer little opportunity for students' input. Therefore, a Saudi EFL teacher is viewed as a material presenter and content demonstrator, not as a manager of language learning situations. Adherence to such models counteracts any attempt to shift the English teaching paradigm to implement

a student-centered approach, wherein a teacher, who serves as a facilitator instead of exercising complete control of the classroom, takes a communicative approach and employs other less-constrictive alternative teaching methods.

3.4 Constraints of Teaching and Learning Standards

Further curriculum constraints appear in not using the quality standards, including those for teaching and learning, upon which to build educational policies and applications and which require educational accountability. Furthermore, there is a failure to use a global standard for measures and in assessing the qualifications of English teachers, which should be employed as the basis for hiring them. As of now, the only qualification for being hired as an English teacher is holding a bachelor's degree in English without any capability to teach the subject.

4. Pedagogical Constraints

Besides components of curriculum constraints, there is another set of pedagogical constraints that contain demoralizing factors in the teaching-learning process of English in Saudi Arabia, including insufficiency of English teaching preparation programs and constraints that pertain to English teaching methods.

4.1 Constraints of English Teaching Preparation Programs

From the early 1980s to the present time, English teachers in Saudi Arabia were trained through programs offered by the English departments at various Saudi universities' colleges of education and colleges of arts, or in four-year English programs at various colleges. These programs prepare Saudi instructors to teach English at the elementary, intermediate, and secondary levels in public schools. Graduates of these programs are awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree in English.

Over the course of four years, prospective teachers are exposed to linguistics, teaching methodology, English literature, and education courses. At the outset, in some universities, these students must first enroll in an intensive program for one or two semesters. Upon the successful completion of this program, students matriculate in to the actual academic mainstream English program, where they take courses in linguistics, phonology, morphology, syntax, English literature, teaching methods, and additional education courses. Therefore, aspiring teachers who participate in English language preparation programs are required to undertake (a) basic education courses to fulfill university or college requirements; (b) courses prescribed by the Department of English, including skill-building curriculum, general linguistics courses, applied linguistics courses, and English literature courses; and (c) elective courses of their choice.

It is noteworthy that the total number of courses and the number of courses in each of these categories may vary from one institution to another. The methodology courses that come under the category of applied linguistics courses or, to be more precise, English-teaching methods, constitute no more than three courses, due to the condensed nature of courses depicted above. This includes the introductory and the first teaching method courses, and a teaching practicum course tagged on in the last semester of the English academic programs, which accumulates approximately eight credit hours (i.e., depending on the policy of each individual English department where these courses are offered). The offered English teaching-methods courses represent no more than 10% of the total courses offered by English departments in colleges and universities (Al-Seghayer, 2011).

Most students who join English departments or TEFL programs are not proficient in English and a significant proportion of them graduate from programs at colleges of languages and translation or colleges of arts that prepare them to specialize in translation or English literature. This lack of proficiency is especially true of graduates of colleges of arts, who neither take courses in English teaching methods nor go through a practicum teaching course for a semester in public schools. Thus, as both Shehdeh (2010) and Khan (2011) contend, due to their inadequate pedagogical preparation they are not qualified for the job of teaching EFL.

Additionally, in-service training programs are currently conducted on a limited scale via the local education departments that are scattered all over Saudi Arabia and are handled in a poor manner. Another disturbing observation is that some English teachers have received almost no in-service teaching training, although they have been teaching English in a public school for over a decade. Related to this, we find that career advancement is not guaranteed for English teachers, other than promotion to a supervisory position. This situation, according to Al-Seghayer (2014), is exacerbated by the fact that there is no incentive for English teachers who may engage in professional self-development and that teacher-training resources are scarce.

Due to the previously described factors, these programs produce a substantial number of Saudi EFL teachers who are professionally and linguistically incompetent and lack a firm grasp of methods with which to teach language elements (Javid, Farooq, & Gulzar, 2012; Khan, 2011). They do not possess enough theoretical background knowledge pertaining to the main factors that affect second-language learning, such as motivation,

attitudes, aptitude, and age. The same problem is common in the area of knowledge of existing language-teaching methods, particularly modern methods and types of language testing. The incompetency also appears in teachers' insufficient knowledge of strategies to teach language elements, including the four skills, grammar, and vocabulary. In addition, testing techniques and the use of educational aids and technology are insufficiently employed in English classrooms. English teachers also have limited experience in material design, evaluation, adaptation, and implementation.

4.2 Constraints on Teaching Methods

The methods employed to teach English in Saudi Arabia are largely centered on the audio-lingual method (ALM) and, to a lesser extent, the grammar translation method (GTM). Al-Mohanna (2011) stated that Saudi EFL teachers comply with ALM's main tenet, which is an emphasis on stimulus processing and response situations. Consequently, teachers tend to engage students in extensive drills of grammatical rules and the monotonous repetition of words and phrases.

The other teaching method that is commonly used to teach English in Saudi Arabia is the grammar translation method (GTM). Al-Seghayer (2011) pointed out that this method encourages teachers to focus on detailed explanations of grammatical structures. It instructs students to memorize vocabulary lists and grammatical rules and exceptions and asks them to translate whole texts word for word as the central focus of their teaching.

Saudi English teachers employ a number of techniques to carry out such traditional teaching methods, including structural analysis, chorus work, answering questions, making corrections, and translating texts. Additionally, reading passages and repetition, providing detailed language information, and the formulaic use of translated chunks of language, consume much of teachers' time and efforts. Students are passively attentive to their teachers' explanations of grammar, as the central component of instruction, or vocabulary presentation. Then, students are instructed to memorize words and grammatical rules. They are also subjected to drills in reading passages aloud, translating words and sentences, and copying the taught vocabulary and other newly introduced language items from the blackboard to their notebooks. Further, they must engage in extensive drilling of the mechanical form of exercises, mostly to practice language patterns. The main focus of the practice of teaching the skill of writing is placed mostly on the final production of the task of writing alongside the linguistic features and sentences level, as maintained by Al-Hazmi (2006) and Al-Ahdal, Alfallaj, Al-Awaied, and Al-Hattami (2014).

Al-Mazroou (1988) made another observation concerning Saudi teaching methods that is still valid to this day. He noted that the system of teaching English in Saudi Arabia is such that teachers are reluctant to propose their own instructional activities for fear that they might distract students' attention from the established lessons and cause them to fail the final exam. In other words, teaching centers on the development of grammatical competency with only marginal attention given to communicative competency and discourse or sociolinguistic and strategic competencies. Students are not taught techniques that enable them to interpret spoken and written forms of English. They are not taught when to say what to whom, or how to use the language in different ways according to the sociolinguistic situation in which they find themselves. They are also not equipped with techniques that they could employ in case of a communication breakdown. Again, as previously mentioned, most Saudi English teachers do not use teaching aids and authentic supplementary materials in the English classroom. Instead, they tend to exploit only the course textbook and the blackboard.

The employments of these two traditional teaching methods fail to produce learners who are able to take part or engage in a basic conversation or comprehend a simple oral command or written message. This is not a normal level of achievement, especially after students have had more than 850 mandatory hours of English study conducted over the course of seven years of formal instruction in English. Today, there has been a rapid increase in the percentage of Saudi students who have failed to acquire competency levels in English.

Other points worth mentioning concerning the objectives of EFL curriculum are that they do not seem to be derived from a needs analysis of the entire Saudi EFL situation or context, including the socioeconomic and educational background of the students, the schools' constraints, or the goals of having students learn English as a foreign language. These goals are also stated in general terms, so they lack specificity and clarity. For instance, one of the general objectives of teaching English is that students should be able to "develop their intellectual, personal, and professional abilities." Another objective states that students are to "acquire the linguistic competence necessarily required in various life situations" (Ministry of Education, Directorate of Curriculum Department, 2004, pp. 4-5).

In addition, 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. Consequently, there is no established link between the English curriculum employed at the elementary, intermediate, and secondary school levels. This could be due to the fact that the curriculum designers failed to identify the students' development as a continuum and did not attempt to establish a link between the learning of English at the primary, intermediate, and secondary levels. Developing English curriculum without conducting students' needs analysis resulted in a failure to appropriately select and organize the appropriate instructional materials. Additionally, the curriculum of each school level does not prepare and advance students to the next level. In other words, the current curriculum was developed with little consideration of the kind of skills and abilities that students should develop by the end of each school level and whether the developed curriculum is designed in a way that incorporates all previous levels and progresses into higher ones. This shortcoming resulted in a lack of compatibility or balance between the objectives of the Saudi EFL curriculum and the needs, interests, and appropriate levels for students.

5. Administrative Constraints

Administrative constraints stand as the fourth major constraint confronting English teaching in Saudi Arabia. They are classified into the following categories: constraint of centralization; constraint of lacking cooperation and partnership with the expertise and specialized centers locally, regionally, and globally; and constraint of the absent of EFL comprehensive strategic plan.

5.1 Centralization Factor

The system of teaching English in Saudi Arabia is centralized and controlled by the Ministry of Education (MOE). At each grade level, English teachers are given an identical syllabus, with guidelines and deadlines that they are required to apply and follow. Thus, Saudi EFL teachers at state schools are tied by the MOE to a relatively fixed syllabus that provides guidelines in the form of learning objectives, teaching methods, and the scope and general order of the learning materials. This strong centralization mechanism for Saudi English language education administration suggests that Saudi English teachers have less autonomy and are teaching within certain boundaries (Shah, Hussain, & Nassef, 2013). In this regard, Al-Saadat and Al-Braik (2004) stated that teachers are expected to adhere to and implement the curriculum policies as they are handed down to them by the MOE. This discourages the development of teacher-made materials and provides no opportunities to trainee teachers in materials development techniques. Furthermore, this rather makes teachers perceive this task to be beyond their capability and responsibility. This practice is derived from the tenets of a top-down model of curriculum development, as opposed to a bottom-up model whereupon a set of hierarchically ordered processes are centrally initiated and controlled by selected expert committees.

The MOE also assigns and distributes EFL textbooks to elementary, intermediate, and secondary students throughout the country. Al-Seghayer (2005) suggested that this is done to ensure that students are receiving similar instruction. According to Al-Hajailan (2006), the curriculum department of the MOE central offices undertakes the tasks of developing guides, establishing standards, and planning instructional units. This work is usually done by assigning a group of experts whose tasks also include defining EFL objectives, selecting or preparing content that meets such objectives, and producing instructional materials.

5.2 Constraint of Partnership

Among the academic administrative constraints is the lack of establishing partnerships with both local and abroad training centers that would reinforce and deepen the qualifications and skills of English teachers and pave the way to providing best field practices for aspiring Saudi English teachers. Partnerships between EFL academic programs at colleges and universities and the EFL Department at the Ministry of Education do not currently exist. Thus, prospective Saudi EFL teachers are not given systematic school-based teaching practice before they enter the professional community. The initiatives of such partnerships and collaboration could also endeavor to conduct capacity-building training programs and work closely with the EFL Department to identify priorities that will result in sustainable pre- and in-service EFL training programs. Related to this strategy, colleges and universities that offer similar EFL training programs are not setting up a system through which they exchange information concerning the training processes that are employed and the performance of program graduates. Hence, universities and colleges are not aware of the firsthand experience of real-life teaching and schools are not now merely moving beyond the business of teaching practice to become more up-to-date with respect to teaching practices from the initial trainers of prospective EFL teachers. Related to this, it is sad to state that there are no partnerships with local private training institutions and textbook publishers to conduct pre- and in-service training courses that could vary in terms of both content and quality.

In this regard, Al-Seghayer (2014) pinpointed that collaboration and partnerships with otherworld-renown EFL educational centers and efforts to team up with a number of well-respected, long-established schools and

language institutes is not established. Doing so would enhance the development and execution of national plans and training activities that pertain to the training of Saudi EFL professionals, including design, documentation, evaluation, and strategic assessments of a wide variety of EFL training programs. This strategy could also include forming platform partnerships between experienced EFL teachers in these institutions, especially those who are familiar with the Saudi EFL context and their Saudi counterparts so that teaching methods, teaching materials, techniques for evaluation and other related issues can be discussed and exchanged.

5.3 Constraint of the EFL Comprehensive Strategic Plan

EFL instruction in Saudi Arabia lacks a national plan that is built on sound teaching theories with specific objectives that are compatible with the goals of the macro-national development plans. A well-organized plan for an EFL curriculum with specific yearly objectives to be achieved by the end of each school level and containing syllabi that meets the stated learning objectives does not exist. Moreover, there is presently a mismatch between the stated goals of EFL and the means that are being used to achieve them. Thus, there is a need to put into effect a comprehensive strategic plan that considers all aspects equated with the process of teaching and learning of English and that avoids temporary solutions and undertakes long-term national approach for teaching English in Saudi Arabia.

The EFL profession in Saudi Arabia is in great need of a well-developed national EFL curriculum that establishes practicable standards of excellence for teaching English in Saudi schools. A thorough needs analysis must be conducted to establish the necessities and levels suitable for students, as well as the goals and objectives that must be set or formulated with the steps needed to implement them. There is also a need to adopt relevant teaching methods and an effective means of evaluation. The selection and compilation of materials must be carefully conducted in order to assemble a curriculum that is appropriate for Saudi students. Doing so will address the immediate needs of students by developing effective curriculum components tailored to the Saudi students' level of proficiency. This will lead to significant achievement in cognitive development. These all constitute the major curriculum processes, which involves analyzing the situation, defining objectives, designing the teaching-learning activities, and implementing and evaluating the program of students learning in a particular context.

The suggested national EFL curriculum in Saudi Arabia should have the following characteristics to ensure that it is designed to underpin genuine proficiency gains. First, it should draft a comprehensive and detailed K–12 standards document. Second, it should establish certain standards for students at all levels, and these standards should be structured into strands so that word knowledge, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are included. Third, each standard should have indicators that define students' progress in meeting the standards that are set for each school level. Fourth, the curriculum should provide a detailed outline of the language skills students should attain by the end of each grade; concurrently, there should be exit-level performance indicators. Fifth, teachers should be given the freedom to navigate within the established curriculum's standards by designing their activities and class materials according to their students' needs, interests, capabilities, and knowledge. Finally, principles for language learning and teaching, choice of materials, assessment procedures, and teaching resources should be stipulated and maintained.

6. Concluding Remarks

The above discussion has demonstrated that since its introduction into the Saudi educational system more than 80 years ago, English has continued to be seen as an essential vehicle for personal and national growth. It was also clear that, despite the tremendous efforts, the achievement level of students was unsatisfactory and disproportionately low. Furthermore, although the curriculum has been continually revised over the years, this process has not been fast enough. Ever-changing developments in the field of second-language acquisition require prompt modification of the EFL curriculum.

Overall, the English proficiency level in Saudi Arabia is expected to remain at its current level unless all relevant factors are taken into consideration. A thorough and comprehensive needs analysis ought to be conducted. The school environment must be improved. Greater emphasis should be placed on teaching methods in teacher preparation programs. There must be a timely reform of the EFL curriculum and student motivation and attitude must be facilitated. Furthermore, a realistic alignment of curricular objectives and teachers' quality improvement must be taken into account, and supportive administration merits consideration. With the implementation of these measures, positive results are anticipated in student proficiency levels and the competency of English teachers.

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