Routledge Research in Language Education

ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN SAUDI ARABIA

NEW INSIGHTS INTO TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH

Edited by
Christo Moskovsky and Michelle Picard

English as a Foreign Language in Saudi Arabia

English as a Foreign Language in Saudi Arabia: New Insights into Teaching and Learning English offers a detailed discussion of key aspects of teaching and learning English in the Saudi context and offers a comprehensive overview of related research authored or co-authored by Saudi researchers. It provides readers with an understanding of the unique cultural, linguistic, and historical context of English in Saudi Arabia – with a focus on the principal factors that may influence successful teaching and learning of English in this country. Uniquely, the book looks separately at issues pertaining to in-country English learning and learners, and those pertaining to in-country English teaching and teachers. The volume also explores issues concerning Saudi learners and teachers in overseas contexts. Lastly, the book touches on the future of English as a Foreign Language and TESOL in Saudi Arabia and its implications for the field.

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Contributors

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Introduction

Christo Moskovsky & Michelle Picard

For a number of political, cultural, and economic reasons, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a special status in the Middle East. It is the largest country in this part of the world, with a population of about 29 million. It is the birthplace of Islam, hosting two to three million pilgrims annually from all over the world visiting the revered holy cities of Madinah and Makkah. Saudi Arabia is by far the largest producer and exporter of crude oil in the world; the latter alone provides up to 75% of Saudi Arabia's budget revenues. Taking advantage of the quite substantial petro-wealth accumulated over several decades, a number of successive Saudi Governments have more recently engaged in a nation-building enterprise the magnitude of which has absolutely no precedent in human history. The Government's Scholarship program launched in the early 2000s has been a critical part of this nation-building effort. The scholarship program which involves funding the tertiary studies of a large number of Saudi nationals at offshore institutions is in essence a prodigious investment in human resources – a campaign to upskill a new generation of Saudis and in this way to build a very highly educated, skilled, and knowledgeable nation. A crucially important added benefit of this initiative has been that it effectively has served to open up the traditionally conservative Saudi community to the wider world and thus prepare it for life in a very globalised 21st century.

Despite only being in operation for just around 15 years, the scholarship program has already started bearing substantial fruit. This is particularly true of the academic domain where one can observe not only a considerable expansion of the Saudi university sector, but also a very strong growth in academic research and publications.

The Saudi Government has clearly recognised the crucially important role that the English language has to play in all of this. Indeed, due to a range of social, cultural, historical, and economic reasons, English holds a special place within the Saudi community. English is the principal and – in some cases – only medium of communication in a wide range of social, administrative, educational, and professional domains. English is the lingua franca used for communication between Saudis and the vast cohort of foreign workers who are widely engaged in the Saudi economy. In essence, a high English competence has become an indispensable component of most professional and administrative establishments – one

without which it would be impossible to operate successfully. More broadly, English has now firmly established itself as the international language of science and technology, of business, commerce, and finances, the language of the internet – effectively a global language. In recognition of the special status of English and its immense importance for a wide range of social and professional domains in the Saudi context, the Government has over the last 15 years undertaken a number of reforms designed to raise the level of English proficiency of Saudi learners. These reforms have involved (among other things) introducing English instruction at an earlier age, increasing students' exposure to English at all levels of the Saudi educational system, modernising the English school syllabus, the teaching methodology, and the teaching/learning materials, improving pre- and in-service teacher training, etc.

In addition to that, the Scholarship program has given a tremendous boost to academic research examining issues of teaching and learning English as a second/foreign language (EFL) in Saudi Arabia. Our review of Saudi EFL research in Chapter 1 (and elsewhere) of this volume reveals that prior to the year 2000 barely a handful of EFL-related studies were conducted in Saudi Arabia each year. It would not be an overstatement to say that after the start of the Scholarship program we have seen an explosion of academic research on EFL issues in Saudi Arabia – most typically as part of a research degree at a Western university leading to the production of an impressive number of research theses. More recently we have also witnessed an exponential growth in Saudi-authored and co-authored EFL-related publications – some of them in the most prestigious academic journals in this field, such as *Language Learning* and *Applied Linguistics* (among others). It deserves to be noted that this research effort shows absolutely no sign of slowing down. Given all this, one can faithfully describe it as a golden age for Saudi EFL research – an extraordinary achievement. Again, it is worth reiterating that it all has occurred as a direct consequence of the Saudi Government's nation-building agenda – especially the Scholarship program. It just shows what can be achieved when a government chooses to invest into its most precious resource – its people.

Having said all this and having given credit where credit is unreservedly due, these developments – extremely positive as they undeniably are both for EFL teaching/learning and for EFL research – have not entirely been free of problems. And while achievements are to be acknowledged and celebrated, perceived problems and issues need to be discussed and addressed in order to advance Saudi EFL teaching/learning and research further.

This is indeed the key objective of the current volume – to conduct a detailed exploration of the most important issues relating to EFL teaching/learning and research in Saudi Arabia.

The book starts with a comprehensive review of Saudi-authored and co-authored EFL-related literature covering around 25 years of academic research on issues of EFL teaching and learning in this country.

Chapter 2 provides a historic overview of English and English teaching in Saudi Arabia including its early 'Golden Age', its virtual disappearance during the

'Wahhabi Period', and its reintroduction and expansion from the 'Unification' period to the present.

Chapter 3 is concerned with attitudes to English teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. More specifically, the chapter focusses on the social-psychological factors that are responsible for the formation of Saudi learners' attitudes towards the English language and its speakers, such as social identity, para-social contact, and perceived out-group threats.

Chapter 4 considers issues relating to in-country EFL learning/learners in Saudi Arabia. Various properties/traits of Saudi EFL learners as a group are examined with respect to their effects on EFL learning and achievement including motivation, attitude, aptitude, anxiety, gender, age, learning styles, and learning strategies. The chapter further reviews common characteristics of the EFL learning environment, such as culture, religion, learning facilities and resources, learning conditions, and more generally aspects of the Saudi EFL educational system and the role these play in relation to EFL learning in the country.

Chapter 5 examines in-country EFL teaching/teachers in Saudi Arabia. It starts with a historical overview of English language teaching policy in Saudi Arabia since 1970 including the most recent 2014–2020 New English Language Teaching Framework. The evolvement of English language teaching methodologies in the Saudi context is also mapped in a historical plan including issues of EFL curriculum and EFL teaching practices. The chapter critically examines perceived problems/obstacles to effective EFL instruction, and considers ways in which these can be addressed.

In view of the fact that student mobility is an integral part of the Government's Scholarship program, there is a growing number of Saudi EFL teachers who are acquiring their teaching qualifications at Western institutions – particularly the USA, the UK, and Australia. Chapter 6 examines issues of EFL teacher training taking place in English-speaking environments – with a focus on the perceived privileges of Western qualifications and the ideologies underlying dominant TESOL pedagogies in the West.

Given the rather dynamic state of EFL affairs in Saudi Arabia and the extraordinary growth the EFL field is experiencing in this country, our book would be incomplete without considering the future of EFL teaching/learning and research in Saudi Arabia. This is the main focus of Chapter 7 – based on a critical examination of current trends and existing policies the chapter makes a range of predictions in relation to how the EFL sector in Saudi Arabia will evolve over the following two decades or so.

The concluding Chapter brings together the book's most important findings and recommends a range of measures designed to promote the further development of the EFL sector in Saudi Arabia.

1 EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia

25 years of research

Christo Moskovsky

Introduction

For a variety of historical, social, cultural, and economic reasons English holds a special place within the Saudi community. English is the principal (and, in some cases, only) medium of communication in a wide range of social, administrative, educational, and professional domains. English is indeed the lingua franca used for communication between Saudis and the rather large cohort of foreign workers widely engaged in the Saudi economy. In essence, an advanced English competence has become an indispensable component of most professional and administrative establishments. In addition, English has firmly established itself as the international language of science and technology, as well as the language of the internet and virtual communication (Alrashidi & Phan 2015).

In recognition of the special status of English, the Saudi Government has in recent years introduced a number of reforms designed to raise the level of English proficiency of Saudi learners. These reforms have involved (among other things) increasing learners' exposure to English instruction as part of the Saudi educational system and modernising the English school syllabus, the teaching methodology, and the teaching/learning materials. Another major development has been the launch of a government scholarship program which has enabled thousands of Saudis to complete undergraduate and postgraduate programs abroad – mostly in English-speaking countries. These developments have in turn given a significant boost to Saudi academic research including research on EFL teaching and learning.

This chapter's key goal is to provide a comprehensive review of EFL-related research conducted by Saudi scholars between 1990 and 2016. This specific timeframe was chosen for a number of reasons. In the first place, pre-1990 studies could not faithfully be described as 'recent'. Besides, the volume of the earlier EFL research in Saudi Arabia was actually rather small – both in terms of the number of studies that had been carried out and in terms of the breadth of the topics examined. Even in the period between 1990 and 1999 Saudi EFL research remained relatively low-scale. It has only been after the introduction of the Saudi Government's Scholarship program in the early 2000s that we have seen a strong growth in EFL research. The number of EFL studies started increasing steadily in

the period between 2000 and 2009, with a sharp rise after 2010. The period following 2010 is also when we have seen the bulk of journal publications reporting Saudi EFL research. It seems that a lot of the Saudi academic research on EFL that took place in the form of postgraduate research programs in the early and mid-2000s has gradually been being translated into scholarly papers finding their ways into different applied linguistics outlets.

For the purposes of the review around 400 sources (including books, scholarly papers, and dissertations) were collected from three electronic databases – Scopus, ProQuest, and the Saudi Digital Library (SDL). The latter is a relatively new digital repository of research theses (both masters and doctoral) produced by Saudi students and academics. The establishment of SDL can only be applauded although it is not clear why access to it is largely limited to Saudi nationals within Saudi Arabia.

In view of the breadth of the review undertaken here, some categorisation of the available literature was essential. As it turned out, in terms of the themes they tackle, most of the sources reviewed here fall naturally into a number of well-established and widely recognised topic areas in second language (L2) acquisition research. One such major topic area concerns *EFL teaching* in Saudi Arabia. This includes issues of *pedagogy* and the *curriculum*, teaching *methodologies*, teachers' *teaching styles* and *techniques*, teachers' *competence*, EFL teachers' *pre-service* and *in-service training*, etc. Within the EFL teaching theme, one issue seems to have generated quite considerable interest among Saudi EFL researchers – there have been numerous studies examining the pedagogical benefits of deploying the new *digital technologies* as part of language delivery.

A second major topic area concerns issues of EFL *learning* in Saudi Arabia. This has been a particularly popular and fruitful area of Saudi research investigating the full range of often interrelated learner variables which have been found to affect both the process of attaining a second/foreign language and its product – the learners' emerging L2 competence. Among these L2-related variables, a very substantial amount of attention has been devoted to the examination of language *attitudes* (both by learners and the Saudi community more generally) and *motivation*. Some work has also been done on the use of *learning strategies* by Saudi EFL learners, on *learning styles*, as well as language *anxiety*.

Another important topic area covers the *major language skills* – listening, reading, writing, and speaking, as well as vocabulary. Some attention has also been given to aspects of the learners' *interlanguage* (IL) *grammar*. Readers should note that the term 'grammar' is used broadly here to cover all of the principal components of the linguistic system – phonetics/phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics.

The role which the learners' *native language* (L1) plays in L2 acquisition has long been an issue of keen interest and it is, therefore, not surprising to find quite a few Saudi EFL studies devoted to examining the possible *effects of Arabic on the learners' IL system*. There have also been attempts to establish the extent to which *controlled use of the learners' L1* in the EFL classroom can be beneficial (or otherwise) to the teaching/learning process.

Finally, there have also been a small number of studies examining other EFL-related issues, such as *language planning* and *language policy*, *bilingualism* and *acculturation*, etc., which do not seem to fit well into any of the categories defined above.

A clarification is in order at this point. Much as a categorisation as the one above is useful and indeed necessary, not all of the reviewed sources fall neatly into a single category. In fact, we find overlapping themes in a number of them. Take for instance Almudibry (2012). This research concerns both the pedagogical use of digital technology (and as such seems to be well suited for the category of *teaching*) and the development of L2 vocabulary (one of the *major language skills*). We took the view that use of digital technologies was the primary focus of study and because of that we classified it together with the other *teaching* issues. Another example of a study involving some element of classification ambiguity is Alebsi's (2002) research which explored the effects of an innovative teaching technique on EFL reading comprehension skills. In this case, it seemed that the primary focus was not so much on nature and properties of reading as an L2 skill, but rather on the dedicated pedagogy deployed for the development of that skill.

The reader should bear in mind that it has not been among the objectives of this review to produce a stringent categorisation of the Saudi EFL research output. The categorisation conceived for the purposes of the review was one of common sense and, frankly, convenience – mostly to enable us to impose some order in what is undeniably a very rich and diverse domain of science.

The rest of this chapter is organised as follows. The bulk of its body is devoted to a comprehensive review of the EFL-related research conducted by Saudi scholars over 25 years or so. The review is divided into subsections in line with the thematic categorisation proposed above. This is followed by some commentary on issues arising from the review of Saudi EFL-related literature, such as trends in thematic orientation, under- and over-explored topics, research design and methodology, etc., including a broad evaluation of the contribution of Saudi EFL research to this field of science.

Research dealing with issues of Saudi EFL teaching/teachers

Teachers

The majority of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia are typically Arab non-native speakers of English and because of that their performance in the target language (TL) commonly involves non-native phonological features. Al-Arishi's (1991) research focussed on the role of context – EFL versus ESL – in which Saudi teachers received their training in relation to their phonological competence in the TL; ESL contexts are those where the L2 is acquired within the L2 community as a second, not foreign, language. Not entirely surprisingly, the study established that phonologically the TL performance of the ESL-trained teachers was significantly superior to that of the EFL-trained teachers. Further Al-Arishi examined

the role of the context in which the teaching was taking place – urban versus rural – on teachers' EFL phonological competence. No significant differences were found between urban and rural EFL practitioners in terms of their TL phonology even though the urban context presumably provides considerably greater opportunities for social interaction with native speakers of English.

One quite unusual and particularly interesting study was that of Alharthi (2014). It tracked productive and receptive vocabulary knowledge among Arabic-speaking EFL teachers over a period of two years after they completed their university degrees. The research established very substantial attrition in EFL teachers' vocabulary knowledge almost immediately following the end of their education. Some – although far from complete – recovery of vocabulary knowledge was observed at the end of the two-year period.

Alnofaie (2013) examined the benefits of using critical thinking pedagogy to elicit high-quality verbal interaction/performance by learners (see also Alnefaie & Gritter 2016). The study's objectives were only partially accomplished mostly because the participating teachers did not have the autonomy to properly implement the critical thinking pedagogy in their teaching. Some important conclusions were made about Saudi teachers' disempowerment – teachers in Saudi Arabia are typically required to blindly follow a curriculum and a teaching model imposed from above. They are denied the license/authority to introduce and implement novel teaching methods, techniques, and materials. Very similar conclusions were reached in Albedaiwi's (2014) thesis.

On the basis of a broad historical review of education in Saudi Arabia, Elyas and Picard (2010) took a rather unique look into issues of teacher identity in this country – with the associated social, traditional, and cultural pressures of teaching English in the Saudi context. The study established a direct link between past teaching practices and present EFL delivery.

Alshenqeeti's (2014) aim was to analyse the nature of the questions used by teachers in the L2 classroom and to determine their functions. Particular attention was devoted to examining teachers' question modification strategies in response to learners' failure to respond.

Al-Beiz (2002) examined Saudi female EFL teachers' openness to novel ideas/techniques for EFL delivery – for instance, using a story-based approach to teaching grammar to secondary school students. The researcher also explored their preparedness to take leadership roles in relation to curriculum change.

Native vs. non-native teachers

Al-Omrani (2008) examined EFL learners' perceptions of native and non-native (typically Arabic-speaking) EFL teachers. The study's results deserve careful considerations. Native-speaking English teachers are recognised by Saudi EFL learners for their value in teaching L2 speaking skills, but non-native EFL teachers are perceived as better-attuned to learners' needs – possibly because of their own experience in learning a second/foreign language. It is interesting to note that Mosbah (2007) did not find major differences between native and non-native

EFL teachers in terms of correcting learners' oral errors. Neither native, nor non-native EFL teachers seemed to have a well-developed awareness of effective strategies for providing corrective feedback. Ultimately, teaching qualifications and teaching experience are regarded as teachers' most important assets – more so than native L2 competence (but for diverging results, see O. S. Alenazi 2014). One very important implication emerging from the Al-Omrani study points to the considerable benefits of EFL programs which involve cooperatively working native and non-native EFL teachers. This view was strongly endorsed by Alseweed and Daif-Allah (2012). For a related study, see also Moores-Abdool, Yahya and Unzueta (2011).

Teacher training

A relatively small number of studies have considered issues of EFL teacher training; their findings are not very encouraging. Using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative instruments, Alansari (1995) collected data from EFL teachers, EFL inspectors, and EFL teacher-trainers about their perceptions of the merits of current teacher-training programs. Participants were also asked about their views about what high-quality teacher training should involve. The study found a substantial gap between the two ultimately admitting that current Saudi programs for preparing EFL instructors were of relatively low standard. Arishi's (1995) study of the perceptions of current and former EFL teacher-trainees of the effectiveness of EFL instructor training programs provided further evidence in that regard. A more recent study, Al-Hazmi (2003), strongly reinforced Alansari's conclusion, describing teacher-training programs in Saudi Arabia as 'non-systematic' and 'inadequate', and suggesting they are much better suited for training translators, not teachers. Binghadeer (2011) produced evidence that textbooks and other teaching materials used in teacher-training programs generally lack the capacity to provide prospective teachers with adequate training in EFL phonology.

Teaching the target language culture

There is a widely held view among L2 researchers and language teaching professionals that teaching the TL culture is an essential part of L2 instruction. Indeed, some even argue that successful L2 delivery is practically impossible without a strong TL cultural component. The picture emerging from Saudi research on the role of the TL culture is quite mixed, however. Mekheimer and Aldosari (2011) and Shamail (2015) strongly endorsed the value of teaching the TL literature and culture as part of language instruction. In Al Hasnan's (2015) study participating teachers regarded the delivery of culture-specific content as highly beneficial to the learning process, but such content was largely missing from textbooks and language learning materials. Teachers were also mindful of negative societal attitudes towards the spread of English-speaking cultures within the traditional conservative Saudi community.

O. Alenazi (2006) established that EFL teachers and their learners generally held positive attitudes to their English writing textbook, *Interactions II Writing*, and believed that the book had the capacity to develop learners' L2 writing skills. That said, participants did find issues with how various culture-specific themes (especially gender) were treated in the textbook.

One of the earlier studies conducting an evaluation of EFL teaching, Zaid (1993), also deserves consideration. The author examined the nature of EFL instruction taking place at Saudi intermediate schools. It was established that the Audio-Lingual method remained the prevailing teaching methodology, and that there was too much emphasis on grammar and not enough effort for promoting learners' communicative skills. The report recommended reducing the volume of English literature content delivered to learners. Zafer (2002) made similar recommendations with regard to the undergraduate EFL teacher preparation program in Saudi Arabia – he proposed a reduction of the content involving English literature, English culture, history of the English language, etc. This position, according to Alfahadi (2012), is in accord with Saudi EFL teachers' views of the EFL textbook's Anglo-cultural content – the latter was perceived as contradictory to local values and because of that was regarded as inappropriate. Participating teachers recommended that the EFL textbook be revised or even re-designed in order to be better aligned with local cultural norms.

Some further commentary on the provision of content specific to the TL culture is offered within the Discussion section below.

Teaching specific language skills

A handful of studies have looked at aspects of the teaching of specific language skills, e.g., reading, writing, speaking, etc. Among them, Alebsi (2002) is of particular interest because it used an experimental design to explore the development of EFL reading comprehension skills. The study's experimental group was exposed to the communicative approach and to authentic reading materials while the control group received the traditional grammar-based instruction. In a post-treatment reading test the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group.

Alsaedi (2012) focussed on the pedagogy of teaching EFL speaking skills in Saudi secondary schools. The results were rather disconcerting. Participating teachers were found to dominate classroom discourse allowing few opportunities to learners to engage in L2 communication (see also Alfallaj 1998). Using Arabic for a broad range of teaching-related functions was found to be commonplace practice. Aliumah (2011) equally acknowledged existing problems with the development of EFL speaking skills, but pointed to the rather widespread reluctance among Saudi EFL learners to participate in communicative activities in the classroom. Aliumah advocated integrative teaching as the best way to facilitate the attainment of EFL speaking skills. Alasmari and Ahmed (2013), on the other hand, favoured using in-class debates as a technique to promote learners' speaking skills.

Most of the participating teachers in Farooq's (2015) research recognised the benefits of Communicative Language Teaching and its capacity to promote learners' communicative competence. At the same time they identified a number of serious obstacles to adequate implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in the Saudi classroom including overcrowded classes, lack of visual aids, learners' low proficiency, insufficient exposure to instruction, etc.

R. Alghamdi's (2014) research established experimentally the superior capacity of the cooperative learning method to improve EFL learners' communicative skills – compared to a control condition involving standard delivery.

Al-jasser (2008) was specifically interested in the pedagogy of EFL phonology. The study established that explicit instruction of English phonotactic rules can lead to an improvement in learners' EFL phonology – especially in relation to lexical segmentation.

Altuwairesh (2013) considered ways of improving Saudi EFL learners' TL listening skills. After receiving metacognitive instruction and extra dedicated practice in listening comprehension, learners in the experimental group outperformed controls on a TOEFL listening task. Hamouda (2012) identified quite a big range of classroom variables generating listening comprehension problems for Saudi EFL learners including the teacher's accent, speed of speech, and substandard audio equipment (among others). Based on these findings, the author offered ideas in relation to how Saudi EFL teachers can help their learners develop effective listening strategies and improve their TL listening skills.

Jouhari (1996) investigated the benefits of a process-centred approach to teaching English composition. Collecting a range of different data, the researcher established that learners responded quite positively to process-centred teaching developing a number of writing-related skills. More recently, Alhosani (2008) examined the benefits of using a process approach to developing the EFL writing ability of 5th-grade Saudi Arabian students.

Some attention has also been given to the teaching of EFL vocabulary. Al-Qadi (1991) recommended providing learners with instruction on derivational morphology arguing this would lead to an improvement in their L2 vocabulary competence (see also Al-Qadi 1992). Al Nassir (2012) found that using pictures to teach vocabulary was more effective than translation with younger low EFL-proficiency learners (such as primary school students) – a somewhat predictable result. Junaid's (2014) research indicated that using English corpora as a way of teaching English collocations can enable learners to retain vocabulary knowledge better while B. Al-Harbi (2012) emphasised the role of dictionaries in relation to building learners' EFL vocabulary proficiency, and explained that teachers can play a crucial role in enabling their learners to develop dictionary competence.

EFL curriculum, methodology, policies and policy implementation

Several studies have examined the EFL curriculum used in Saudi public education institutions, but no clear outcomes have emerged from most of them. Take, for instance, Al-Hajailan (1999) whose research was specifically conducted to

evaluate a new EFL textbook, *English for Saudi Arabia*; at the time of the study this textbook had recently been adopted by the Saudi Ministry of Education. The study found that stakeholders were generally happy with various features of the textbook although they were ambivalent with regard to the book's capacity to fulfil national educational goals. Other evaluative studies of English textbooks with no clear-cut outcomes include Al-Yousef (2007); Madkhali (2005); and Rahman (2011). In comparison, Alfallaj's (1998) research stands out. It was devoted to a comprehensive evaluation of the English curriculum at a Saudi College including learners, teachers, administrators, teaching and learning materials, etc. Alfallaj's findings were largely unfavourable. According to the study, the English curriculum was not properly aligned with learners' needs, the teaching and learning materials used as part of EFL instruction were inadequate and ill-suited, the teaching was almost exclusively grammar-oriented and was often delivered in Arabic, and the teachers dominated the classroom providing little or no opportunity to learners for interactive communicative use of the L2. On the related issue of power distance between Saudi teachers and learners, see Alshahrani (2016).

Poorly designed and/or poorly delivered EFL curricula seem to be a rather pervasive problem – much broader than the context of a single institution. In what can be described as a seminal review of EFL education across the Arab world, Kharma (1998) reported a high degree of community awareness among Arab nations of the importance of competence in English as a second/foreign language. However, in the author's view the English curricula in these countries seemed to be constructed and delivered in an *ad hoc* fashion – not on the basis of dedicated systematic research. Kharma also pointed to very widespread underachievement among EFL learners – a situation which seems to be unanimously acknowledged by relevant stakeholders (see, e.g., Alhawsawi 2013, among many others). The author concluded that a very well planned and focussed research effort is required in order to improve EFL delivery – with a special emphasis on the specific needs of various stakeholders including learners, employers, educational institutions, etc.

Hasan (2003) specifically looked at the capacity of an existing program – *Basic English Program* delivered to Saudi Aramco employees – to foster high-level communicative competence in English; within the Saudi context it is widely acknowledged that Saudi EFL learners largely fail to develop an adequate level of communicative competence. The study collected data via direct observations and audio-recordings of English classes. The findings reveal that learners in this program were not provided with sufficient opportunities to engage in meaningful and socially appropriate communication in English.

Aben Ahmed (2013) examined the English business communication literacy needs of several Saudi EFL companies concluding that current EFL business communication education generally fails to meet these needs. The author recommended changes to the English curriculum in order to address this.

With specific reference to English communicative skills, Alharbi (2015) advocated substantial reform to higher education policy. In her view, EFL delivery

should be designed to promote learners' problem solving and critical thinking skills. She also recommended the establishment of bilingual schools in Saudi Arabia.

In addition to inadequate and unsuitable curricula, Liton and Ali (2011) identified a relatively broad range of other factors diminishing the quality of EFL education in Saudi Arabia. These included the typically large EFL class sizes (sometimes involving over a hundred students) which do not yield themselves to task-based language delivery, teacher-centred instruction, low learner motivation, and poor and inadequate classroom settings. Delivery was further hampered by excessive teaching loads (see also Liton 2013).

Based on a carefully designed and controlled quasi-experimental study, Mekheimer and Aldosari (2013) advocated the adoption of an integrated skills EFL teaching methodology to be used at Saudi universities. Those among the study's participants who were exposed to EFL instruction via the integrated method significantly outperformed the control group across all of the four major language skills.

Faruk's (2014a) research is quite interesting because it involved a very broad overview of Saudi EFL education policies covering a period of over 30 years. The study found (among other things) that there had not been a sufficient balance between the Government's national and transnational objectives in the textbooks used in the Saudi school system – especially with regard to their cultural content. Faruk's results are in accord with Alhamdan (2013) who discovered a substantial gap between educational EFL policies as stated in Government documents and the way such policies were implemented in day-to-day classroom EFL delivery. Alhamdan's findings are strongly reinforced by Wedell and Alshumaimeri (2014) whose research revealed that the Saudi Government's educational reforms were not being properly and consistently implemented.

Abdan (1991) conducted an interesting comparison between the Saudi public school system and the private school sector in relation to EFL delivery. Notably, private school students' initial exposure to EFL instruction takes place earlier – in primary school. Abdan's research found that public school students were outperformed by their private school counterparts. The latter's superior achievement was solely attributed to their longer exposure to EFL instruction. Why learners' age was ruled out as a contributing factor is unclear given voluminous literature showing consistent correlations between age of initial exposure to the L2 and learners' proficiency in that language (see, e.g., Bialystok 1997; Grimshaw et al. 1998; Johnson & Newport 1989; Long 1990; Moskovsky 2002; Oyama 1976; Scovel 1988; Thompson 1991, among many others). Neither is it quite clear whether the socio-economic differences between the two student cohorts were factored in; it is now well established that higher socio-economic status is typically linked to better academic performance.

Alhawsawi (2013) reviewed EFL-related institutional policies/practices including the specific structure of the EFL program in place, the use of English as a medium of instruction, EFL instructor recruitment practices, the teaching methodology, etc. Each of these was found to have a distinct influence on Saudi

EFL learners' learning experiences. For instance, Communicative Language Teaching was linked to a greater level of learner engagement and independent learning while the traditionally popular Grammar Translation Method fostered teacher-centeredness and lack of learner participation.

ICT in EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia

Saudi EFL research examining various aspects of the pedagogical use of information and communications technology (ICT) in EFL classrooms has been quite extensive and has generated a quite considerable number of theses/papers – perhaps more than any of the other topic areas. In view of the ever-increasing roles that the new digital media play in practically all professional and social domains this state of affairs should not be particularly surprising. Most of the Saudi sources reviewed here have taken a distinctly positive stance in relation to the pedagogical use of ICT and its potential benefits for learners. In Almudibry's (2012) comparative study of vocabulary learning, the experimental group was exposed to vocabulary instruction via computer-assisted language learning (CALL) while the control group received standard delivery. The CALL-trained learners achieved better scores on the post-test; they also reported more frequent use of word-solving strategies. H. Alotaibi (2009, 2010) revealed that use of computers in EFL reading classes improves learners' performance. Among the participants in Alshumaimeri and Almasri's (2012) study, EFL learners who used WebQuests were able to develop better reading skills than learners who did not. Abuseileek (2009) found that computer-based instruction of EFL grammar was particularly effective with more complex grammatical structures. In Alaboudi's (2014) research learners were required to prepare online blogs as part of their EFL writing class. This study in essence demonstrated that using an innovative form of instruction can have a motivating effect on learners making them more interested and engaged, and ultimately leading to better achievement. Al Fadda and Al Qasim (2013) explored the capacity of podcasting to improve learners' listening comprehension skills. According to Alshwairkh (2004), EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge can gain from extensive directed reading on the Internet. Mahdi and El-Naim (2012) explored the potential of informal Facebook-based interactions among EFL learners while Alwehaibi (2015) advocated using YouTube for content delivery to EFL learners. Almutairi (2014) applied a holistic analysis to task-based instruction involving tabletop technology. In their attempts to accomplish their tasks the participants in his study developed unique interactive systems which often included nonverbal communication.

Some of the findings are quite pervasive and consistent pointing to a range of distinct benefits of teachers' use of ICT for instructional purposes. ICT affords teachers a more diverse and comprehensive range of teaching/learning options (e.g., getting learners to produce a web-based blog as a way of encouraging learner writing). In addition, ICT is often linked to better learner engagement, and has been found to enable greater learner autonomy (Gamlo 2014). Literature on the use of ICT for EFL instruction is practically unanimous that EFL teachers

generally have very positive attitudes to ICT (Abalhassan 2002; Al-Asmari 2005; Al-Kahtani 2001; Almukhallafi 2014; Gamlo 2014; Mohsen & Shafeeq 2014), and most contributors to this area of research recognise the potential of the new digital technologies to improve L2 teaching and learning. As established by Al Shammari (2007), Saudi EFL learners also hold essentially positive attitudes to teachers' use of digital technology.

Regardless of all that, however, the level of actual ICT use inside Saudi EFL classrooms has reportedly been rather low (Al-Kahtani 2001). In fact, research has identified a number of pervasive constraints and obstacles to the integration of ICT into language instruction (Abalhassan 2002; Al-Furaydi 2013). Workplace access to suitable equipment and/or the Internet is typically very limited (Al-Asmari 2005; Al-Kahtani 2001). As pointed out by Abalhassan (2002), most teachers do not have sufficient theoretical and/or methodological grounding in the classroom implementation of digital technologies. Therefore, they often lack adequate confidence for using ICT, and are generally reluctant to allocate class time to ICT-related activities (Gamlo 2014); see also Alnujaidi (2008) for a review of the factors determining the adoption of web-based instruction. Most studies recognise that the majority Saudi EFL teachers are not adequately trained for ICT use, and recommend dedicated pre- and in-service training of EFL teachers in the pedagogical application of ICT (see, for instance, Aldosari 2014; Alotaibi 2010; Robertson & Al-Zahrani 2012, among many others). In addition, Almukhallafi (2014) called for redesigning language syllabi/curricula to include a greater orientation towards the use of digital technologies (see also Abuseileek 2007).

One very interesting and noteworthy dimension of ICT implementation in the EFL classroom, albeit not directly related to L2 learning/teaching, concerns the potential of the new digital technologies to overcome traditional cultural stereotypes and prejudices. Al-Salem (2005), for instance, explored the role of the internet in changing Saudi female EFL learners' social attitudes, in empowering Saudi females, and enabling them to broaden their social and cultural perspectives. S. Alanazy (2011) examined attitudes to mixed-gender cooperative online learning among Saudi students in the USA. The study's participants (representing both genders) reported positive attitudes to coeducational online education, and expressed the belief that it could successfully be adopted within the Saudi educational system. The capacity of technology to manage rather sensitive cultural constructs, such as gender, was also on display in Al-Saadat and Afifi's (1990) paper which described a situation in which – in order to deal with staff shortages – EFL instruction delivered by male teachers was broadcast via CCTV to female classes.

Even though most of the ICT-related research reviewed here has produced results which are favourable to the pedagogical use of digital technology, there are also a handful of studies which defy this trend. Alenezi, Karim, and Veloo (2010) found that many Saudi university students are reluctant to engage in e-learning – mostly as a consequence of computer anxiety. Al-Amri (2009) conducted a comparative analysis of computer-based and paper-based testing of EFL reading

comprehension skills. The different medium was not found to have any effect on the testing itself, on the scores, or on the test-takers' approach to the test (they used essentially the same test-taking strategies). In F. Alqurashi's (2005) research learners were exposed to collaborative learning in two modalities – face-to-face and web-based. No effect of modality was established in relation to learners' attitudes to collaborative learning, their social self-efficacy, and their perceived peer-support. There is also some evidence that in many cases online teaching platforms, such as Blackboard, are more often used for administrative management than for pedagogical purposes (Mohsen & Shafeeq 2014).

Before we conclude our review of ICT-related themes, a note of caution is in order. As pointed out at the beginning of this section, the interest that pedagogical applications of ICT have generated among Saudi EFL researchers is a reflection of the growing presence of the new digital technologies in all areas of our lives. But this interest may also at least in part be due to (tacit) beliefs that technology could be the key to a fast and effortless attainment of high L2 proficiency. Given what we know about the nature of L2 learning, such beliefs seem largely unwarranted. It is important to recognise that L2 learning is an extremely complex multidimensional cognitive process involving a broad spectrum of interrelated components of which technology is just one. It cannot reasonably be expected to produce spectacular results in and by itself. This is not to say that digital technology should be avoided or abandoned altogether by EFL instructors. As the research reviewed here has demonstrated, there are a range of undeniable benefits associated with the pedagogical use of ICT – not least its capacity to boost learners' self-efficacy and autonomy (AlMaghrabi 2012; Robertson & Al-Zahrani 2012). The latter is at least in part due to the immediate availability of an extremely broad range of ICT-based language learning resources – mostly but not only on the Internet – which learners can use to support their learning at little or no cost. One key question here is how EFL teachers, administrators, and policy makers can harness this potential to enhance language learners' learning opportunities and thus enable them to advance their TL competence.

Corrective feedback

Provision of corrective feedback (CF) constitutes a very important dimension of language instruction. There has been an ongoing debate on what forms CF should take, how much CF should be provided, what aspects of the learners' output should be targeted by CF. Not surprisingly, these questions have provoked a considerable amount of interest among Saudi EFL researchers. The available evidence indicates that most Saudi EFL teachers are unaware of the whole range of different CF types, and generally do not have a clear understanding of when or how CF should be provided (Althobaiti 2012). There is also some evidence that they may overestimate the amount of CF they actually provide to learners (Al-Enizi 2009). Interestingly, English native-speaking EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia may not be much better than local Saudi teachers in terms of their understanding of, and performance with, corrective feedback (Mosbah 2007).

The evidence also suggests that the type of correction that teachers tend to provide is largely limited to what can be described as 'surface structure' features of their learners' TL output – for instance, explicit correction of phonological errors (Althobaiti 2012) or explicit correction of grammar and vocabulary (Asiri 1997). Notably, even when following strict institutional guidelines teachers do not always provide systematic and consistent CF to their learners (Alshahrani & Storch 2014). Besides, the type of CF they commonly provide may not be in accord with learners' preferences and/or expectations (see also Hamouda 2011). On the positive side, Althobaiti's study also showed that dedicated training in CF provision can lead to marked improvement in teachers' provision of CF. Also on the positive side, expert provision of CF can promote learning, and can contribute to the development of a TL skill, as Barnawi (2010) demonstrated.

Research dealing with issues of Saudi EFL learning/learners

This constitutes a rather broad domain of EFL research examining biological, cognitive, social, psychological/affective, and environmental L2 learner variables.

Research on L2 motivation

As noted earlier, research on the role of psychological/affective factors in L2 acquisition – especially *motivation*, *attitudes*, and *anxiety* – has been particularly productive representing a quite considerable proportion of the Saudi EFL research effort in recent years. This is also where we find some of the most notable achievements. Take, for instance, Alrabai (2010) whose study of teachers' motivational strategies has most deservedly been described as groundbreaking (see also his contribution to this volume). Alrabai's research followed a recent trend in L2 motivation research examining classroom-specific aspects of motivation and designed to inform teachers' classroom practices (Cheng & Dörnyei 2007; Dörnyei 2001; Dörnyei 2007, p. 111; Dörnyei & Csizér 1998; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei 2008). Prior to Alrabai's study empirical research on the link between teachers' motivational behaviours in the classroom and their learners' learning motivation had been quite limited. Alrabai's was in fact the first controlled study to address this issue. Alrabai deployed a very rigorous pre-post intervention plus control protocol involving 14 teachers and nearly 300 Saudi EFL learners representing different levels of education and coming from geographically and demographically diverse regions of the country. The intervention involved using a set of pre-selected motivational strategies as part of EFL delivery in the experimental group while the control group was exposed to standard EFL instruction. The results of Alrabai's research showed a statistically significant increase in the motivation levels of the experimental group only, and can be seen as incontrovertible evidence of the capacity of teachers' motivational behaviours to cause enhanced motivation in their learners (see also Moskovsky et al. 2013).

A related study also deserving careful consideration is that of S. Alqahtani (2015). Alqahtani's research which was in many aspects a replication of Alrabai's study produced strong independent support for Alrabai's findings. Notably, Alqahtani went a step further; his study's protocol included an EFL proficiency measure which enabled him to demonstrate that teachers' motivating behaviours can ultimately contribute to learners' achievement – a finding of profound significance.

The importance of teachers as motivators is widely recognised. E. Alshehri's (2014) study supports the view that teachers are perhaps the most potent force for motivating learners inside the language classroom, but also reveals that not all teachers have a clear understanding of what drives learning in their learners, and as a result are unable to come up with the motivational strategies which would suit their learners best. This study is of particular interest because it offers a relatively rare perspective of teachers' motivational behaviours – from the learners' point of view.

Some Saudi motivation-related research has been inspired by Zoltan Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) highly influential L2 Motivational Self System theory. In Dörnyei's theory motivation is conceptualised as the product of the interplay between the learner's *ideal self* (the learner's idealised perfect image of himself) and their *ought-to self* (an image determined by the learner's social environment's expectations of him); the learner's specific language learning experience is also seen as a formative factor in relation to motivation. In a strongly growing body of empirical research on the L2 Motivational Self System theory, motivation has commonly been operationalised in terms of learners' *intended learning behaviour*, and a considerable proportion of the research effort has been devoted to establishing the capacity of Dörnyei's self-guides to predict *learners' intentions* to learn the L2 – with often a tacit assumption that high learning intentions unavoidably lead to higher achievement. A number of studies (some of them involving large participant samples) have produced evidence in support of the self-guides' influence on learning intentions. A notable Saudi study which produced similar results was Almuaawi (2013 although see A. Alqahtani 2015 for dissenting findings). However, as Assulaimani (2015) correctly pointed out, *intended learning behaviour* may not necessarily be translated into *actual learning behaviour*, and does not automatically lead to higher L2 achievement. Moskovsky and Alrabai's (2009) study is noteworthy in relation to this – its results showed that Saudi learners of English generally hold positive attitudes to the target language and its speakers, and that they typically have positive learning intentions. However, these do not seem to be reflected in actual achievement – there is very wide agreement, even consensus, that on average Saudi EFL learners achieve well below what is expected.

In practical terms, however, very little else matters – higher achievement is what both learners and their teachers are ultimately after. A theory's relevance in relation to a language-learning variable – in this case, motivation – therefore lies in its capacity to link this variable to achievement. This was in fact the key objective of Assulaimani's (2015) research – to examine the extent to which Dörnyei's

self-guides are linked to, and can predict, L2 achievement (operationalised in terms of L2 proficiency). As far as learners' learning intentions are concerned, Assulaimani's results were in accord with previous research – the self-guides in Assulaimani's participant sample were indeed linked to higher intended efforts. In relation to L2 achievement, however, his study's findings were quite unexpected. The self-guides were shown to only marginally predict achievement, and even this was not in the desired direction – high self-guides were linked to low achievement (and vice versa) (see also Moskovsky et al. 2016).

Another noteworthy Saudi study examining Dörnyei's self-guides was A. Alqahtani (2015). It involved participants from the same linguistic, sociocultural, and educational background as those in Assulaimani's research. Even though A. Alqahtani did not use L2 achievement as a criterion variable, his research did relate the self-guides to actual behaviour – namely Saudi learners' level of engagement in intercultural contact. The results suggest that the self-guides were generally a poor predictor of learners' intercultural engagement – considerably less so than a range of other social, cultural, and personal factors. A. Alqahtani's findings reinforce the point that the capacity of L2 Motivational Self System theory's components to predict learners' intentions cannot automatically be extended to actual behaviour.

Given that Assulaimani's has been one of very few studies of the L2 Motivational Self System theory which have used a measure of L2 proficiency as an independent criterion, it would be inappropriate to draw very definitive conclusions about Dörnyei's theory on its results alone. Nevertheless the results unequivocally point to the need for more research on the link between the self-guides and achievement – ideally involving a range of diverse sociocultural and educational contexts.

Assulaimani's research also strongly reinforces the importance of treating motivation as a highly dynamic construct – one which is quite sensitive to a broad range of learner-internal and learner-external variables, not just the self-guides (A. Alqahtani 2015), and which is subject to regular shifts and fluctuations (Alzayid 2012). Changes in learner motivation overtime were indeed established by AlMaiman (2005) whose study showed a distinct decline in the motivation of Saudi Year 7 schoolchildren after one year of exposure to English instruction. In relation to this, Al Shaye's (2014) research requires attention. Al Shaye examined differences in motivation among Saudi school students representing two different age groups – Year 9 and Year 12. The study found that at different points in time learners had different goals and, as a consequence, different motivational orientations. The author concluded that it would be incorrect to treat motivation as a static, stable, durable, and essentially unchanging trait.

Most experts on L2 motivation acknowledge the capacity of learners' learning experience to influence learners' motivation (Dörnyei 2005, 2009; Gardner 1985). Ghaith and Diab (2008) emphasised the importance of creating a friendly and sociable classroom atmosphere because it supports learner confidence and contributes to higher motivation. Alhawsawi (2013) established three categories of factors affecting learners' learning experience and, by extension, motivation also. One of the categories was defined as 'institutional' covering

policy and administration. The second category concerned the learners' family background – particularly parents' level of education; learners with at least one highly educated parent tended to be more engaged in learning and generally more highly motivated. The third category involved pedagogical aspects of language delivery; the specific language teaching methodology learners were exposed to – communicative teaching vs. grammar-translation – had substantial effects, positive or negative, on learners' engagement, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and – ultimately – motivation.

Shoaib's (2004) research seems to have taken a rather unusual angle in examining the motivation of teachers (rather than learners), and attempting to identify the factors which motivate or de-motivate Saudi EFL teachers. One of the study's key findings was that teachers' motivation often suffers from a conflict between teachers' strong commitment to their job as EFL instructors and a range of administrative and institutional obstacles with which they have to deal on a regular basis.

Fodah (2013) conducted a comparative study trying to establish the extent to which context – EFL vs. ESL – can determine motivation. In the latter, learners are immersed in the target language community while in the former they are among their L1 community. The results point to a slightly higher motivation for the ESL cohort. Relatively minor differences were established in relation to the prevailing motivational orientations in the two groups – with a stronger instrumental orientation found in the EFL cohort. Alnatheer (2013) also revealed a link between context and motivation – her ESL cohort (study abroad, in Australia) were found to have higher levels of motivation by comparison with the EFL cohort (learning English at home, in Saudi Arabia). Perhaps not entirely unexpectedly, the ESL cohort in her study demonstrated considerably higher levels of communicative competence.

In light of Alfawzan's (2012) findings, instrumental motivation is likely to be the dominating type of motivation among Saudis learning English in Saudi Arabia, not somewhere overseas. Such learners perceive English competence as particularly beneficial in relation to career building and professional advancement. The study's participants reported a strong desire to attain high levels of English proficiency on that basis.

Research on L2 attitudes

Most L2 motivation theories recognise language *attitudes* as an important antecedent of motivation (see, for instance, Gardner 1985 among many others). It should come as no surprise that the attitudes variable has attracted a considerable amount of attention among Saudi researchers, and here again some notable achievements can be reported. Among them Alrahaili's (2014) research stands out (see also his contribution to this volume). This study is very interesting for a number of reasons. In contrast to most other attitudinal research in the L2 field, Alrahaili's study went beyond just examining the language attitudes of a specific group of L2 learners and tried to establish the factors responsible for the formation of prevailing EFL attitudes in the Saudi context. Alrahaili conceptualised language

attitudes as falling into two distinct and quite different categories: (1) attitudes to the TL, the TL speakers, and the TL culture, and (2) attitudes to the learning situation (including attitudes to the teacher, the textbook, the available learning resources, the classroom dynamics, peer relationships, etc.). One very insightful and original idea in Alrahaili's research was that the factors which generate the two categories of attitudes are essentially different – TL attitudes are determined by social-psychological constructs like *in-group identification*, *para-social contact*, *in-group contact*, and perceived *out-group threats*, while attitudes to the learning situation are largely based on learners' *beliefs about language learning*. Another outstanding aspect of Alrahaili's research was using a well-established theory from social psychology – Stephan and Stephan's (1996) Integrated Threat Theory – as the conceptual basis of the social-psychological predictors of L2 attitudes. Because of that Alrahaili's (2014) contributions to the field go well beyond the wealth of empirical data which the study produced and have important implications for both the theory and practice of attitudinal research in EFL and applied linguistics.

The Saudi community is a socially conservative one in which religion (Islam) plays a dominant role. Some research has been conducted to establish the extent to which religion influences community attitudes to English and EFL learning. Aldosari (1992) collected attitudinal data from a relatively large participant sample representing three different groups: EFL learners, EFL teachers, and religious officials. While teachers and learners were found to be overwhelmingly positive, even enthusiastic, in relation to teaching and learning English, religious officials were either reserved about, or distinctly against, the provision of English language education in Saudi Arabia. Much more recently Alswuail (2015) examined the effects of cultural and religious factors on EFL learners' engagement in the Saudi context. Her participant sample was a bit smaller than the one used by Aldosari, but represented the same three social categories. In Alswuail's study learners and teachers were likewise found to hold very positive attitudes to English and to English learning, and – as far the learners were concerned – their attitudes were found to be positively correlated with engagement. A major difference between the two studies emerged in relation to the representatives of religion – in Alswuail's study they too reported essentially positive attitudes to English learning. This looks like a very significant finding, perhaps reflective of a more general cultural shift within the Saudi community since the time of the earlier study – one which only dedicated future research would be in a position to establish conclusively. It is interesting to note, however, Faruk's (2014b) broad review of Saudi attitudinal research showing an increase in positive attitudes to English among Saudi learners. The author has attributed this to the Saudi Government reformist policy in relation to English education which has involved the gradual expansion of English instruction in Saudi public schools.

Research on L2 anxiety

In the 1980s Elaine Horwitz posited a language-specific type of anxiety – Foreign Language Anxiety (Horwitz 1986) – which has generated a considerable amount

of research since then including a number of Saudi studies. Aljafen (2013) found that Saudi EFL learners experience writing anxiety for a range of reasons – they perceive their L2 competence as inadequate, they lack self-confidence, and they are strongly intimidated by the prospects of tests/exams. In Al-Saraj's (2014) examination of language anxiety among female Arab learners the teacher was identified as the principal source of anxiety for learners.

Within the realm of anxiety research, Alrabai's (2015) study is particularly noteworthy. Using Horwitz's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), Alrabai first tested over 500 Saudi EFL learners for levels and types of anxiety. Then he designed a set of anxiety-reducing strategies specifically targeting the prevailing types of language anxiety established earlier among the participating learners through the application of the FLCAS. These strategies were then used by teachers in the classroom as part of an experimental eight-week treatment of one group of just over 230 Saudi EFL learners. An equally sized and suitably matched control group was not exposed to any anxiety-reducing strategies. Anxiety-related data collected with the FLCAS pre- and post-treatment revealed a substantial reduction of anxiety levels in the experimental group while the control group actually experienced a rise in the level of anxiety. These findings add to a growing body of evidence demonstrating teachers' capacity to guide learners' affective states and thus ensure optimal learning outcomes.

Research on the relationship between affect and L2 achievement

A handful of studies have focussed on the effect of several affective variables – individually and/or together – on L2 achievement. Makrami (2010) considered learners' motivation, anxiety, and attitudes, and found that these all significantly correlated with L2 achievement. Among other results, the study also established a decline in positive TL attitudes overtime. M. Al-Qahtani (2013) examined a relatively broad range of learner variables and their relationship with L2 achievement (operationalised in terms of English course grades). The paper found significant correlations between participating Medical Science students' EFL achievement and their age, age of initial exposure to English instruction, motivation, and general academic achievement.

Most research on learners' affective variables has been cross-sectional in nature typically involving a single collection of data. Alrabai and Moskovsky's (2016) study broke away from this model by including a longitudinal dimension to their design – data were collected from just over 250 Saudi EFL university students in two waves, three months apart. The study's main objective was to determine the effects of five affective variables – *motivation*, *attitudes*, *anxiety*, *self-esteem*, and *autonomy* (together and individually) – on L2 achievement. Alrabai and Moskovsky's findings went beyond just confirming the importance of affect in the learning of second/foreign languages. The study's design enabled it to generate data which few studies of this kind had been able to produce previously. The authors were able to establish the specific effects of the five affective variables on L2 achievement relative to each other. In addition, the study's longitudinal

data produced evidence with regard to the relative durability of these effects. The results from the analyses showed that the five affective variables together (i.e., as a composite construct) were responsible for between 85% and 91% of the variance in the participants' L2 performance. Their individual contribution to achievement, however, was very far from equal – among the five included in the study, motivation claimed 'the lion's share'. Motivation was in fact the only variable among the five whose effects remained statistically significant overtime. By comparison, the individual effects of the other four affective variables can be described as marginal. This seemed particularly true of *anxiety* which was shown to have the weakest predictive capacity among all.

Other research on affect

There is wide acknowledgment among relevant stakeholders (including researchers, teachers, and learners) of Saudi EFL learners' general lack of autonomy (see, for instance, Alfallaj 1998 and Alsaedi 2012 among many others) although dedicated research on issues of learner autonomy has until recently been rather limited. Major inroads into the study of Saudi EFL learners' autonomy/independence have been made by Alrabai (2016, 2017). His 2016 research examined – using quite a sizeable participant sample – the relationship between learner autonomy and EFL achievement. The 2017 study's main objective was to establish the level of Saudi EFL learners' readiness for autonomous/independent learning. The results of both studies reveal rather low levels of learner autonomy among this population of learners – with significant pedagogical, psychological, and cognitive implications. Take EFL pedagogy, for instance; there is a large body of evidence showing that some teaching methods – particularly communicative approaches – have a much greater capacity to promote learner autonomy than others, such as Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual (Alhawsawi 2013; Gamlo 2014).

A closely related area is that of *learner beliefs*. Alsamaani (2014) deployed Horwitz's (1987) *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* to establish that the prevailing beliefs about EFL learning among Saudi learners are generally positive and realistic. The author advocated aligning EFL instruction with learner beliefs. Abdel Razek (2012) showed that learners' self-efficacy beliefs, their perception of success, and their capacity for cultural adjustment to the cultural norms of the host community are important contributors to academic achievement.

In summary, Saudi EFL research on L2 affective variables has been particularly fruitful and has produced a number of outstanding studies making an undeniable contribution to the general field of L2 acquisition – both in terms of providing a wealth of valuable data and in terms of enhancing L2 acquisition theory and L2 methodology. Saudi research on L2 affective variables has revealed that Saudi EFL learners generally hold quite positive attitudes both to the TL and to the TL speakers although there is a clear recognition that at least some aspects of the TL culture may be incompatible with Saudi culture and with Islamic norms and traditions. Research in this area has also produced converging results in relation

to Saudi EFL learners' motivation. More specifically, motivation-related research has provided evidence that on average Saudi EFL learners have strong learning intentions, but these are often not converted into actual efforts and – by extension – to achievement. All authors are practically unanimous in their recognition that Saudi learners do not achieve as highly as one could expect given the amount of exposure to English instruction they get via the public school system, as well as through university and through various private providers. Therein lies, in our view, the challenge for future research – especially on motivation: To try and establish the reasons why with a quite significant number of Saudi EFL learners positive attitudes and high learning intentions are not translated into actual efforts and (higher) achievement. One thing seems certain though – teachers are in a position to play a critical role in that regard.

Research on issues in relation to the learners' native language (L1)

Use of L1 in the classroom

One question which has long been the source of heated polemic is whether the learners' L1 should completely be banned from the language classroom, or whether L1 use (by either teachers or learners, or both) should be allowed to one degree or another. Classroom use of the learners' L1 is an issue that almost exclusively concerns foreign (rather than second) language contexts, i.e., situations in which the learners' (and teachers') L1 is the (mainstream) community language. For obvious reasons it is quite unlikely to occur in second language contexts where in the most typical case a native-speaking teacher teaches a linguistically diverse group of learners. It is also necessary to bear in mind that the use of L1 is essentially a classroom management issue – in other words, one which is entirely within the teacher's discretion.

As far as English delivery is concerned, Saudi Arabia constitutes a very typical foreign language context. The use of Arabic inside the EFL classroom is quite common – by learners and teachers alike (Alkatheery 2014; Almulhim 2001) – and is by far not limited to low-proficiency learners (Storch & Aldosari 2010). In view of that, it is not surprising that the issue of the classroom use of L1 has generated a considerable amount of interest among Saudi EFL researchers. A number of studies have attempted to establish whether teachers' use of L1 follows a specific pattern, when and how it occurs, and whether it can be linked to specific pedagogical functions (Almuhayya 2015; Almulhim 2001; M. Alshammari 2011; Khresheh 2012; Storch & Aldosari 2010). There seems to be wide agreement that teachers most frequently resort to the L1 for two reasons: (1) to explain the meaning of new TL lexemes (typically via offering an L1 translation equivalent), and (2) to clarify language tasks and/or activities which learners are required to undertake. It is interesting to note that L2 learners tend to use the L1 for very similar functions – for task management and for negotiation of lexical meaning (Storch & Aldosari 2010).

Within the Saudi EFL context the use of the L1 as part of classroom learning seems to be perceived quite positively by learners and teachers alike (Al-Nofaie 2010). Indeed, there seems to be a widely held belief that L1 can be a facilitator of, not necessarily an obstacle to, learning the TL (M. Alshammari 2011). However, at least as far as Alseweed's (2013) research is concerned, these beliefs may not have a sound empirical/experimental foundation. In Alseweed's study, learners exposed to instruction on the English passive voice in their native language were outperformed by learners whose instruction was strictly delivered in English.

One particularly noteworthy study – albeit, relatively small-scale – is that of Bindayel (2014). It examined three different classroom situations – one in which the L1 was extensively used; another one which only involved limited use of the L1; and a third one in which English was exclusively used. The author claimed that the study's results undermine the influential 'English-only' view and strongly endorse the pedagogical value of limited use of L1. The study's small participant sample and its essentially descriptive methodology deny its findings the conclusiveness that one would ideally like to see in a research of this type.

Research on L1 transfer

The concept of language *transfer* became a key part of L2 acquisition theory with the emergence of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and more generally the establishment of behaviourism as the dominating framework in the domain of language and language acquisition. Among CAH's central tenets was the view that the learners' L1, the mother tongue, exerts a powerful influence on their interlanguage (IL) system. Likewise widespread was the view that the typological differences between L1 and L2 determine various aspects of L2 acquisition including the types of errors a learner makes (or does not make), the ease or difficulty of attaining specific L2 structures, etc.

Behaviourism remained a dominant force in the language domain for several decades – until the 1960s and early 1970s – when it gradually became clear that this theory's capacity to adequately explain language-related phenomena is rather limited. This coincided with the rise of nativism in linguistics (whose most prominent and best-known proponent is Chomsky). The advent of nativism led to a strong philosophical shift in L2 theory whereby CAH and transfer came to be regarded as largely or even completely compromised because of their behaviourist underpinnings. In the following 20 or 30 years most research was conducted on the premise that the learners' L1 is not a significant factor in L2 acquisition and that its effects on the learners' IL system are at best negligible.

It deserves to be said that this position has probably been ideologically motivated rather than grounded in empirical fact. Nativist L2 theories typically assume that the same highly specialised cognitive apparatus which is responsible for language acquisition in early childhood – Universal Grammar (UG) – is equally (and, perhaps, solely) responsible for the acquisition of second/foreign languages (e.g., Cook 1993; Cook & Newson 1996; Epstein, Flynn & Martohardjono

1996; White 1996; White & Genesee 1996 among many others). A UG hypothesis, therefore, in and by itself rules out *transfer* as a relevant L2 construct. Allowing for the possibility that transfer takes place would significantly weaken the UG hypothesis, but would be very much in accord with the Fundamental Difference hypothesis (Bley-Vroman 1989; Clahsen & Muysken 1986; Eckman 1996; Moskovsky & Berghout 2001; Schachter 1988, 1990, 1996).

In the meantime there has actually been a growing body of evidence of a rather wide range of different L1 effects on learners' ILs suggesting that the learners' native language does affect, and even determine, various aspects of both the process of L2 acquisition and its product – the emerging TL competence (Bialystok & Hakuta 1994; Coppieters 1987; Eckman 1977; Han 2000; Kellerman 1979; Moskovsky 2002; Ringbom 1987; Schachter 1974). As a matter of fact, quite a number of the Saudi EFL studies examined for the current review have added further substance to this body of evidence. Take, for instance, R. Alruwaili (2013) whose research revealed distinct L1 effects on temporal and aspectual constructions in Saudi EFL learners' interlanguage grammars. In the author's own words, Saudi EFL learners' performance with preterite vs. present perfect forms 'was constrained by their L1 grammar' (p. ii). Many other studies – while not specifically investigating transfer – have nevertheless produced evidence demonstrating one or another aspect of L1's influence on the interlanguage system. A brief summary of their findings is provided below.

Al-Mansour's (2004) research revealed that early stages of L2 lexical development involve mapping to L1 translation equivalents (see also Owaidah 1991). Khojah (2013) likewise produced unequivocal evidence of transfer in the lexical field, particularly with regard to figurative expressions. Banjar's (2014) examination of EFL learners' knowledge of idioms produced very similar results indicating that Saudi learners favour English idioms whose composition is identical or similar to corresponding Arabic idioms. Al-Sindy's (1994) examination of Saudi EFL learners' writing found plenty of evidence of L1 transfer including frequent errors with English verbal tenses, copulas, auxiliaries, articles, and prepositions (see also Al-Rawi 2012). In a study specifically exploring the acquisition of English articles, Almahboob (2009) found evidence that learners transfer properties of the Arabic (L1) definite article to their TL output. (For similar results involving L1 transfer on articles, see Alhaysony 2012). Alshayban's (2012) analysis of frequent copula omission in Saudi EFL learners' TL production suggested that it was due to L1 transfer (see also Al-Rawi 2012). Again at the level of the syntax, L1 transfer was the determining factor for Saudi EFL learners' use of pronominal copies with English relative clauses (Maghrabi 1997).

L1 influences on the L2 are often particularly evident in the phonological system. A number of studies have reported findings confirming that L2 phonemes which lack a (close) L1 equivalent can be the source of sometimes significant pronunciation problems for L2 learners (T. Alharbi 2013; Almuhaya 2013; Alotaibi 2013).

Last but not least, Saudi research has produced evidence of cultural/pragmatic transfer in Saudi EFL learners' TL performance (see Salameh's 2001 study of compliment responses).

In conclusion, we seem to have reached a point when a re-evaluation of the field's attitude to L1 transfer is called for. The available evidence strongly suggests that, even though the original behaviourist underpinnings of transfer may have been ill-suited for the (second) language domain, the concept of *L1 transfer* (as a construct denoting L1's influence on L2 acquisition) is highly relevant and one which certainly deserves more dedicated research.

Research examining aspects of Saudi learners' interlanguage system

There is now a relatively long-standing and well-established line of research in the field of L2 acquisition typically referred to as *interlanguage studies*. It is premised on the understanding that learning a second/foreign language as an adult is a function of a rather broad variety of interrelated and interacting biological, psychological, cognitive, and social factors (including age, aptitude, motivation, attitudes, etc.) (Doughty & Long 2008). Among other things, scholars pursing this line of research examine the grammatical properties of learners' interlanguage (IL) systems, and attempt to link these properties to various learner-internal and learner-external variables.

We find some IL-related type of research within the Saudi context too. A handful of the studies – all conducted in the 1990s – are notable for examining properties of the process of EFL acquisition while most of the others have considered specific aspects/features of the grammatical systems of Saudi EFL learners' interlanguages. Al-Afaleg (1991) attempted to determine – in line with the Krashen tradition of the 1970s (see, e.g., Bailey, Madden & Krashen 1974) – the order in which Saudi learners acquire eight English grammatical morphemes. The project involved collecting data via an error recognition test and a cloze test from 230 Saudi EFL learners representing four different levels of proficiency. Comparisons were drawn with morpheme studies in ESL contexts (Saudi Arabia is an EFL context) and some differences were identified with regard to how these grammatical morphemes are acquired. Again, in line with the Krashen tradition, no L1 effects were found in the learners' performance on the two tasks (but see our discussion of L1 transfer above). Al-Afaleg's findings should be treated with caution. It is important to bear in mind that his work suffered from the same conceptual and methodological weaknesses as the earlier morpheme order studies effectively treating accuracy/difficulty orders (from a grammatical task) as acquisition orders; but quite clearly they are not the same. The study did not have a longitudinal dimension and because of that no developmental inferences could be made in relation to the subjects' interlanguages.

Al-Banyan (1996) deserves particular attention because it is the only study in our sample which examined the process of L2 acquisition with reference to a specific second language acquisition theory – Universal Grammar. This study is also quite interesting because it collected data from two different cohorts of L2 learners – Arabic-speaking learners of English and English-speaking learners of Arabic. Al-Banyan's results only support a partial access-to-UG hypothesis.

Two other studies focussing on developmental aspects of EFL acquisition are Alfarraj (1995) and Noor (1993). Taking a functional approach and using a 'function-to-form' analysis, Alfarraj (1995) examined the developmental patterns of Saudi EFL learners' acquisition of English tense and aspect. Noor (1993) revealed that the process of acquiring EFL temporal conjunctions is quite similar to the process observed in first-language acquirers.

As mentioned above, most of the other studies in this category have looked at a specific IL feature/property including IL phonology and morpho-syntax. In a study examining aspects of IL phonology, T. Alharbi (2013) established that – regardless of their length of exposure to English instruction – Saudi learners experienced difficulties with syllable-final English nasal contrasts; these difficulties were linked to phonological differences between English (the TL) and Arabic (the learners' L1) – specifically the absence of some TL phonemes from the L1 phonological system. *Markedness* was also found to contribute to learning difficulties especially at earlier stages of acquisition. Almuhaya's (2013) research confirmed that L2 phonemes which lack a (close) L1 equivalent can be the source of sometimes significant pronunciation problems for L2 learners. Esshali (2013) revealed that English consonantal clusters in word-initial position are particularly challenging for Saudi EFL learners (see also Ahmad 2011). In Alotaibi's (2013) research learners experienced serious difficulties in producing the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ especially in word-final position (see also Binturki 2008); the phonological system of Arabic – the learners' L1 – only includes a voiceless version of that phoneme. Learners' age and their length of exposure to the TL were both found to be correlated with accuracy of performance of /v/. Again L1 transfer was assumed to be the determining factor. In a somewhat different vein, Shehadeh (1999) explored the benefits of L2 output modification by EFL learners and their interlocutors with respect to achieving a higher level of comprehensibility in the TL.

The English article system has long been recognised as particularly challenging for L2 learners of English. Saudi learners' acquisition of the English article system has received some attention. Alenizi (2013) investigated learners' knowledge of four non-generic uses of the English definite article. The study found, somewhat predictably, that more advanced learners performed more competently with all four non-generic article categories (see also Al-Rawi 2012). Almahboob (2009) produced evidence indicating (among other things) that in their TL output Saudi learners tended to transfer properties of the Arabic (L1) definite article to all situations involving definiteness. Alhaysony (2012) deployed error analysis to analyse Saudi female learners' use of English articles revealing frequent incorrect omissions of the indefinite article and frequent incorrect suppliance of the definite article. Most of these errors were attributed to L1 transfer.

Interlanguages can be highly individualised involving a lot of inter-learner variation, but common grammatical features can be found in the interlanguages of learners representing the same L1 background. Al-Rawi (2012) identified three grammatical features of the interlanguage of Saudi EFL learners which were found to occur in their TL output with a high level of frequency. These included copula deletion, irregular use of articles, and omission of present tense marking.

Once again L1 transfer was identified as the most likely source of all three of these features. Alshayban's (2012) research on copula omission produced very similar findings.

More generally Mahboob and Elyas (2014) determined that Saudi English is mostly based on standard varieties of English, but in addition it also involves some distinctly Saudi features reflecting local social, cultural, and religious norms and beliefs.

Research on the four major language skills

As is now widely accepted, language competence involves four distinct skills – listening, reading, writing, and speaking – each with its own rather specific properties. Most experts also agree that each of these can individually be targeted for instruction and that each can evolve in a relatively separate and autonomous fashion. In view of this it makes sense to conduct research designed to examine the acquisition of each of these skills separately and independently of the others.

Research on EFL listening comprehension

Not much attention seems to have been given to issues of EFL listening comprehension. One of a rather small handful of studies (Al Fadda & Al Qasim 2013) has been reviewed within the ICT section of this chapter. Two others include Altuwairesh (2013) and Hamouda (2012). The former revealed that metacognitive instruction can be contribute to the development of learners' EFL listening comprehension skills and emphasised the benefits of deliberate practice of EFL listening. Hamouda (2012) identified a range of learner-external and learner-internal factors which can affect Saudi EFL learners' listening comprehension capacity. The learner-external factors included the interlocutor's rate of speech, their regional accent, sound quality, etc. Among the learner-internal factors limited EFL vocabulary competence, diminished concentration, and enhanced anxiety were found to reduce learners' listening comprehension.

Research on EFL reading skills

Unlike listening comprehension, reading as a skill has generated quite a lot of interest among Saudi EFL researchers. Some of the research on EFL reading skills has tried to establish the specific factors/conditions which promote the development of this aspect of L2 competence. L. Alharbi (2008) found that cooperative learning is linked to better reading performance and to more positive language attitudes among learners. Alroomy (2013) likewise explored the capacity of group work (*collaborative strategic reading* in his terms) to improve learners' reading comprehension. Participating learners did report an improvement in reading ability although observation and interview data were not linked to actual achievement data, and because of that the self-reported improvement cannot be verified independently. Alshumaimeri (2011) demonstrated that reading aloud is

a more efficient mode of developing reading ability than silent or sub-vocalised reading. Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009) claimed that extensive reading has an equal or even greater capacity than intensive reading to facilitate the development of reading ability.

Al-Fallay (1994) established that L2 texts that are thematically, stylistically, culturally, and conceptually aligned with the learners' background/culture are easier to process, which facilitates better comprehension and generally improves learning outcomes. Abanomey (2002) likewise underscored the importance of learners' background knowledge in relation to their capacity to comprehend written text. Al-Samani (1999) identified several categories of variables (e.g., psychological, cultural, and linguistic) which can cause learners to experience difficulties in L2 reading. These included insufficient learner motivation (commonly associated with lack of adequate parental support/encouragement), differences between the learners' local culture and the TL culture, as well as linguistic/orthographic differences between L1 and L2. The latter, according to Al-Arfaj (1996), were in fact at the core of Saudi EFL learners' reading difficulties. H. Alshammari (2013) examined the effects of time constraints on reading comprehension and found – not entirely unexpectedly – that the more time learners have, the better they perform.

A couple of studies have considered the relationship between learners' reading ability in their native language and their L2 reading skills. The results suggest that high L1 literacy is often linked to higher L2 literacy (Alhoshan 2014) and that L2 learners' L1 reading ability can be a good predictor of their L2 reading performance – especially for more advanced learners (Mushait 2004). It is interesting to note similar findings in relation to EFL writing (see Aljamhoor 1996 and Alnofal 2003 below).

Among the studies examining the four major skills quite a lot of attention has been devoted to establishing the potential benefits of learning strategies. Saudi EFL learners' have generally been found to be moderate users of learning strategies; higher frequency of strategy use is related to higher L2 proficiency; likewise, more highly motivated learners are likelier to use strategies more (Al-Otaibi 2004; Javid, Al-Thubaiti & Uthman 2013, but also see S. Alharbi 2011 whose research found no link between learners' frequency of strategy use and their L2 proficiency level).

Research on the utility of reading strategies has produced mixed findings. Saudi EFL teachers seem to hold distinctly positive views of the benefits of providing learners with dedicated explicit instruction of reading strategies. The participants in Alsamadani's (2012) research particularly favoured cognitive reading strategies, but were generally unaware of metacognitive strategies. Similar results were obtained in Bamanger and Gashan's (2014) research involving Saudi in-service EFL teachers. Some support for the capacity of reading strategies to facilitate the development of reading skills can be found in Alsamadani (2011). S. Madkhali (2005), on the other hand, established that dedicated training in two reading strategies led to no significant improvement in reading ability by comparison with the learners who received no strategy training. In Al Rasheed's (2014) research participating learners were exposed to two pre-reading strategies – vocabulary

pre-teaching and pre-questioning. Both seemed to produce positive results although the study's design did not involve a control condition and because of that it is impossible to know if the reported benefits can strictly be explained with reference to the learners' exposure to reading strategies. Ismail and Tawalbeh (2015) demonstrated the utility of dedicated instruction of metacognitive reading strategies as a way of enhancing low-proficiency learners' reading skills. The study's results are notable because it involved an experimental pre-/post-test design. Al-Melhi (1999) found a link between learners' L2 proficiency level and the number and type of reading strategies they used. A similar link has been unveiled in relation to vocabulary learning strategies (Al-Jabri 2005) and to EFL learning more generally (Alhaisoni 2012). At least one study (Alsafi 2015) explored the relationship between learners' test-taking strategies on reading comprehension tests and their specific learning style.

Research on EFL writing skills

EFL writing as a skill has also generated a substantial amount of research in the Saudi field and again there has been a considerable focus on the factors/conditions promoting the development of this skill. Othman (2014) found that the nature of the writing task – narrative, argumentative, or personal information – holds significant implications for the written output's syntactic complexity and accuracy. Interestingly, there was some disagreement between teachers and learners with regard to which of the three writing tasks was the most challenging one – narrative (learners) or argumentative (teachers). A. Fageeh (2003) considered EFL learners' perceived difficulties in EFL writing. The study's participants reported that they were only provided with very limited opportunities to engage in writing activities and they were generally dissatisfied with the quality of the training they received in EFL writing. Jahin (2012) found that Saudi EFL learners' quality of writing improves when learners engage in peer-reviewing each other's compositions. It is noteworthy that those of the participating learners who were involved in peer-reviewing reported lower levels of anxiety. In Mahmoud's (2014) study the use of a cooperative language learning approach to develop Saudi EFL learners' L2 writing skills only led to a marginal improvement.

Somewhat surprisingly very few of the studies on EFL writing have in fact collected and analysed actual writing samples. One notable exception was Hamdan (2015) examining the use of deictic expressions in EFL writing. Another exception was the much earlier Farghal (1992) who specifically looked at issues of cohesion in the EFL writing of Saudi learners.

Again we find a couple of studies comparing EFL learners' L1 and L2 writing skills. In Aljamhoor's (1996) research rhetorical and linguistic differences between Arabic and English were among the strongest determinants of writing difficulties in the L2. Alnofal (2003) specifically looked at properties of the writing process in both L1 and L2. No significant differences were discovered in relation to the 'while-writing' process although some differences emerged in the pre- and post-writing processes. Participants also reported

differences in the nature and volume of training they had received for writing in the two languages.

As we have seen with the other language skills, a big proportion of the research was devoted to studying writing strategies – again with mixed findings. Alkubaidi's (2014) results deny a link between learners' proficiency level and their use of writing strategies. No link was discovered between learners' learning style and strategy use, either. In Okasha and Hamdi (2014)'s research learners who received dedicated training in writing strategies showed a small improvement in writing skill compared to those who did not get any strategic training. Alharthi (2012) established that only already highly skilled EFL writers planned their writing globally or locally. Alhaysony's (2008) research is noteworthy because it involved a comparative examination of Saudi EFL learners' writing strategies both in L1 and L2 writing. The study found that participants deployed essentially the same range of writing strategies when undertaking a writing task in either language although less skilled writers tended to do this in a rather intuitive, unplanned, and quite often not consciously rationalised manner.

Research on EFL speaking skills

Issues of the attainment of EFL speaking skills have not for some reason been given much consideration and we have only been able to find just a handful of studies devoted to examining Saudi EFL learners' English-speaking skills. Most of these have emphasised that as a foreign language context Saudi Arabia provides learners with few opportunities for communicative use of the L2 outside of the language classroom (H. Alharbi 2015; Almeniei 2005; Hasan 2003). As it seems, Saudi EFL learners do not get many opportunities to speak the TL inside the classroom, either. By way of addressing this, R. Alghamdi (2014) recommended using cooperative learning arguing it can improve the quality of verbal interaction between learners and can lead to higher communicative competence. Almeniei (2005) revealed that classroom communication was mostly one-sided – from teacher to learners, and that while EFL instruction generally promoted grammatical accuracy and lexical competence it did not encourage language use and/or facilitate TL fluency. H. Alharbi (2015) argued that significant improvement in learners' communicative competence would be impossible to achieve without some relatively large-scale educational reforms designed to introduce teaching methods promoting learner autonomy, problem solving, and critical thinking skills. The author advocated bilingual education because of its well-established capacity to develop high TL proficiency including speaking skills.

Research on EFL vocabulary acquisition

Vocabulary acquisition seems to have provoked considerable interest among Saudi EFL researchers and has generated quite a lot of vocabulary-related research – more so than any of the other principal language skills. A number of vocabulary-related studies have investigated the acquisition of TL collocations,

lexical bundles, idiomatic expressions, figurative expressions, etc. (Alasmary 2014; Al-Zahrani 1998; Fattani 2013; Khojah 2013; Sonbul 2012). Some of these found clear L1 effects on lexical knowledge of this type (e.g., Banjar 2014; Khojah 2013; Owaidah 1991); we have reviewed them within the L1 transfer section of this chapter. In some of the others a specific type of Saudi EFL learners' vocabulary competence, e.g., lexical bundles (Fattani 2013), was examined by comparison with English native speakers' competence. The results unsurprisingly revealed a substantial gap between the two categories of speakers – in favour of the participating English native speakers. Likewise comparative studies of English lexical competence – receptive or productive, or both – involving Saudi EFL learners and English native speakers (Alasmary 2014) showed a clear advantage of the native-speaking group – again a somewhat predictable result.

Rather predictable outcomes can be found in other EFL vocabulary-related research. Take, for instance, Al-Zahrani (1998) whose research revealed a positive correlation between Saudi EFL learners' knowledge of English collocations and their overall L2 proficiency. That there is a mismatch between receptive and productive lexical competence – even among native speakers of a language – is very well established and widely accepted. In view of that, Alothman's (2014) finding that advanced Saudi EFL learners do develop a high level of receptive knowledge of English academic vocabulary although their productive knowledge of the lexical domain remains relatively poor is not entirely unexpected.

Some of the vocabulary-related research has looked at issues of vocabulary size. Al-Masrai and Milton's (2012) study is noteworthy because it was one of few to examine the size of vocabulary knowledge of a particular group of Saudi EFL learners – university students. It established that on entry Saudi university students know between 2,000 and 3,000 English lexemes and that this number grows to around 5,000 by the time they complete their degrees – certainly well below expectations. Saudi EFL learners' relative lack of achievement in English lexical knowledge is acknowledged in other vocabulary-related research and some researchers have specifically sought to establish the factors responsible for the reportedly low vocabulary achievement including cultural, linguistic, and orthographic differences between L1 and L2. Owaidah (1991) found that the process of acquiring L2 lexemes is sensitive to the cultural and linguistic distance between L1 and L2, and that learners tend to use a one-to-one mapping between their L1 lexical system and the TL lexical system (see also Al-Mansour 2004). The results suggest that direct social contacts with the TL speakers (e.g., via residing in the TL community) can facilitate the attainment of the L2 lexical semantics and can do that far better than indirect social contact (e.g., via the media). Assaqr (2013) investigated orthographic and phonological differences of EFL vocabulary knowledge between EFL learners from two different L1 backgrounds – Arabic and Chinese. The study found that the Arabic learners' orthographic knowledge was superior to that of the Chinese group while the latter had a distinct advantage in phonological knowledge. Regrettably no attempt was made to explain these differences. Al-Akloby's (2001) research was devoted to unveiling the factors determining low EFL vocabulary attainment among Saudi public school

students. Lack of adequate lexical proficiency among this category of learners was attributed to insufficient use of learning strategies, imperfect syllabus and issues of presentation, low learner motivation, etc. According to Alsaif and Milton (2012), Saudi school students' insufficient grasp of EFL vocabulary is at least in part due to insufficient exposure to new EFL vocabulary. The authors found fault with the English textbooks used for EFL instruction within the Saudi school system which reportedly provide around 2,800 high-frequency lexemes and up to 1,000 less frequent lexical items. In Alsaif and Milton's terms, poverty of (vocabulary) input is at the core of learners' lack of adequate EFL vocabulary competence. It is not clear though what the optimal amount of vocabulary input would be; given that Saudi public school education typically involves no more than four EFL classes per week, obviously there are strict limitations on the amount of language material (including vocabulary) which learners can realistically be exposed to (see also Al-Masrai & Milton 2012).

The issue of vocabulary learning strategies has likewise generated a great deal of interest among Saudi EFL researchers. One common finding is that learners' current level of proficiency is related to the number and type of strategies learners choose to deploy in their vocabulary learning (Al-Jabri 2005; Albousaif 2012). However, note that N. Alqurashi (2013) found no correlation between learners' use of vocabulary learning strategies and the size of their EFL vocabulary knowledge. Another common finding is that Saudi EFL learners are generally unaware of the full range of possible vocabulary learning strategies. As a result strategy use is infrequent and is limited to a very small number of strategy types. The benefits of providing learners with dedicated training in strategy use are advocated (Al-Fuhaid 2004; Guduru 2014).

In Al Qahtan's (2005) research Saudi EFL learners' gender and level of education had only a marginal effect on strategy use. However, learners of higher vocabulary proficiency level were more likely to deploy strategies requiring what the author called 'deep processing', such as guessing lexical meaning and using a monolingual dictionary. Faqeehi (2003) examined the effects of combined vocabulary learning strategies on Saudi EFL learners' performance on vocabulary recall tasks and sentence completion tasks. Notably, participating learners' translation strategies were statistically linked to their performance.

Some of the research in this area has considered specific individual vocabulary learning strategies. Alhatmi (2012) focussed on various categories of note taking as an important vocabulary learning strategy revealing that participating learners most commonly engaged in note taking to copy a new lexeme from the textbook and to provide its Arabic translation equivalent. Al-Qarni (2003) looked at rote repetition as perhaps the most widely used learning strategy among Saudi EFL learners. The findings suggest that written repetition (silent or vocalised) of new lexical items is more effective than vocalised repetition. Alseweed's (2000) investigation of word-solving strategies found that while higher proficiency learners are commonly prepared to guess the meaning of new lexical material, lower proficiency learners tend to rely on dictionaries for new words. Fageeh and Mekheimer's (2011) research was about the effects of using three different types

of dictionaries – monolingual, bilingual, and bilingualised – on the learning of new L2 vocabulary. A bilingualised dictionary can be described as a hybrid between a monolingual and a bilingual dictionary – lexical entries are essentially the same as those in a corresponding monolingual (e.g. English-English) dictionary, but also contain a translation equivalent in a designated language (e.g., the learners' L1). Fageeh and Mekheimer found bilingualised dictionaries to be distinctly superior to the other two types in terms of their capacity to facilitate L2 lexical acquisition. Addamegh (2004) is notable as one of only two Saudi studies examining EFL learners' test-taking strategies on vocabulary tests. In this research, learners doing a vocabulary test deployed a range of test-taking strategies in order to compensate vocabulary competence deficiencies. Addamegh revealed that participants were able to respond correctly to around 40% of unknown lexical items based on linguistic and non-linguistic clues – with clear implications for vocabulary test design and construction (see also Al-Fraidan 2010).

In conclusion, the number of Saudi studies devoted to examining vocabulary-related issues seems extraordinarily large – especially relative to the work which has been done on the other principal language skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking). However, does this part of L2 acquisition truly deserve the attention it has been getting? (To be fair, this level of interest in L2 vocabulary is not limited to Saudi EFL research.) No one could reasonably deny the importance of lexical knowledge – high L2 proficiency is certainly impossible without it. That said, lexical competence alone does not guarantee overall L2 proficiency. Otherwise learning a second language could be reduced to memorising a small bilingual dictionary. In addition to this, there may be very good reasons to treat lexical knowledge as an aspect of literacy rather than as part of the L2's grammatical system. Evidence from L1 acquisition seems to support this view – even though a lot of lexical acquisition takes place in the early years of life, attaining the lexical system of one's mother tongue does not finish by the age which is generally regarded as the endpoint of the acquisition of the L1's grammatical system (four or five years of age in normal circumstances). Acquiring new lexemes (L1 or L2) is in fact a life-long process. An individual's lexical competence is typically related to their level of education.

The other point that deserves to be made is that the lexical component of L2s can very naturally be acquired as part of the acquisition of the other major skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking). Al-Hadlaq's (2003) research seems particularly relevant in that regard. Al-Hadlaq found that among a range of vocabulary learning tasks writing a composition ensured the highest level of lexical retention in Saudi EFL learners. Notably, in this research L2 writing ability was also linked to overall L2 proficiency. In summary of this point, the view taken here is that good proficiency in the TL vocabulary can quite successfully be accomplished as part of the acquisition of the four major skills – not in and by itself. This would suggest that future Saudi research on issues of L2 vocabulary acquisition should examine the most effective ways of vocabulary teaching/learning as part of teaching/learning the four major skills.

Research examining sociolinguistic aspects of EFL in Saudi Arabia

A handful studies can be described as having a distinct sociolinguistic orientation. One of them, Alshahrani (2016), deserves to be acknowledged as the first and so far only research to examine the issue of *power distance* between EFL teachers and learners in the Saudi context. The author described Saudi classroom culture as highly formal, teacher-centred and generally lacking learner independence and individualism – a type of culture that can faithfully be described as *high power distance*. The latter was found to be a weak predictor of EFL achievement.

Some of the research being reviewed in this section has looked at issues of gender. Alsweel (2013) recognised English as an essentially empowering force facilitating a range of changes in Saudi women's social and cultural values. Hakami (2012) identified a number of factors which can facilitate or obstruct Saudi female students' capacity to acculturate while undertaking tertiary studies in the United States. These included participants' educational level, marital status, English proficiency, and length of stay in the USA. The author emphasised the importance of the host community's attitudes to foreign students, as well as the level of institutional support which is provided to them. Meccawy's (2010) research was about Saudi female learners' perceptions of the impact of exposure to EFL instruction on their social and cultural identity. Most of the participants were found to hold essentially positive attitudes to English and to regard competence in English as a valuable personal and professional asset. These attitudes were not unanimously shared though – a small number of the participants expressed concern about the growing influence of English and its effects on local culture/tradition.

Yassin (2012) unveiled the roles that learners' gender and cultural background play in determining individual learning style. In the author's view, adjusting teaching to learners' learning styles can have a favourable effect on L2 learning.

Binasfour (2014) compared speech acts of apology by Saudi EFL learners and native Americans; the results reveal no substantial differences between the apology strategies deployed by the two groups (for another study of apologies, see also E. A. Y. Alghamdi 2014). Salameh (2001) examined compliment response patterns in three different populations – native speakers of American English, native Saudi speakers of Arabic, and Saudi EFL learners – establishing significant gender-based differences between Saudis and Americans in relation to how they respond to compliments. The research also produced evidence of cultural/pragmatic transfer in Saudi EFL learners' TL performance with regard to compliment responses.

Al-Kahtany (1995) was another very interesting and quite unusual research with a sociolinguistic orientation. It examined Saudi ESL learners' attitudes to three US-based varieties of English – Standard American English, Black American English, and Indian English – establishing distinct preferences among Saudi students for Standard English; Indian English was perceived least favourably. The latter finding could be a reflection of linguistic prejudice among participants; subcontinent Indians represent a large proportion of guest workers in Saudi

Arabia – typically in less prestigious low-paid jobs and providing local Saudis with plenty of exposure to Indian English.

Zughaibi (2013) was one of few studies to consider issues of learners' pragmatic L2 competence. He examined EFL learners' ability to comprehend nonliteral meaning in the TL and the extent to which this ability is influenced by: (1) learners' EFL proficiency level, and (2) the amount of learners' contact with the TL speakers. Zughaibi's research is also notable for its original and innovative way of measuring pragmatic comprehension. In another relatively rare study of L2 pragmatics Ben Duhaish (2014) emphasised the importance of pragmatic L2 competence (e.g., politeness, indirect speech, nonverbal communication, etc.) and advocated its integration into EFL instruction – both to EFL learners and to EFL teacher-trainees.

Almuraikhi (2012) is one of only two studies that we are aware of examining issues of acculturation of Saudis temporarily residing overseas – in her case, Australia. Saudi mothers of young children and local Australian teachers were involved as participants. The study demonstrated that consistent and wide-ranging support is necessary – both by parents and by teachers – to facilitate children's acculturation to the host society and to enable them to achieve a high level of bilingual competence. Children's seamless re-acculturation to their home community on return to Saudi Arabia likewise depends on the support of relevant stakeholders.

Alasmari's (2014) participants were Saudis learning English in two essentially different contexts: At a Saudi university (EFL context) and at an Australian university (ESL context). The former displayed a significantly greater level of social, psychological, and cultural distance from the TL and TL speakers including high levels of rejection. Alasmari emphasised the role of acculturation within the second language context in reducing Saudi learners' negative attitudes and enhancing their integrative orientation.

Other EFL research

A number of the studies reviewed for this publication deal with subject matter which does not yield itself to classification in one of the categories considered above. We do find some of the most interesting, original, and unusual studies among them. Take, for instance, Almahmoud's (2012) research on language planning in Saudi Arabia which involved an investigation of language attitudes among Saudi male university students to Standard Arabic, Colloquial Arabic, and English. The researcher used an innovative integrated research design including an attitudinal questionnaire, a matched guise test, and a focus group protocol. The study found participants' attitudes to the three languages to be rather complex, often involving internal inconsistencies and contradictions. There was a clear recognition of the special status of Standard Arabic as an important marker of ethnic, cultural, political, and religious identity. At the same time participants indicated that they felt uncomfortable using Standard Arabic in most situations – probably in part due to the fact that Standard Arabic was for most of them a second language

and, therefore, a language in which they felt considerably less competent than in their native Colloquial Arabic. There was a distinct preference among participants for Colloquial Arabic – the latter was their favoured medium of communication in most domains (outside of religion and classical literature) although it was perceived as lacking the importance and prestige of Standard Arabic. Participants also reported distinctly positive attitudes to English – most probably in large part due to the recognised utility of competence in English for career building in most professional domains. It seems somewhat surprising that Almahmoud advocated policy measures to maintain and further enhance the current status of Standard Arabic, including mandating its use as instructional medium in the domain of education – a recommendation which seems to go against the study's findings.

Another study on language planning (Payne & Almansour 2014) pointed to the unique position of English as the only foreign language included in the public school curriculum. The authors referred to evidence indicating that many Saudi students are keen to acquire competence in languages other than English. Arguments were presented in favour of extending the number of foreign languages available to Saudi school students.

Learners' age and exposure to L2 input are widely recognised as perhaps the strongest determinants of achievement in second/foreign language acquisition. When schoolchildren are first introduced to L2 instruction and how much exposure to the L2 they get are certainly questions which educators and policy makers need to address. Altayar's (2012) research revealed strong support among both parents and teachers for a very early start of EFL education – as early as the first grade. The study's participants did not seem to have serious concerns about possible negative effects of an early start (e.g., in primary school) on the learners' culture and L1. With a view to the benefits of greater exposure to L2 instruction, Alzahrani (2012) advocated the introduction of bilingual education in Saudi Arabia. The author pointed to the success that immersion programs in particular have had elsewhere in enabling learners to develop native or near-native L2 competence.

In what seems to be the only research exploring issues of assessment (Alabdelwahab 2002), self-assessment portfolios were used as a method of assessment in EFL classes at an intermediate public school in Saudi Arabia. Relevant stakeholders (learners, teachers, school administrators) were found to hold essentially positive attitudes to an innovative and extremely uncommon (for the Saudi context) evaluation procedure which showed a lot of potential to promote learners' critical thinking skills and to enhance their motivation.

In an attempt to assess the validity of the IELTS academic writing module, Alsagoafi (2013) surveyed the views of a range of stakeholders (including test-takers, university lecturers, and markers). The results suggested that thematically IELTS writing tasks may be ill-suited for prospective university students. Participants reported that Saudi students very rarely encountered similar tasks in their subsequent tertiary education. In addition, the IELTS writing module was regarded as a poor predictor of students' further academic performance. When assessing the validity of such views, the reader should bear in mind that the sole

objective of IELTS (including the writing module) is provide a reasonably accurate measurement of a candidate's *current* English competence; IELTS has not been designed to predict test-takers' future academic performance.

Most of the Saudi EFL research reviewed here has typically focussed on pedagogical, psychological/cognitive, and – to a lesser extent – linguistic aspects of L2 acquisition. Very few researchers seem to have taken an interest in the administrative dimension of the provision of language education. One notable exception is Alsobaihi (2005) who investigated the role and function of Saudi EFL program directors. Needless to say, efficient and productive delivery of such programs would be impossible without a suitably trained and competent executive officer. Alsobaihi's results, however, reveal that while most of the participating program directors held very high academic qualifications (including PhDs), very few among them had in fact received any training in administration.

In a first of its kind for the Saudi context, Alshahrani (2011) investigated the relationship between language aptitude and EFL achievement in a group of first-year Saudi university students. The analyses of data derived from a dedicated aptitude test and an L2 proficiency test revealed aptitude as a moderate predictor of second language achievement. The study is notable for its experimental design including a longitudinal component (see also Moskovsky et al. 2015).

In an analysis of beginning Saudi EFL learners' spelling errors, Alhaisoni, Al-Zuoud, and Gaudel (2015) found omission to be the most frequent error type. Other Saudi research dealing with EFL spelling includes El-Hibir and Al-Taha (1992) and Khan and Itoo (2012).

A few studies have used language needs analysis to assess the needs of Saudi EFL learners from different perspectives including learners, teachers, educators and policy makers, prospective employers, etc. In Almulhim's (2001) research, for instance, representatives of various Saudi businesses emphasised that employees' high level of competence in English (especially listening skills) was absolutely crucial for the successful operation of their companies.

Alharby (2005) revealed that the EFL courses medical students take as part of their degree generally fail to provide them with an adequate level of EFL competence. It is well known that English is quite extensively used in the Saudi healthcare sector. Ghobain (2014) went further claiming that using English as the medium of instruction in medical programs can lead to higher levels of EFL competence than what students would attain via standard language courses. Javid and Umer (2013) identified speaking and reading as the most important EFL skills for Saudi undergraduate students doing a medical degree.

In another examination of language needs – this time of Saudi learners undertaking postgraduate degrees at British universities – M. Alqahtani (2010) established that Saudis learning English in an English-speaking environment are sensitive to a set of cultural factors which are unique to learners of their ethnolinguistic background.

O. S. Alenazi (2014) produced evidence that in hiring EFL instructors language institutions manifest strong preference for native-speaking English teachers – even when a much more highly qualified and experienced non-native speaking

candidate is available (see also Al-Omrani 2008). The issue of the native speaker cult and the perceived prestige of Western TESOL qualifications is explored in depth in Chapter 6 of this volume.

Discussion

Considering broadly the number of studies and the range of topics reviewed in this chapter, it seems virtually indisputable that the Saudi research effort in the field of EFL teaching and learning has made truly remarkable progress over the past 25 years or so and has achieved a lot. We have witnessed an ever-growing number of EFL-related publications by Saudi authors – some of them in top-level applied linguistics journals. It seems equally indisputable that some of the studies reviewed here have made substantial contributions to the field – both to L2 acquisition theory and to L2 teaching/learning practices. Most impressively, this research effort is not only showing no signs of slowing down, but actually seems to be building further and further strength and momentum – an achievement which deserves to be acknowledged and celebrated.

Having said that, we can also point to a number of sometimes serious weaknesses in some of the studies reviewed here. Identifying these and giving them due consideration is absolutely essential in order to ensure the future growth and success of this sector. To start with, there seems to be an element of randomness and imbalance in terms of where the bulk of this research effort has gone. As the review above has shown, some EFL issues/areas have received a very considerable amount of attention while other issues/areas have largely or even completely been neglected. Learning strategies – especially with respect to the major language skills and vocabulary – is one example of a topic area which has been given an extraordinary amount of attention, particularly relative to some other topic areas. But how important are strategies really in terms of their role in the whole process of L2 learning and do they deserve so much attention? Evidence – both from Saudi research and more generally – seems to suggest that the contribution of strategies to achievement is rather small or even insignificant. Take, for instance, Alkubaidi's (2014) results which deny a link between learners' proficiency level and their use of writing strategies.

Another topic area which seems to have attracted undue attention is in relation to the presumed benefits of teaching the TL culture as part of L2 instruction (see, e.g., Al Hasnan 2015; Mekheimer & Aldosari 2011; Shamail 2015). The view that learning an L2 essentially also involves learning the L2 culture has been quite influential – not only in Saudi Arabia, but also more widely. There are valid reasons to take such a view. Language is essentially a cultural construct. A tremendous amount of cultural content is encoded in the local language. Language is indeed the principal transmitter of culture. Given all this, developing high levels of L2 competence might not be possible without at least some knowledge of the L2 speakers' culture. English, however, is quite unlike most other languages. In the first place, English is not representative of a single culture. If one does choose to teach English culture as part of EFL instruction,

which English-based culture should that be – British, American, Australian, New Zealand (among others)? However, even more importantly, it is now widely recognised that there already exists a 'global' variety of English, International English, which is generally unrelated to any of the cultures associated with the regional varieties/dialects of English. International English (rather than a culturally or regionally specific variety of that language) is indeed very widely used at political, business, science, etc., forums globally. Competence in International English, in fact, ensures the ability to communicate successfully in all kinds of social and cultural settings. The increasingly globalised nature of today's world points to the possibility that International English is perhaps the best variety to teach to learners – especially in contexts in which the general community's language is not English – not one of the regional culture-embedded varieties of English. This is in accord with the view that *acculturation* as a concept is relevant to contexts where the new language is learned as a second language (i.e. in contexts in which the target language is also the general community's language), but not to foreign language contexts (as is the case with teaching/learning English in Saudi Arabia). There is also some emerging empirical evidence (including from Saudi research) that learners may be more comfortable with language materials which are conceptually and culturally relevant to them, not to the TL culture (see, e.g., Alfahadi 2012; Al-Fallay 1994; Zafer 2002; Zaid 1993, 1999).

EFL vocabulary acquisition is yet another area of a rather extensive research effort – without clear evidence that targeting vocabulary skills *per se* (outside of the four major language skills) is a productive way of promoting learners' TL competence.

At the same time we can easily identify a range of undeniably important EFL areas which are either underrepresented in current Saudi EFL research, or are missing altogether. One could reasonably argue that optimising EFL teaching and learning would be impossible without having a good understanding of grammatical and developmental aspects of Saudi learners' interlanguage. Yet, we only find a handful of studies examining properties of the learner language and most of these were conducted quite early on – in the 1990s. While it is true that Saudi EFL research has produced some interesting and informative results in relation to L1 transfer (and generally the influence of the learners' native language), in most cases these results are rather a by-product than the actual object of the investigation. Likewise, issues of L2 communication and communication strategies have mostly been neglected – perhaps in part due to the relative lack of attention that L2 communication receives in the typical Saudi EFL classroom.

No one could deny that assessment is a very important dimension of language education, but it seems to have been almost completely ignored by the Saudi EFL research community. One notable exception is Alabdelwahab (2002), reviewed in the section on 'Other EFL research'.

It was also disappointing to find so few studies involving error analysis (with Alhaysony 2012, a notable exception) given its potential to reveal aspects of IL's grammatical system – perhaps more so than other investigative techniques.

Alshahrani (2011) was the only research we are aware of devoted to issues of language aptitude and aptitude testing. Alshahrani's work also deserves credit for

developing the first ever Arabic adaptation of Carroll and Sapon's (2002) Modern Language Aptitude Test.

Quite astonishingly, we have been unable to find even a single study dealing with issues of L2 *fossilisation*.

In view of the above, one unavoidable conclusion is that there is a distinct need for a more balanced and coordinated approach to EFL teaching/learning and research in Saudi Arabia.

The general thematic orientation of Saudi EFL research aside, a number of studies are vulnerable to criticism with regard to the suitability of topic that was chosen. Take, for instance, Alhaisoni, Al-Zuoud, and Gaudel's (2015) research on English spelling. Apart from the fact that its findings were rather unremarkable, one cannot help but ask what value there is in investigating an aspect of the written system which is essentially a cultural convention and which offers little or no insight into the TL's linguistic system? (Remarkably, research related to EFL spelling is not limited to Alhaisoni et al.; we are aware of at least two other studies – El-Hibir and Al-Taha (1992) and Khan and Itoo (2012) – examining issues of EFL spelling/orthography.)

H. Alshammari's (2013) investigation of the effects of time constraints on L2 reading comprehension represents another case in point. The study very predictably found that learners who are afforded more time tend to perform better. In the view taken here, a study of this type can hardly be justified – even if it is only a masters-level project. Reading (especially but not only in an L2) is an extremely complex and demanding cognitive task. It is already very well-established that cognitive performance is quite sensitive to time constraints – with all else being equal, more time is invariably linked to better results; this is certainly true of L1 reading. It would appear therefore that in this case the project chose to address a question whose answer is already quite well known.

Alshammari's (2013) was by far not the only research producing predictable results. Alenizi (2013), for instance, established that accuracy of performance with English articles is a function of learners' L2 proficiency. One cannot help wondering whether dedicated research was truly required to demonstrate that. There are certainly other aspects of the article system – grammatical, functional, semantic – whose investigation could be of substantially greater value to L2 teaching and learning.

The review has also identified a number of sometimes serious weaknesses in the methodologies deployed in various EFL projects. Some studies proposed to explore the effect of a specific treatment on learners' EFL proficiency, but failed to use a control group (e.g., Aliumah 2011; B. Al-Harbi 2012; Alhosani 2008; H. Alotaibi 2009, 2010; Al Rasheed 2014; Jouhari 1996; Mahmoud 2014). Without controls it is impossible to demonstrate whether the reported effects were due to the treatment (as commonly assumed) or to something else. Take, for instance, Al Rasheed's (2014) study. The author argued that the participating learners' exposure to two pre-reading strategies was responsible for their achievement, but in the absence of a control group how can one rule out other contributing factors?

In some cases where both an experimental and a control group were used, the two were not properly matched along relevant demographic variables (see, e.g., Abdan 1991).

Other problems with methodological design can also be identified. In Alshumaimeri and Almasri's (2012) research, for instance, the experimental group's treatment (which involved use of WebQuests and access to online learning resources via it) seems to have been supplementary to the standard delivery provided to the control group. In effect the experimental group learners received a greater exposure to reading activities/resources – compared with the learners in the control group. It could be argued that the increased TL input was responsible for their superior achievement – not the online nature of some of these activities/resources *per se*. Alshwairkh (2004) is vulnerable to the same criticism. The learners in the experimental group seemed to have received a substantial amount of extra exposure to L2 input – additional to what the control group received – which could easily explain the former's superior performance.

While some studies did use a more stringent protocol including controls and because of that were in position to experimentally establish the specific effects of the treatment, data in relation to the size of these effects were not always made available and as a result the magnitude of these effects remained unclear. This seems to be the case with Ismail and Tawalbeh (2015) and Okasha and Hamdi (2014). In both studies, the experimental group (the one which received the treatment) outperformed the control group, but the magnitude of the experimental group's gain (in terms of the effect size) was not reported and because of that it is impossible to know whether the gain was large enough to justify the treatment. As teaching professionals know painfully well, classroom time is an extremely valuable and scarce resource, and allocating extra time to a particular issue (e.g., strategy training) can only occur at the expense of something else. Reliable evidence is required to show whether 'the trade-off' is justified.

A number of the studies reported here are vulnerable to criticism with regard to the size and/or composition of their participant samples. Studies involving a small(ish) sample size include Alshahrani (2011); Alshwairkh (2004); B. Al-Harbi (2012); Fodah (2013); and Junaid (2014), among others. In quite a few of the studies researchers have used a single-sex sample (either male or female) which inevitably limits its representativeness (e.g., Alshahrani 2011, among many others). Choosing to work with a single-sex sample is undeniably a reflection of the segregated nature of the Saudi educational system (and a deeply embedded Saudi cultural norm more broadly). That said, collecting data from a mixed-gender sample is certainly not impossible as evidenced in some of the research reviewed here – just logistically more demanding. Alrahaili (2014) serves as an excellent example of the latter. His study's sample included both male and female participants; a dedicated female research assistant was deployed to recruit female participants and to conduct the data collection (see also Assulaimani 2015).

Gender, unfortunately, is not the only aspect of the poor representativeness of some participant samples. Take Almahmoud (2012), for instance. In this study,

the participant sample comprised Saudi male university students – in other words, a relatively homogeneous group of highly educated young adults. Quite clearly such a sample cannot be treated as representative of the whole Saudi community. However, as the reader has noted in the review of this study above, its principal aim was to explore issues of language planning and language policy in Saudi Arabia which are highly relevant to the whole of the Saudi community – not just a small and demographically homogeneous segment of it.

Selection of the sample is undeniably a complex and challenging aspect of a study's design, but a good quality sample is certainly not impossible to achieve. Alrabai (2010) deserves credit in that regard – his sample of nearly 300 Saudi EFL learners was selected from different levels of education and from geographically and demographically diverse regions of the country, and can be considered to be truly representative. The design and methodology of Alrabai's research can more generally be described as exemplary.

Data collection instruments is another aspect of the methodology which deserves a brief commentary. The review has unveiled what can faithfully be described as an addiction among Saudi EFL researchers to using surveys/questionnaires for the purposes of data collection. No one would deny the usefulness and practicality of surveys as a way of collecting data – particularly in relation to various social and psychological variables and particularly with larger samples. However, it is very important to recognise and factor in their limitations. Perhaps most importantly, while surveys do have the capacity to capture broad tendencies, they typically lack the ability for in-depth examination and because of that survey data need to be suitably supplemented with other data derived via different instruments. It is a pity that only a handful of the studies reviewed here have taken advantage of the wealth of otherwise available data collection options. Some notable exceptions include Aljamhoor's (1996) use of stimulated recall and Almahmoud's (2012) use of matched guise test.

Some additional commentary and recommendations in relation to Saudi EFL research can be found in the Conclusion Chapter of this book.

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2 A brief history of English and English teaching in Saudi Arabia

Tariq Elyas & Michelle Picard

Introduction

Unlike the other Gulf countries and many countries in the Middle East and North Africa, Saudi Arabia has never been under the control of a modern European power and thus has avoided the impacts of colonisation and missionary influence (Rahman 2011). However, as early as Roman times, there were reports of trade between the inhabitants of 'Arabia' and Africa, Europe, and Asia with well-worn camel routes engaging nomadic Bedouins and more sedentary oasis inhabitants alike in contact with foreign traders and foreign languages as a result of their trade in frankincense, myrrh, and other aromatics (Al-Rasheed 2010; Wynbrandt 2010). In the first century BCE, the Saudi inhabitants mastered sailing and were able to travel from Arabia to Africa and India, and to engage with sailors and their languages from across the ancient world (Wynbrandt 2010). Ancient religious practices that included cremations and pyres using frankincense supported the trade in aromatics. This lucrative business eroded with the spread of Christianity and simple burials across the Christian world. During the so-called 'Age of Ignorance' that followed, the inhabitants of Arabia had less contact with foreign traders and languages for more than 200 years until the dawning of the 'Age of Light' and the introduction of Islam. However, some areas of Saudi Arabia, such as Mecca, had substantial Jewish and Christian inhabitants and had continued to have contact with foreign languages and cultures throughout this period (Wynbrandt 2010).

With the rise of Islam across the region now known as Saudi Arabia and its spread across Asia, Africa, and Europe, the Saudi inhabitants came into increasing contact with pilgrims from across the world – particularly in the pilgrim cities of Mecca and Medina. Trade also increased alongside the pilgrims and scholars who came to learn at the large mosques. Consequently, the areas where currently the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stands became a focal point for language contact involving speakers of a diverse range of languages. Among them, English has featured more prominently than others, especially over the most recent century or so. The history of English in Saudi Arabia is discussed in this chapter alongside the history of English teaching exploring the status of English at each key stage, the factors influencing the status of the language, and how this in turn affected the teaching of English.

The teaching of English now appears to be an intrinsic component of the current Saudi Arabian Education system that – along with e-learning – has become a driver of the Ministry of Education's vision of building a 'Globally Competitive Knowledge-based Community' (Ministry of Education 2017). However, even in the Ministry's *Vision* documentation, the objective of '[b]uilding Students' *Islamic, National* [our emphasis], and Intellectual Personality in terms of Knowledge, Skills, and *Values* [our emphasis]' is placed first in a long list of values while the objective of '[e]nhancing Local, and *International Partnerships* [our emphasis]' is mentioned last. This suggests that Islamic, national, and 'values' education underpins all teaching in Saudi Arabia, including English, and is the first priority of the Ministry. Despite encouragement from government and industry to expand the teaching of English, a hostile attitude has persisted towards English in some sectors of Saudi Arabian society, with some even dubbing it 'the language of the infidels' (Al-Brashi 2003 cited in Elyas & Picard 2010). Debates about *how* English should be taught and *for what purposes* have also persisted. However, controversies surrounding foreign language teaching are not new in Saudi Arabia, and are not unique to this context.

This chapter aims to contextualise the debates and developments around the speaking of English and English teaching in Saudi Arabia by exploring the history of language teaching in relation to five key shifts in Saudi Arabian Educational policy as described by Al-Ghamdi and Al-Saddat (2002). First, it explores the 'Golden Age' of 750 to 1400 as well as the early Ottoman period. Next, it examines the '*Wahhabi* Period' of 1740–1900 and the first resistance to foreign language teaching (including English) as well as the beginning of Anglo-American influence in Saudi Arabia. The section on the 'Unification' period of 1926 to 1954 explores both the early introduction and later expansion of foreign language teaching in Saudi Arabia. The next section explores the influence of the petrochemical industry particularly from 1954 to 1984 and how it led to an increased demand for secular education, including English, as well as an increased emphasis on quality assurance and teacher training. Finally, the chapter explores the post-9/11 period along with the policy debates in the early 2000s and their influence on current policy and practice. Throughout the discussion, regional differences are considered where relevant.

Literature review

This chapter draws on a wealth of literature regarding various aspects of Saudi Arabian society, education, and English teaching. This ranges from early texts, such as the book by Hitti (1970), that explore how Islam is historically embedded into all aspects of Saudi Arabian life, including education; to texts focussing specifically on the history of education in Saudi Arabia, such as the thesis by Al-Ajroush (1980). The chapter also draws on texts that focus specifically on the history of English teaching in Saudi Arabia (Ahaydib 1996; Elyas & Picard 2010; Mahboob & Elyas 2014) and global debates on English language teaching and its relationship to the socio-political context (e.g., Canagarajah 1999; Daaud 2005; Hadley 2004). The

chapter builds on an early conceptual article by the authors (Elyas & Picard 2010) and integrates two chapters from Elyas's PhD thesis (Elyas 2011). The unique contribution of this chapter is that it synthesises current debates around the introduction of English and English language teaching in Saudi Arabia and contextualises these in the history of secular education and English language teaching in this country, as well as linking local and global debates.

The 'Golden Age' 750 to 1400 CE and the early Ottoman era

The 'Golden Age' from the establishment of Islam to the late mediaeval period is noted for the religious devotion among followers of the Islamic faith which was accompanied by a quest for both religious and scientific knowledge. Although there was no unified education system at the time, contemporary reports suggest that the Prophet Mohammed encouraged his followers to learn to read, write, and develop secular knowledge (including the learning of languages) alongside religious knowledge. While *kuttab* (pre-school and primary school) education consisted of basic reading, writing, and arithmetic along with recitation of the *Holy Qur'an* and the *Hadith* (Prophet Mohammed's sayings), the *madrassa* (school of higher learning) included lectures and discussions led by both religious and secular scholars (Al-Rasheed 2010; Elyas & Picard 2010; Hitti 1970). Jawad (1998), citing both the *Holy Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, suggests that this veneration of all knowledge has been an important trend in Islamic thought in Saudi Arabia from the time of the Prophet Mohammed who told his followers to 'search for knowledge though it be in China' (cited by Jawad 1998, p. 17). Despite the emphasis on learning and knowledge described above and the founding of great Islamic universities around the world, such as the *House of Wisdom* and the *Umayyads of al-Andalas*, foreign languages were not formally taught in Saudi Arabia until the Ottoman era.

The Ottoman Empire had fluctuating levels of control over the region from 1517 to 1918. Selim I acquired Mecca and Medina in 1517, and later in the 16th century other areas of what became Saudi Arabia were added to the Ottoman Empire. These included the Hejaz and Asir regions along the Red Sea and the Al Hasa region on the Persian Gulf coast, and the Ottomans even laid claim to the interior. However, they had limited control over day-to-day life and – although there was an Ottoman governor and garrison in Meccin – the Sharifs of Mecca were largely left in control of their territory (Al-Rasheed 2010; Bowen 2015; Wynbrandt 2010). In addition, the Ottoman Empire paid very little attention to the interior of the country except where movement of the land caravans to Mecca and Medina were affected (Ochsenwald 2015).

The Ottomans introduced Turkish as the first foreign language to be formally taught in Saudi Arabia. The mosques remained as in the 'Golden Age' centres for higher learning. However, the Ottomans also introduced a few state-run schools and *waqfs* (charitable endowments) where Turkish was taught. In Mecca and Medina and some of the coastal town and cities, these schools and institutions were attended by the elite wanting to communicate with their Ottoman rulers

and by guild members wanting to interact with Turkish (and other) foreign traders and pilgrims. However, Ottoman education and foreign language teaching did not penetrate the interior or the remote regions of the country (Ochsenwald 2015). Even in the Hijaz, despite the instrumental value of foreign language learning for trade and political purposes, Turkish language education and state schools were often boycotted as Turkish was regarded by many as the language of the invader (Al-Ghamdi & Al-Saddat 2002).

This negative response to foreign languages and foreign language teaching would intensify during the Wahhabi period where local influences from the interior came into conflict with the forces of the Ottoman Empire.

Wahhabi Period 1740–1900 CE and early Anglo-American influence

The Wahhabi movement began in the middle of the 18th century in *Najd* (the central part of the Arabian Peninsula) led by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab; it was based on the teachings of a 14th-century Syrian Imam called Ibn Taymiyya. For the Prophet Mohammed's early followers and for the Ottoman rulers, foreign languages were intrinsically linked with spreading the word of *Allah* and interacting with pilgrims (for both religious and trade purposes). However, for Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his followers foreign language teaching like all secular teaching was viewed as anti-Islamic, and followers were instructed only to send their children to the *Qur'anic* school. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab advised that primary school instruction should be limited to the memorisation and recitation of the *Qur'an*, *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet), *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and the performance of prayers and other rituals while high school and adult education was restricted to religious observation in the mosque (Hitti 1970). Arabic as the language of the *Qur'an* was given special sacred status whereas it was believed that the speaking and teaching of foreign languages could potentially unleash 'alien ideologies' – an argument that is still prevalent in modern-day Saudi Arabia (Mahboob & Elyas 2014).

Politics, religion, and attitudes to foreign language teaching intersected in this period as they have throughout the history of Saudi Arabia. *Wahhabi* attitudes to the speaking and teaching of foreign languages were promoted because of the close relationship between Muhammad Ibn Saud, founder of the Saudi royal dynasty, and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (Al-Rasheed 2010). Ibn Abd al-Wahhab supported Ibn Saud in his establishment of the first Saudi state in 1744 in the area around Riyadh. This state expanded at a rapid pace and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's influence persisted despite his death in 1792 (Bowen 2015; Wynbrandt 2010). In 1818 the first Saudi state was destroyed by the Ottoman Viceroy of Egypt known as Mohammed Ali Pasha. However, a second smaller Saudi state in the *Najd* region was established in 1824 and *Wahhabi* influence persisted.

From the establishment of the second Saudi state onwards until the early 20th century there was a constant power struggle in the interior of Saudi Arabia between the Al Saud family and another Arabian family – the Al Rashid. While the Al Rashid were victorious in 1891 and the Al Saud were driven into exile,

in 1902 Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud recaptured Riyadh. The power of the Al Saud was increased incrementally in 1913 when with the help of the *Ikhwan* (a tribal army led by Faisal Al-Dawish and inspired by *Wahhabi* teaching) Ibn Saud captured Al Ahsa from the Ottomans (Bowen 2015; Ochsenwald 2015). Due to the *Wahhabi* influence it would be expected that during the early 20th century the teaching of foreign languages would decrease even more. However, it is at this crucial period that Anglo-American influence and discourses alternative to *Wahhabism* encouraging the teaching of English started emerging in Saudi Arabia.

Since the Ottomans were a common enemy, the British took a series of actions in tandem with Saudi Arabian tribes and leaders. On 26 December 1915 they signed a treaty with the Al Saud supporting their sovereignty in the areas of *Najd*, *Hasa*, *Qatif*, *Jubayl*, and their all related dependencies, and protecting the Saudis against foreign invasion. As would happen throughout the history of modern Saudi Arabia, political influence would be accompanied by financial or trade benefits since the Al Saud were also provided with weapons and $5,000 per month. In exchange, the Saudis agreed to not interfere with Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman which had also signed treaties with Britain (Ochsenwald 2015; Wynbrandt 2010). Besides their treaty with the Al Saud, Britain was also negotiating with other inhabitants of what now constitutes Saudi Arabia. For example, in 1916 they supported the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein bin Ali, in a revolt against the Ottomans. The hope was to create a united Arab state that would support the British in their First World War efforts against the Ottomans. The Al Saud did not participate in the pan-Arab revolt because of old rivalries with the Sharif of Mecca and their ongoing battles with the Al Rashed. Despite being unsuccessful in creating a pan-Arab state, with the Allied victory in World War I the Ottoman control in Arabia ceased (Bowen 2015).

The alliances of the First World War also strengthened the Al Saud's position against their old adversaries the Al Rashid who had a treaty with the Ottomans. With the support of the British Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud finally defeated the Al Rashid in 1921 and annexed all of northern Arabia. His position was further strengthened when the British withdrew support from Hussein bin Ali, and Mecca was surrendered to the Al Saud in December 1925 (Al-Rasheed 2010). Ironically, Ibn Saud finally succeeded to the thrones of *Hejaz* on 10 January 1926 and *Najd* on 27 January 1927 due to the support of two entirely opposing entities. On the one hand, they were supported by the British hoping to extend their influence and, consequently, the speaking and teaching of English. On the other hand, the *Hejaz* was won with the help of the conservative *Ikhwans* hoping to spread *Wahhabi* influence and prevent the speaking and teaching of English along with all 'alien influences'. When the Al Saud took over the *Hejaz* region, the rudimentary school system which included Turkish language teaching still existed alongside traditional Muslim schools and specialised religious circles while in the *Nejad* only religious instruction in the *kuttab* and mosques remained.

Some have speculated that the introduction of English as a separate subject as early as 1924 in a few limited schools, as well as the introduction of a public

education system under the General Directorate of Education in Mecca and Medina in 1926, were moves on King Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud's side to once again gain favour with the British. The British had withdrawn their financial support from Ibn Saud in 1924 (Al-Kahtany, Golam Faruk & Al Zumor 2016). However, in the Treaty of Jeddah (signed on 20 May 1927) Britain recognised the independence of the Kingdom of *Hejaz* and *Najd*, and Ibn Saud rejected the push from *Ikhwan* leaders to expand into the British protectorates of Transjordan, Iraq, and Kuwait. Realising the dangers of coming into conflict with the British, Ibn Saud instead chose to side against the *Ikhwan* who he defeated in the Battle of Sabilla in 1929. In 1930 the two kingdoms were united as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed 2010; Bowen 2015; Wynbrandt 2010). As is described in the following section, the two competing influences of Anglo-American trade and political influence as opposed to the religious and political strength of the *Wahhabis* continued to affect the speaking and teaching of English in the early Saudi era from 1926 to 1954 known as the 'unification period'.

Unification period 1926–1954

From the inception of the General Directorate of Education there was resistance from certain sections of the clergy to the teaching of secular knowledge. The Director of Education reported objections to the teaching of drawing, foreign languages, and geography which were dubbed as constituting 'a means of learning the beliefs of the infidels, and their corrupt science, which is dangerous to our beliefs and the morals of our children' (Hafiz Whabat cited in Assah 1969, pp. 292–293). Despite these concerns King Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud personally encouraged the development of a unified education system, and in 1928 the unified Ministry of Education for the whole of Saudi Arabia divided the educational system into five stages: (1) Kindergarten; (2) Elementary School; (3) Middle School; (4) High School; and (5) Higher Education. Although secular knowledge was taught from the middle school level (including foreign languages in some cases), education in this period was firmly entrenched in Islamic principles and doctrine – albeit based on a broader understanding than in the *Wahhabi* period (Ahaydib 1996; Al-Ajroush 1980). Using a comprehensive Islamic teaching approach, the goal was to achieve:

> [A] balanced growth of the total personality . . . through training . . . [infusing] Mohammed's spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily sense [into the curriculum] . . . such that faith is infused into the whole of each student's personality.
>
> (Al-Attas 1979, p. 158)

These principles are still present in the modern-day Saudi Arabian curriculum despite an increase in secular courses including English.

With the standardisation and expansion of the education system there was an immediate need for large numbers of teachers, and the Kingdom started to send

local students abroad for study – a custom which has continued to this day and which has also resulted in an increased focus on teaching English to prepare the students for their studies. To meet the identified need to prepare Saudi students to go abroad, the Scholarship Preparation School was established in 1936. This was only open to students planning to study abroad, and included the first formal English high school instruction (Al-Ghamdi & Al-Saddat 2002; Mahboob & Elyas 2014). Qualified teachers were recruited from Egypt to teach at this school, and consequently the curriculum was modelled on the Egyptian system which in turn had been modelled on the French system for all secular subjects. However, Islamic subjects remained under the control of the Saudi Arabian Education Ministry. The tight central government control over the curriculum remains a characteristic of the Saudi Education system today.

New Zealand mining engineer Major Frank Holmes was authorised by King Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud to search for oil in eastern Saudi Arabia as early as 1923. However, it was only in 1938 that the USA company CALTEX discovered oil in commercial quantities at Dammam oil well No. 7 in what is now modern-day Dhahran. This was the beginning of the largest source of crude oil in the world, and resulted in a dramatic change in the politics and economy of Saudi Arabia. British influence waned, and increasingly Saudi students were sent to the USA to study (Al-Rasheed 2010; Bowen 2015; Wynbrandt 2010). Oil revenues became the most important source of wealth to the country which no longer had to rely on receipts from pilgrimages to Mecca. There was also now an impetus for locals to learn English to interact with workers from the USA and for more Saudi students to study abroad to become teachers and also to work in the petroleum industry (Al-Ghamdi & Al-Saddat 2002; Payne & Almansour 2014; Rahman 2011). In 1943 the name of the company in control of oil in Saudi Arabia was changed to the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco). Increasingly the Saudis negotiated better conditions including initially free kerosene and gasoline and increased prices for the concession. By the 1950s the Saudi Arabian governments shared profits equally with the USA arm of the company while levying tax on the profits (Al-Rasheed 2010; Bowen 2015; Wynbrandt 2010).

The confidence of the Saudi Arabian government in its global influence steadily grew and was increasingly expressed in Islamic-Nationalism and Islamic pedagogies in the education system. At the same time a competing discourse of American and secular influence can also be discerned in the increase of secular courses in the education system, expansion of the public education system, and the growing number of students studying abroad – all of which resulted directly from the expansion of the petrochemical industry (Elyas 2011; Elyas & Picard 2010; Mahboob & Elyas 2014).

The power of petroleum: increased English and secular education 1954–1984

By 1952 the United Nations reported that Saudi Arabia had 306 elementary schools, but illiteracy remained between 92% and 95% (Elyas 2011). In response

to concerns that not enough students were being educated to meet the demands of the petrochemical industry, the Ministry of Education called for the first educational conference in 1957 to explore issues related to the quantity and quality of education in the Kingdom – with the main outcome of further expanding the elementary, intermediate, and high school provision. In addition, also in 1957 the first university teaching secular courses in the history of the Kingdom – King Saud University – was opened with the express purpose of meeting the demand for locally trained teachers. Unlike many other countries, 'expansion in the educational system was not part of a slow and gradual process of social and economic development', but rather 'part of the newly-created welfare state where most of the social services, including schools, were offered to the indigenous population for free' (Abir 1988, p. 194). Therefore, secular education including English can be viewed as an integral part of nation building (Al-Ajroush 1980).

As part of the enhancements in the secular education system and the Scholarship Preparation schools in particular, English and French were introduced as subjects in the Saudi Arabian secondary education system from the 1930s onwards. English was expanded into more schools on the introduction of intermediate and secondary schools in 1942. However, it was only in 1958 that legislation mandating the teaching of English at the intermediate level (grades 7–9) and high school levels (grades 10–12) of schooling was passed (Elyas 2011; Elyas & Picard 2010; Mahboob & Elyas 2014). The increasing importance placed on English can be seen in the fact that French was removed from the intermediate level in 1969 and only remained as an elective subject at the secondary level (grades 10–12). Since then English has been taught as a core subject mandated by the Ministry of Education in both public and private schools across the country. Between 1952 and 1990 school enrolment grew more than 160-fold (Elyas 2011). The inclusion of English as a core subject at intermediate and high school levels led to an increase in the number of Saudis able to speak at least a rudimentary level of English.

The further expansion of Aramco resulted in more and more foreign workers entering the country in both the petrochemical and services industries, as well as medical and educational fields (Abir 1988). By the 1970s there were close to a million foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, but by the 1980s this had increased to close to three million – with foreign workers both filling skills gaps in the local population and taking up menial jobs which were increasingly shunned by locals (Hertog 2012). In response, the Saudi government in the First Development Plan (1970–1975) dramatically enhanced the number of local Higher Education, Technical, and Vocational Education facilities, sent numerous Saudi students abroad on scholarships, and guaranteed graduates jobs in the public sector. However, despite the concerted efforts to increase local workers, communicating with foreign workers through the medium of English became necessary for locals within Aramco and its service industries. In a similar fashion, the continued import of weapons and the expansion of modern hospitals placed pressure on Saudi military personnel and hospital staff to use English for a range of work-related purposes. As a result, the demand for English teaching grew further.

For many years eight English classes of 45 minutes each per week were taught at an intermediate and a high school level in line with the allocation in the Scholarship Preparation Schools. However, in 1963 this was reduced to six lessons of 45 minutes per week at the intermediate level. In 1970 English became a subject from grade 7 to 12 and was taught for four 45-minute classes per week (Al-Ajroush 1980). This reduction in the volume of English instruction occurred in part in response to concerns that 'the use of English entails Westernisation and detachment from the country' and that it would be 'a source of corruption to their religious commitment' (Al-Haq & Al-Smadi 1996 cited in Elyas 2011, p. 77). Another contributing factor was the rise of Saudi Arabian nationalism and pride with the gaining of 20% control of Aramco in 1972 by the Saudi government and the flexing of economic muscle in the oil boycott against Western countries supporting Israel in the Yom Kippur War in 1973. In 1980 Saudi Arabia took full control of Aramco by gaining a 100% stake in the company resulting in a decrease in the USA's economic and social influence in the country (Abir 1988; Hertog 2012).

Fluctuating influence: 1980s and 1990s

In the 1980s and 1990s there was continued economic growth in Saudi Arabia due to dramatic increases in the price of oil and Saudi Arabia's position as the largest oil producer in the world. The wealth generated by oil revenues resulted in rapid and dramatic technological modernisation and urbanisation, as well as the expansion of mass public education. These changes, as well as the increasingly large numbers of foreign workers, greatly affected traditional Saudi norms and values (Al-Kahtany, Golam Faruk & Al Zumor 2016).

Although no longer economically dependent on Britain or the USA, Saudi Arabia continued close ties particularly with the USA in this period due to security concerns arising from the Iranian Islamic revolution and anti-government *Shi'ite* uprisings in the oil-rich Eastern province in 1979. Islamic extremists also seized the Grand Mosque in the same year (Al-Rasheed 2010; Bowen 2015; Wynbrandt 2010). Despite these events leading to closer ties with the USA – particularly in terms of military cooperation and the sale of arms – they also resulted in a need for the government to demonstrate its observance of traditional religious and social norms in the country to placate the religious community. Therefore, the cinemas were closed, the *Ulema* (religious community leaders) were given a more prominent role in government, and King Fahd added the title 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' to his name in 1986 to symbolically demonstrate the religious significance of his kingship (Al-Rasheed 2010; Bowen 2015; Wynbrandt 2010).

Saudi Arabia supported Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, but opposed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and asked the USA to intervene. Consequently, the USA and coalition troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Arabian forces participated in the bombing raids of Iraq and the liberation of Kuwait. The stationing of Western troops had two effects on the speaking and teaching of English in Saudi Arabia. On the one hand, closer military ties

resulted in a need for more English in order for Saudis and Americans to communicate and collaborate on military, political, and economic matters. On the other hand, the presence of Western troops near the holiest of Islamic sites angered the *Ulema* and boosted resistance to the use and teaching of English (Payne & Almansour 2014; Rahman 2011).

Although Saudi Arabia experienced significant economic and technological development in the 1980s and 1990s, this did not necessarily increase the work participation of Saudi citizens. By 1995 there were 6.2 million foreign nationals working in Saudi Arabia – almost double the number in the 1980s (Al-Asmari 2008) – yet productivity in the private sector declined dramatically from 1982 onwards, and the Saudi economy contracted (Hertog 2012). In addition, by 2000 56% of the workforce in Saudi Arabia was expatriate (Al-Asmari 2008), 'and unemployment among Saudis [was] running between eight to 12 percent' (Saudi Gazette 2016). Although the participation of locals in the public sector was high, it remained extremely low in the private sector – with only 18.8% of Saudis working in the private sector in 1987 (Al-Asmari 2008).

One response to economic contraction, high unemployment figures, and underemployment in the private sector has been the 'Saudisation' or systematic replacement of foreign workers with Saudi nationals. This policy started with the Fourth Development Plan (1985–1989) and the first comprehensive 'Saudisation' policy was drawn up in a September 1994 resolution that tightened up immigration and deported many undocumented foreign workers. However, the program had only limited success (Stratfor Worldview 2016). This was partially due to a reluctance among Saudis to take up menial and mid-level positions or any jobs outside the public sector, but also because employers were reluctant to hire and train Saudis due to the availability of cheap unskilled Asian labour 'creating a vicious cycle of low-margin production vs. low-margin workforce' (Hertog 2012, pp. 73–74). Another issue affecting Saudisation was the limited number of graduates skilled in technical jobs and qualified in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Despite significant government spending on Universities of Technology, Junior Colleges of Technology for both industrial and commercial studies, and Technical Industrial Secondary Institutes (for students aged 16+ who have passed the Intermediate Education Certificate) all over the Kingdom, the completion rates were very low. For example, by 2000 only about 20% of the Saudi University graduates were in technical and scientific fields and only 24% of industrial education students who started their courses from 1969 to 1992 graduated (Al-Asmari 2008).

Despite the issues mentioned above, the teaching of English at school remained restricted as it had been in the period from 1970 to 1980, and a strong emphasis on Arabic and Islamic subjects remained at all levels of teaching. For example, up until 2001 21 hours out of a possible 30 hours of primary school instruction were devoted to religious and Arabic courses – with at least 30% of the time devoted to religious content (Elyas 2011; Elyas & Picard 2010; Mahboob & Elyas 2014). In addition, other parts of the curriculum including history, social studies, and Arabic involved significant amounts of Islamic content (Jamjoon 2010).

Post 9/11: 2001 to present

Change in the role of English would probably have continued at a snail's pace in Saudi Arabia had it not been for the events of 11 September 2001. This event changed the world dramatically for Saudis, as well as for Arabs and Muslims in general. American politicians, the Western public, and the Western and Arab media turned their gaze on Saudi Arabia to try to determine the reasons behind the attack carried out by the 19 hijackers, 15 of whom were from Saudi Arabia. Despite the ongoing close diplomatic and trade ties between the USA and Saudi Arabia, this relationship was strongly tested, and Saudi authorities had to acknowledge that there was deep-seated anti-American and anti-Western hostility in the country – in part driven by the presence of Western troops since the First Gulf War (Golam Faruk 2014).

Although Saudi Arabia had never endured Western colonialisation, there was still resentment over its neo-colonial imposition of a global world order and the role of English in this imposition (Alhamdan, Honan & Hamid 2017; Canagarajah 1999; Daaud 2005; Hadley 2004; Mahboob & Elyas 2014). Even though this resentment is common to other countries in Asia, Africa, and the Gulf where English is increasingly imposed, it appeared to be particularly strong in Saudi Arabia. Perhaps this is because of the powerful role of Arabic in Saudi Arabia. Significantly, Saudi Arabia houses the most sacred sites of Islam and the central text of Islam the *Qur'an* is only formally recognised in Arabic giving the language huge political, social, and symbolic power. In addition, since the first introduction of *Wahhabism* in Saudi Arabia the speaking of Arabic and adherence to Islamic values have been even more conflated while the speaking/teaching of English is widely regarded as a reflection of 'corrupt' Western values.

Western editorials have specifically blamed the Saudi schools and universities for exacerbating a negative attitude towards Western values and English, and have even suggested that they foster anti-USA terrorism (Alhamdan, Honan & Hamid 2017; Canagarajah 1999; Daaud 2005; Hadley 2004; Mahboob & Elyas 2014). Karmani (2005, p. 262) states:

> An extraordinary unparalleled degree of pressure has been escalating on the [Saudi Arabian] government to reform its educational curricula, the underlying belief being that the current educational system in place in the Muslim world was partly responsible for motivating the terrorist attacks.

The Saudi government responded first by acknowledging the problem. In July 2004 Prince Khalid Al-Faisal on his weekly program *Idhaat* on *Al-Arabiya* television agreed that the school curricula constitute 20% of the issue. However, he also noted that '80% is the hidden curricula and the way in which these ideas of violence and extremism are inculcated by those who are responsible for the students in the schools, institutes, faculties and universities' (cited in Elyas 2011, p. 132). To address curriculum issues along with the attitudes of teachers, a number of actions were taken by the Ministry of Education. First, close attention was paid

to the content of all curricula, and textbooks (which in many cases become the *de facto* curriculum) were updated to remove negative content related to foreigners while at the same time not contravening traditional Islamic values. Second, the amount of secular content in the school and university curriculum was increased. For example, religious subjects dropped from eight weekly periods to five periods for intermediate-level students. Third, English was introduced as a subject from the elementary level, and the number of English classes per week at an intermediate and high school level was raised in 2004 from four periods per week to ten. Finally, large numbers of local English teachers were sent abroad to study (20,000 between 2002 and 2010), and all English teachers took part in professional development workshops aimed at a more communicative English approach using technology as part of the *Tatweer* initiative (Elyas 2011; Elyas & Picard 2010). Even these relatively limited reforms provoked local resistance – with Mohammad Al-Najimi, a member of the Islamic *Fiqh* academy, stating 'some of the calls for curricula change harm national principles, and this threatens national identity' (cited in Elyas 2011, p. 132).

Along with external political pressure from the West, there has also been an economic impetus for reform to upskill students in technology as part of the Saudisation policy discussed above which has gained strength since 2007. The growth of the Internet and the so-called 'information age' has also increasingly provided Saudis with access to English incidentally in their daily lives and promoted the desire and need to learn English to access information. As Saudi businesses participate in e-commerce more and more, there is also more exposure to global markets and English (Ezzi 2016) although many Saudi students lack motivation to learn English as they still encounter it rarely in their daily lives (Alqahtani 2015).

In response, the Saudi government has undertaken a number of educational reforms. A growing number of Science and Technology courses at Saudi universities have been adopting English as the medium of instruction – with one university even having English as its sole medium of instruction – and there has been some debate about using English as the medium of instruction in technical colleges and even in high schools (Al-Kahtany, Golam Faruk & Al Zumor 2016; Alzahrani, 2012). At the school level, the *Tatweer* policy launched in 2007 promoted the introduction of information technology into school curricula and gave a strong impetus to the development of infrastructure and teachers' skills to support the pedagogical use of this technology including the teaching of English. The Saudi government has also dramatically increased the number of students studying STEMM disciplines abroad with the aim of addressing the skills shortages. The impact that the information age has had on Saudi government policy and English is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 on the future of English in Saudi Arabia.

Implications for teachers and others

The government's educational reforms in relation to EFL delivery (briefly outlined above) – both at the secondary and the tertiary level – deserve to be

commended because they have led to an increase in the amount of EFL instruction, and have encouraged the learning and use of English for accessing information. That said, the Saudi Government has remained ambivalent to, and even wary of, Western/English values in education. Prince Naif Ibn Abd Al-Aziz stated in the Saudi owned Al-Sharq Al-Awsat newspaper:

> We do believe in the soundness of our educational curriculum, but we never oppose development of educational methods in a manner that does not run counter to the country's deep-rooted principles.
>
> (cited in Elyas 2011, p. 132)

The Saudi government, therefore, continues to walk a tightrope. On the one hand, it promotes the teaching of English and development of secular technical education to meet the needs of rapid government-lead economic and social development and infrastructure expansion, as well as for serving military needs and sending students to English-speaking countries to study. On the other hand, it placates conservative forces who resent the perceived rise of English linguistic and cultural influences in the country, and fear they occur at the expense of Arabic-Islamic culture.

Consequently, the Saudi English curricula reflect what some have called the 'strong Islamisation' position (Karmani 2005; Zughoul 2003) which tries to separate the teaching of the English language from Western cultures (see also Chapter 3 of this book). According to Picard (2006, p. 27):

> [This position] stresses the consolidation of mother-tongue teaching and a localised and learner-relevant content, it would focus on facilitating the learning of, and access to, 'modern day knowledge', and 'censor content' that could be viewed as anti-Islamic.

This means that English teachers are restricted to carefully selected textbooks or material focussing on Science and Technology topics that do not contravene Islamic principles. However, on the other hand, external political pressure and the easy access to information via the Internet has resulted in education policies, such as the *Tatweer* and the more recent *Vision 2030*. These policies reflect a 'weaker Islamisation' position where teachers 'unpack Western discourses in texts and compare them with local discourses' (Elyas 2011, p. 92) with the aim of accessing the Knowledge Economy and achieving global awareness. This position also advocates the learning of English in order to spread the word of Islam and encourage mutual tolerance between the Arab and Western world.

English and English teaching in Saudi Arabia has been contested throughout its history. English has been welcomed to spread Islam, facilitate trade, improve employment opportunities, and achieve political alliances. However, it has also been viewed as a threat to Islam, a hurdle to obtaining employment, and a symbol of oppression. Policy makers and English teachers alike need to acknowledge this ambivalence towards English in order to teach English effectively in this context.

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3 Cultural and linguistic factors in the Saudi EFL context

Musaad Alrahaili

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the social-psychological factors that are responsible for the formation of Saudi learners' attitudes towards English and its speakers. These factors include Saudi *social identity*, *para-social contact* (exposure to English mass media), and *perceived out-group threats* (Stephan & Stephan 1996). Recent research findings suggest that Saudi learners of English as a second/foreign language (EFL) have essentially positive attitudes towards English and its speakers, but are generally opposed to accepting the target language group's social and religious values (Alrahaili 2014). Research has also demonstrated that Saudi social identity, exposure to mass media, and perceived out-group threat significantly predict Saudi learners' attitudes towards English and the English-speaking communities.

In what follows, the chapter first provides some background information about social, cultural, and religious specifics of the Saudi context which are relevant to EFL teaching and learning in this country. Given the centrality of Islam for the Saudi community, Islamic clerics and religious scholars play an extremely influential role in all aspects of life in the Kingdom including language education. A dedicated section of this chapter reviews Saudi clerics' views about English and English education in Saudi Arabia – with some among them promoting the idea of English as a threat to the Saudi community. A further section examines prevailing attitudes towards EFL learning in the Saudi context and more broadly. The chapter's focus then shifts to an exploration of the predictors of Saudi EFL learners' attitudes to English, the English-speaking communities, and to learning English; the most important among them include in-group identification, intergroup threats, and para-social contact. The chapter's concluding section provides a summary of the main contributions of attitudinal research in the Saudi EFL context.

Background

Educational and labour reforms were started by the Saudi government in 2005 to lower the unemployment rate of Saudis and reduce the dependence on foreign

workforce. A substantial part of these reforms was the launching of a government scholarship program in 2005 supporting thousands of Saudi nationals undertaking undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in America, Australia, Europe, and parts of Asia. Improving Saudi human resources and raising workers' productive efficiency and innovative capabilities are set as the goals of this scholarship program (Ministry of Higher Education 2010).

In recognition of the importance of English competence for these reforms, the Saudi government has put in place a range of strategies designed to improve EFL achievement. It is widely acknowledged that these have not yet yielded the desired results. The ambitious educational goals for enhancing opportunities and developing skills for the Saudi labour force in different fields have been limited by the lack of English language proficiency among Saudi tertiary students. Lack of English language proficiency is not the only obstacle faced by the Saudi government in relation to reforms in education. Voices are increasingly heard denouncing the growing influence of English in the Saudi community. These voices have risen from within the community claiming that the spread of English is at the expense of the Arabic language and the Saudi identity. Al-Sultan (2009), a columnist in the Arab News Newspaper, expressed this concern saying that '[k]nowing or mastering the English language is of paramount importance but not to the extent of submerging our cultural identity' (p. 1). This resentment about the strong presence of English is felt by many Saudis – especially after the Ministry of Education revealed an intention to implement English in the first grade of the public school system.

In his own comment on the decision to introduce English in the fourth grade, Al-Mofreh, a member of the *Shoura* (consultative) Council's Education Committee, called for limiting the teaching of English only to high school, and argued that implementing English at the primary school level is a waste of money and human resources (Al Asmari 2013; Khan 2011). As far as teaching English at the intermediate and secondary school levels is concerned, Al-Mofreh ascribed Saudi EFL students' poor achievement to the learning milieu, insufficient exposure to English, and inadequately qualified teachers of English (Al Asmari 2013; Khan 2011).

It is also important to understand the cultural context of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi community is a collective tribal community in the sense that tribal conservative traditions, tribal allegiances, and family ties are emphasised among the Saudi people. Al-Seghayer (2005); Ménoret (2005); and Yamani (2000) all maintained that the Saudi community is characterised by a high degree of cultural homogeneity in terms of their Arabic language, Arabic traditions, tribal allegiances, and Islamic values. These cultural aspects determine the social identity of the Saudi community – a patriarchal community in which males are the dominant gender and the decision-makers who hold positions of power and prestige, and have the authority to 'define women's status, privileges, and rights in the community' (Kalabamu 2006, p. 1). Islamic identity is also an influential part of Saudi people's lives. Al-Abdel Al haq and Smadi (1993, p. 307) asserted that:

> [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] citizens are intensely religious, Islam having a strong influence on their minds and hearts; they resist radical change. Furthermore, Islam continues to be a strong and vital force for the Saudis collectively and individually. Religion is a strong motivating force that governs their behaviours; most phases and aspects of culture, and practically every act and movement of life, are coloured by religion.

The Islamic identity is deeply rooted in the Saudi community. Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam, and it hosts the two Holy Mosques and other sites of the early Islamic heritage in the cities of Mecca and Medina. Every year around two million Muslim pilgrims travel in groups from all around the world to Saudi Arabia to offer prayers, perform *Haj* (pilgrimage), and practise their religious rituals at the Islamic sites in Mecca and Medina. According to the Basic Law of Saudi Arabia, Article 55, the King has to 'rule according to the rulings of Islam and shall supervise the application of *Shari'ah* (Islamic law)' (Basic Law 1993, p. 7). Also, the primary goal of both school and university education is to instil the Islamic faith in young people's minds, promote the belief in one God, in Islam as the true way of life, and in Mohammed as the last messenger of God whose traditions should be followed (Basic Law 1993).

Arabic is the official language of Saudi Arabia according to the basic law of governance (Basic Law 1993). It is worth noting that the revelation of the *Qur'an* – the Muslims' holy book – in Arabic set the scene for a unique bond between Arabic and Islam. On the one hand, Arabic serves as the linguistic medium for the message of Islam and fosters the Islamic culture. On the other hand, Islam promotes Arabic beyond the geographic borders of the Arabian Peninsula and maintains its supremacy in the sense that Muslims are required to use Arabic in their prayers. As the language of the holy *Qur'an*, Arabic is required to be promoted in the fields of education, business, health, and in everyday life.

It is important to understand the Saudi community's social and cultural context in terms of the desire to maintain the supremacy of the Arabic language in all social, educational, and economic fields. There is a widely held view that the cultural and religious importance of Arabic is being challenged by the increasing importance of knowledge of English as an essential prerequisite for work, education, business, academic research, and science. This brings forth a conflict between the need to learn English – advocated by the government's socioeconomic policy – and the deeply embedded cultural and religious traditions to maintain the supremacy of the Arabic language in the Saudi community.

Islamic clerics' opinions about learning English

Islamic clerics have preached against learning English if it is learned for integrative purposes. Religious scholars consider English as a threat to Islamic identity and the Arabic language if it is not used for serving Islam or satisfying worldly needs (i.e., use of English for specific purposes). Al-Uthaymeen, the late member

of the Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and *Ifta* (advisory opinions) (PCSRI), was asked in 1997 for his opinion about learning English for seeking knowledge or preaching Islam. In his book, Kitaab al-'Ilm, Al-Uthaymeen (1997, p. 143) stated:

> Our view on learning English is that it is a means and it is a bad means if the aim is bad. But the one thing that we must avoid is using it instead of Arabic. That is not permitted. We have heard some foolish people speaking English instead of Arabic, and some of the foolish people who are dazzled by the West, whom I regard as lackeys [of the West], teaching their children to use the greetings of the non-Muslims, and teaching them to say "bye-bye" when departing, and so on. Because using this language, instead of Arabic, which is the language of the Quran and the noblest of languages, is *haraam* (forbidden).

This advisory opinion has been revised slightly by PCSRI which is the supreme religious committee in Saudi Arabia. In response to a question about whether learning English is prohibited or lawful, PCSRI (Fatwa 4967, n.d.) stated:

> If there is a religious or worldly need for learning the English language or other foreign languages, there is no *haram* (forbidden) in learning it. However, if there is no such need, it is *makruh* (reprehensible) to learn it.

That indicates that top Saudi Islamic scholars are suspicious of the impact of learning English on the Arabic language and culture in Saudi Arabia although recent research findings suggest there may have been a shift in religious scholars' attitudes to English and to learning English (for more detail, check the review of EFL research in Chapter 1 of this volume). These religious and traditional views about learning English may have been responsible for reducing or completely removing Anglo-cultural content from the Saudi EFL curriculum. It is noteworthy that this policy is indeed in accord with the preferences of both Saudi EFL teachers and learners (Alenazi 2006; Alfahadi 2012).

EFL teachers are reluctant to plan lessons that are focussed on the target language culture because the students may find it uncomfortable when they are exposed to culturally and religiously sensitive content, such as video clips with music and celebrities (Mekheimer & Aldosari 2011). More importantly, all English textbooks and instructional activities are customised and monitored to suit the Saudi cultural context. This approach gives the teachers limited options for choosing the teaching materials that may raise awareness, and create a deeper understanding, of the English language and its culture.

English as a threat

The political and cultural implications of the spread of English across the world have captured the attention of a number of scholars (Graddol 1997; Honey 1997;

Pennycook 1994). Alastair Pennycook, a professor of language at the University of Technology, Sydney, challenged the traditional views that teaching English has no political agenda. He argued that English language education has been so modified by socio-political and ideological factors that it has developed into more than 'simply teaching a language'. In 2003 Sohail Karmani – at that time a lecturer at the University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates – had a series of email exchanges with Pennycook about English, Islam, and 9/11. In one of them Pennycook stated:

> The notion that a language, English, could somehow be a threat to a great religion looks on the face of it rather bizarre. How could this system of grammar and vocabulary threaten a vast set of beliefs and practices?
>
> (Karmani & Pennycook 2005, p. 158)

In other words, English is seen not merely as a structural system of grammar and words; rather, it involves a package of cultural and ideological values. Pennycook elaborated his claim further suggesting that:

> Many now claim that English is no longer tied to any culture since it is now the property of the world rather than the possession of the English-dominant nations. But such a proposition misses the point that English is deeply embedded in a set of social, cultural, political and economic relations.
>
> (Karmani & Pennycook 2005, p. 158)

Pennycook also asserted that there are clearly two motives to change the school curriculum in Muslim countries. First, there is a desire to remove what are perceived as anti-West components of the curriculum. Second, it is the desire to replace elements of the school curriculum with English. This would then enable English to become a symbol of modernity and secularisation (Karmani & Pennycook 2005).

Should English be perceived as a threat to local languages around the world? This question has been raised in many educational contexts – especially after introducing English as a medium of instruction at many universities around the world. English as a medium of instruction (EMI) refers to the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries where the mainstream community language is not English. In 2013 a study was conducted by EMI Oxford (The Centre for Research and Development in English Medium Instruction). The study's aim was to map the size, shape, and future trends of EMI worldwide. The findings show that 51% of respondents in 55 countries regard EMI as controversial. Such attitudes reportedly arise from the desire to protect national languages and cultures, as well as the fear that EMI is potentially divisive and could lead to social inequalities (Dearden 2014).

In a similar vein, some scholars (Asraf 1996; Hadley 2004; Y Kazmi 1997; ZA Kazmi 2004; Zughoul 2003) perceive American globalisation as 'cultural colonisation' (Picard 2006, p. 19). They think that English will dominate Muslim

culture and subsequently change it. English is also described as the language of the non-Muslim because of Muslim scholars' concerns about the spread of English in the Muslim world and its impact on young generations (Argungu 1996; Picard 2006;). Issues like 'neo-colonialism' and 'Western secularity' were discussed in because of their potential to negatively affect Islamic values and threaten Muslim identity. Dorian (1994, 2009) and De Swaan (2001) used the term 'language imperialism' to reveal their suspicion of the increasing dominance of English worldwide. English is, therefore, perceived as 'an indoctrinating imperialist force' in Gulf countries (Picard 2006, p. 19).

In this context, some scholars call for Islamising English language teaching to solve this cultural and religious problem (Picard 2006). This Islamic approach to teaching English is preferable for scholars like Asraf (1996) and Zughoul (2003) because it consolidates the position of the Arabic language and makes content localised and relevant to Islamic culture (Picard 2006). In this way, Muslim learners will avoid the culture shock when they are exposed to English materials (Argungu 1996; Picard 2006). An 'Islamised' curriculum can, for instance, exclude reference to alcoholism, sexuality, and other themes which are taboos in the Muslim community. Similarly, Asraf (1996) points out that it is the Muslims' responsibility to 'de-secularise' or 'Islamise' knowledge to be beneficial for his community (cited in Picard 2006, p. 28). Consequently, censoring anti-religious ideologies and trimming content that is incompatible with the Islamic culture and faith are considered by some scholars a solution for Western hegemonic discourse and culture (Asraf 1996; Hadley 2004; Picard 2006).

The suggested approach of teaching English in Gulf countries has been equally opposed by people who support internationalism (Pennycook 1994) and by pragmatists who belong to the Muslim community and emphasise the importance of being up-to-date with global economy and integrating in the international community (Hare 1996; Picard 2006). Pragmatists argue that a Muslim student may find it hard or impossible to understand a text if it has been decontextualised. In agreement with this, Hare (1996) suggests that Muslim students can reject what is culturally inappropriate or incompatible with their values, but still learn it to understand context and acquire modern-day knowledge (Picard 2006). This means that Muslim learners can learn the English language, but can still have a critical stand or attitude towards culturally inappropriate content.

In short, 'Islamising' EFL curriculum can be a solution, especially with respect to taboos in Muslim communities. However, this should not limit the role of English as a powerful means of communicating ideas and research.

Attitudes in second language acquisition

Extensive research has investigated the role of the affective variables in second language (L2) acquisition (e.g., Crookes & Schmidt 1991; Dörnyei 1990, 1994, 2005; Gardner 1985, 2001, 2006, 2010; Gardner & Lambert 1959; Yashima 2002). Gardner – a widely recognised authority in this area – has posited that

positive attitudes towards the target language group and desire to integrate with the target language culture can explain success in L2 learning. Research also indicates that L2 learners who hold positive attitudes towards the target language and the target language group are more likely to achieve long-term success than learners who learn a second language for utilitarian purposes (Taylor, Meynard & Rheault 1977).

Gardner and Lambert's (1959) pioneering study explored the role of attitudes and motivation in L2 acquisition among high school English-speaking learners of French in Montreal where the students had first-hand contact with the French-speaking community. They found that attitudes and other variables, such as aptitude and motivation, were strongly correlated with L2 French proficiency. Subsequent studies (e.g., Gardner 1960, 1968; Gardner & Lambert 1972) have also shown that positive attitudes towards the target language and target language community influence L2 achievement. A common feature among these studies is that they were all conducted on a large group of English-speaking learners who were studying L2 French in Canada. In a somewhat different context, Scherer and Wertheimer (1964) conducted a study involving American college students of German which investigated the relationship between attitudes and these students' achievement in L2 German. The findings supported earlier claims about the correlation between positive attitudes towards the target language and L2 achievement.

L2 attitude as a construct contains a number of operational variables, such as attitudes towards the target language community, the target language, the target language culture, the social values of target language usage, and the L2 learners' own communities (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991). L2 attitudes also incorporate evaluations of other aspects of the learning situation, such as teachers, curriculum, and teaching methods (Gardner 2001).

Research has shown that a number of factors can influence L2 attitudes. Some of these, according to Ellis (1994), include parents, classroom peers, and the learning situation. As Smith (1971) pointed out, the language teachers' attitudes can also be an important factor – teachers who hold negative attitudes towards their students influence the students' attitudes negatively towards the learning situation and target language. Smith also argued that if the teacher does not meet the students' psychological needs they would develop negative attitudes toward the target language.

Attitudes to English in the Saudi/Arab EFL context

There has been some research on the role of attitudes in the Arab and Saudi EFL contexts. Malallah's (2000) study in Kuwait revealed that Kuwaiti EFL learners' attitudes towards English are essentially positive. Malallah also found that English was perceived by participants as a prestigious, interesting, and likeable language, but it was not preferred over Arabic. Al-Bassam (1987) conducted a study involving 270 female participants from three high schools in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of her study was to investigate the relationship among three variables – attitudes,

motivation, and achievement in the Saudi EFL context. The findings of the study showed a strong positive correlation between positive attitudes toward English and higher achievement scores on the English placement test. For more on Saudi EFL learners' attitudes (and other affective factors), see the relevant part of the review of Saudi EFL research in Chapter 1.

Predictors of Saudi EFL learners' language attitudes

In view of the social and cultural specifics of the Saudi EFL context briefly discussed above, three social factors have been found to act as predictors of EFL learners' attitudes towards English and the English-speaking communities – *in-group identification*, *intergroup threats*, and *intergroup contact* (para-social contact).

In-group identification

In their Social Identity Theory, Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that identification with an in-group motivates the in-group members to positively differentiate their in-group from out-groups ultimately causing in-group bias; the latter is based on in-group favouritism, but presumably does not necessarily involve negative attitudes towards the out-groups. Others have argued, however, that the greater the in-group identification, the greater the inclination to generate less positive attitudes towards out-groups (Brewer 1999; Mummendey, Klink & Brown 2001). Therefore, high in-group identifiers are more likely to develop unfavourable attitudes towards out-groups – especially if such out-groups compete with their in-group interests.

In in-group identification, nationality, ethnicity, and religion play a very important and significant role in the formation of self-identity (Altschul, Oyserman & Bybee 2006; Kinnvall 2004; Marty & Appleby 1997; Rumbaut 1994; Waters 1990). In a pioneering study, Alrahaili (2014) conceptualised Saudi EFL learners' self-identity as a composite construct involving three main constituent identities – Saudi, Arab, and Muslim identity; among them the latter two can be seen as more inclusive because they are relevant to Arab Muslims beyond the Saudi context. Alrahaili examined the role that these identities play – individually and together – in the formation of Saudi EFL learners' attitudes to the English language and culture, as well as to the English-speaking communities.

The study found (among other things) that Saudi EFL learners are intensely religious and Islam is a strong force in Saudis' construction of self-identity. The research participants displayed strong identification with Saudis, Arabs, and Muslims, but notably they most strongly endorsed their religious (i.e., Muslim) identity. This is a clear reflection of the fact that the Muslim identity is strongly promoted – over and beyond the other identities – in the Saudi Basic Law of Governance (Basic Law 1993). Consequently, Muslim identity features prominently in rules, education, and dress code in the Saudi social context. There is extensive evidence that Islam has a great importance in the way Muslims live their lives (Phalet & Güngör 2004).

Previous research has shown that individuals with a Muslim background tend to consider their Muslim identity as significant and crucial (Ouis & Roald 2003). In the European context, several studies indicated that Muslims have a very strong Muslim identity (e.g., Haddad & Smith 2001; Modood et al. 1997; Verkuyten 2007; Vertovec & Rogers 1999). Very much in accord with these and related studies, Alrahaili's (2014) results revealed that Saudi EFL learners are strongly in favour of living an Islamic way of life. Regardless of that, the Muslim identity was not found to be a significant predictor of Saudi EFL learners' out-group attitudes. A similar finding was obtained in relation to Saudis' Arab identity – it was not significantly associated with participants' attitudes towards English and the English-speaking communities. On the other hand, the least inclusive identity – Saudi identity – turned out to be much more influential in predicting attitudes towards English and the English-speaking communities.

In-group affect by definition refers to the positive feelings that are associated with being a member of a group (Cameron 2004). In the context of the Saudi identity, in-group affect refers to the national pride attached to being a Saudi. It seems that Saudis with a strong sense of national identity typically have a negative attitude towards English and the English-speaking communities (Alrahaili 2014). Similar results were also reported in the field of social psychology indicating that the affective aspect of identity is a potential cause of intergroup bias and ethnocentrism (Wilder & Simon 2001). Consistent with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner 1979), in-group bias (favouritism) generates negative attitudes towards the out-group; in the case of Saudi nationalists the relevant out-group are the English-speaking communities.

Intergroup threats

The influence of social and psychological factors on attitudes in intergroup relations has been investigated in numerous intergroup studies (for a review, see Kinder & Sears 1981; Riek, Mania & Gaertner 2006; Sherif & Sherif 1969). A number of theories – e.g., the Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RGCT), the Symbolic Threat Theory (STT), and the Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) of prejudice – have been proposed to conceptualise and identify the intergroup threats. ITT proposes that out-groups pose four types of threats on in-groups: realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes; two of these were also considered in earlier intergroup theories, such as RGCT and STT (Stephan & Stephan 1996, 2000). These threats are proposed to act as causal antecedents of prejudice in intergroup relations.

Intergroup threat is regarded as an important predictor of prejudice in intergroup research (Stephan & Stephan 2000). Intergroup threat is experienced when members of one group perceive another group as a possible source of harm to them (Stephan, Ybarra & Rios Morrison 2009). The threat is proposed to occur when 'one group's actions, beliefs, or characteristics challenge the goal attainment or well-being of another group' (Riek, Mania & Gaertner 2006, p. 363). It is thought that when an out-group is perceived to be posing threats

to the in-group's scarce resources such as jobs (Jackson 1993), political well-being and welfare (Sherif 1966; Stephan & Stephan 1996), and the culture and social norms of in-groups (Stephan & Stephan 1996, 2000), the in-group members would display negative attitudes towards that out-group (see Riek, Mania & Gaertner 2006 for a meta-analytic review).

ITT combines these two types of threats – symbolic threats and realistic threats – with the threat stemming from intergroup anxiety and negative stereotypes; threats are treated as antecedents of prejudice towards the out-group (Stephan & Stephan 1996, 2000). Although *intergroup threat* has been studied extensively in social psychology and is considered to be one of the key causes of intergroup bias and prejudice against out-groups, it has never been studied in the domain of second language acquisition to predict L2 attitudes (see Li & Zhao 2012; Riek, Mania & Gaertner 2006; Stephan, Ybarra & Rios Morrison 2009).

As far as the Saudi EFL context is concerned, existing research evidence suggests that Saudi EFL learners do not regard English as a threat to their national language and/or their social identities (Alrahaili 2014). On average, Saudis are uncertain whether English-speaking communities are posing political and/or military threats to the Saudi community. The only type of threat which seems to generate strong negative attitudes among Saudi EFL learners is cultural threat – Saudis find the cultural values of English-speaking communities with reference to family and religion to be incompatible with Saudi cultural values (for similar views, see Mashood 2003). Saudi EFL learners seem to be quite open towards the English-speaking communities as a psychological entity, but regardless of that report extreme distance towards the target language group culture (Alrahaili 2014).

Intergroup threat has been shown to be a very potent factor in the formation of language attitudes among Saudi EFL learners. Those reporting high perceptions of intergroup threat tend to be less open towards the English language and the English-speaking communities, and they tend to have more negative attitudes to classroom aspects of the EFL teaching/learning process, such as the teachers and the curriculum (Alrahaili 2014). This is consistent with the findings of other research investigating the role of realistic threat (Islam & Jahjah 2001; Schwarzwald & Tur-Kaspa 1997; Stephan & Stephan 1996; Stephan, Ybarra & Bachman 1999) and symbolic threat in intergroup contexts showing them to be reliable predictors of negative attitudes towards the out-group (Sears & Henry 2003; Weigel & Howes 1985; Ybarra & Stephan 1994).

Intergroup contact/para-social contact

The notion of *intergroup contact* is traced to Allport's (1954) Theory of Intergroup Contact. Allport proposed that under certain conditions, such as equal status, cooperative activity, personal interaction, and social norms, intergroup contact between two conflicting groups plays a significant role in reducing intergroup prejudice. Allport proposed also that negative intergroup contact could reinforce the pre-contact negative stereotype between the groups.

Saudis have para-social (i.e., indirect) contact with the target language group via the English mass media. Alrahaili (2014) established that exposure to the English mass media is associated with positive attitudes towards English and English speakers, as well as positive attitudes towards co-education. Intergroup contact with the out-group – even when that contact is indirect – reduces prejudice (Allport 1954; Schiappa, Gregg & Hewes 2005). Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) found similar results in foreign language contexts. They showed that L2 cultural products play a salient role in familiarising learners with the L2 community and thus in shaping their L2 attitudes. Similarly, Alrahaili (2014) found that para-social contact positively influenced not only learners' attitudes towards the English-speaking communities but also learners' intended and actual efforts for learning English.

These findings suggest that even indirect contact with the target language group (e.g., via the mass media) can play a strong determining role with regard to L2 learners' attitudes and motivation. Various forms of *para-social contact*, such as exposure to English mass media, are associated with distancing from the Saudi identity and Arab identity and, consequently, with less prejudice towards the English-speaking communities. Saudis who report a high exposure to English mass media are less likely to be ethnocentric (Alrahaili 2014). This situation is consistent with previous research demonstrating that intergroup contact is related to less national pride (Pettigrew 1998), reduced national identity (Pettigrew 2009), reduced prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006) and provincialism (Eller & Abrams 2004).

Para-social contact, therefore, has the capacity to reduce perceived intergroup threat. According to Alrahaili (2014), this seems to be the case with Saudi EFL learners. Those reporting high exposure to English mass media are less likely to perceive English-speaking communities as a threat. This stands in contrast with *in-group contact*. High in-group contact is typically related to higher perceptions of intergroup threat. Previous research (outside of Saudi Arabia) has produced evidence that in-group contact increases the feelings of stereotypical threat while out-group contact reduces the feelings of threat (Elizaga & Markman 2008).

Conclusion

This chapter contributes to our understanding of Saudi learners' attitudes towards the English language and the English-speaking communities in the Saudi EFL context. Research evidence indicates that Saudi learners generally have positive attitudes towards the English language and the English-speaking communities. Most Saudi EFL learners have distinctly warm feelings towards English speakers, and report a preparedness to socialise with members of the English-speaking communities.

There are powerful social factors driving the formation of Saudi EFL learners' attitudes to English and the English-speaking communities. *In-group identification* – Saudi national identity in particular – is one of these factors. Research shows that a strong sense of national identity is linked to less openness

to the out-group, to less preparedness to accept the out-group's moral and cultural values, and – ultimately – to unfavourable attitudes to English and the English-speaking communities.

Another of these factors concerns perceptions of the out-group as a threat. While Saudi EFL learners' do not appear to regard English as a linguistic or cultural threat and are ambivalent in relation to actual political and/or military threats presented by the English-speaking communities, they do see Anglophone culture as a potentially serious threat to traditional Saudi and Islamic values, and such perceptions have the capacity to generate negative attitudes.

Exposure to English media including newspapers, TV, literature, films – in other words, *para-social contact* – is a strong determinant of positive attitudes. Those Saudi EFL learners who report high amounts of para-social contact are found to have the most positive attitudes to English and the English-speaking communities (Alrahaili 2014).

Research findings as the ones reported in this chapter have implications for language planning and educational policies in the Saudi EFL context. One key finding concerns the positive correlation between learners' openness to the target language group and both their intended and actual efforts for learning the second language. It seems therefore that a government policy designed to reduce cultural distance and to promote greater openness to English and the English-speaking communities would lead to increased motivation for learning English and – ultimately – to better achievement.

There are a variety of ways in which this can be accomplished including providing Saudi EFL learners with more opportunities for direct and indirect contact with the TL community and its culture, and encouraging them to practise English outside the classroom through social media and English-speaking media – radio, television, Internet websites, newspapers, and magazines.

Due to the increasing importance of English for millions of people worldwide, learning English has become imperative for young generations of Muslims. Opposing the spread of English and perceiving it as a threat to the Muslim culture is a limited view that neglects the huge benefits of acquiring modern-day knowledge and the ability to cope with the fast technological developments in the world which advanced English competence brings along. In view of this, Saudi community leaders including religious clerics should provide guidance to young Muslims in relation to how to take the best from this international language.

Young Saudi learners should acquire the necessary language skills and develop the ability to use English to communicate with non-Arab communities effectively. However, in doing so they should be able to evaluate what is appropriate or inappropriate for a Muslim culture. Openness to other cultures or civilizations does not necessarily mean being negatively influenced by Western secular communities, and does not have to be at the expense of the local culture. On the contrary, English can be used in education, medicine, engineering, technology, and interfaith dialogue worldwide while respecting and preserving local cultural traditions. Besides, learning English in Saudi Arabia may help to dissipate the negative stereotypes about Muslims, such as Islamic fundamentalism and

terrorism. Mastering the English language can be an opportunity to defend the Muslim identity and introduce the Muslim culture, ethics, and religious values to the international communities. Muslim EFL learners may consider mastering English as a source of pride (Malallah 2000). Learning English can, therefore, be beneficial for Muslims since it is an influential tool that is positively used to reflect the true picture of Islam and unveil the real nature of Muslim believers.

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4 Learning English in Saudi Arabia

Fakieh Alrabai

Literature review

Many factors shape the nature of EFL learning in Saudi Arabia, such as the community, culture, religion, teaching and learning practices, and the learners' primary language – Arabic. A key factor is the Saudi community which, according to Alrahaili (2014) is a collective and religious tribal community with strong conservative tribal traditions, tribal alliances, and family ties. Al-Saraj (2014) pointed out that the strong conservative and religious traditions of the Saudi community have made Saudi culture resistant to changing or adopting new ways of life including learning English – despite the increasing need for Saudi individuals to learn this language. Previous research that has investigated this issue (Al-Seghayer 2014; Al Dameg 2011; Elyas & Picard 2010; Mahboob & Elyas 2014) has confirmed a widely held misconception that learning English may affect the learning of Arabic – especially at younger ages – or may undermine local Saudi culture, customs, and identity. Despite the widely recognised benefits of early exposure to language instruction, Saudi public elementary schools do not introduce English until the fourth grade (at age nine), not in the first grade (at age six), because of community concerns that English language instruction will affect the Islamic or Arabic identity of young students (Elyas 2008). As Al-Seghayer (2014) emphasised, the fear that English will impact Arabic use and may erode Arabic culture, customs, and identity demotivates some Saudi learners from attempting to learn English and in turn affects their L2 academic achievement.

Nouraldeen and Elyas (2014) acknowledged that culture is one of several factors that affect EFL learning in Saudi Arabia. They argued that, because Saudi Arabia has never been under colonial rule, Saudi culture has not been affected by European cultures. Lack of influence by foreign European cultures resulted in the Saudi community's public refusal to accept the English language when it was first introduced in the country.

Islam, the official religion in Saudi Arabia, is deeply rooted in the Saudi community and culture. The rules and regulations that govern the educational system in Saudi Arabia are based on Islam. Saudi Arabia is one of just a few countries with a segregated school system (Al-Zarah 2008) which is legally mandated because of the Islamic principle that places of study and work for women must be completely

separate from those for men. Wiseman (2010) attributed single-sex schooling in Saudi Arabia to Islamic beliefs that remain at the core of the educational system and to other cultural, social, and traditional values.

A range of classroom-related teaching and learning practices have been found to play a role in EFL learning in Saudi Arabia. One of them concerns the use of Arabic, the learners' first language (L1), alongside or even in place of English – a phenomenon often referred to as code-switching (Alhawsawi 2013; Almutairi 2008; Alrashidi & Phan 2015; Fareh 2010). In Alshammari's (2011) study, 60% of Saudi EFL teachers claimed that using Arabic is necessary to reduce the time needed for instruction. Nearly 69% of those teachers explained that they use Arabic in English language classrooms to clarify difficult concepts or explain new vocabulary and grammatical points to their students. Alhawsawi (2013) and Rabab'ah (2005) attributed the use of the Arabic language in Saudi EFL classes either to teachers' low competence and confidence in using English or to their desire to make their own jobs easier.

Using the mother tongue as the language of instruction in EFL classes has a distinctly negative impact on learning English. It undermines learners' communicative competence by minimising their exposure to English and giving them little or no opportunity to practise and communicate in the target language (but see the review of Saudi EFL research in Chapter 1 for alternative views). Alharbi (2015) claimed that using the L1 in language classrooms decreases students' motivation to practise speaking English in the classroom; classroom practice is crucial in an EFL context where opportunities to speak English outside the classroom are very limited.

Saudi EFL learners lack sufficient exposure to English both inside and outside the classroom. Khan (2011) emphasised this fact stating that English in Saudi Arabia is regarded only as an academic subject since most Saudis communicate in their native language, Arabic, with their family, peers, friends, and classmates resulting in few opportunities for students to speak English through daily interactions. Alharbi (2015) acknowledged that Saudi learners lack authentic situations for practising English communication skills outside the classroom. One reason for the lack of suitable exposure to English in Saudi Arabia is the dominance of Arabic as the Kingdom's official language and as the principal medium of communication among Saudis. The dominance of the Arabic language has been found to undermine the value of English among Saudi students. Alqahtani (2011) and Alharbi (2015) believed that, due to the dominance of Arabic, Saudi students are insufficiently motivated to advance their English language proficiency, and may not understand why they need English. According to those studies, the perceived domination of Arabic has in turn resulted in learners' assumption that English is worthless in both their academic and social life contributing to their poor performance in English. Another factor that has been found to undermine Saudi learners' exposure to English in the classroom are the typically overcrowded EFL classes – with obvious consequences for learning outcomes (Al-Mohanna 2010; Bahanshal 2013).

Another typical feature of the EFL classroom in Saudi Arabia is the teacher's dominance over the learning process. According to Alshahrani (2016), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is characterised by a rich and traditional Islamic culture and a high level of *power distance* between teachers and learners. He added that in the classroom learning environment in Saudi Arabia the teacher's authority is accepted and respected with high reverence, and student–teacher relationships are highly formal – with classroom discourse typically occurring unidirectionally, from the teacher to students. Alshahrani attributed this to the teacher-centred culture which is generally devoid of independence and individualism in learning. Alharbi (2015) has likewise recognised the central role teachers in Saudi Arabia play, emphasising that they control everything that happens in the classroom. This teacher-centred rather than student-centred learning environment has been blamed by some for Saudi EFL learners' widespread underachievement (Ahmad 2014; Alkubaidi 2014; Alrabai 2014a; Alrashidi & Phan 2015; Fareh 2010; Rajab 2013). In this context learners assume a passive role in the learning process because they regularly depend on their teachers as the main source of knowledge (Alkubaidi 2014), and are often content to remain passive observers and recipients of knowledge rather than be active participants in the learning process.

In Saudi Arabia, as in many EFL contexts around the world (see, e.g., Batra & Nawani 2010), the textbook has become the de facto curriculum. The Ministry of Education (MOE) in Saudi Arabia provides a ready-made English curriculum in the form of English language textbooks that are commonly referred to as *English for Saudi Arabia*. This package includes three materials: A textbook and a workbook for students and a teaching manual for the teacher. This curriculum is specifically designed to reflect the beliefs, customs, values, and traditions of the Saudi Arabian community, and is identical at each grade level throughout the country. The textbooks integrate all language skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking) with functional grammar and vocabulary.

This curriculum is imposed on practically all Saudi EFL learners at public institutions – even at the tertiary level (Al-Seghayer 2014) although its design seems to be more a reflection of its designers' personal perceptions and intuitions rather than on students' actual needs, goals, desires, and real-life concerns (Al-Subahi 1991). Saudi students' classroom activities are limited in number and range to those which are encoded in the curriculum; neither teachers, nor students can choose to engage in any activities beyond the ones specified in the curriculum. According to Almalki (2014), Saudi EFL teachers only have a minimal role in planning the curriculum; besides, they are inadequately trained on how to implement the new EFL curriculum. This marginalisation of Saudi EFL teachers from the curriculum development process is well-established in Alnefaie and Gritter's (2016) research. (For a critical discussion of other EFL teaching-related issues in Saudi Arabia, please see Chapter 5 of this book.)

Saudi EFL teachers' lack of control/autonomy over what they do in the language classroom and how they do it has implications for learner autonomy. Indeed, as revealed by research quite recently, Saudis generally tend to be non-autonomous learners. Using a sample of 630 Saudi students, Alrabai (2017a) investigated

learners' level of autonomy and its relationship with academic achievement in EFL. The learners in Alrabai's research manifested very low autonomy – with a mean score of just 2.35 out of 5; their language achievement was quite low, too (M = 66 out of 100). The study attributed the lack of autonomy of Saudi learners to a variety of reasons, such as over-reliance on teachers and the spoon-feeding nature of instruction prevalent in this context; the absence of learner involvement in decision-making policies; the lack of teacher training on up-to-date teaching methods; and the lack of learner training on certain skills that contribute to the development of learner autonomy, such as self-management, self-monitoring, and self-assessment.

In a related study, Alrabai (2017b) attempted to assess the readiness of Saudi students for independent/autonomous learning – with a focus on EFL learning. Using a sample of 319 Saudi EFL learners (aged 15–24) the study deployed a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to tap into the participants' perceptions of their responsibilities, decision-making abilities, motivation, involvement in autonomy-related activities, and capacity to take charge of their own learning. Learners demonstrated low responsibility levels – with only about 17% prepared to accept sole responsibility for their EFL learning. A considerable percentage of participants (27.29%) reported rarely being involved in self-directed activities; these learners demonstrated high levels of teacher dependency and low levels of learner independence. The overall mean score of 3.06 indicated a rather low readiness for autonomous EFL learning among participating students. The author explained this as a kind of survival strategy in which learners in this context seek to achieve little beyond the bare minimum requirements for passing the course.

In a similar study, Tamer (2013) aimed to assess the readiness of 121 Saudi university students in a preparatory English program to engage in autonomous EFL learning; the study sought to examine their perceptions of responsibilities, abilities, motivation, and self-directed activities inside and outside class. The results, similar to the findings of Farahani (2014), showed that the reported high levels of motivation and self-confidence were inconsistent with the lack of voluntary learning activities coupled with students' reluctance to assume responsibility for their own learning.

Alrabai (2017c) investigated Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of the challenges they encounter in promoting learners' autonomy. The teachers identified some deeply entrenched cultural attitudes among Saudi EFL learners which hindered the promotion of learner autonomy, in particular learners' focus on passing exams rather than on actual learning. This focus is a well-documented trait of Saudi EFL learners. Alhammad (2010) claimed that the academic approaches at Saudi schools encourage students to develop a system of ineffective memorisation and a superficial understanding of facts for the sole purpose of passing exams rather than achieving deep and meaningful learning. Further support to this claim comes from Al Alhareth and Al Dighrir's (2014) research revealing that the Saudi education system focusses on subjects that do not appeal to students, and that the reliance on rote learning leads to memorisation rather than understanding.

The teachers participating in Alrabai's study identified learners' over-reliance on the teacher to be another barrier to learner autonomy. They also believed that low learner autonomy can also be attributed to Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the English language and learners' lack of previous experience with autonomous learning. Notably, participating teachers admitted they had not received proper training on how to advance their learners' autonomy. Additionally, a staggering 82% of them acknowledged their rather limited expectations of what their learners could achieve, and recognised this as another serious obstacle to learner autonomy.

The interviewees also identified institutional barriers that they encountered in the promotion of learner autonomy, such as the density of the prescribed curriculum, the insufficient time allotted to English classes, the activities and tasks in the curriculum, the overcrowded classes, the arbitrary norms imposed by academic institutions, the lack of teacher autonomy, and the major impact of the traditional teaching environment. In addition, learner-related factors were perceived as contributing to low learner autonomy, such as low learner motivation, low level of English language proficiency, lack of self-confidence, unwillingness to take part in discussion, and reluctance to perform learning tasks on their own.

The results of an earlier study, Al Asmari (2013), reinforce Alrabai's findings above. The participating 60 EFL teachers from Taif University in Saudi Arabia regarded their learners' ability to learn autonomously as very low, and recommended various strategies for improving this situation including continuous professional development and reflection on teaching and learning practices.

Very few studies have examined the role of Saudi learners' self-esteem in learning English. A thorough search of literature was only able to find two studies on EFL learner self-esteem in the Saudi context. AlHattab (2006) examined how writing achievement was related to the global self-esteem, situational self-esteem, and task self-esteem of 81 Saudi EFL students in the Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah region. The study's results revealed a positive correlation between learners' situational and task self-esteem and their EFL writing performance, but only found a nonsignificant relationship between the learners' global self-esteem and their writing achievement. The second study was that of Alrabai (2017d) who examined the concept of language self-esteem among 263 Saudi EFL learners and its relationship with language achievement. Questionnaire data were subjected to various descriptive and inferential statistical analyses demonstrating low levels of learner self-esteem ($M = 2.94$ [out of 5]) and low language achievement ($M = 62.80$ [out of 100]). The study revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.414$) between learners' self-esteem and their EFL achievement. No significant differences were established between male and female learners – either in self-esteem or in EFL achievement. These findings reinforce the importance of learner self-esteem as a determinant of EFL achievement and the need to find practical solutions for promoting Saudi learners' self-esteem. (See also Alrabai and Moskovsky (2016) for their findings in relation to the role of self-esteem relative to other affective factors.)

Notwithstanding claims in government EFL learning/teaching policy documents about the use of technology and developing learners' information literacy skills, it seems that the Saudi educational system has largely failed to take full advantage of modern technologies despite plenty of available evidence of their benefits for the delivery of language education. Almutairi (2008) claimed that most Saudi schools lack English learning facilities, such as language labs, educational films, or tape recorders; even where such resources are available, they are usually out of order because of poor maintenance and a lack of training in their correct use. Alharbi (2015) highlighted this further pointing out that common educational technology, such as computers, recorders, and projectors, is often completely missing from Saudi schools. Fareh (2010), in turn, claimed that schools in Saudi Arabia are rarely provided with relevant resources including wall charts, flash cards, posters, audio and visual aids, language software, e-learning resources, suitably equipped language computer laboratories, and other teaching/learning facilities. According to Al-Seghayer (2014), because adequate teaching resources are unavailable, Saudi English teachers often do not even consider using teaching aids in their classroom. Instead, they rely heavily (and, often, solely) on textbooks and blackboards during class, often delivering a listening segment by reading it out themselves to the students rather than using a play-back device. According to this study, Saudi EFL teachers tend to produce their own teaching aid materials which are often unprofessionally designed and prepared, and because of that are not particularly effective in the classroom. Al-Seghayer concluded that the absence of truly authentic reading and listening materials is at least in part responsible for the learners' low motivation and lack of interest in learning English.

In those relatively infrequent cases when technology was incorporated into EFL delivery its use usually produced enhanced learning outcomes. Morris (2011) found that creating ways to allow learners to use their laptops and cellular phones constructively can help lower these learners' anxiety and aid their learning. Participants in Alkhatnai's (2011) study emphasised the effectiveness of online activities using technology versus a traditional classroom setting. They reported being able to overcome some of the problems associated with face-to-face classroom dynamics when interacting online, such as speaking up, speaking out, asking questions, engaging with peers, or monitoring and reflecting on learning. This, in fact, contradicts some of the claims made in the *Vision* and other EFL policy documents in Saudi Arabia.

Elyas and Picard (2010) explained that the Saudi EFL context is a typical example of the traditional grammar-translation method (GTM) of teaching which involves explicit instruction of L2 grammatical rules and then applying them in the translation of sentences from L2 to L1.

As a result of long-lasting exposure to GTM and other inefficient and inappropriate teaching methods, Saudi EFL learners have developed inadequate learning strategies, such as memorisation and rote learning (Alkubaidi 2014; Almutairi 2008; Alrabai 2014a; Fareh 2010; Rajab 2013, etc.). According to Alrashidi and Phan (2015), most learners in Saudi EFL classes employ memorisation as their

sole strategy for learning – they try memorising everything they learn, including paragraphs, grammar rules, or vocabulary, without necessarily understanding their meanings and the ways in which they are formed. Memorisation as a learning strategy is further reinforced among Saudi EFL learners by the nature of language testing at Saudi public schools and universities which almost exclusively targets memory-based declarative knowledge. As both Saudi EFL teachers and learners already know very well, rote memorisation can help students pass exams and achieve high grades without actually mastering language skills.

Instead of being encouraged to employ their creativity and imagination learners are often provided with summaries for each unit of the curriculum, and are asked to study these summaries for the exam and to memorise information, but not to think deeply about it. According to Al-Misnad (1985), such students are typically unfamiliar with the task of pursuing knowledge on their own; rather, they expect their instructors to explicitly tell them what they need to know which they then memorise and regurgitate on exams. This is indeed widely recognised as a crucial flaw of the Saudi educational system.

There are other cross-institutional and inter-governmental factors contributing to the lack of adequate achievement in this field. One of them is the absence of effective partnerships with international institutions in the area of English language teaching and training. Al-Seghayer (2014) noted the lack of partnerships with well-known EFL educational centres throughout the world and the lack of efforts to collaborate with well-respected long-established schools and language institutes. According to him, suitable cross-institutional partnerships would have the capacity to promote the development of new language curricula and language policies, as well as improve teacher-training standards. However, there are also arguments against partnerships – see alternative viewpoints in Chapter 7 of this book.

A large body of earlier research (see, e.g., Al-Khairy 2013; Alrabai 2014a; Alrashidi & Phan 2015; Rahman & Alhaisoni 2013) has recognised that low achievement is a rather common phenomenon in English language classes. Many learners usually graduate with a low level of English competence despite the nine years they spend learning English at the school level and regardless of the considerable efforts of the Saudi government to improve English teaching and learning in the country (e.g., Al-Johani 2009; Alhawsawi 2013; Khan 2011; Rajab 2013). Saudi EFL learners' low achievement has been attributed to a variety of multidimensional factors. These include affective/psychological factors, such as lack of motivation to learn English, high learner anxiety during language classes, low autonomy, and low self-esteem.

Lack of motivation for learning English is widely recognised as a key characteristic of Saudi EFL learners that negatively affects both their EFL learning and the ensuing EFL competence (see, e.g., Al-Khairy 2013; Alrabai 2014b; Khan 2011). Fareh (2010, among many others) claimed that most learners in Saudi Arabia are unmotivated and have no particular desire to learn English. Alrabai (2011, 2014b, 2014c) conducted a series of experimental investigations to examine Saudi learners' motivation for learning English attributing their low motivation to diverse and complex reasons. Among these reasons are inappropriate teacher behaviour, low

self-esteem and self-confidence, high language anxiety, low motivational intensity, low autonomy, and inappropriate EFL teaching methods. Al-Khairy (2013) emphasised the existence of other factors behind the low motivation of Saudi EFL learners, such as poorly designed textbooks, improper English faculty behaviours, peer pressure, inappropriate teaching methods, insufficient use of modern teaching aids, and difficult English vocabulary and grammar. Alrabai and Moskovsky (2016) examined five affective factors – motivation, attitudes, anxiety, self-esteem, and autonomy – with the aim of establishing their effect, both collectively and individually, on Saudi learners' L2 achievement. Descriptive and inferential data analyses confirmed the importance of affect in relation to L2 acquisition – the five affective variables together accounted for 85% to 91% of the L2 performance variance in the study sample. Individually, each of the five variables was found to uniquely contribute to L2 performance, but among them motivation clearly emerged as the strongest predictor of L2 achievement. By comparison, the effects of the other four variables on achievement can be described as marginal. This outcome constitutes compelling evidence of the critical role of motivation in L2 acquisition generally and achievement more specifically.

Previous studies (Al-Johani 2009; Alrashidi & Phan 2015; Khan 2011) have proposed that the teacher is perhaps the strongest determinant of learners' motivation, and have attributed Saudi EFL learners' low motivation to lack of proper teacher encouragement and support. As Al-Johani (2009) has pointed out, teachers commonly fail to provide encouragement to their learners and/or to acknowledge learners' participation and ideas; they often fail to offer examples from real-life situations when presenting lessons; they tend to overcorrect learners' mistakes and to be unduly critical of their learning attempts (cited in Alrashidi & Phan 2015, p. 39). Khan (2011) noted that EFL learners in Saudi Arabia are usually left to their own devices – without any guidelines from the teacher. Teachers' failure to regularly provide substantive feedback on learners' EFL output or to offer constructive commentary on their development can reduce learners' motivation and consequently curtail their progress (see also Al-saraj 2014).

The majority of Saudis have held negative attitudes about English in the past. There has, however, been a noticeably positive shift in Saudi learners' attitudes towards English in recent years. The reader is referred to Chapter 3 of this book which is specifically concerned with learner attitudes.

One issue that has received very little attention is the role of aptitude in learning English for Saudi learners. To the best of our knowledge, the only study that has investigated the impact of foreign language aptitude on English proficiency in the Saudi context is Moskovsky et al. (2015). This rather limited interest in foreign language aptitude in Saudi applied linguistics research might be due to the lack of a valid reliable Arabic version of the foreign language aptitude test. For this reason, Moskovsky et al. (2015) conducted a study that aimed to develop a foreign language aptitude test for Arabic native speakers and to determine whether foreign language aptitude was related to Saudi learners' L2 proficiency. The study established foreign language aptitude to be a significant, albeit weak, predictor of English language achievement among Saudi learners.

Feelings of anxiety are often prevalent in English language classes in Saudi Arabia (Al-Saraj 2014; Alrabai 2015; among many others). Alrabai (2014a) established that language anxiety often manifests itself in Saudi EFL learners' reluctance to participate in classroom discourse, their unwillingness to provide responses, to ask questions, or to engage in class discussions, as well as their excessive dependence on their teacher. Past research conducted in the Saudi EFL context (including Al-Saraj 2014; Alrabai 2014a, 2015; Alshahrani & Alandal 2015, etc.) has identified fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, negative attitudes towards the English class, and language testing as the major sources of language anxiety among Saudi EFL learners. According to Hamouda (2013), low self-esteem also contributes to anxiety and to learners' reluctance to engage in EFL communication.

Second language research has established that L2 learners quite often approach the learning of the new language with a set of well-established beliefs about the nature of L2 learning. Regardless of whether these beliefs are valid (or otherwise), they can contribute to language anxiety. According to Alrasheed (2012), Saudi EFL learners' beliefs about L2 learning include beliefs that mastering a foreign language is an overwhelming task requiring special learning abilities and a substantial amount of intelligence, that only younger language learners can be successful, that learning a foreign language is a matter of only memorising vocabulary items and grammatical rules, and that success in L2 learning means achieving native-like fluency and a perfect accent in the foreign language (cited in Alrabai 2014a, p. 90).

Tanveer (2007) identified other factors contributing to language anxiety in the Saudi EFL context, such as the threatening classroom atmosphere, the lack of learners' involvement in class discussion and decision making; the competitive learning atmosphere where learners work against each other instead of cooperating, overcrowded EFL classes, the ready-made EFL curriculum that often emphasises the quantity over the quality of the content, and the unduly strict classroom rules imposed by schools in Saudi Arabia.

With respect to the gender of EFL learners in the Saudi context, Salem (2006) found no statistically significant differences between males and females regarding EFL achievement. However, other gender-related studies indicate that females outperform males in general. In a study sample of 315 Saudi university students (177 males and 138 females), Ismail (2015) reported that females significantly outperformed males in EFL achievement. Likewise, Al-Nujaidi (2003) identified significant gender differences favouring females in Saudi EFL learners' test performance. This pattern is, in fact, present in other cultures and societies as well. It should be noted, however, that there is no evidence indicating that single-sex education has a negative effect of on EFL learning in Saudi Arabia. Although education in Saudi Arabia is segregated based on gender, both sexes receive the same quality of education and educational facilities (Al-Johani 2009). For example, the stages of schooling are the same for both genders (e.g., primary, intermediate, and secondary school), and curricula are almost identical – with only minor variations to meet different gender-related needs (Alrashidi & Phan 2015).

The role of religion in L2 learning in Saudi Arabia is sometimes discussed. It is a misconception that Islam impedes the learning of languages including English. Instead, Islam promotes and encourages the learning of languages for a variety of reasons. One reason, according to Nouraldeen and Elyas (2014), is for the sake of spreading Islam and communicating with other people and nations. Communicating with other nations and people in other cultures requires learning their languages. As Allah states in the Holy *Qur'an*: 'O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other' (*Surah Al-Hujurat* [The Private Apartments] 49:13) (Ali 1997). Likewise, non-Muslims cannot be invited to practise Islam unless Muslims master the languages of the people of other nations. As Allah instructs in the Holy *Qur'an*: 'CALL THOU [all mankind] unto thy Sustainer's path with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner' (*Surah An-Nahl* [The Bee] 16:125) (Asad 2008).

Investigating the role of age in learning English among Saudi learners has generated little or no interest among language researchers in the country. A comprehensive search of related literature was only able to identify a single study that investigated the effect of age on learning English in Saudi Arabia. Using three achievement tests, Gawi (2012) compared young students' performance (level-4 elementary school) with older students' performance (level-3 intermediate school) to determine whether there is a significant difference in EFL achievement between younger starters (aged five or six) and somewhat older learners receiving their first exposure to the L2 at around the age of 12. The study's findings supported the widely held understanding that younger starters generally achieve better including better fluency and a more advanced lexical competence. The study's author encouraged the MOE to introduce EFL classes at an earlier age.

Saudi EFL-related research has given some attention to the role of learning strategies and learning styles in learning English by Saudi learners. Utilising the most inclusive taxonomy of language learning strategies (LLSs) – that of Oxford (1990) – Alhaisoni (2012) investigated the type and frequency of LLSs among a population of 701 male and female Saudi EFL learners. The results revealed that the Saudi learners employed LLSs at low to medium frequency. They further showed that cognitive strategies (e.g., practising, analysing, and reasoning, etc.) and metacognitive strategies (e.g., organising, setting goals, etc.) were the most frequently used strategies in the study's sample. Affective strategies, on the other hand (e.g., controlling anxiety, etc.) and memory strategies (e.g., asking questions, etc.), were the least frequently used strategies (see also Alqahtani 2016; Alhaysony 2017; Al-Otaibi 2004.) Al-Qahtani's (2013) study is notable as perhaps the only one that tried to establish the relationship between the use of learning strategies and L2 achievement. Al-Qahtani found that achievement in English was positively and significantly associated with the social learning strategies.

Alkahtani (2011) examined Saudi EFL college students' preferred learning styles as a predictor of academic persistence, satisfaction, and success in different learning environments. The preferred learning styles included *tactile*, *auditory*, *visual*, *group*, *kinaesthetic*, and *individual*. They were typically determined by

learners' personality types, cultural beliefs, and teachers' teaching style. Additionally, there was a correlation between students' satisfaction and success, their positive and negative learning experiences, and their learning style preferences. The study's findings revealed further that the learning styles of Saudi EFL learners are determinants of their language learning strategy choice, motivation, and confidence. This study emphasised the importance of understanding Saudi students' learning styles and meeting their expectations and needs in the classroom.

Implications

As part of its examination of issues of in-country Saudi EFL learners/learning, this chapter considered factors pertaining to the EFL learning environment in Saudi Arabia, such as the community, culture, role of the mother language (L1), religion, teacher behaviour, teaching method, curriculum, lack of learning facilities and resources, lack of adequate exposure to the L2, and faults with the Saudi EFL educational system. It seems that the nature of the language learning environment in this country is at least in part responsible for some common demographic, social, and psychological traits of Saudi EFL learners including motivation, aptitude, anxiety, autonomy, self-esteem, gender, learning styles, and learning strategies; all of these have been found to impact EFL learning and its outcomes.

This section of the chapter considers the practical implications of the research findings presented above, and discusses how these findings can be used to improve EFL teaching and learning practices in Saudi Arabia, and thus ultimately contribute to higher achievement. These implications and recommendations concern the different major stakeholders of the EFL teaching/learning process in Saudi Arabia – the government, EFL Policy makers, the teachers, and the learners.

In order to improve the general community's understanding of the value of high English competence for a broad range of social and professional domains in the Kingdom, the government needs to undertake sweeping PR initiatives designed to raise the population's awareness of the importance of learning English. A PR campaign of this type would point out that English is not only the world's most widely spoken language, but is also the language of science, technology, politics, and world business. It would similarly highlight the practical ways in which learning English can benefit Saudi individuals and the whole Saudi community alike. It would emphasise that English is particularly important for the Saudi community because globalisation has created an intense demand for English language skills in the Saudi marketplace, and because of that the Saudi educational system must change to meet this demand. A PR campaign will highlight that the significance of English for Saudi Arabia is not limited to its linguistic and/or communicative practicalities, but is actually fundamental to a broad range of social, economic, political, and religious domains at the national and international levels.

Regarding the economy, English is particularly important for the Saudi context because of its perceived economic value; the language has become intrinsically

linked with the discourse of petroleum. Even with the very recent move away from petroleum as the most important aspect of the Saudi economy towards a knowledge economy due to the unstable oil market, English remains important. By way of providing an alternative to dependence on oil resources which will be depleted in the future, the Saudi government must consequently recognise education as the cornerstone of a knowledge-based economy that can support sustainable development and economic growth in the country. Therefore, the government should invest heavily in English language learning/teaching and provide incentives for Saudi citizens to continue taking up educational opportunities in English-speaking countries. When those students return to Saudi Arabia they would be expected to contribute to an enormous expansion of EFL delivery in the country. In addition to currently sending substantial numbers of Saudi students abroad to obtain a Western education, the government should recruit qualified teachers from around the globe to teach English at Saudi academic institutions.

One way of promoting the development of higher English proficiency among Saudis is to provide EFL learners with more opportunities for exposure to English. Classroom interactions between the teacher and students should be conducted in the target language. Teachers' use of the Arabic L1 should be strictly controlled and should only occur when the use of English becomes impractical. Learners should also be encouraged to take advantage of opportunities for exposure to English outside the classroom by using social media and watching English language media, such as television programming. Teachers should raise their learners' awareness of suitable online sources, such as electronic English newspapers, articles, journals, magazines, and stories, and provide them with guidance on how to use information from these sources in classroom activities. Language institutions should regularly hold extracurricular activities that stimulate learners' imagination and creativity, help them think beyond the content of the ready-made curriculum, and offer them opportunities to use English outside of the classroom.

High L2 proficiency may be impossible to attain in the absence of professionally developed curricula and suitable teaching methodologies – ones that properly reflect learners' needs, goals, and preferred learning styles. In relation to this, teachers should be encouraged to start phasing out outdated methodologies, such as the Grammar-Translation Method, which have been shown to lack the capacity to develop learners' communicative competence, and gradually adopt the undeniably superior communicative language teaching approach. Teachers should also adopt task-based language teaching that promote self-directed learning in the classroom, such as community language learning and experiential language learning.

In terms of curriculum design and development, any future reforms should take into consideration both teachers' and learners' perspectives, and should necessarily include adequate training for teachers on how to implement the new curriculum. Curriculum designers should reduce the curriculum's preoccupation with the content of the language itself rather than the use of the language

as a communication vehicle (Zaid 1993). Designers should emphasise quality over quantity of curriculum content by reducing EFL curriculum density, and should promote more extensive use of communicative exercises and activities, such as group and pair work, games, puzzles, and role play, to help students practise communicative tasks in real-life situations. Curriculum content and related tasks/activities should be within the students' abilities in order to reduce their fear of failure and boost their confidence. Importantly, teachers should be provided with adequate financial and material resources to enable them to implement the prescribed curriculum.

A lot can be accomplished via providing Saudi EFL teachers with better pre-service and in-service training. For instance, pre-service training should include much more extensive school practice which could even involve partnerships with local, regional, and international training centres; such partnerships have a tremendous potential to reinforce and extend the qualifications and skills of Saudi EFL teachers. Both before they begin teaching and throughout their teaching careers, teachers should receive comprehensive training on how to utilise the most up-to-date teaching methodologies and modern technology (devices and applications) in EFL teaching.

One of the main problems with the Saudi educational system is overcrowded classes. A student-centred rather than teacher-centred approach is highly recommended to facilitate the learning process in overcrowded classes. This approach allows learners to become more responsible and involved in the learning process rather than being mere observers. In order to deal with oversized classes, teachers should be encouraged to utilise collaborative tasks that allow greater interaction among students and thus enable them to become active participants in learning activities thereby creating a more effective and productive learning environment. Other strategies that promote cognitive elaboration, enhance critical thinking, provide constructive feedback, promote social and emotional development, foster an appreciation of diversity, and reduce student attrition are highly recommended in large classes; such strategies may include group work, pair work, peer editing, games, role play, and interviews.

Teachers in Saudi Arabia should be encouraged to be mindful of students' psychological and emotional dispositions. They should endeavour to promote learners' motivation and autonomy while minimising negative feelings, such as language anxiety and low self-esteem. Sound advice in relation to how to promote learner motivation and reduce anxiety can be found in Alrabai's (2014d) practical guide.

Teachers can also do a lot to promote learners' autonomy. Training learners on certain skills, such as self-management, self-monitoring, and self-assessment, can raise learners' awareness of autonomy and the benefits of independent/autonomous learning. According to Benson (2001), training learners on such skills would make them psychologically prepared for more learner-centred learning instead of the teacher-centred education to which they are accustomed. Teachers must, however, pay heed to Little's (1995) note of caution – it is difficult for learners in formal education contexts to immediately accept responsibility for their learning,

and teachers can help them do so gradually by equipping them with sufficient materials and opportunities to practise.

Saudi EFL teachers should act as facilitators of learning, helpers, supporters, guides, counsellors, and builders of learners' self-confidence and motivation. They should regularly engage learners in autonomy-promoting activities, such as role-transfer activities (e.g., choosing and preparing learning materials, being a source of information to other learners, peer monitoring, peer teaching, peer correcting, etc.).

Self-esteem is primarily about having a good self-image including how much students feel valued, appreciated, accepted, and loved. Teachers can effectively promote learners' self-esteem in a number of ways. For instance, they should avoid criticising students, should always accentuate the positive, encourage students to identify things they can do well and things they feel good about, help them have realistic expectations of themselves, and help them accept the fact that making mistakes is a normal aspect of any learning process and that such mistakes are learning opportunities. Teachers should take time to commend learners for their accomplishments and efforts. This will encourage positive behaviour towards the foreign language and will contribute in building a strong self-esteem. Helping students feel important in class can likewise contribute to their self-image. The teacher can do this by giving each student an important classroom job, or find ways in which this student can be helpful to others. Students can gain self-esteem from involvement in activities they care about. For this reason, the teacher can find a few minutes every day to talk with his/her students about their favourite hobbies, sports, television programs, or musical groups. Since students with low self-esteem are often isolated from their classmates, teachers are to encourage a sense of belonging among learners. This can be done by enabling such students to engage with their classmates in activities that take place both in and out of school

Learners should also have sufficient access to technology, such as laptop computers, cellular phones, and YouTube EDU channels. Modern technology must become an integral part of the Saudi EFL classroom to enhance the quality and effectiveness of learning. Furthermore, proper learning facilities, such as wall charts, flash cards, posters, audio and visual aids, language software, e-learning resources, and a well-equipped language computer laboratory can confidently be expected to further promote the efficiency of the learning process and ultimately lead to higher L2 proficiency.

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5 Teaching English in Saudi Arabia

Saleh Mohammad A Alqahtani

Introduction

English is considered the main foreign language taught in Saudi Arabia due to the important role it plays in a wide range of social, professional, and educational domains in the country, as well as its role as the global language of the 21st century. English is the only foreign language that is taught in all Saudi state schools, and it is taught as a core subject at all levels of school (primary, intermediate, and secondary). English is also the principal medium of communication within Saudi petroleum companies like the Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi Aramco) and Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) which are vital in the country's economy, and in the health sector (Alqahtani 2015). English is a requirement in a number of fields in higher education including medicine, engineering, nursing and, recently, business where the medium of instruction is English (Alfahadi 2012). As a result, Saudi education policy makers have shown considerable interest in enhancing English language teaching policies, curricula, and teaching methodologies.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the literature on teaching English as a second/foreign language (EFL) in Saudi Arabia. The next section offers an overview of the English language teaching policy in Saudi Arabia including a review of the following periods: 1970 to 2001 *Ministry of Education English Language Teaching Policy*, 2000 to 2014 *Ministry of Education English Language Teaching Policy*, and 2014 to 2020 *New English Language Teaching Framework*. The section that follows discusses the most commonly used English language teaching methodologies in the Saudi Arabian context including the Grammar Translation Method, the Audio-Lingual Method, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The historical development of language teaching approaches in the Saudi context is explored along with Saudi English teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. The final section sheds light on the obstacles negatively affecting teaching English in Saudi Arabia and their impact on the English language proficiency level of Saudi learners.

English language teaching policy in Saudi Arabia

The English language teaching policy in Saudi Arabia has evolved over the years since English was first introduced as a school subject more widely in the

1930s with the discovery of oil (Al-Johani 2009; Al-Nofaie 2010) and then became compulsory at the intermediate and secondary level in 1958 (Al-Johani 2009). At that stage the Saudi Ministry of Education (MOE) formulated a complete English language curriculum for intermediate-level schools (grades 7–9) and secondary-level schools (grades 10–12) (Arishi 1984; Alfahadi 2012). Chapter 2 of this volume explores the history of English and English teaching in the early days of Saudi Arabia in more detail. This chapter focusses on the important features of the Saudi Arabian English language teaching policy from 1970 onwards and the impact that policy has had on teachers' beliefs and practices.

1970–2001 Ministry of Education English Language Teaching Policy

In Saudi Arabia MOE has always determined EFL teaching policy which has a direct link to the broader curriculum framework and syllabus for each level. The first detailed framework and syllabus for English at the secondary level was released in 1970 (Ministry of Education 1970; Mitchell & Alfuraih 2017). Mitchell and Alfuraih pointed out that the English language syllabus in 1970 emphasised instrumental goals, such as enabling students to read and thereby access academic and scientific knowledge in English, and to have sufficient English proficiency to enter English-medium universities. However, the goals also focussed on broadening students' perspectives to accept and understand other cultures and developing their critical and creative thinking skills. In order to achieve these goals the syllabus objectives included both practical skills development in the four English skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) and an emphasis on understanding the value of EFL learning for economic, social, and cultural purposes. Some scholars (e.g., Aljohani 2016) have criticised this emphasis on the culture of language as focussing too much on familiarising students with Western cultures, beliefs, and values. Aljohani (2016) asserted that learning about some features of Western cultures fostered by English textbooks could negatively affect Saudi students (whose identity is rooted in the Muslim faith) and bring them into conflict with their culture and beliefs.

2000–2014 Ministry of Education English Language Teaching Policy

Since 2001 there has been a shift in the role of English teaching in the educational system in Saudi Arabia. This is due to the perception among a number of government officials, parents, educators, and journalists that the English proficiency levels of Saudi intermediate and secondary school leavers is unsatisfactory (e.g. Al-Hazmi 2003; Al-Shammary 2003). Consequently, the Saudi Arabian government decided in 2003 to introduce English in all primary schools (Elyas 2008; Ministry of Education 2002). However, the introduction of English at a primary school level had a number of critics who suggested that this would negatively affect Saudi students' cultural and religious identities and could have negative effects on their language development in

Arabic (Al-Shammary 2003; Alabdualkarem 2007). The voices protesting against English at the elementary stage suggested that the money and effort should be spent on improving intermediate and secondary school English teaching, as well as Arabisation of the curriculum and translation of scientific material into Arabic (Al-Hazmi 2006). In response to such criticisms, in 2002 MOE stated the key goals underpinning the English language teaching curriculum framework as follows:

> [T]o provide students with proficiency in English as a way of acquiring knowledge in the fields of sciences, arts and new inventions, and of transferring knowledge and the sciences to other communities, in an effort to contribute to the spread of the faith of Islam and service to humanity.
>
> (Ministry of Education 2002 cited in Elyas & Badawood 2016, p. 74)

The new curriculum document identified a long list of objectives linking scientific and professional knowledge and the spreading of Islam to learning English. These objectives also recognise the importance of English as a means of international communication. Alamri cites these objectives as follows:

1. Acquire basic language skills in order to communicate with the speakers of English Language.
2. Acquire the linguistic competence necessarily required in various life situations.
3. Acquire the linguistic competence required in different professions.
4. Develop the awareness of the importance of English as a means of international communication.
5. Develop a positive attitude towards learning English.
6. Develop the linguistic competence that enables them to be aware of the cultural, economic and social issues of their society in order to contribute in giving solutions.
7. Develop the linguistic competence that enables them, in the future, to present and explain the Islamic concepts and issues and participate in spreading Islam.
8. Develop the linguistic competence that enables them, in the future, to present the culture and civilization of their nation.
9. Benefit from the English-speaking nations, in order to enhance the concepts of international cooperation that develop understanding and respect of cultural differences among nations.
10. Acquire the linguistic bases that enable them to participate in transferring the scientific and technological advances of other nations to their nation.
11. Develop the linguistic basis that enables them to present and explain the Islamic concepts and issues and participate in the dissemination of them.

(Ministry of Education 2002 cited in Alamri 2008, p. 12)

Elyas and Badawood (2016) suggest that this linking of the curriculum to the dissemination of Islam and the needs of the Islamic nation-state, as well as the emphasis on English as instrumental in the access to and spreading of scientific and technological knowledge relates to what Ratnawati (1996, p. 8) refers to as the 'strong Islamisation' position. The policy suggests that English teaching could achieve these 'without promoting morals and customs which are contradictory to our religious beliefs and customs' (Ministry of Education 2002 cited in Elyas & Badawood 2016, p. 74).

Al-Saadat and Al-Braik (2004, p. 201) noted that to address previous criticisms of the quality of English teaching in Saudi Arabia MOE launched a project of comprehensive revision of its educational curricula and teaching materials at elementary, intermediate, and secondary school levels in the early 2000s. There was also a strong emphasis on improving English language teachers' skills. Also efforts were made to quell fears that learning English at an early age will impact negatively on Arabic (Aljamhor 2003; Aljarf 2004).

2014–2020: New English Language Teaching Framework

In 2013 MOE released the English Language Curriculum for Elementary, Intermediate, and Secondary Schools in Saudi Arabia (2014–2020) for grades 4 to 12. The new framework elaborates on the principles and guidelines first described in Article 50 of the Educational Policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It presents a functional curriculum based on the current developments in EFL theory and practice in the fields of curriculum design and teaching methodology. This document was developed by a partnership between MOE (English language Supervision Division supported by the Curriculum Division) and the *Tatweer* Company for Educational Services English Language Teaching Development Initiative (Mitchell & Alfuraih 2017). The curriculum specifies what Saudi students should learn by the end of each grade – from grade 4 to grade 12 – and also aims to help schools to plan their curriculum, to design their tests and examinations, and to guide material writers.

The English Language Curriculum was developed with the following underlying principles:

1. Language is used for communication: teaching a language involves enabling learners to interact socially in a variety of situations and contexts. This is optimally achieved through the unification of the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing.
2. Learners' needs and abilities must be taken into consideration.
3. Learners have different individual learning styles.
4. Learners should be involved in meaningful, interactive tasks for optimum effectiveness.

(Ministry of Education 2013, pp. 1–4)

The new framework of English Language Curriculum aims to develop the students' communicative competence in the English language by achieving the following goals which enable them to:

1 Explain the tenets of Islam with a vision to promoting international understanding and tolerance.
2 Advocate and participate in spreading Islam.
3 Promote mutual cultural understanding and respect among nations.
4 Enhance their cognitive and problem-solving skills, thus leading to academic and professional advancement.
5 Develop an awareness of the significance of English as a means of international communication.
6 Develop a positive attitude towards learning the English language.

(Ministry of Education 2013, pp. 1–4)

Like the 2002 document, the new English Language Curriculum recognises the utilitarian value of competence in English for academic and professional advancement, as well as for the spread of Islam. However, there is a new explicit emphasis on 'mutual cultural understanding and respect', 'international communication', and a 'positive attitude towards learning English' suggesting a more moderate or 'weaker Islamisation' position (Ratnawati 1996, p. 8).

The *Vision 2030* policy also influenced the English language policy and curriculum since it recommended the establishment of collaboration between government and private education sectors. As result of the partnership the *Tatweer* Company has introduced professional development activities for English language teachers including testing English language proficiency, the development of pedagogical skills, the effective use and teaching of the textbooks, and enhancing EFL teachers' English language proficiency (Mitchell & Alfuraih 2017). The aim of this initiative is to provide processes and effective training to the approximately 35,000 EFL teachers across Saudi Arabia.

English language teaching methodologies in the Saudi context

EFL teaching has significantly changed in the last decade in Saudi Arabia. Ellis (2008) stated that English language teaching methodologies mainly have focussed on the importance of giving learners opportunities to communicate meaningfully. During the last 80 years English teaching in Saudi Arabia has changed from teaching reading texts and grammar structure in order to improve language skills to using English for meaningful real-time and real-life communication. Abahussain (2016) drew attention to essential changes which have occurred in relation to teaching content 'what to teach' and methodologies 'how to teach' in the EFL field in Saudi Arabia. The next section presents an overview of the historical developments of this field in this country over the last 80 years.

Historical development of language teaching approaches in Saudi contexts

The Grammar Translation Method

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was popular to teach all languages in Saudi Arabia from the 19th century onwards. GTM focusses on the idea of presenting students with short rules, word lists, and then translation exercises in which they have to make use of the same rules and words (Harmer 2008). It is common practice for students to translate the texts from the target language (TL) into their native language (L1). The L1 is commonly used for classroom interaction – with little attention paid to using the TL (Abdulkader 2016; Larsen-Freeman 2000).

The first English curriculum in Saudi Arabia was introduced in 1944 (Al Hajailan 2006). For 14 years the purpose of teaching and learning English was to read foreign language literature (Abahussain 2016). Two textbooks were used at the secondary school level – the *Red Primer* and the *Green Primer*. Abahussain (2016) reported that the predominant teaching technique at that time was GTM. Teaching emphasised grammar and translation as a means to understanding by focussing mainly on reading and writing skills. Teachers produced detailed explanations of grammatical structures by instructing students to memorise vocabulary lists and grammatical rules, then asking them to translate whole texts word-for-word (Al-Seghayer 2011; Al-Seghayer 2014b). Abahussain (2016, p. 43) pointed out that the choice of teaching methods and teaching techniques at this early phase in Saudi Arabia was indeed in accord with the broader historical development of English language teaching and learning in Europe and worldwide.

GTM teaching is mainly teacher-centred in terms of sources of knowledge and direction (Abdulkader 2016). Here the teacher is the only controller and the source of the information in the classroom while students are required to complete the tasks given by the teacher. As a result the communication between teacher and student is limited which in turn prevents them from sharing their opinions about the content of their language learning. GTM has also been criticised for its focus on written language instead of fluency in speaking the language and its consequences for learners' ability to use the TL for communicative purposes outside classrooms (Al-Seghayer 2011). Because of these criticisms, as early as the 1950s the Saudi education policy makers shifted the emphasis of EFL teaching and learning towards encouraging oral skills (Abahussain 2016).

The Audio-Lingual Method

Abahussain (2016, p. 45) dubbed the shift from the GTM towards the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) in the Saudi context *the reformative phase*. The ALM principles are based on structural linguistics and behavioural psychology (Larsen-Freeman 2000). ALM is particularly focussed on language's sound structure. In addition, teaching the four language skills is done in the usual order of listening,

speaking, reading, and only then writing (Al-Ahaydib 1986). ALM's central focus is the assumption that the student must learn to understand and speak the TL before reading and writing it (Al-Kamookh 1981). Al-Kamookh (p. 27) explained ALM's major principles:

> 1) foreign language learning is a process of habit formation; 2) speech should precede writing; 3) learning should be based on analogy rather than analysis; and 4) language should be learned in a cultural context.

The Audio-Lingual approach requires that students be taught the phonology, morphology, and syntax of the TL; all these patterns can be learned through contrastive analysis of the differences between the L1 and the L2; awareness of these differences presumably helps students to acquire the new language more easily (Kamhuber 2010).

Even though culture has a supposedly prominent place in ALM, in Saudi Arabia the most distinctive and often only feature of this method became the use of drills and pattern practice. Very much like the GTM, ALM was teacher-dominated whereby 'the teacher models the target language, controls the direction and pace of learning, and monitors and corrects the learners' performance' (p. 62). Teachers who implement ALM in their classes employ a set of teaching techniques and materials specifically designed to develop oral and listening faculties.

In 1958 the secondary stage of public school education was split into two sections – intermediate and secondary. The focus of EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia shifted to oral skills. As a result a new curriculum was adopted and new textbooks were introduced for teaching English at that period in order to improve the learners' oral skills. Abahussain (2016) explained that the *Living English for the Arab World* textbook (published by Longman) was used at the intermediate stage whereas *Living English Structure* was used at the secondary level.

As Al Hajailan (2006) pointed out, these books were used for 20 years – with ALM as the prevailing teaching method in the classroom. The books introduced grammatical structures through short dialogues and drills, followed by an explanation of structures and, finally, repetition (Al Hajailan 2006; Al-Mohanna 2010; Al-Seghayer 2014b).

After more than 20 years of ALM dominance teachers and administrators started to question the validity of this teaching methodology in Saudi Arabia. Al Hajailan (2006) stated that the most serious problem with ALM was that despite the endless drills and repetition it failed to equip learners with adequate communication skills. As Abahussain (2016) argued, although learners taught through ALM still remembered the dialogues, they could not use English in real-life communication. This resulted in a move towards Communicative Language Teaching.

Communicative Language Teaching

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is widely regarded as very effective – especially in terms of its capacity to develop L2 communication

skills in learners (Nunan 2004; Richards & Rodgers 1986). In Richards and Rodgers' words (p. 69), the CLT approach in language teaching 'starts from a theory of language as communication, to develop learners' communicative competence'. Similarly according to Abdulkader (2016, p. 47) 'the main goal of CLT is to develop the ability of the language learner to interact appropriately using the knowledge of grammar they have learned in various social contexts'.

The fundamental notion of CLT is the idea of communicative competence. Hymes (1972, p. 13) defined communicative competence as 'the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language which the speaker-listener possesses'. According to Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence has four components including grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Richards (2006 cited in Abdulkader 2016) characterised the key aspects of communicative competence as follows:

a) Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions;
b) Knowing how to vary use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech, or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication);
c) Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations);
d) Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies).

(Richards 2006, p. 3)

In 1981 responding to the criticism of the previous teaching methods in Saudi Arabia, a new pedagogy was introduced by MOE. The main change was from teaching grammatical structures to teaching students how to use these linguistic forms in real-life communication.

The benefits of CLT and teachers' perceptions of this approach have been studied in the Saudi context. Participating teachers in Al Asmari's (2015) study supported the use of CLT in their classrooms regardless of a number of challenges. However, the study also showed that because of the lack of knowledge and exposure to CLT several fallacies had emerged regarding the method. Some teachers believed that the method included no grammar teaching while others thought it only focussed on speaking. This resulted in many teachers rejecting CLT and returning to traditional methods including GTM and ALM. Abdulkader (2016) pointed out that having a positive attitude toward using CLT in the classroom is not enough to implement this approach, but the need is to remove all the obstacles which discourage EFL teachers to practise CLT in the classroom. Farooq (2015) identified a number of the obstacles to implementing CLT in the classroom, such as overcrowded classes, non-availability of visual aids, students' low level of proficiency, time constraints, etc. Najjar (2013) mentioned that even when teachers had positive attitudes toward CLT the low level

of students' TL competence and lack of opportunities for interactive communicative use of the TL by learners limited its effective implementation. He suggested that low-proficiency passive learners needed more than CLT and suggested that it be supplemented by more traditional methods of teaching. Najjar (2013) also suggested that the limited classroom time allotted to English severely limited the usefulness of a teaching method like CLT.

SAUDI EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN THE CLASSROOM

The impact of teachers' beliefs can clearly be seen in the studies on CLT in the Saudi context above. Teachers require a positive attitude towards the target language, methodologies, and pedagogies in order to teach effectively. As noted by Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013, p. 115), teaching is a demanding job and 'being qualified or having credentials doesn't mean necessary to be a good teacher'. A range of studies have explored teachers' beliefs and practices on teaching the four major language skills in the Saudi classroom.

Several studies have focussed on the teaching of reading strategies and the effect of teachers' beliefs on their practices when teaching this skill. Bamanger and Gashan (2014) established that Saudi EFL teachers believe that teaching reading strategies is very important in their actual classroom practices. Alsamadani (2011) reported that Saudi English language teachers believe in the significance of cognitive reading strategies in the classroom, but also acknowledged that they need in-service training for using metacognitive reading strategies. Althewini (2016) conducted a quantitative study to identify teachers' beliefs about reading instruction. The findings showed that the teachers valued most of the skills underlined by the cognitive theory of reading instruction.

Al-enizi (2009) examined Saudi secondary school teachers' beliefs regarding feedback on grammatical errors; one of the study's goals was to establish to what extent teachers' self-evaluation corresponds to their real performance. The research found a disparity between teachers' self-reported levels of grammatical feedback to students and the amount of feedback they actually gave. Al-Nofaie (2010) examined the processes of implementing a critical thinking pedagogy for developing the quality of classroom performance of students. The study found that teachers struggled to implement critical pedagogies largely because teachers in Saudi Arabia are required to follow a curriculum and a teaching model imposed from the Ministry of Education. The teachers in Alnofaie's research felt powerlessness in implementing classroom interventions without the explicit permission of the authorities.

Fewer studies have focussed on listening and vocabulary teaching. Altuwairesh (2013) suggested the usefulness of both metacognitive instruction and deliberate practice for the development of EFL listening. The results revealed that the experimental group outperformed on the final MALQ and TOEFL test the control group. The participating teachers in Al-Zughaibi's (2008) study showed a positive attitude towards the importance of vocabulary learning strategy training. In their classroom practice these teachers encouraged

their students to use a guessing strategy in order to discover the meaning of an unknown word.

A number of studies have focussed on the teaching of writing in the Saudi context as well as combining writing, vocabulary, and grammar teaching. For example, Okasha and Hamdi (2014) conducted an experimental study to test the effectiveness of using strategic writing techniques in order to change EFL learners' negative attitudes towards writing. The results revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed for all sub-skills: fluency, content, organisation, vocabulary, grammar, structures, and conventions compared to the control group. The study also recommended that teachers should focus on teaching writing in English as a process, not as a product. In line with Okasha and Hamdi, Alhosani (2008) found that participant teachers encourage utilising the writing process as an effective method to improve EFL learners' writing ability by employing several writing strategies, such as collaborative writing activities, games, varying speed and voice tone, interest in students' cultures and languages, and social interaction with the students.

TEXTBOOK-DRIVEN CURRICULUM IN SAUDI ARABIA

As widely acknowledged in relevant Saudi literature on the question, there is a very strong expectation that teachers should strictly follow the textbook. Like in many other contexts, the textbook has become the *de facto* curriculum in the Saudi Arabian EFL classroom. For example, when in 1981 MOE adopted the CLT approach this was introduced through textbooks that were developed by MOE in collaboration with international publishing companies. For instance, MOE collaborated with Macmillan English (www.macmillanenglish.com) to introduce the English Language Development Program in 2013. The Macmillan Education series provides teachers with a prescribed curriculum for teaching English at all different stages in Saudi public schools. Each stage has its own course. The primary stage is called *Get Ready*, the intermediate stage is called *Lift Off*, and the secondary stage is called *Flying High*. For the primary and intermediate stages the course includes a Student's Book and Workbook for the students, as well as a teaching manual, flash cards, and posters for the teachers. For the secondary stage the course includes a Student's Book, a Teacher's Book, a Workbook, Audio material, and a CD-ROM.

The teacher's book for each stage contains sets of objectives for each lesson, as well as detailed instructions to teachers on how to present the lesson content. These instructions prescribe communicative teaching methods and provide explicit notes and directions for teachers on how to use teaching materials appropriately.

A few studies have evaluated how the new textbooks drive the new curriculum in Saudi Arabia. Alasmi (2016) examined the perceptions of teachers and supervisors of the implementation of the English curriculum in the fourth grade. Participating school teachers were critical of the pace at which EFL instruction was required to take place – especially in the early units – commenting that by the end

of the semester there were students who still didn't know all English letters. They also recommended the inclusion of audio CDs to enable students to practise at home with new vocabulary and thus improve their pronunciation.

In Alharbi's (2017) study participating teachers indicated dissatisfaction with the textbook objectives for the second grade in the secondary level (*Traveller 3 & 4*). They also believed that the textbook's contents are not conducive to applying proper teaching methodologies and techniques, and were very critical of the required language assessment procedures.

Alharbi's (2015) aim was to establish whether the high school students' textbook (*Flying High*) for Saudi Arabia series achieved EFL teachers' pedagogical objectives. The study identified a number of shortcomings. For instance, the textbook failed to differentiate between receptive and productive skills and the vocabulary lists or glossaries provided were insufficient. The reading passages were not representative of the whole range of styles in the contemporary English language. There were also issues with teaching practices targeting composition writing. These problems notwithstanding, the school teachers' evaluations of the textbook were generally positive although some expressed concerns that the textbook's cultural content may be incompatible with the learners' local cultural and traditional values.

A very similar concern was raised by teachers participating in Faruk's (2015) critical review of the three secondary school textbooks used over the last three decades. These books were *Saudi Arabian Schools' English* used from 1982 to 1997, *English for Saudi Arabia* used from 1998 to 2012, and *Traveller 3* used from 2013 to the present. The teachers expressed the view that all the textbooks needed an explicit unpacking of Anglo-cultural elements in order to assist students to 'develop a positive attitude towards learning the English language' as recommended in the new curriculum framework (The Ministry of Education 2014–2020, pp. 1–4).

Obstacles to effective EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia

As discussed in more detail elsewhere in this book, the education system in Saudi Arabia has in recent years undergone substantial reforms – including the EFL sector – designed to raise the quality of delivery and to enhance learners' achievement. However, it is widely acknowledged that these reforms have failed to produce the desired results and that Saudi learners' levels of EFL proficiency remain well below expectations. This lack of achievement can in part be attributed learner-related factors, such as attitudes, motivation, anxiety, self-esteem, autonomy, etc. These have been explored in considerable detail in Chapter 4 of this book. In what follows, this chapter examines curriculum-related and pedagogical obstacles to EFL achievement in the Saudi context.

Curriculum obstacles

EFL teaching can be constrained by the curriculum especially when the curriculum is dictated centrally. This section considers a range of curriculum-related

issues, such as insufficient exposure to EFL instruction in the classroom, the availability of strategies/learning resources and modern technology, and a strong tendency to teach English as a form of declarative knowledge rather than as a set of specific language skills.

Insufficient exposure to EFL instruction in the classroom

There is a strong expectation embedded in the new Saudi curriculum framework that students will reach high levels of proficiency. Achieving this would necessitate a rich classroom environment with plenty of exposure to English instruction. This is particularly important since students have limited exposure to English outside of the classroom. This does not seem to happen in reality, according to Al-Seghayer (2014b). This study's findings suggest that Saudi EFL learners receive few or no opportunities for communicative use of the L2 in the classroom – with obvious implications for their ensuing EFL competence. Very large class sizes ranging between 40 and 50 students exacerbate this situation further placing substantial constraints on learners' capacity to participate in interactive communication tasks. Given these conditions, it would be unreasonable to expect very high achievement when classroom exposure to English is limited to two 45-minute English classes per week for grades 4 to 6 and four classes per week for the intermediate and secondary levels (Liton & Ali 2011; Shah, Hussain & Nassef 2013) – with little or no exposure to English outside of the classroom. In Al-Seghayer's view, higher learner achievement would be impossible unless the Saudi EFL curriculum provides for more contact hours, much smaller class sizes, greater attention to individual performance, and more opportunities for active participation on the part of learners. In essence, there is a compelling need to increase learners' exposure to the TL – both inside and outside of the EFL classroom.

Insufficient access to teaching/learning resources and modern technology

Many Saudi EFL teachers report that often they do not have adequate access to appropriate teaching resources and/or modern technology. In Al-Seghayer's (2014a) study the resources supplied to teachers, such as posters and CDs, were often in rather poor condition, were of low quality or were outdated, and in some cases did not even correspond to the current textbook. Al-Seghayer also believed that such teaching resources are often designed without due consideration of learners' individual differences, varying learning styles, or language proficiency levels.

Although MOE promotes the integration of ICT in EFL delivery in policy and through the various *Tatweer* training initiatives, many EFL teachers fail to take advantage of ICT in their teaching. There seem to be a variety of reasons for this including limited access to resources, insufficient confidence when using ICT, lack of belief in the value of ICT, unwillingness to make time to use ICT, and poor teacher training (Gamlo 2014). Almukhallafi (2014) called for redesigning the Saudi English language curricula in order to facilitate a greater orientation

towards the instructional use of ICT since it would have a positive impact on EFL learners' performance and autonomy. Chapter 7 describes a number of MOE initiatives aimed at training and retraining teachers and providing them with a bank of resources that will hopefully address this obstacle.

Teaching English as declarative knowledge

One major criticism of English language textbooks used in the Saudi Arabian educational system is that they emphasise the acquisition of explicit conscious declarative knowledge of EFL structures and rules rather than trying to develop learners' ability to actually perform in the four principal skills – listening, reading, writing, and speaking. There is evidence that Saudi EFL learners are predominantly taught grammar and vocabulary – with little or no opportunity to engage in genuine communicative tasks that would enable them to develop the specific skills to use the L2 in a wide range of real-life situations (Al-Seghayer 2014b; Rahman & Alhaisoni 2013). Therein lies, according to Khan (2011a), one of the main reasons for Saudi learners' lack of achievement.

Pedagogical obstacles

Apart from curriculum constraints, research points to other obstacles to learner achievement which can broadly be described as *pedagogical*. These pertain to pre-service and in-service training programs and to teaching styles/practices.

Issues with pre-service and in-service training programs

For over three decades Saudi EFL teachers have graduated from English language departments in either Colleges of Education or Colleges of Arts. Students completing a teaching degree at a College of Education are required to complete coursework in linguistics, teaching methodology, English literature, and education. On the other hand, students completing an undergraduate degree at a College of Arts do not receive any training in teaching methodology during the four years of their program even though they do a one-year intensive program at an Education College as part of their BA. In the preparation program, potential teachers are required to take: (1) basic education courses to fulfil university or college requirements; (2) courses in skill-building curriculum, general linguistics, applied linguistics, and English literature, as prescribed by the Department of English; and (3) elective courses of their choice (Al-Seghayer 2014b). The applied linguistics component comprises only three courses representing approximately 10% of the total credit hours (Al-Seghayer 2011). It also is noteworthy that neither Education, nor Arts Colleges provide their teacher-trainees with adequate English proficiency by the time of their graduation. The emphasis is on translation and English literature – with little or no exposure to English teaching methods or opportunities for adequate pre-service classroom teaching experience. Graduates from these Arts Colleges are commonly hired

to teach in elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools, but according to Farah (2010) they are often ill-equipped pedagogically and methodologically for teaching English.

As far as in-service training programs are concerned, MOE does offer such but this is done on a very limited scale across Saudi Arabia. Althobaiti (2017, among others) has been rather critical of these programs suggesting they are often disproportionately focussed on implementing MOE initiatives, such as the Tatweer-promoted integration of ICT, which is often at the expense of critical training in language pedagogy. Besides, these in-service retraining programs remain out of reach for most teachers – even those who have already worked in the school system for a number of years. This state of affairs is clearly regrettable because professional development programs can help teachers keep up-to-date with advancements in the teaching profession, as well as build their capacity for student engagement, as demonstrated in Khan's (2011b) research. Established weaknesses of in-service training programs and the scarcity of opportunities to participate in them were recognised by the teachers involved in Elyas and Al Grigri's (2014) study. Al Malihi's (2015) research deserves attention because it reveals the relative lack of career advancement options for EFL school teachers – other than promotion to a supervisory position.

Issues with teaching styles

A growing body of Saudi literature (Elyas & Picard 2010; Syed 2003, among many others) has recognised the teacher-centred culture in the Saudi EFL classroom as a factor contributing to Saudi students' low proficiency in English. Teachers' comprehensive control over what takes place in the classroom and how, and the related lack of learner autonomy are seen as responsible for the widely attested low motivation among Saudi EFL learners and – by extension – for very low classroom participation and learner engagement (Abdulkader 2016). Some of these issues are discussed in substantial detail in Chapter 4 of this volume.

Conclusion

This chapter has focussed on EFL teaching/teachers' issues in Saudi Arabia. Researchers in the Saudi context have shown that EFL teachers face numerous challenges that can negatively affect the teaching/learning process – with implications for EFL learners' proficiency.

The *New English Language Teaching Framework 2014–2020* recommends that learner-centred work opportunities for collaboration, sharing ideas, self-assessment, and reflection should be encouraged and that ICT and the target culture should be addressed into the curriculum. However despite the Saudi EFL teachers' positive perceptions of the value of communicative language teaching (Abdulkader 2016; Al Asmari 2015; Farooq 2015; Najjar 2013), too many among them remain inclined to rely on traditional teaching/learning techniques, such as rote memorisation, translation, and drilling.

Research has also shown that current pre-service and in-service teacher-training programs in Saudi Arabia do not completely address the deeply rooted teacher-centred traditions or the preference for grammar/translation and audio-lingual drills (Al-Mohanna 2010).

All this points to the need for further educational reforms in the EFL sector in Saudi Arabia. Reforms should involve increased support for EFL teachers to enable them to make the shift to Communicative Language Teaching and away from traditional teaching methodologies, such as Grammar-Translation and the Audio-Lingual Method which are now widely regarded as compromised. EFL teaching practices will also gain from improved pre-service and in-service training, as well greater availability of teaching resources including the new digital technologies. Only continued reform can ensure that the problem of low achievement among Saudi EFL learners is properly addressed.

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6 Educational mobility and EFL students and teachers in Saudi Arabia

Navigating diverse sociocultural and pedagogical spaces

Rachel Burke

Introduction

Student mobility forms an important element of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's commitment to the internationalisation of its education system (Alhazmi 2013; Barnawi & Phan 2015; Denman & Hilal 2011; Mahboob & Elyas 2014; Phan & Barnawi 2015; Taylor & Albasri 2014; Varghese 2008). In 2005 the government implemented the King Abdullah Scholarship Program to encourage qualified Saudi citizens to complete higher education at foreign institutions (Taylor & Albasri 2014), to contribute to 'a high level of international academic and professional standards in Saudi Arabia', and to facilitate the exchange of 'scientific, educational and cultural experiences with various countries across the world' (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission 2017, n.p.). The initiative was extended beyond the initial five-year period and is currently set to continue until 2019, funding 130,000 Saudi students to study abroad each year (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission 2017). Scholarship allocation is informed by the Saudi economy's human resource requirements, with the objective of 'creating a highly qualified and skilled workforce' (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission 2017, n.p.). In addition, collaborations such as the Memorandum of Co-operation in Higher Education between Saudi Arabia and Australia, signed in 2010, facilitate important research relationships and the exchange of academics and students (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission 2017).

Critical examination of the impact of educational mobility is essential to the broader exploration of current issues related to the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The increased flow of Saudi EFL students and teachers across borders and pedagogical spaces can be considered alongside research regarding the privileging of Western educational approaches within the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) profession at the macro level and the experiences of individual EFL teachers and students from 'Outer' and 'Expanding Circle' (Kachru 1985) countries at the meso/micro level. There is an established body of literature critiquing the cultural politics of knowledge construction within the TESOL profession, the privileging of Western qualifications, and the normalising of methodological

approaches favoured in 'Inner Circle' (Kachru 1985) countries (Barnawi & Phan 2015; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy 1999; Canagarajah 1999; Liu 1998; Pennycook 1998; Phillipson 1992). There is also a growing body of research exploring the complex processes of identity(ies) formation evident within the experiences of Saudi EFL learners and teachers in international educational contexts (Alhazmi 2013; Barnawi 2009; Barnawi & Phan 2015; Saba 2013).

In these experiences, the contestation of Western authority within the dominant channels of knowledge construction in the TESOL profession and the adaption, hybridisation, and creation of language teaching methodologies appropriate to Saudi learning environments are important acts of cultural (de)construction. Further, contestation of the positioning of EFL learners and teachers from 'Expanding' and 'Outer Circle' countries (Kachru 1985) as 'linguistic tourists' (Pennycook 2007) and complex acts of reconfiguration regarding Saudi teachers' and learners' cultural identity(ies) and relationships with the English language and the cultures of the English-speaking world are important aspects of educational mobility in the Saudi EFL sector.

This chapter details the results of a scoping study of existing research regarding the experiences of Saudi EFL teachers and students as they engage in education in international contexts, particularly in North America, Britain, and Australia (NABA). The objective of the study was to scope the nature and depth of research published on this topic over the last decade, consider key emergent themes and persistent questions, and synthesise findings focussed on Saudi EFL teacher and learner experiences within NABA educational institutions. Specifically, this chapter seeks to explicate the complex processes of identity(ies) formation and linguistic and pedagogical transformation identified in the growing body of literature which discusses Saudi EFL learner and teacher perceptions of their construction as 'Other' within dominant discourses of the TESOL profession, while actively constituting their own conceptions of 'Self' and the place of English within Saudi Arabia.

These dual processes are demonstrated within the discussion of research that examines Saudi EFL learner and teacher experiences in international contexts, and interrogates meso/micro level understandings against broader paradigms of authority and power within the TESOL profession at large. The overarching theme of the chapter relates to Saudi EFL teachers and learners' navigation of what David Crystal (2012, p. 22) describes as the tension between a desire for 'mutual intelligibility' through the proficient use of the global language and the maintenance of local identity(ies).

World Englishes and Saudi EFL teachers and learners

Kachru (1985) presents the Concentric Circles model in which the established geographic bases of contemporary first language speakers of English, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Canada, are conceptualised as 'Inner Circle' countries; the 'Outer Circle' countries refers to locations in which English is often not the speaker's first language, but is an official language, such

as in Singapore and India; the 'Expanding Circle' is where English is not an official language, but is recognised as an important means of communication. While not the only conceptualisation of the spread of English, the Concentric Circles model offers a means of considering the varied functions and uses of a global language across different linguistic contexts. Graddol (1997) suggests that the three circles of English overlap, with the centre being second language speakers of English, who outnumber first language speakers. The shift in 'ownership' of English and the complexity and richness of polyglossic and plurilingual practices in which 'speakers/users create varieties [of language] as they use them and according to their needs and communicative event in a rich, multimodal, flexible way' (Blommaert & Rampton 2011, p. 4) is an important focus of research (Canagarajah 1999; Phillipson 1992).

Yet, there is also a great deal written about the privileging of English first language speakers within the TESOL profession (see Barnawi & Phan 2015; Chowdhury & Phan 2014; Hu 2002; Sonaiya 2002). While the notion of Englishes – in the plural – and multiple versions of the language which function according to contextual requirements and sociolinguistic landscapes is established in academic settings, research reports resistance to this notion within everyday communicative, educational, and employment contexts. This theme of EFL learners and teachers being positioned on the periphery as 'linguistic tourists' (Pennycook 2007) of English is raised consistently in the literature regarding Saudi EFL students in international contexts. Issues of identity construction and learner/teacher relationships with the English language have important implications for educators both in the TESOL profession and beyond.

In recent years the relative dearth of research focussed specifically on the experiences of Saudi EFL students and teachers in NABA contexts such as Australia and the United States has gradually begun to be redressed. Scholarly investigations into issues of cultural acclimation, identity construction, and appropriation of knowledge learned in international institutions to suit Saudi educational contexts have made important contributions to the field (see Barnawi & Phan 2015; Denman & Hilal 2011; Saba 2013; Shaw 2009). This burgeoning body of research suggests a growing understanding of the complexities of the global education sphere more generally, as well as specific acknowledgment of the diverse range of Saudi EFL student and teacher experiences. A major theme within the literature is the need to attend to the complexity and diversity of students and student experiences both across and within cultural groups.

Research during the last decade has explored the cultural and sociolinguistic dissonance experienced by Saudi EFL learners and teachers whose expectations of education are frequently different to the practices they encounter in international settings. Researchers such as Barnawi (2009) and Shaw (2009) explore instances in which Saudi students' cultural schemas of education contrast with ideologies and assumptions embedded within Western educational institutions. Such studies tend to highlight issues of language and culture as defining aspects of the Saudi international student experience, exploring expectations regarding learner independence and critical engagement in academic literacies and learning (Barnawi

2009; Shaw 2009). These emergent issues will now be considered in light of the limited, yet growing, body of research on the experiences of Saudi EFL learners and teachers undertaking international education in NABA contexts.

Academic literacies and critical thinking

A key theme within the research regarding sociolinguistic and cultural experiences of Saudi EFL learners attending international universities is the practices and ideologies embedded within academic literacies instruction. Research suggests that Saudi EFL learners identify writing as the most difficult macroskill and that the associated challenges extend beyond the attainment of structural and surface-level skills to the understanding and application of ideological assumptions about critical engagement with text (Saba 2013; Shaw 2009).

Central to these studies is acknowledgment of the inherently ideological nature of all methodological approaches to languages instruction. As Sonaiya (2002) states, teaching methods are a product of the sociocultural context within which they originate. Research examining the experiences of Saudi EFL learners explores the values embedded within English language writing instruction in NABA institutions, and considers learner attitudes and responses to these cultural practices.

In her exploration of Saudi EFL student perceptions as they undertook an academic writing course in the United States, Saba (2013) focussed specifically on connections between gender, attitudes to peer and teacher authority, and the development and expression of critical and analytical thinking repertoires. Both male and female Saudi EFL students in Saba's (2013) study experienced challenges in learning the English language vocabulary and structures required for writing, and in navigating the cultural assumptions embedded within the American educational system. In particular, emphasis on critical engagement and the presentation of a thesis within academic literacies practices posed a challenge to student acclimation and progress in their studies.

Established and culturally informed ideas about the role of the teacher in assessing the accuracy of written output, and about the purpose of writing – whether as a means of learning or as a product itself – may vary according to educational context (Turner 2011). The differing ideological assumptions behind a skills-based approach to literacy instruction and more holistic critical understandings of writing can be difficult for students to navigate, particularly if these concepts are not typically embedded within the education systems in their home country (see De Silva 2015; Riely 2006; Turner 2011; Walsh 1995; Zangmo et al. 2015). As Walsh (2008) has pointed out, skills-based approaches to literacy tend to emerge from a positivist paradigm in which knowledge is considered to be neutral, transferrable, and universal, while holistic approaches take a social-constructivist view of knowledge as embedded within the student's cultural context and personal world. Vastly different understandings about the nature and purpose of writing underpin these contrasting approaches to instruction. The Saudi EFL student participants in Saba's (2013) study experienced dissonance between their expectations that the writing teacher would instruct learners on

what to write and how to produce grammatically accurate compositions and their actual experiences in American classrooms in which teachers emphasised critical engagement with text and student independence in developing their own written output.

The differences between the teacher-centred approach commonly employed in Saudi schools and the critical engagement emphasised in the academic writing programs undertaken at American universities are described by Saba (2013) as largely the result of a distinction between focus on product – an error-free, grammatically correct output, and focus on process – including analytical and planning practices. The use of 'writing to learn' rather than solely 'learning to write' and engaging in a range of critical interactions including peer conferencing and evaluation proved initially challenging and culturally unfamiliar to Saudi EFL learners in Saba's (2013) study. She suggests that the students were unprepared for the radically different understandings of literacy they encountered in their studies in American universities, and many failed to see the relevance of various stages of drafting, revising, and disseminating writing.

Culturally entrenched expectations about the role of the language teacher – whether to act as a source of authority and the main evaluator of student output or as a facilitator to encourage the students to discover the acquisition strategies best suited to them – have been shown to create tension in other educational contexts where students' and teachers' expectations about classroom roles differ (Al-Khairi 2015; Sonaiya 2002; Zangmo et al. 2015). Likewise, the Saudi students' frustration with the multiple drafting stages and peer evaluation sessions embedded within their American academic literacies classes (Saba 2013) is a common theme within cross-cultural and comparative studies of EFL education (Turner 2011; Walsh 2008).

What Saba's (2013) study suggests, however, is that while the contrasting educational philosophies embedded within Saudi and Western university systems prove initially challenging for students, with the appropriate scaffolding and support Saudi learners may become adept at engaging in critical approaches to literacy. The importance of meaningful and differentiated scaffolding is a key theme in literature regarding academic literacies practices more broadly (Bak & O'Maley 2015; Murray 2010; Rose et al. 2003). As Saba (2013) notes, students from all backgrounds may experience challenges navigating the implicit expectations of the academy although sociocultural and linguistic issues may intensify difficulties for learners studying in educational environments that differ significantly from their own. The need for caution when considering the impact of educational background on student behaviour and the necessity of acknowledging the rich diversity within student groups is a major theme of studies, such as Saba's (2013) research. While past educational experiences may provide insights into likely approaches to learning, it is essential for teachers to maintain reflexivity and critical consciousness regarding the diversity across and within the Saudi student group (Onsman 2012).

Other scholars emphasise the need to question assumptions about critical thinking, engagement, and 'learner style' – a contested concept – when considering

groups of students from particular cultural backgrounds (Kennedy 2002; Liu 1998; Stapleton 2001). Barnawi (2009) and Stapleton (2001) also challenge claims that analytic engagement is absent in teacher-centred educational systems, such as those of Saudi Arabia, asserting rather that different social values outweigh an emphasis on critical thinking within assessment of learning. In these researchers' view, students from all cultural backgrounds possess critical thinking abilities, but may express these in different ways than expected in NABA contexts. The necessity of providing appropriate support to assist learners in navigating the assumptions and ideologies embedded within assessment practices and the requirement for educators to acknowledge and integrate multiple ways of engaging critically with text are central themes within the literature. As Saba (2013, p. 228) asserts:

> Instead of asking how they can improve students' English skills, teachers should start looking for ways to assist the Saudi students to exhibit the critical thinking skills they already have to achieve their goals. They can do that by acknowledging the students' cultural experience and reflecting on it, in order to make students comfortable with who they are and help them be more willing to learn and become competent.

In terms of critical literacies instruction, some scholars (Saba 2013; Canagarajah 1999) advocate attending to student expectations regarding grammatical error correction while gradually introducing more critical discussion and evaluation of writing practices and content. Specifically, Saba (2013) suggests incorporating tasks into the writing classroom that allow for multiple perspectives and viewpoints, and encouraging students to reflect on topics that are personally relevant and culturally meaningful. This attention to students' cultural identity(ies) and experiences allows for the valuing and maintenance of their cultural heritage while acquiring/developing English language expertise within a NABA context. Further research into such teaching approaches is needed in order to explore productive ways for engaging with the multiplicity of Saudi EFL learner experiences in international educational contexts.

Perceptions of mixed-gender education

Male and female education occurs separately in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and consequently a major aspect of cultural adjustment for international students relates to their experiences in mixed-gender classrooms (Alhazmi & Nyland 2010). In response to the lack of literature specifically focussed on the examination of Saudi students' perceptions and responses in mixed-gender learning environments in international contexts, Alhazmi (2013) investigated the experiences of students studying in Australia. Alhazmi took a social-constructivist approach to understanding student experiences with gender and, importantly, the implications of these experiences to each learner's understanding of his/her own identity(ies).

Three male and one female Saudi international students were interviewed to gain an insight into their understandings and experiences with mixed-gender learning environments. The author suggests that within these student experiences it became clear that the development of greater insights and strategies for working within mixed-gender classrooms occurred in stages, beginning with the initial 'culture shock' and gradually progressing to greater familiarity and ease with mixed-gender environments. Alhazmi (2013) found that the Saudi EFL learners perceived their transition through these stages of growing familiarity as mostly constructive and indicative of personal growth. While the beginning of their time as international students proved the most challenging due to their unfamiliarity with working in mixed-gender environments, each student identified their experiences as shaping the ongoing development of their own identity and sense of self. The challenges of transitioning from a segregated to mixed-gender system were felt keenly by all participants – male and female. Yet, with time and space to reflect, each of the four student participants in Alhazmi's study described the experience of working in mixed-gender environments as a positive one in which they developed resilience and a range of new strategies for navigating this aspect of international student life.

Saba's (2013) investigation into Saudi EFL learners and their experiences with academic literacies instruction at an American university also suggested students encountered significant difficulties with the mixed-gender classroom environment and with being taught by instructors of the opposite gender. Unlike Alhazmi's (2013) study, Saba's research (2013, p. 237) found that the issue of gender was a particular challenge for the female Saudi students. The participants' responses to the mixed-gender groups were not unexpected given Saudi students' unfamiliarity with the situation, but Saba (2013) notes that the intensity of their experience was heightened by the fact that group and pair work is not generally employed in writing instruction in Saudi classrooms. Not only were the mixed-gender interactions unfamiliar to the student participants in this study; the expectations and assumptions regarding the role of pair/group writing evaluation and review were also unclear.

Saba (2013) suggests the use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as a feasible means of facilitating class collaboration while respecting cultural values regarding mixed-gender groups. The use of CALL may allow for collaborative writing and linguistic engagement without the requirement for face-to-face interactions. By removing some of the tension associated with mixed-gender groupings, students may focus on acclimating to the idea of peer conferencing and learner ownership of output. Indeed, the participants in Saba's (2013) study reported the benefits of digital interfaces for allowing them to relax and work together while at the same time respecting their cultural and/or religious norms and values.

Saba (2013) further suggests teachers make use of 'whole-class' discussions to encourage peer-driven learning and interaction while avoiding the need for closer pair/group work in mixed-gender environments which may be too confronting for Saudi learners. This use of whole-class discussion may also prove

a useful strategy given Saudi students' backgrounds in a rich oral culture, and can assist with the transitions between oral and literate language practices (Saba 2013). Where female students may be hesitant to speak in whole-class discussions due to cultural values associated with gendered communication in public fora, Saba (2013) suggests teachers employ smaller group discussions – although still larger than the pair/small group arrangements often favoured in NABA classroom contexts.

Saudi EFL learners: navigating cultural and pedagogical spaces

Currently there is a marked paucity of studies focussed on the educational, linguistic, and intercultural strategies employed by Saudi EFL learners in international contexts. This dearth of research urgently needs to be redressed if educators are to gain useful insights into productive pedagogical approaches to harness the strategies and practices employed by Saudi EFL students to acclimate to international learning environments. As Canagarajah (1999) advocates, teachers have a responsibility to harness the strengths and resources students bring to the EFL classroom. Engaging with student approaches to learning allows educators to develop teaching methods based on the strategies and processes learners already employ (Canagarajah 1999).

To date, Shaw (2009) provides one of the only studies focussed primarily on the strategies employed by Saudi EFL students when seeking to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps encountered in the foreign learning environment. In her investigation of 25 Saudi students undertaking education in the United States, Shaw (2009) maps students' perceptions of the contrasts between Western and Saudi education, including the role and use of group work during tutorials, interpersonal communication styles between educators and students, assumptions regarding assessment, cultural understandings of the purposes and value of education, and gender norms and identities. While initially expressing feelings of inferiority and hesitation regarding their legitimacy as users of English, the students in Shaw's (2009) study also reveal their adoption of strategies to explore, understand, and navigate cultural dissonances between their expectations and the foreign learning context and to consider and consolidate their identity(ies) as English language speakers.

Included in the strategies Saudi EFL students identified as important to their successful acclimation were setting strategic goals for their studies, practising efficient time management, participating in study groups and academic development programs, utilising campus support services, and maintaining persistence (Shaw 2009). Shaw's study further revealed that group membership within the campus community was central to Saudi student acclimation. As with Saba's (2013) research, underlying assumptions about group work and the objectives of tutorials were identified by Shaw's participants as posing particular challenges to their initial adjustment. Yet group work – the membership within a community of practice – whether with other Saudi students, international students, or American classmates – provided an important means of support and encouragement for

Shaw's participants as they navigated the often-unspoken assumptions and expectations of American educational systems. Gaining and maintaining membership within learning communities frequently required conscious effort to traverse significant cultural and linguistic differences, but students considered their inclusion in learner groups to be invaluable to their success.

In securing group membership with peers, the Saudi learners exhibited resilience and sociocultural awareness and expertise. Shaw (2009) encourages educators to assist students to actively identify, articulate, and share their strategies for developing and expanding on such intercultural competence, and to acknowledge and incorporate these strategies within the language classroom. Indeed, Shaw's participants identified the development of intercultural competence as a major outcome of undertaking international studies. Through engagement with divergent ways of thinking, a growing sense of cultural relativism was reported by participants, alongside greater linguistic competence accompanied by heightened pragmatic proficiency and intercultural awareness. Participants noted that engagement with foreign cultural concepts and understandings resulted in greater appreciation for the Saudi EFL learners' own beliefs, values, and perspectives.

In negotiating a foreign educational system, Saudi EFL learners are faced with both cultural and linguistic challenges, and are frequently required to respond to these unfamiliar situations rapidly and with minimal support (Saba 2013). All students in Shaw's (2009) investigation emphasised the importance of adequate preparation to assist with the development of intercultural competence. Further research focussed specifically on the preparation of Saudi EFL learners for international study would make a timely and useful contribution to the field. Shaw notes that both the dearth of existing research focussed specifically on Saudi international students and the lack of attention to the learners' own perceptions and understandings means that learner agency and resilience tend to be overlooked. The requirement for richer and deeper understandings of Saudi student experiences continues to characterise current literature.

In addition to learner preparation, teacher awareness and expertise in NABA contexts is an essential focus for research. As Saba (2013) reminds educators, cultural inclusivity in the classroom extends beyond knowledge of religious and social issues to encompass awareness and understanding of varying discursive practices and communication styles. In her study, students' pragmatic and sociolinguistic behaviours were perceived to result in frequent miscommunications with other speakers of English and with instructors. Speech acts, such as joining a conversation, advancing an argument, or participating in whole-class discussions, are culturally informed behaviours. Indeed, research suggests that acquiring the interpersonal language required for participation in tutorials and group work presents a significant issue for many Saudi international students across disciplinary fields – particularly in the initial stages of their study aboard (Midgley 2009). Intercultural understanding and awareness for both NABA educators and international students, therefore, has the potential to open spaces of critical negotiation and intercultural exploration ultimately enhancing and enriching linguistic insights for all participants. Currently the degree to which TESOL practitioners

in NABA contexts are prepared to assist Saudi EFL learners' strategic engagement with cultural and linguistic aspects of international study is a question that remains largely unexplored in the literature, and represents an essential focus for future research.

Saudi EFL learner identity(ies): negotiating the self through participation in the language classroom

Barnawi's (2009) examination of two Saudi first-year students undertaking a post-graduate TESOL degree in the United States sought to document the process of identity(ies) formation that occurred via participation in the language classroom. Analysing personal narratives and interview transcripts, Barnawi (2009) found that the challenges and complexities of the Saudi EFL learners' adjustment to international studies involved navigation of their own crises of confidence regarding English language proficiency. Perceptions of self and one's own linguistic expertise were also integral to the students' understanding of themselves as 'legitimate and competent members' of the classroom community (p. 19). The (de)construction and reconfiguration of identity(ies) in the American learning environment was found to be a reiterative and multifaceted process. Fears of 'losing face' and/or of insufficient language proficiency – particularly in comparison with first language speakers of English and more proficient international students – prompted the Saudi EFL learners to remain quiet during classroom discussions. Students explained that they felt unprepared to engage with their peers, and desired stronger oral language expertise and vocabulary development before they would consider themselves ready to do so.

According to Barnawi (2009) – in addition to anxiety about inadequate English language competency – Saudi EFL student participation in group discussions was further limited by difficulties understanding reading materials and resources, an unfamiliarity with the expected structure for presenting oral arguments within the American classroom, and problems understanding the educator. Despite strong motivation and careful preparation to participate in classroom debate, the pace and unfamiliarity of topics discussed in classroom interactions rendered participation a challenge.

The Saudi EFL students in Barnawi's (2009) study adopted a range of strategies to allow them to avoid participation in classroom discussions without appearing to be apathetic or uncommitted learners, or disrespectful to their teacher and peers. These strategies included avoiding eye contact with the educator and their classmates, appearing to take notes, and consulting relevant reading materials and resources. While initially utilising these coping mechanisms to avoid verbal participation, students continued to take steps to build sufficient confidence to enable their eventual involvement in class discussions. Challenges with the depth and quantity of required reading led students to seek Arabic language materials containing the same content in order to better understand the course and therefore join in classroom discussions with appropriate comments and questions. Participants also attempted to improve their oral language skills by meeting with

educators after class, rehearsing their verbal contributions privately before tutorials, and imitating classmates' pragmatic and linguistic behaviour. This strategic use of imitation is indicative of the resourcefulness and strong motivation of the Saudi EFL students to succeed in gaining pragmatic competency despite a lack of explicit instruction. The learners' description of the strategies they employed to gain insights into the communicative and linguistic structures of classroom communicative events also offers educators valuable suggestions for how they may explicitly address these issues in class.

The Saudi EFL learners in Barnawi's study also reported particular challenges with American conventions for interacting with educators describing their reluctance to disagree with teachers during classroom discussions, or refer to educators by their first name – behaviours thought to be disrespectful in Saudi classrooms. Student discomfiture regarding the discussion of issues considered to be taboo in Saudi learning contexts, such as sexuality, contributed further to their hesitation to participate in classroom exchanges (Barnawi 2009). Here Barnawi's study reveals the deep connection between language and culture and its relevance to understanding student experiences. Cultural values underpin linguistic behaviour, which in turn impacts student participation in the languages classroom.

Significantly, the participants reported gaining great confidence and a sense of inclusion and value when classmates agreed with their comments. This encouragement led to greater participation and ongoing growth in both language proficiency and learner engagement. In Barnawi's view, this finding indicates the importance of a supportive environment for student inclusion and development. This is also an important indication of the role of language as a mechanism for inclusion within a community of practice. Further, the study demonstrates how discursive acts, such as avoidance of educators' first names and a tendency to eschew the expression of divergent opinions, can be understood by teachers as acts of respect and Saudi EFL learners' attempts to gain membership in the classroom in ways that are consistent with their cultural background. The research points to the socioculturally embedded nature of classroom communication, the various roles learners may fill within classroom interactions, and the impact of cultural background on shaping student and teacher perceptions (Barnawi 2009). Barnawi's study also demonstrates the importance of educators engaging critically and reflexively with student silence in the classroom and considering issues of unfamiliarity with classroom culture and pragmatics, as well as student perceptions of their legitimacy as English speakers, as potential contributing factors.

Existing research regarding Saudi EFL students undertaking education in Western contexts reveals a dual-discourse of self-perpetuated inferiority in terms of linguistic, academic, and cultural insight; and agency in terms of self-determination, pedagogical transformation, and appropriation of knowledge (Al-Asmari 2008; Barnawi & Phan 2015; Shaw 2009). Regardless of the fact that Saudi EFL students have described themselves as existing on the fringes of English-speaking communities expressing hesitation about their English language proficiency, cultural competence, and academic abilities as international students, they have also been shown to exhibit resilience in navigating intercultural contexts (Alkhatnai

2016; Barnawi 2009; Shaw 2009). Focussing explicitly on the impact of these processes for notions of identity(ies) – constructed in and through the use of English – may allow for greater reflexivity for learners and teachers. This is expressed in Spack's (1988, p. 745) call for educators to encourage learners to (re)construct and (re)configure their own identities – not only through the prism of culture, but rather 'through a kaleidoscopic lens that captures the dynamic and complex processes that result from the interaction of individual, cultural, and contextual factors'.

Perceptions of the status of foreign qualifications in the Saudi TESOL profession

Multiple perspectives regarding the value of Western TESOL qualifications within the Saudi context are evident in the limited, but growing, body of research in this area. Studies that examine Saudi EFL educators' perceptions of foreign qualifications represent an important contribution to wider debates regarding the status of Englishes, dialectal variation, linguistic identities, and knowledge construction within academe. In Barnawi and Phan's (2015) examination of the perceptions and experiences of two Western-trained Saudi EFL teachers, NABA derived qualifications were conceptualised in various ways, including as a financial asset and a professional advantage within the employment marketplace. The study also evidences the dominant discourses of privilege attached to Western qualifications which – according to researchers, such as Park (2013) – have not only been normalised within TESOL contexts, but remain largely unquestioned.

The power and prestige associated with NABA qualifications is linked to broader discourses of the superiority of 'Native Speaker English' – often equated with the Standard American and British English dialects. Existing research evidences the importance with which many English users in 'Outer' and 'Expanding Circle' countries view 'native speaker like pronunciation' for TESOL practitioners (Inoue & Stracke 2013). Inoue and Stracke's research regarding EFL trainee teachers undertaking education in NABA contexts indicated that for the Saudi participant in their study it was important to acquire a 'native-like' accent and eliminate his Arabic accent as much as possible in order to maintain his pride as an English teacher. Another participant in the same study expressed the belief that it would be 'shameful' for an EFL educator to speak English with a foreign accent.

According to the authors, all participants in the study, including the Saudi TESOL teacher, identified the manner in which 'native speaker English teachers' (NESTs) tended to be held in a privileged position when compared with 'non-native' speaker teachers. The authors identified three components to the perceived strength of NESTs – social perceptions, English skills, and pedagogy – with the superiority of 'native speaker' teachers thought to be most marked with regard to English language speaking abilities, grammatical fluency, and spontaneous communication. The Saudi participant also emphasised the association of the English language with the cultures of 'Inner Circle' countries suggesting that NESTs' familiarity with these cultural settings was particularly valued by

employers. Likewise, pedagogies and approaches employed by NESTs tend to be accepted as 'best practice' due to the location of such educators within the 'Inner Circle'.

However, Inoue and Stracke (2013) discuss a duality in their findings. Their participants reported an acute awareness and contestation of the privileged status of 'Inner Circle' Englishes and, therefore, teachers from these contexts, and some participants' willingness to challenge the status quo. Yet at the same time they valued their degree from an Australian university as a means of distinguishing themselves from other teachers in their home countries. This may be paralleled with investigations of Saudi EFL teachers who overwhelmingly recognise and accept the notions of Englishes – dialects of the language as it is used around the world – yet favour 'native speaker' varieties of English in the EFL classroom, particularly for written communication (Asmari 2014).

Other researchers, such as Asmari (2014) and Barnawi and Phan (2015), identify the manner in which foreign qualifications are afforded status as important forms of capital leading to the marginalisation of Saudi EFL educators who do not possess degrees from Western institutions. In Barnawi and Phan's (2015) study both participants articulated what Kumaravadivelu (2003) describes as 'self-marginalisation practices' in which greater value is attributed to foreign derived degrees. The authors suggest this theme is evident in one participant's description of Western university degrees as 'golden' and originating in 'the house of knowledge and research' while degrees from Saudi or other institutions in the region were described as 'survival degrees' that were 'easily attainable' and lacking in prestige (p. 38). As Barnawi and Phan (p. 38) articulate: 'The use of such terms by these teachers is also an indication of how the cultural politics underlying NABA TESOL shapes language teachers' perceptions and practice in the field'.

Research examining the experiences and perceptions of Saudi EFL teachers who undertake TESOL qualifications in non-Saudi contexts provides important insights into the sociocultural, political, and educational ideologies of these often incongruous settings (see Barnawi & Phan 2015). The dominance of Western institutions as the 'natural' locus for TESOL teacher preparation has been critiqued by various scholars as a manifestation of postcolonial ideologies pertaining to the 'ownership' of English (in the singular) (see, e.g., Brutt-Griffler & Samimy 1999; Chowdhury & Phan 2014; Kubota & Lin 2009; Pennycook 1998; Phillipson 1992). An established body of research critiques NABA TESOL teacher preparation for failing to engage with issues of the 'ownership' of English and for such degrees favouring methodological approaches and techniques that are privileged in Western contexts, but are not useful, appropriate, or are otherwise irrelevant to learning contexts in students' home countries (Canagarajah 1999). Research seeking to better understand the degree to which teacher education in non-Saudi settings prepares EFL educators for professional contexts at home reflects a complex range of frequently overlapping positions – from perceiving NABA institutional practices as alienating and irrelevant to Saudi student teachers, through identifying Saudi teachers and learners as appropriating

methodology to suit Saudi contexts, to regarding NABA institutions and Saudi staff and students as working together to engage with issues of power, linguistic ownership, and identity(ies) in the academy. Various researchers identify a number of assumptions and misunderstandings fundamental to Western TESOL contexts that prove problematic for some Saudi EFL teachers (Barnawi & Phan 2015). These include: failure to understand the importance of direct instruction to traditions and practices in Saudi educational contexts, failure to appreciate the cultural situatedness of notions of 'passive' and 'active' classroom learning behaviours, and misunderstandings about the important roles and responsibilities afforded to educators in Saudi culture (on the latter point, see Elyas & Picard 2010).

Yet, researchers exploring Saudi EFL teachers' engagement with knowledge and practices privileged within Western TESOL educational contexts also emphasise the role of teacher agency (Barnawi & Phan 2015). For instance, Barnawi and Phan's examination of the perceptions and experiences of two Western-trained Saudi EFL teachers in relation to the translation of their post-method pedagogy training in NABA contexts to their practice in Saudi classrooms raised important issues regarding TESOL knowledge construction. The teachers in their study quite clearly took advantage of being trained in the West, but in the authors' words they 'also appeared to do so with awareness and with a strong sense of agency' (p. 35).

Barnawi and Phan's (2015) study showed the strategic awareness of the Saudi teachers who critically engaged with the aspects of their TESOL education that they considered appropriate to their needs. The authors argue that rather than unthinking adoption of methodological approaches encountered within teacher training in Western contexts, such as Communicative Language Teaching or Task-Based Learning, the Saudi teachers in their study actively appropriated relevant aspects shaping these practices to better suit their own sociocultural contexts. In other words, these teachers were seen to exhibit 'a desire to challenge the debilitating effects of method' (Kumaravadivelu 2003, p. 545) adopting instead a post-method approach which various scholars consider to be less bound to 'Inner Circle' hegemony – particularly if teachers shape educational approaches in accordance with local cultural conditions rather than paradigms of practice privileged in other contexts. A representation of Saudi teacher agency and autonomy therefore emerges from research exploring their role in shaping hybrid EFL classrooms characterised by plurality of method and pedagogy.

A major implication of this growing body of research relates to the requirement for teacher educators to critically contest 'the discursive formation of the colonial concept of method' (Barnawi & Phan 2015, p. 75). However, Barnawi and Phan (p. 46) assert:

> Despite the quest for the internationalization of higher education, most NABA TESOL programmes often give little recognition to international students' intellectual capabilities and to their academic and professional identity construction journeys. These programmes often demand international

> TESOL students to discard their prior knowledge in exchange of more advanced teaching methodologies and pedagogies.

This privileging of certain methods and approaches over others – even within the context of a 'post-method condition' course – was identified by Barnawi and Phan's (2015) participants; one of them recounted how drilling methods and memorisation were condemned by teacher educators without a broader discussion of the impact of culturally established approaches to learning on methodological choice in languages education. Here the Saudi TESOL student teachers showed critical engagement with the need to appropriate and adapt methods to suit their local contexts. Further research on approaches and strategies for facilitating such critical contestation of established dogmas about languages education is required.

Conclusion

A critical review of research investigating the educational mobility of Saudi EFL teachers and students highlights the need for NABA institutions to engage with issues of power and exclusion within the academy. This requires conscious acknowledgment of the many overt and covert ways in which students and teachers from 'Outer' and 'Expanding Circle' nations are positioned on the periphery. In pragmatic terms, this requires educators in NABA countries to explicitly engage with Saudi EFL students' educational schemas and home contexts, value diverse 'ways of knowing' and thinking, and acknowledge the richness of polyglossic and plurilingual practices. This necessitates teacher educators to acknowledge and embrace issues beyond the language itself, and to consider the sociocultural and political contexts of knowledge construction and the range of intellectual repertoires and perspectives Saudi EFL teachers and learners bring to NABA contexts. Greater awareness of, and insight into, the strategies and mechanisms employed by Saudi EFL students undertaking studies in NABA institutions will assist educators to understand the complex processes of linguistic adaptation and sociocultural identity(ies) formation occurring within linguistic communities of practice.

Further, the explicit unpacking of cultural assumptions and discursive practices within NABA institutions is required to facilitate educator and student reflection on assumptions and expectations regarding literacies and languages assessment, as well as participation in communicative events, such as tutorials and group work. Strategies for rendering these assumptions and expectations visible to students and activities to encourage their apprenticeship into privileged forms of language are essential (Barnawi 2009).

Valuing student experiences and educational schemas is also fundamental to this process, as well as encouraging contestation of notions of 'native speakers' and 'non-native speakers' and engagement with the plurality of English as it is spoken around the world. Such critical conversations allow for linguistic identity(ies), boundaries, and definitions to be negotiated and shaped collaboratively by speakers of English as a second language themselves (Jenkins 2006). Teachers from traditional English as a first language contexts and those in the 'Outer' and

'Expanding Circle' countries are required to critically contemplate and discuss the relevance and appropriacy of different methodological approaches – or indeed to consider the notion of 'method' itself – to their varied teaching contexts. Constructing and contesting various understandings of languages education and providing mechanisms for ongoing conversations about adaptation, hybridisation, and reconfiguration of methods after EFL educators return to their teaching in Saudi Arabia is an essential means of ensuring a scholarly and collegial community of praxis within and across contexts of English language education.

As the studies discussed in this chapter suggest, Saudi EFL students and teachers do not automatically adopt aspects of NABA language pedagogy, and NABA institutions have shown progress in focussing more fully on learner needs and sociocultural contexts. However, further research is required regarding the complex processes of identity(ies) formation and power relations in TESOL knowledge construction. The considerable status of TESOL as a commercial entity within the neoliberal academy renders the task of expanding research on power differentials in languages education and the implications for EFL student and teacher mobility particularly pertinent.

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7 The future of EFL and TESOL in Saudi Arabia

Michelle Picard

Introduction

The future of EFL in Saudi Arabia and TESOL remain – as they were at the inception of the modern Saudi state – inextricably linked with the economic, social, and political imperatives of the Saudi state. Despite strong attempts at economic diversification and privatisation, Saudi Arabia remains very much a state-managed economy (Al-Rasheed 2017; Albassam 2015; Nereim & Martin 2017) – with a state-directed social and education system underpinned by religious and national values (Elyas & Picard 2013). This is demonstrated in the first section of this chapter that explores the limited literature focussing on the future of EFL and TESOL in Saudi Arabia. The literature review indicates that a comprehensive analysis of the future of EFL and TESOL in Saudi Arabia has to date been missing – a significant gap addressed in this chapter. The brief literature review outlines the predicted economic, social, and political drivers of EFL and TESOL in Saudi Arabia over the next decade including neoliberalism and privatisation. The second section of the chapter explores the future of education in Saudi Arabia with particular reference to TESOL. It is shown that the 'diverging identities/discourses' (Elyas 2011, p. 1) reflected in TESOL educational policy and practice are likely to persist as reflected in the analysis of Saudi General and Higher Educational Policy. First three key educational policy documents that can be seen as predicting the future of TESOL in the country are examined. Then the role of information technology in the future of EFL and TESOL is explored. Information technology is likely to play a similar disruptive role in teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia as it has worldwide, changing teaching and learning practices and providing students with access to information and even new learning environments through international online providers. Other new methodologies and trends in English teaching are also explored including changes in medium of instruction, possible changes in age of exposure to English, amount of exposure, methods of exposure and pedagogies, learning materials, future teacher training, etc.

The final section of the chapter explores how Saudi Arabia is likely to balance this open access to English information, opinion, and cultures on the web with its concerns with preserving national and religious identity and avoiding the negative impacts of neoliberalism.

Literature review

Drivers of EFL in Saudi Arabia

Although petro-economics and communication with foreign workers remain strong reasons for promoting EFL, the increased privatisation of some services including municipal water supply, electricity, telecommunications, healthcare, traffic control, and car accident reporting, and even some aspects of education necessitate communication with international partners usually through the medium of English. Even previously state-controlled entities like the banks are increasingly being opened up to foreign investment. Likewise, Saudi Arabia aspires to being viewed as a society that is technologically advanced in 'Science and Knowledge' (Ministry of Education 2017a, para. 5). EFL is viewed as an important way to access scientific and technological knowledge, as well as disseminating Saudi innovation to the world. Another key social aim will remain the dissemination of the Saudi religious vision and role as leaders of Islam through English medium religious media and when hosting millions of Muslims during the periods of pilgrimage in the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina.

Politically, EFL has and will remain important in fostering Saudi/USA relations. These have improved significantly in recent years with the logistical and technological support of the US for Saudi military actions in Yemen and the recent arms deal worth $300 billion over a ten-year period signed by the Trump and Saudi administrations. Despite increasingly amiable relations between the US and Saudi Arabia, a degree of concern regarding Saudi support for radical Islam and terrorism is likely to persist thus providing an increased imperative for 'more English'. However, the Saudi government is unlikely to complete the calls for more English with a similar call for 'less Islam' (Karmani 2005).

Internal politics and pressures to develop more job opportunities for an increasingly educated but unemployed and underemployed youth are also likely to drive a movement towards more English. New Saudisation policies have moved from merely increasing local participation in state-owned enterprises to emphasise employing local labour in private industry and in joint local-foreign enterprises (Al-Rasheed 2017; Albassam 2015; Nereim & Martin 2017; Saudi Gazette 2016; Stratfor Worldview 2016). To operate effectively in these new roles, English is promoted as being a public lingua franca despite retaining the symbolic, social, and religious importance of Arabic (Al-Asmari 2008; Alhamdan, Honan & Hamid 2017; Elyas 2014; Pavan 2013; Payne & Almansour 2014). The role of English is even described as moving from English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to English as a Second or Additional Language (ESL/EAL) in the Saudi context (Alghofaili & Elyas 2017; Mahboob & Elyas 2017).

Drivers of change in TESOL in Saudi Arabia

As noted in the earlier chapter on the role of culture in EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia, English teachers in Saudi Arabia face a dual challenge. On the one hand,

they need to teach English cultures along with English language in order to teach the language effectively while, on the other hand, they should value Arabic as key to the Saudi religious and social identity, and negotiate local opposition to English instruction. One change in TESOL is that more and more local teachers are trained as English instructors even at the university level and valued above foreign native speaker teachers. At the same time, 'one-size fits all TESOL programs' delivered by native speakers are increasingly criticised (Alghofaili & Elyas 2017; Sulaimani & Elyas 2015). Saudi-based research suggests that 'teachers' nativeness . . . . [has] no significant effects on the EFL Saudi students' learning processes' and that other aspects of EFL teaching/learning, such as L2 competence, experience, teacher's personality, and rapport with students, are perceived more important than instruction by a native speaker (Alghofaili & Elyas 2017, p. 1). In fact, research suggests that a local Saudi teacher could be potentially more effective because of their understanding of the local context and ability to negotiate sometimes-conflicting identities (Alghofaili & Elyas 2017; Alhamdan, Honan & Hamid 2017). This change is in line with a movement towards 'global Englishes' rather than hegemonic Anglo-American TESOL (Daaud 2005; Van Tol 2016; Zughoul 2003).

There is also a contrasting movement towards English as a medium of instruction in Saudi technological colleges and universities focussing on science and technology disciplines. This is particularly the case in the nine private universities and 21 private colleges established to date (Al-Dali, Fnais & Newbould 2013). These institutions have developed links with international universities, such as the Sorbonne in France and Swarthmore, Duke, and Mount Holyoke in the United States. They specialise in professions-based science and technological disciplines, such as 'nursing, law, special education, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, radiology and laboratory techniques, computer science, management, marketing and finance, teacher training, tourism and hospitality – fields all important to local and national economies' (Al-Dali, Fnais & Newbould 2013, pp. 134–135). The rationale behind this move is that it will provide learners better access to international science and technology resources and will enable the 'internationalisation' of these institutions through the hiring of high-cite professors. There has been criticism of this move because it contravenes national policy without necessarily taking the needs or desires of the local population into consideration (Al-Kahtany, Golam Faruk & Al Zumor 2016; Le Ha & Barnawi 2015). However, privatisation and English medium of instruction have occurred because of other criticisms of Saudi higher education for producing too many humanities graduates and for focussing too strongly on Arabic and religious content to the detriment of science and technology, and for not addressing the employability of graduates sufficiently (Saudi Gazette 2016; Stratfor Worldview 2016; Varshney 2016). English as a conduit for science and technology is in line with the 'weaker Islamisation of English' perspective in which English is viewed mainly as vehicle acquiring 'modern day knowledge' (Elyas 2011; Elyas & Picard 2013; Hadley 2004; Karmani 2005; Mahboob & Elyas 2014).

Another worldwide trend affecting EFL and TESOL in Saudi Arabia is the international movement towards online education including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which are often used by Western universities as a way of advertising their courses to a wider audience. These online courses taught from abroad usually use native speakers rather than local Saudis.

In Saudi Arabia, online learning material – especially for English language teaching – has provided students with an alternative to textbook-driven curricula in the classroom and access to diverse cultures and content. However, since this material has not been curated and unpacked for the Saudi context, students might find it difficult to understand, and it might potentially offend local sensibilities. Although international English MOOCs, such as EdEx, have gained prominence, local MOOCs based in Saudi Arabia and other Middle-Eastern countries are also gaining traction (Adham Raniah & Lundqvist Karsten 2015; Al-Khalifa 2009). In addition, there have been concerns about the quality of distance education. To address these, the Saudi government has introduced tighter controls over locally sanctioned and accredited distance learning institutions and has chosen not to recognise distance education qualifications gained abroad (Al-Khalifa 2009; Elyas & Al-Garni 2015).

In general, ESL and TESOL are likely to be viewed in the future as part of a movement towards education for greater employability, quality assurance and enhanced learning environment, access to knowledge and skills, development of creative and critical thinking skills, and privatisation. As described in the *Vision 2030* policy, the aforementioned initiatives are part of the Saudi government's vision for the future while at the same time emphasising the development of individuals who are 'proud of their cultural heritage', 'have high values', and 'are proud of their national identity' (Saudi Arabian Government 2016b, para. 3). Since cultural heritage, national identity, and high values are for the Saudis encapsulated by an Islamic vision, there is likely to be even more Islam along with more English.

Future trends in education and TESOL in Saudi Arabia

Future trends in education and TESOL in Saudi Arabia are likely to continue to be strongly influenced by central government policies. The following section explores three key policies that predict future trends in education and the impact of these on TESOL in the Kingdom.

Policies affecting education and TESOL

The first of these policies affecting education and TESOL in particular is the *Vision 2030* (Saudi Arabian Government 2016b) which describes the planned methodology and roadmap for economic and developmental action in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Then we have the *National Transformation Program 2020* (Saudi Arabian Government 2016a) which was launched in 2016 and provides interim targets for 2020. Finally, there is the *Aafaq* (Horizons) initiative announced in 2009 which is a 25-year plan with the aim of improving higher

education opportunities, increasing scientific research output, and addressing the shortage of scientists in the country in key disciplines affecting economic prosperity (Al-Youbi 2017).

The *Saudi Vision 2030* policy, as noted by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Chairman of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs in the foreword to the policy, is based on three pillars:

> The first pillar of our vision is our status as the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds. . . . The second pillar of our vision is our determination to become a global investment powerhouse. . . . The third pillar is transforming our unique strategic location into a global hub connecting three continents, Asia, Europe and Africa. Our geographic position between key global waterways, makes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia an epicentre of trade and the gateway to the world.
>
> (Saudi Arabian Government 2016b, para. 3–5)

As noted in Chapter 2 of this volume, the above quotation demonstrates that – as it has been from its earliest history – English and English teaching in Saudi Arabia are likely to continue to be valued because of the perceived importance of English for the spread of Islam. In addition, a high-level English competence can play a role in encouraging trade, improving the economy, and enhancing political relationships with the outside world.

The three key themes of the *Vision 2030* policy – 'a vibrant society', 'a thriving economy', and an 'ambitious nation' – likewise have a relationship with the history of English, education, and TESOL in the country. The 'vibrant society' is built on the 'strong roots' of 'Islamic values' and a 'national Arab Identity', as well as encouraging 'tolerance'. The policy describes the key activities of enriching 'pilgrims' spiritual journeys and cultural experiences while in the Kingdom' with 'more museums . . . new tourist and historical sites and cultural venues' and the development of and sharing internationally of 'meaningful entertainment', as well as participating internationally in sport (Saudi Arabian Government 2016b, para. 1–10). Skills in foreign languages and English, in particular, are necessary to enable citizens to disseminate Islam and Islamic culture, as well as to participate internationally in sport and cultural activities. The 'thriving economy' also requires a different educational focus in which TESOL plays a key role.

In order to 'invest for the long-term', the country needs to diversify and privatise. This means that Saudi locals need English and other foreign languages to be able to communicate with foreign staff within international private companies and public-private partnerships, access and use international products and training, and communicate with foreign customers. This is even more important in the entrepreneurial activities and small and medium businesses recommended by the policy where cheaper 'off the shelf' materials and outsourcing can save money and where there might not be the resources required for Arabic translation or locally developed products (Al-Rasheed 2017).

In order to 'leverage its unique [geographic and religious] position' as the centre of the Islamic religion and its close proximity to Africa, Asia, and Europe, locals need to be able to communicate with businesses and pilgrims across the world making English teaching an important part of the curriculum at school and university levels (Saudi Arabian Government 2016b, para. 4–5).

In order to provide 'rewarding opportunities' for its citizens and 'be open for business', the introduction to the *Vision 2030* (Saudi Arabian Government 2016b, para. 4) prioritises education that prepares students for work 'in line with market needs'. According to the policy, market needs necessitate increased vocational education, a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and entrepreneurial education as determined by 'the National Labour Gateway (TAQAT)'. In addition, there is a need for 'sector councils that will precisely determine the skills and knowledge required by each socio-economic sector' (Saudi Arabian Government 2016b, para. 4).

As noted in the literature review above, the focus on STEM disciplines has already resulted in a number of international educational partnerships where English is the medium of instruction to facilitate communication. Additionally, local STEM-focussed higher education institutions are starting, and are increasingly likely, to have English as a medium of instruction in the future to enable easier access to information and to avoid costly translation and duplication of materials. The *Vision 2030* Thriving Economy section also encourages small and medium businesses to make use of 'vast marketing opportunities through social media and digital platforms' (Saudi Arabian Government 2016b, para.7). Since English still dominates the Internet, effective use of the language is implied.

For some time the Saudi government has sent students abroad to complete their postgraduate studies. The *Vision 2030* (Saudi Arabian Government 2016b, para. 14) has refocussed these scholarships 'towards prestigious international universities' and 'fields that serve our national priorities' suggesting again that STEM disciplines and English-medium universities will dominate since the national priorities are STEM focussed and the highest ranking universities are predominantly North American and United Kingdom-based. For example, on the *Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2018*, 17 universities in the top 21 are based in the United States of America and three are based in the United Kingdom, with only one in Switzerland (Times Higher Education 2018). This means that scholarship students are likely to study in English-speaking countries, return to Saudi Arabia, and teach STEM disciplines at Saudi universities and technical colleges through the medium of English.

Being 'open for business' and providing 'rewarding opportunities' for Saudi citizens is viewed as needing more private industry and international partnerships. For this to occur, the *Vision 2030* Thriving Economy section suggests that businesses and government industries alike attract workers with 'the necessary skills and capabilities both from within the Kingdom and beyond our national borders' (Saudi Arabian Government 2016b, para. 5). English as lingua franca will enable highly educated foreign workers to communicate more effectively with local workers and international companies. Earlier and more effective

teaching of English in the vocational institutions, high schools, and even primary schools is likely to result from the more outward and technological focus implied by the *Vision 2030*.

As noted above, the *National Transformation Program 2020* (Saudi Arabian Government 2016a) provides concrete objectives linked to the interim targets for the year 2020 and ways to follow up and evaluate the achievement of the targets. Targets relevant to education include dramatically increasing the number of students enrolled in vocational education, and improving school students' performance in international tests, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) which test the science, mathematics, reading, collaborative problem solving and financial literacy, and mathematics and science knowledge respectively. Another target is to have 'at least five Saudi universities among the top 200 universities in international rankings' (Saudi Arabian Government 2016a, p. 39) and to establish new universities focussed on STEM, such as the King Salman University for Technical and Vocational Education (allocated 2,900,000 budget in the *Program*).

The *Program* suggests that these targets will be achieved by 'a modern curriculum focused on rigorous standards in literacy, numeracy, skills and character development'. It recommends carefully tracking progress of all students from early childhood through to K-12 and beyond into tertiary education (higher and vocational) in order to improve education planning, monitoring, evaluation, and outcomes (Saudi Arabian Government 2016a, pp. 39–41). In addition, the *Program* suggests 'working with the private sector to ensure education outcomes are in line with the requirements of the job market' as well as building 'strategic partnerships with apprenticeship providers, new skills councils from industry, and large private companies' (Saudi Arabian Government 2016a, p. 41). The practical aim of these targets is to dramatically increase the percentage of graduates who secured employment within six months of graduation. Alongside the stated aims, the STEM focus can be seen in the budget allocations towards school students' participation in international scientific competitions (50,000), towards 'establishing technical labs in schools' (1,691,760) and towards 'shifting to digital education' (1,600,000). To reiterate an earlier point with regard to the anticipated impacts of the *Vision 2030*, the focus on STEM and nongovernment industry jobs and partnerships and accessing information via the Internet is likely to result in an increased focus on English teaching to access English resources, information, and markets, and compete internationally.

The push towards greater privatisation heralded in the *Vision 2030* is given specific targets even in the educational context in the *National Transformation Program 2020*. For example, one of the goals is to increase private investment in schooling, and a significant funding (240,000) has been allocated to attract private investments to finance schools' construction and to establish a national centre 'dedicated to Special Education in collaboration with the private sector (1,000,000)'. Money is also allocated to 'develop and deploy the Independent Schools Model to reach 2000 public schools run by small establishments

(50,000)' and the goal is to increase the percentage of students in nongovernment higher education from 6% in 2016 to 15% in 2020 (Saudi Arabian Government 2016a, pp. 100–102). As already noted above, privatisation of education and links with global multinational education organisations are both likely to lead to more courses and programs using an English medium of instruction at tertiary level and to an introduction of more English and even English medium of instruction at an earlier age for school students. Along with changes to the amount of English taught as well as an increase in English medium of instruction, the style of teaching English is likely to change as is discussed in the sections on technology use and trends in Saudi Arabian English teaching below. *The National Transformation Program 2020* allocates large sums of money to developing 'student-centric education (1,028,400)' and to establishing 'the e-service framework for universities (90,000)' (Saudi Arabian Government 2016a, pp. 100–102).

Interestingly, the word 'English' is only mentioned once in the *National Transformation Program 2020* document in relation to funding allocated to a 'Centre for English Language Education Development (49,990)'. However, since two other Centres receiving funding relate to STEM discipline education and the remaining Centre to 'Arabic Language Education Development', English teaching is obviously viewed as important in the policy and underpins many of the other initiatives detailed. The only other time where 'language' is referred to is the goal to increase the 'number of languages used in the awareness programs' during pilgrimages (Saudi Arabian Government 2016a, p. 64) once again showing the vital importance of foreign languages to the mission of spreading Islam.

The final policy affecting the future use and teaching of English in Saudi Arabia is the *Afaq* (Horizons) 25-year Ministry of Education plan for Higher Education first introduced in 2009. In its 'Vision and Mission', the Ministry notes that it pursues a 'globally competitive knowledge-based community' and aims to 'increase the effectiveness of Scientific Research, encourage creativity and innovation, develop community partnership and promote the skills, and capabilities of students' (Ministry of Education 2017c, para. 1–2). As already noted above, accessing information in a knowledge-based economy, involvement in and access to scientific research, and building skills in an internationally competitive privatised economy all require English proficiency and hence the push towards more English teaching and English medium of instruction courses and programs in Saudi higher education and even vocational and school education.

Of the 13 Objectives of the *Afaq* policy, six objectives can be seen as directly relating to the importance of increased use and teaching of English within higher education. Objective 6, 'producing, disseminating, and employing scientific research and knowledge, and expanding Higher Postgraduate Programs' requires access to international scholars to teach the programs, access to international knowledge to understand the field, and for Saudi students to study abroad in English to be able to disseminate their research to the international scientific community. Objective 7 aims at 'expanding private education with a view to achieve the development objectives' which requires international funding and partnerships necessitating English as a medium of communication between

partners and to access resources. Objective 10 focusses on 'granting overseas scholarships to talented students with a view to meet the needs of development, and to exchange knowledge', and – as already pointed out above – the majority of the most highly ranked overseas universities are in the United States or the United Kingdom once again necessitating English as language of instruction for communication. Objective 11 focusses on 'optimally employing Information and Telecommunication' networks and it is likely that English will remain a dominant language on the Internet and in the 'knowledge economy'. Finally Objectives 12 and 13 focus on 'diversifying the education funding resources, and investing in education' and 'enhancing local and international partnerships' (Ministry of Education 2017b, para. 1). Those partnerships already in place are predominantly with English-medium institutions (e.g., Swarthmore, Duke, and Mount Holyoke in the United States) and this is likely to persist in the future. The Ministry aims at continuing to expand and enhance the contribution of private education with the goal of achieving 25% of government funding allocated to students attending private and external universities. In addition, as described in the 'initiatives and projects' section of the *Afaq*, the Ministry wants to attract 'prominent international universities' to set up campuses in the country (Ministry of Education 2017a, para. 15).

The Ministry has expected each Saudi national university to come up with its own response to the *Afaq*. These tend to focus on 'expansion, quality assurance, and differentiation' taking market needs into consideration (Majmaah University 2017). Each of these aspects requires more international interaction and hence an increased use and teaching of English. King Abdullah University for Science and Technology, for example, has expanded scientific research programs and Centres for research in STEM. The University differentiates itself by its focus on postgraduate Masters and PhD programs in STEM fields and its recruitment of international students, and ensures quality by hiring internationally recognised scholars and management by an independent board of trustees (Ministry of Higher Education 2010). Because of the reasons discussed above, the language of instruction for King Abdullah University for Science and Technology is English only. Applicants require a minimum entry score in international English language tests that is comparable to university entry requirements in English-speaking countries, or need to have studied previously in an English-speaking country (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology 2018).

Another key element of the *Afaq* policy is its focus on technology investment. E-learning is promoted by the National Centre for e-Learning and Distance Learning (NCeL) which has the following aims:

- Distribute e-learning, and distance learning applications in conformity with quality standards.
- Contribute to the assessment of e-learning, and distance learning programs.
- Support e-learning, and distance learning research and studies.
- Set quality standards for the design, production, and publication of digital learning materials.

- Give advice to related parties in their areas of specialty.
- Encourage the creation of educational software, and circulate such software to serve the educational process in government, and private higher education institutions.
- Promote, and coordinate outstanding e-learning, and distance learning projects.
- Organize meetings, conferences, and workshops that contribute to the development of e learning, and distance learning.
- Build cooperation relations with international organizations, and institutions operating in the field of e-learning and distance learning.

(Ministry of Education 2017a, para. 7)

Given the nature of these objectives, NCeL clearly intends to address many of the issues that have stalled effective implementation of e-learning in Saudi Arabia (to be discussed in the following section). The centrality of e-learning to the *Afaq* also highlights the importance of English to the policy since the international quality assurance standards and cooperative relations espoused by the organisation require communication through the medium of English and access to English resources – heralded by the fact that the organisation's website is available only in English. The Saudi Digital Library (SDL) is another major technological investment with the aim of providing 'huge resources of knowledge' and massively enhancing the scientific digital environment of Saudi universities. Although the library provides comprehensive materials in Arabic, many of these resources are available in English.

The role of information technology in the future of TESOL in Saudi Arabia

As discussed above, the introduction of the NCeL as part of the *Afaq* policy suggests that e-learning and blended learning will increasingly become important in Saudi Arabian higher education. The push towards integration of information and communication technologies has a long history in Saudi Arabian schools and higher education. However, from the brief history provided below, it is clear that despite provision of ICT there remain significant challenges in effectively integrating it into English teaching, as well as teaching other subjects using English as the language of instruction. (See also the review of Saudi research on ICT in EFL in Chapter 1.)

In 1991 the Ministry of Education introduced a computer-based course to the compulsory curriculum for the secondary school level for boys, and by 2003 there was a compulsory ICT subject for male and female secondary school students and male primary school students (Saudi Ministry of Planning 2005).

The next phase of development involved integrating ICT into all subjects taught at the high school level. This phase was heralded by the National *Watani* project introduced in 2000/2001 which focussed on infrastructure providing

schools with computer laboratories (one computer per 10 pupils) and integrating all schools onto an Internet network. An important aspect of teacher development in this phase involved assisting teachers to use the Internet and computer equipment (Al-Asmari & Khan 2014; Al-Madani & Allafiajiy 2014; Al-Maini 2013). However, English teachers in particular resisted using ICT in their classrooms as they struggled to gain access to the laboratories, lacked the training to meaningfully use the Internet in their classroom activities, and were still textbook and exam orientated, and therefore viewed ICT activities as 'light relief' or entertainment for students rather than serious learning activities (Al-Maini 2013).

The *Jehazi* initiative launched in 2006 aimed to overcome teacher resistance to ICT use and enhance their technological skills. This was attempted by providing them with:

> a laptop, memory stick, laser mouse, one year free Internet subscription, one year free subscription to a specialist computer magazine, a six-hour training course at a New horizon computer training centre, training to obtain the International Computer Driving Licence ICDL, and after sale services support.
>
> (Jehazi.com 2006 cited in Oyaid 2009, p. 25)

In addition, parents, students, teachers, and administrators were connected via the national *School Net* platform. However, teachers still had difficulty integrating ICT in their English classes due to the dominance of textbook-driven pedagogy and national examinations. Also, although teachers might know how to use the technology, they did not necessarily have the pedagogical knowledge of how to use it effectively to teach English. They, therefore, tended to use ICT more for administrative than teaching purposes (Al-Madani & Allafiajiy 2014).

The final initiative to integrate ICT into all subjects was launched as part of the general *Tatweer* (To develop) Public Education Program launched in 2007 which was focussed primarily on pedagogy although ICT availability was also enhanced. The *Tatweer* aimed to

> improve the quality of teaching and learning through (i) the employment of new teacher professional development initiatives; (ii) the implementation of new learning technologies in classrooms; and (iii) the development of greater teacher autonomy in state schools.
>
> (Tayan 2016, p. 61)

The Program began with the establishment of 50 pilot 'smart schools' across the country that were equipped with 'wireless internet access, smart-board use, LCD projectors and digital cameras' (Tayan 2016, p. 64) and ensured that all students and teachers had wireless accessible laptops. In addition, the *Tatweer* included a large-scale teacher development program involving workshops and online support resources developed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Centre for British Teachers (www.cfbt.com; Al-Madani & Allafiajiy 2014). The

emphasis of teacher training were pedagogies that encouraged responsible and active use of ICT and consequently the belief was that there would be improvement in students' entrepreneurship skills, technological knowledge, reading and writing skills 'that would create learners fit for 21st labour market needs' (Tatweer 2014, p. 18 cited in Tayan 2016, p. 67).

Uptake by English teachers of ICT has, however, been slow regardless of the significant work done as part of the *Tatweer*. This is in spite of the large number of studies in Saudi Arabia that have shown the positive effects on student motivation and English language proficiency of using ICT on English teaching (e.g. Al-Madani & Allafiajiy 2014; Al-Maini 2013; Alenezi 2017; Alghamdi & Alnowaiser 2017; Aljasir et al. 2017; Allam & Elyas 2016; Allam, Elyas & Bajnaid 2017; Lawrence 2016). Most of these studies have shown that teachers are still resistant to using social media and/or free access to students of the Internet via smartphones and other devices for fears of them accessing inappropriate content. The teachers are also concerned that students are just 'playing round' rather than seriously learning when using the Internet. Many teachers also lack the ability to link Internet resources to their English teaching which is still textbook driven (Aldera 2017; Aljasir et al. 2017; Allam & Elyas 2016; Allam, Elyas & Bajnaid 2017; Naveed et al. 2017; Nawal Hamad Mohmad 2017; Sarhandi, Bajnaid & Elyas 2017). Teachers' ability to take advantage of internet resources have also been hampered by lack of equal bandwidth across regions and schools, incompatible IT systems, etc. (Alenezi 2017). In addition, older teachers and teachers who have not had access to the training remain resistant and prefer to teach in 'tried and tested' teacher-centred approaches (Alqurashi, Gokbel & Carbonara 2017). Thus, although new learning technologies have been implemented in English language classrooms across Saudi Arabia as recommended by the *Tatweer*, not all teachers have accessed professional development or fully or effectively implemented what they have learned in their classrooms. Likewise, the quality of teaching and learning has not necessarily improved or achieved the goals of the *Tatweer* of preparing effective and autonomous 21st-century learners.

Tayan (2016, p. 64) suggests that the limited success of the *Tatweer* in achieving 'neoliberal values of autonomy, trust, and greater leadership powers for teachers' and student learning autonomy and critical thinking 'evident in *Tatweer* discourse were overshadowed by the performance devices of human capital and the dynamics of disciplinarily power control, and authority'. However, the central authority and Ministry of Education push towards technology integration and changes in pedagogy has had some more positive influence recently as evidenced by a study comparing teachers in Saudi Arabia and the United States' knowledge in content, pedagogy, and technology integration. It showed that both cohorts had stronger perceived pedagogical and content knowledge than technological pedagogical knowledge or technological pedagogical content knowledge. However, the *Tatweer* initiatives appear to have had an impact since the Saudi Arabian cohort had significantly higher confidence in their ability to conduct online interactivity than teachers in the USA. They also had more 'confidence in their ability to use technological representations to demonstrate specific concepts

and ability to use various courseware programs to deliver instruction'. In addition, the Saudi teachers had significantly higher confidence than teachers in the USA in their ability use technology to create effective representations of content and predict student understanding of topics, and 'meet the demands of online teaching' (Alqurashi, Gokbel & Carbonara 2017, p. 1418). Alqurashi and colleagues, therefore, suggest that such centrally driven initiatives should continue since they have contributed to improved practice among teachers, and that even more explicit support focussing on the integration of technology and pedagogical knowledge should be provided. The authors further claim that the explicit requirement of new teachers to be able to implement technology into their teaching has also had an impact on Saudi teachers. However, this does not address older teachers who have not been trained in the new methods and who were already employed before the new requirements were implemented.

Since like in many other contexts the Saudi Arabian English curriculum is textbook and exam-driven, recent initiatives to provide stronger explicit guidance to teachers has also probably resulted in the improved uptake of technology among school and university teachers and is likely to continue to improve uptake as more guidance is provided. This is because these resources relieve teachers of the stress of developing their own materials and activities from scratch and of the stress that students might access culturally inappropriate material on the Internet. Initiatives already implemented have borne fruit. For example, in 2014, a new textbook series was introduced into Saudi state schools. The primary school English textbook series entitled *Get Ready*, the intermediate schools series entitled *Lift Off*, and the secondary schools series entitled *Flying High* all include access for teachers and students to a website with a range of teaching resources (see, for example, www.macmillanenglish.com/GRSA for more information regarding the *Get Ready* series). In addition, several software companies have collaborated with the Ministry to provide resources, lesson plans, and lesson structuring tools. For example, Semanoor, a local educational software company, has produced an electronic version of curricula of all official government K-12 public and private schools including English, as well as a multimedia library and electronic class system which help teachers to develop their e-lessons. Teachers are also encouraged to make use of the 'Obeikan Education' resources on the 'Skoool website that contains over 250 interactive lessons for mathematics and science for K-12 students'. This website uses English as a language of instruction, thus already from a primary school level English is encouraged as the language of instruction at least in terms of resources for STEM (Al-Asmari & Khan 2014, p. 2).

Increasingly technical education is also taught through online and blended modalities as part of international partnerships using international and locally developed resources and English as language of instruction. For example, in 2008 the Ministry of Higher Education 'launched its Google Educational Program' and more recently signed memorandums of understanding with Intel and Microsoft to provide e-learning programs for students and training for teachers online. In addition, businesses also collaborate with the technical colleges (e.g. Communications and Information Technology Commission [CITC]

in association with the National Commercial Bank) to provide online resources (Al-Asmari & Khan 2014, p. 2).

As noted in a previous section, e-learning and blended learning are already viewed as important at a university level – this is quite clear from the *Afaq* initiatives and the setting up of NCeL. More teaching of English and use of English as a language of instruction are increasingly viewed as intrinsically linked to e-learning and blended learning, as well as to progress in research, employability, and participation in the 'knowledge economy'. In addition, English is increasingly important since partnerships and access to learning materials are facilitated by an English medium of instruction.

As early as 2007 the *Knowledge International University* was set up to support the use of e-learning resources, and the Saudi Digital Library discussed above also provides a repository of e-learning resources including e-books, learning resources, and activities, as well as academic articles. A number of Saudi Universities, such as King Saud University (KSU), King Abdul Aziz University (KAU), Al-Baha University, Taiba University, Qassim University, King Khalid University (KKU), and Madinah Islamic University, have made formal arrangements with the NCeL to deliver e-learning and have instituted Deanships of Online and Distance education and/or e-learning centres. Some universities, such as King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM), provide a number of courses in science, engineering, and management through international consortiums, for instance OpenCourseWare Consortium. These courses are provided in both Arabic and English language of instruction (Al-Asmari & Khan 2014).

Ironically, despite 'cultural limitations' to accessing higher education for female students in Saudi Arabia, Saudi women 'represent 56.6% of Saudi university students with the Ministry expecting enrolment of women to increase' (Almansour & Kempner 2015, p. 520). Higher education in Saudi Arabia, except for a few private or postgraduate institutions (e.g., King Abdullah University of Science and Technology), is strictly gender-segregated with male lecturers teaching female students remotely interacting only via audio link. However, female students have an increasingly high uptake of educational technology (Jamjoon 2010; Jawad 1998; Nawal Hamad Mohmad 2017). Perhaps this is because the uptake of new technologies, such as social media, video recordings of the teacher speaking, and other interactivity, has actually 'shortened the transactional distance between female students and their university teachers' rather than increasing it as is usual in online and distance study (Ghamdi, Samarji & Watt 2016, p. 52). As Ghamdi, Samarji and Watt note, the effectiveness of university teachers in online environments is often due to teacher immediacy that allows interaction and exchange of ideas and a better social relationship. They also argue that improvement of an 'instructor's perceived social presence through immediacy in [an] online environment' dramatically enhances learner motivation, engagement, and learning. Ghamdi, Samarji, and Watt (2016, p. 21) showed that their female students were more satisfied than their male participants when experiencing

'perceived e-immediacy behaviours' proposing that blended and online learning is likely to increase even more, especially as the female university population grows as suggested by Ministry of Education figures (cited in Almansour & Kempner 2015, p. 520).

Despite all this activity encouraging online and blended learning from the Ministry of Higher Education, there is still structural resistance to online and blended modalities of study. 'Saudi embassies do not authenticate online or distance education degrees obtained from foreign countries' – even institutions as prestigious as 'MIT, Harvard, and Stanford in the United States of America, and Oxford in the United Kingdom' (Al-Asmari & Khan 2014, p. 8). Consequently, Saudi students cannot qualify for government jobs or participate in graduate studies in Saudi Arabia if their degrees are obtained through online or blended study abroad which explains students' resistance to participate in online or distance study (Adham Raniah & Lundqvist Karsten 2015; Al-Asmari & Khan 2014; Al-Khalifa 2009). However, given the focus in the *Vision 2030* on international and private-public partnerships, access to the 'knowledge economy', and increase in internationally recognised research and quality assurance, e-learning and blended learning are likely to dramatically grow and gain greater recognition for English teaching and STEM studies using English as language of instruction. That said, as indicated in the *Afaq* documentation, the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education is also likely to increasingly rely on organisations, such as NCeL, to ensure 'conformity with quality standards' for the distribution, 'design, production, and publication of digital learning materials' and programs (Ministry of Education 2017b). They are also likely to ensure that the quality standards are met before accrediting programs or recommending resources as part of professional development for teachers.

Other predicted trends in TESOL in Saudi Arabia

Based on the review of relevant literature and Government policy documents in earlier sections of this chapter, it is predicted that English will increasingly be introduced at earlier stages of education in Saudi Arabia as more positive attitudes towards English prevail (Golam Faruk 2014). Other new methodologies and trends in English teaching are also explored including changes in medium of instruction, possible changes in age of exposure to English, amount of exposure, methods of exposure and pedagogies, learning materials, future teacher training, etc.

Currently Saudi students start English in the fourth grade. However, in line with international trends and with an increased focus on STEM and the 'knowledge economy', it is likely that English instruction will soon be introduced from the first or second year of primary school (Van Tol 2016, p. 1). Indeed many private schools in Saudi Arabia already introduce English language instruction in Kindergarten and many Saudi teachers believe that the introduction of English should be earlier in the elementary school curriculum (Mitchell & Alfuraih 2017).

Bilingual Arabic-English education (Alzahrani 2012) is also likely to increasingly be promulgated in Saudi Arabian middle and secondary schools. Alzahrani advocates partial immersion programs where students learn up to half of their subjects at school in the second language while supporting and continuing to develop the students' first language as the most appropriate for the Saudi context. However, rather than recommending immersion or 'submersion' in an English-only environment with English monolingual Western teachers, Alzahrani is in line with Alghofaili and Elyas (2017), who recommend Arabic-speaking local teachers who are bilingual or fully bilingual foreign teachers who understand the local culture and who are suitably qualified to teach bilingual education. At a university and vocational education level, as already noted above, it is likely that more and more institutions will introduce English as a medium of instruction in more courses and programs. The number of English-only local and internationally partnered institutions is also likely to grow.

At a university level and even high school level, the focus in English teaching is likely to change from English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching to English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching, and this is likely to be encouraged through bilingual education immersion programs. In addition, English instruction from university and even possibly high school and vocational level is likely to move from English for General Purposes (EGP) or even English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) to increasingly English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) supporting students in their English language of instruction studies. This ESAP will most likely focus on STEM and other vocational language in order to meet the demands for disciplinary and vocational knowledge and participation in the 'knowledge economy'. In addition, interdisciplinary English language and study skills are likely to be increasingly taught (Fallatah 2016).

Teacher training is already viewed as a Ministry of Education priority as recognised in a number of studies (e.g., Al-Madani & Allafiajiy 2014; Alghofaili & Elyas 2017; Allam & Elyas 2016; Alqurashi, Gokbel & Carbonara 2017; Jamjoon 2010; Oyaid 2009; Van Tol 2016), and e-learning is likely to be prominent in this teacher training. For example, as noted above, the NCel recommends training, development, and support in quality assurance, assessment, learning material development, English (along with other courses), speciality advice, and pedagogy development in meetings, conferences, and workshops (Ministry of Education 2017b). However, e-learning is not the only emphasis of this teacher development (Al-Sheikh 2015), and a focus on communication activities where students can actively participate and use English either face-to-face in the classroom or online (Alqahtani 2015) is likely to increasingly form part of teacher professional development. In addition, as international and industry partnerships grow in number, there is likely to be more staff development using software, resources, and training provided by training institutions attached to multinational companies and international universities. One can also anticipate that additional formal qualifications will be required in the future to upskill and reskill English teachers (Al-Madani & Allafiajiy 2014).

Learning and teaching English more online and with a different pedagogy is also likely to change the way learning and teaching in general occurs. As staff and students gain more and more access to information and different cultures through online resources, the way in which teaching and learning occur is likely to change (Hamdan 2015). Likewise, there are strong expectations that Saudi Universities will become more 'global', that academics will be given more freedom to research and access research materials on topics 'beyond the traditional limits allowed in contemporary [Saudi society]', and that they will change their English teaching pedagogy to increasing critical thinking including debate and collaborative learning approaches (Almansour & Kempner 2015, p. 519).

Another change to English teaching pedagogy that has occurred due to the advent of online and particularly mobile learning in Saudi Arabia is related to the growth of instructional 'flexibility'. Mobile learning is often defined as learning that provides a 'just in time, just in place, just for me experience' for learners (Bozkurt 2017, p. 27). Saudi teachers are increasingly expected to offer more flexible, individualised, and differentiated learning experiences to their students (Alghamdi & Alnowaiser 2017). As English teachers in Saudi Arabia are provided with more support for flexibility, a range of quality materials to allow flexibility, and resources for diagnosing student weaknesses and individualising curriculum, more flexible teaching pedagogies are likely to emerge. As noted by Alghamdi and Alnowaiser, although Saudi teachers currently identify differences in their students' levels and needs, their 'strategies [are] limited in number and variation' due to the 'highly-structured courses, with fixed material and unified learning outcomes'. As further guidance is provided to Saudi English teachers on how to be flexible and meet individualised needs, they will tend to include more 'dynamic classroom practices that are sensitive and reactive to students' needs and interests' (Alghamdi & Alnowaiser 2017, p. 158).

Conclusion

English and English teaching in Saudi Arabia will increasingly be affected by international trends, such as the movement towards e-learning, mobile learning and blended learning, the use of proprietary software and international private company and institutional resources, partnerships with external organisations and industry, vocational or science focussed English courses, and more individualised pedagogies. However, local concerns, such as the spread of Islam and Saudi nationalism and a strong centralised educational system, are likely to continue to ensure that – although there is 'more English' – Islam and Arabic remain important and national concerns and culture are not neglected. The role of teacher education and professional development is paramount for Saudi Arabia to harness the power of 'World Englishes' to help to achieve its political, economic, religious, and social goals and reach the targets set out in its ambitious policies. Equally, Saudi Arabia will need to engage international partners as true partners ensuring that they understand local culture in order to avoid neo-colonial/neoliberal domination and local resistance (Sulaimani & Elyas 2015; Tayan 2016).

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Conclusion

Christo Moskovsky

The review of Saudi EFL-related literature in Chapter 1 included some critical commentary which acknowledged the remarkable advances in this area over a quarter of a century – particularly after the year 2000 – but also identified a number of weaknesses. These included issues of thematic orientation in Saudi EFL research – particularly under- and over-explored topics – as well as issues of research design and methodology, etc. Chapter 1 established an element of randomness in the way EFL research topics are often selected and explored – with some topic areas getting a disproportionately large amount of attention while others getting little or none. The over-explored ones include learning strategies, teaching the TL culture, social-psychological factors (such as attitudes, motivation, anxiety, learner autonomy, etc.), vocabulary acquisition, and the pedagogical use of ICT. This is not to say that these topics are unworthy of research or that they do not have any capacity to inform language pedagogy. What we are saying is that the research effort should be more balanced and should give due attention to the whole spectrum of interrelated social, cognitive, psychological, and environmental factors which are now known to play a role in the process of L2 acquisition and to contribute – one way or another – to the learner's emerging L2 competence.

One undeniably important and interesting domain of L2 research which deserves to be explored considerably more is known as *Interlanguage Studies* and is concerned with the examination – quite often via error analysis – of grammatical and developmental aspects of the learners' interlanguage (IL) system including the effects of L1 transfer. It is now clear that – regardless of the sometimes considerable inter-learner variation – the ILs of learners sharing the same ethnolinguistic background may involve a unique configuration of rather stable common features, which is why it is not unusual to find in literature references to specific types of ILs, e.g., *Polish-English Interlanguage*, *Italian-English Interlanguage*, etc. It would not be unreasonable to expect that the interlanguages of Arabic learners of English would share a number of phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties; indeed, the results of Al-Rawi's (2012) research support such an assumption suggesting the existence of another fairly stable specific type of IL – *Arabic-English Interlanguage*. A good understanding of this IL's common properties can very effectively be used to guide EFL

teaching and can lead to improved learner achievement. An understanding of the specific developmental processes and stages for Arabic learners of English can be equally beneficial for teaching/learning practices. Last, but not least, L2 developmental research more generally can take advantage of completely new data from a rather unique sociocultural ethnolinguistic context and thus contribute to extant theories of L2 fossilisation.

Other areas which deserve further examination include issues of EFL communication and communication strategies, issues of L2 testing and evaluation, and issues of language aptitude and aptitude testing.

Apart from the need to achieve a more thematically balanced approach to EFL research, the Saudi research effort will gain from improving aspects of the *research methodology* including more stringent design (empirical, experimental, longitudinal, cross-sectional), better and more representative sampling (size and matching), better and more diverse instruments and data collection techniques (qualitative, quantitative, mixed), more stringent data analyses (including effect sizes), etc.

This brings us to the more general issue of how researchers – especially commencing ones – select their research topics. Experience tells us that – more often than not – a topic is not necessarily chosen in view of its strategic importance to the general field. Some prospective researchers may already have clearly defined interests in a particular area, and a research topic is chosen on that basis – with little or no consideration about its overall strategic importance. In quite a large number of cases (perhaps even a majority), prospective research supervisors are instrumental in determining a candidate's topic – a topic is selected, simply because it is aligned with a prospective supervisor's research interests. Again, no global and/or strategic considerations necessarily play a role in this process. This has probably contributed to the sense of arbitrariness in the thematic orientation of Saudi EFL research that we alluded to above; it may also have played a role in how the design and methodology were conceived for a number of studies.

In view of this it would be highly desirable to find ways of coordinating and streamlining future EFL-related research in Saudi Arabia, and to work towards *developing a unified and consolidated EFL research program* in this country. How can this be achieved? One possibility would be to establish a dedicated Saudi agency – for instance, *a National Centre for EFL Research* – whose primary function would be to guide Saudi research in the EFL field. How such a Centre could be conceived and how it will operate is a matter of public discussion, but it would necessarily have to involve representatives of most major Saudi universities (and, perhaps, some external consultants as well).

A National Centre for EFL Research would have the capacity to optimise the research effort and channel it in directions which are justifiable in terms of the global and strategic needs of the EFL field and the Saudi community more generally. The Centre could also play a critically important role in guiding EFL-related research in terms of design and methodology. Importantly, a national research centre would have the capacity to cross the gap between academic research and actual EFL delivery by facilitating the implementation of various

research findings into actual classroom practices and thus creating conditions for higher quality EFL delivery and better learner achievement.

Improving learner achievement is indeed the ultimate goal for everyone involved, especially in view of widespread underachievement of Saudi EFL learners (Kharma 1998) reported throughout this book and elsewhere. As argued in this book elsewhere, the Saudi Government can play quite a critical role in that regard. The Government's efforts could broadly target four general areas: (1) EFL curriculum and methodology; (2) EFL teachers and teaching culture (including pre-service and in-service teacher training); (3) EFL learners and learning culture (including attitudes among the Saudis towards the English language and the English-speaking communities); and (4) the internationalisation of EFL delivery.

To give credit where credit is due, over the past two decades or so the Saudi Government has made serious attempts at redesigning and improving the national *EFL curriculum*, but much further work is required in that regard. For instance, there have been calls to reduce EFL curriculum density and enhance the communicative component of the program including more interactive exercises and activities, such as group and pair work, and games. EFL curriculum reform and development should be driven by the understanding that language education is unlike any other type of education and should be informed by needs-based research taking into consideration both teachers' and learners' perspectives (Alfallaj 1998). In essence, what is the most suitable language pedagogy for the Saudi context can only be established empirically; this is indeed where dedicated EFL research could be particularly valuable. Further work would also be needed to improve EFL textbooks and related teaching and learning materials, teaching aids and facilities (including audio-visual technology and ICT), teaching and learning infrastructure (e.g., language laboratories), class sizes, etc. EFL delivery should also take much better advantage of the broad range of ICT-based language learning resources most of which learners can use to support their learning at little or no cost.

There is practically a consensus in literature that a major shift is required in *teaching methodology* – from the currently prevalent Grammar-Translation method to Communicative Language Teaching – in particular task-based language teaching; there is a growing body of evidence of the latter's superiority over other methods/approaches in developing learners' communicative competence (Alhawsawi 2014). Having said that, it is necessary to give due consideration to Burke's discussion (in Chapter 6) of the established body of research critiquing the tendency for 'Inner Circle' methodologies to be accepted as best practice for 'Outer' and 'Expanding Circle' contexts due to the cultural politics of TESOL knowledge construction (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy 1999; Chowdhury & Phan 2014; Kubota & Lin 2009; Kumaravadivelu 2003; Pennycook 1998; Phillipson 1992). Burke promotes the view that Saudi EFL teachers, curriculum designers, and policy makers should indeed strive to adopt best professional practices, but they should not do that uncritically and should adapt educational approaches to align them with the unique and varied sociocultural contexts of Saudi Arabia.

It is undeniable that teachers play a critical role in all aspects of EFL delivery. As a matter of fact, it would largely fall on EFL teachers to overcome existing obstacles (Farooq 2015; Liton & Ali 2011) and make the methodological shift to Communicative Language Teaching. And there is a lot more that teachers can do in the classroom to improve the quality of delivery and achieve better results. Apart from specifically delivering the EFL instruction, teachers perform the role of the classroom manager – they determine the range and nature of teacher–learner interactions, the type and amount of corrective feedback they provide, etc. As importantly, teachers can play a crucial role in managing their learners' affective states – anything they do in the classroom can influence (positively or negatively) their learners' attitudes, motivation, self-esteem, self-confidence, etc. (Alrabai 2010, 2015; E. Alshehri 2014).

In reality, however, individual EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia can only make a limited impact. They have little or no say in how the curriculum is constructed; they are denied the authority to use innovative teaching techniques or materials; in fact, they are expected to do little else than blindly follow a curriculum imposed from above (Albedaiwi 2014). EFL instruction in Saudi classrooms is typically teacher-centred (Alsaedi 2012), often delivered in Arabic and denying learners substantive opportunities for interactive communicative use of the L2 (Alfallaj 1998; Alnofaie 2013).

There is a growing consensus in literature that significant changes to the *teaching and learning culture* in the Saudi EFL classroom would be required in order to improve teaching and learning standards and raise learner achievement. More specifically, EFL delivery in the Saudi classroom should shift to a much more learner-centred approach, rely much more on self-directed learning, and utilise effective means of boosting learners' self-efficacy and autonomy.

Pre- and in-service teacher training can play a major role in this cultural shift. However, as the Review of Saudi EFL literature in Chapter 1 revealed, many Saudi authors regard current pre-service EFL teacher training programs as inadequate (Alansari 1995; Arishi 1995; Al-Hazmi 2003). There is also a strong view that in-service Saudi EFL teachers should be provided with more opportunities for professional development. Here is where the Saudi Government can use leadership to reform and upgrade teacher training. For instance, pre-service training should involve much more opportunity for supervised school-based practice. In-service training should involve more opportunities for professional development including workshops specifically designed to help teachers understand the need for a cultural change and to guide them towards that change.

The critical role of teachers notwithstanding, a shift in *learner/learning culture* is equally needed. When describing Saudi EFL learners, literature abounds with qualifications like 'low autonomy', 'dependence on teachers', 'negative attitudes to the TL and to learning more generally', 'low responsibility', 'low motivation', 'low self-esteem', 'strong reluctance to participate in communicative activities in the classroom' (Aliumah 2011). To be fair to the average Saudi EFL learner, in many cases these problems are at least in part determined by contextual and environmental factors (including the teacher!). That said, there is a compelling need for Saudi EFL learners to be much more pro-active and

to start taking much more responsibility for their own learning (see Alrabai's contribution to this volume and elsewhere). This new and much more independent and autonomous approach to learning can start with a recognition of the immense utility of advanced EFL competence for a wide range of social, professional, and personal domains. Saudi EFL learners can also recognise that in today's world of the internet and modern technologies they have a practically unlimited capacity to generate their own learning opportunities – both inside and outside of the language classroom. For instance, learners could actively seek opportunities for increased exposure to English – mostly, but not only through digital media. Learners can likewise seek opportunities to engage in meaningful socially relevant and appropriate communication in English – both inside and outside of the classroom.

This shift in learner/learning culture would receive a significant boost from a change in *attitudes* to the English language, the English-speaking communities, and the Anglo culture. Again, the Saudi Government can play a critical role in promoting this attitudinal change. There are compelling reasons to maintain and even strengthen the Scholarship program enabling more and more Saudi nationals to complete their education in English-speaking countries. The benefits from this are multiple, very substantial, and long-lasting. To start with, a prolonged immersion in the L2 community is a fool-proof way of developing a high L2 competence. As importantly, direct contact with the L2 speakers and direct exposure to the L2 culture fosters positive attitudes to the TL and improves learners' motivation. As Chapter 3 very convincingly shows, increased social and para-social contact with the TL group fosters more positive attitudes to the second language and – by extension – leads to higher L2 motivation and better achievement. In addition to providing Saudi nationals with more opportunities for social and para-social contacts with the TL group, the Saudi Government should promote the idea that Anglophone culture does not present a threat to traditional Saudi moral and cultural values.

Last, but not least, the quality of English education in Saudi Arabia can significantly improve through what we could broadly describe as the *internationalisation of EFL delivery*. This can take place in-country – via recruiting a larger number of highly qualified and experienced EFL instructors from around the globe to teach English at Saudi academic institutions (Alrabai, this volume). There is evidence (Al-Omrani 2008) that EFL programs which involve cooperatively working native and non-native EFL teachers are generally of a higher quality and produce better results. Internationalisation of EFL delivery can also take place via building international partnerships with well-established and highly regarded TESOL institutions and through joint delivery of EFL programs whereby Saudi EFL learners would have the opportunity to do some of the program onshore and another part offshore – at the partner institution. Online delivery can also contribute to this process. The Saudi Government's concerns in relation to online delivery notwithstanding (see Picard this volume), there are already technologies in place involving virtual classrooms in which instruction takes place in real time and learners can engage in real-time interaction with

the teacher and with each other. All of this can very successfully be used for the benefit of Saudi learners.

In summary, our overview of EFL-related issues in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has revealed a vibrant and highly dynamic field – a field which, in addition to a rather extensive growth, is undergoing a range of fundamental changes most of which are undeniably positive and can confidently be expected to produce improvements across the whole field including EFL teaching, EFL learning, research, curriculum development, and language policy. The future of EFL in Saudi Arabia looks very good indeed.

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