



# Critical Issues in Teaching English and Language Education

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International Research  
Perspectives

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*Edited by*  
Salah Troudi

palgrave  
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*In memory of Amal Treki, an inspiring person and an excellent scholar*

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**Kholoud Almancee** has been working in the Saudi Ministry of Education for 18 years. She worked as a teacher, English language supervisor, general supervisor and a head of the Preparatory Year Program (PYP) at the University of Medicine in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. She has a bachelor's

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**Randa Alsabahi** holds an EdD in TESOL and an MEd. from the University of Exeter, UK. She is a passionate English-language teaching professional who has been working in the field of English language teaching, teacher training and curriculum review and design for over a decade. Alsabahi has written on reflective practice, project-based learning, students' evaluation of teaching and learning, and academic writing and publishing and professionalism. She remains active in the field of ESL by attending and presenting at conferences and has been a member of TESOL for many years. Her areas of specialization are: TESOL, twenty-first-century skills and improvement of both teacher competency and student academic success.

**Reine Azzi** teaches language, literature, and philosophy at the Lebanese American University. She is currently completing her EdD in TESOL at the University of Exeter, UK; her research interest is in critical applied linguistics and its impact on teaching English and language teacher identity in Lebanon. She firmly believes in the need to actively engage and collaborate with teachers in order to debate shared beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices

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**Alina Rebecca Chirciu** has completed an education doctoral degree in the field of TESOL at the University of Exeter, UK. She is currently a member of the English language faculty at Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman. Her primary interests are promoting critical literacy and learner empowerment in ESL. She is also interested in the interplay between power, diversity and access in language education. She has published research papers in the areas of learner autonomy, issues in ELT in the Arab world, language teaching through the use of literature, e-learning and self-access.

**Taghreed Masri** holds an EdD in TESOL from the University of Exeter, UK. She has a master's degree in TESOL from the American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. She has a bachelor's degree in English language and literature from the United Arab Emirates University. Masri has written on flipped approach, writing courses at university level, proficiency and identity. She has also presented in different TESOL conferences. Her areas of specialization are: proficiency, writing and identity, language and culture, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), and research skills.

**Antonia Paterson** has taught English in the UK, Italy and China, with a focus on teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Throughout her career, she has developed particular interests in cultural influences on teaching and learning, and curriculum design. She now teaches EAP in the UK university context, where she enjoys working with international students from all over the world. Her research interests include student

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**Mubina Rauf** is a lecturer in Imam Abdurrahman bin Faisal University, Dammam, Saudi Arabia. She holds a master's degree in English literature and Cambridge DELTA qualification. At present, she is an EdD TESOL candidate at the University of Exeter, UK. Her teaching career spans more than 15 years of teaching EFL/ESL, specifically exam classes. She has also worked as an assessment coordinator in one of the largest EFL programs in Saudi Arabia. Her research interests include nonnative English teacher training and development, corpus linguistics, critical discourse analysis and EAP for Asian students in their local context. The focus of her doctoral research is the relationship between critical thinking and academic writing.

**Paulina Sepulveda-Escobar** is an EFL teacher currently studying for her doctoral degree at the University of Exeter. At various times in her career she has taught in primary school, secondary school and further education for a total of 10 years. As a qualified teacher, Paulina has spent the most recent years of her teaching career working in teacher education in Chile. Her last role was as a placement coordinator in an EFL initial teacher education program in Chile. She holds a master's degree in TESOL from Melbourne University, an MEd from Universidad Catolica de la Santisima, Concepcion, Chile and a BEd from the University of Concepcion. Her current research interests include teachers' professional learning, initial teacher education and professional learning communities.

**Assia Slimani-Rolls** is Reader in Applied Linguistics and Education and Head of Research and Professional Development at the Institute of Languages and Culture at Regent's University London. Her research interests include Exploratory Practice (a form of practitioner research), language learning, language-teacher education, teacher professional identity and continuing professional development. Her belief in the collaborative work by teachers and learners to understand better their classroom practice has been heightened further since working with ELT and MFL

language teachers and learners on several projects to implement Exploratory Practice in their classroom, which led to her latest co-authored publication *Exploratory Practice for continuing professional development: An innovative approach for language*.

**Amal Treki** began her academic career at Columbia University, initially studying engineering, then transferred to business administration, but finally found her vocation in teaching the English language. Amal was an ESL/EFL instructor with 19 years of post-certificate experience, as well as an EAP writing instructor, with experience in program development and syllabus design. Her areas of research interests include academic writing, teacher cognition, critical discourse analysis, and written corrective feedback.

She was awarded her DELTA from Cambridge University in 2011 (Level 7 Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults). She received her MA TESOL with Distinction from Middlesex University in 2013 (Thesis title: ‘Teaching Academic Writing in the UAE: Exploring Beliefs and Practices’). She was in her final year as a Doctoral Student in Applied Linguistics (EdD TESOL) at Exeter University, UK.

Over the course of her career, she was among the very few locals who taught at the British Council in Tripoli, Libya, from 2007 to 2009, and was a former speechwriter/editor at the Office of the 64th President of the General Assembly of the United Nation. Yet she always found time and energy to care for the needy, the helpless, four children and a husband.

**Salah Troudi** is Associate Professor in TESOL and language education at the Graduate School of Education, the University of Exeter, UK. He directs the doctorate program in TESOL in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and is the International Development Coordinator. His teaching and research interests include language-teacher education, critical issues in language education, language policy, curriculum development and evaluation, and classroom-based research.

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# 1

## Critical Issues: An Introduction

Salah Troudi

The idea for a book on critical issues in teaching English and language education from international research perspectives sprang from years of teaching a doctoral course at the University of Exeter. This course aims to introduce doctoral students to critical discussions of several themes and issues related to language education in general, and to English-language teaching in particular. The book marks a celebration of the contribution of a large number of my students over the past 20 years and recognition of their efforts, participation, the research studies they conducted and above all their ideas and passion about bringing equity and improvement to classrooms and schools. They are all English-language teaching professionals mainly working at tertiary level. Some were in leadership positions while many were classroom practitioners.

The chapters in this book aim to capture the spirit of the lectures, activities, seminars and the research produced by diverse groups of doctoral researchers from different parts of the world. The contributors to this book are mostly past students of the Doctor of Education in Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL) offered by the Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter both in its Dubai and

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Exeter campuses. Some of the studies were conducted in the Gulf region, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates. Other investigations come from Lebanon, the UK, Chile, the Dominican Republic, and China, hence providing a wide international spectrum about issues of voice, equity, discourse, language of instruction policies, curriculum, classroom pedagogy, and teacher education among other topics.

All the studies in this volume are informed by the main tenets of critical theory, critical education and critical applied linguistics. Their common point of departure is an ambition to question set definitions, policies and taken-for-granted practices and approaches in the language classroom. Drawing on the work of critical philosophers and scholars such as Jurgen Habermas from the Frankfurt School, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Alistair Pennycook, Robert Phillipson, James Tolleson, Edward Said and many others, the research represented in this volume is set to challenge mainstream discourses in teaching English and language education. The theoretical frameworks used in the reported studies allow its authors to revisit very recent developments in the field of TESOL and foreign language education as an attempt to tackle language issues from the perspectives of critical applied linguistics, critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis and critical literacy. The studies empirically demonstrate that there is more to the field of TESOL than classroom techniques, language proficiency, materials, communicative competence, and outcome-focused professional development.

The studies reflect a clear sense of dissatisfaction with strategies and hegemonic practices of performativity, outcome-based evaluation and teacher marginalization from decision-making processes, and an aggressive focus on financial interest and reduced support for teachers. These are all carried out at the expense of widening access, social mobility and the development of the critical learner. Through engaging in critical research, the authors of this volume engage in counter-hegemonic discourses questioning and challenging the incessant encroachment of neo-liberal and neoconservative policies and practices in language education and TESOL.

The book is organized into four themes with each chapter being a research study following the established structure of an introduction, a literature review, a description of the research methodology, methods,



analysis of the findings, and implications and recommendations for future studies. Three main features characterize each of the chapters: first, the inclusion of a section on the critical research agenda of the study and a clear elaboration on the theoretical framework or philosophy adopted by the researchers to guide their investigations; second, a section on the theoretical and pedagogical contributions of the studies. These two features are essential elements of research informed by a critical paradigmatic position aiming to question, challenge and suggest better and preferred futures for learners and teachers. The third feature is a section on further reading whereby the reader is provided with additional and up-to-date resources on the topic of the chapter. Each title is followed by a brief description of the main points addressed in the resource. For the novice researcher in education and TESOL in particular, each chapter serves as a sample of a research study located in the wider framework or approach referred to as the critical paradigm. This research has also been referred to as radical, aiming to make a difference to the research participants and society at large. To question, challenge and offer recommendations and alternatives for preferred futures in TESOL and language education, the authors of the chapters in this book have at their disposal a range of methodological options. Actions research, critical discourse analysis, critical ethnography and critical exploratory designs have been adopted, explained and justified theoretically and practically. Each section on research methodology is followed by a theoretical justification to explain how the adopted methodology is compatible with the critical agenda of the study and the research questions. Procedural descriptions of the design and data collection methods, sampling techniques as well as ethical dimensions are also described and explained. The authors provide detailed reports on their data analysis frameworks and procedures. In a time of an overall lack of specialized educational resources on how to conduct critical research in TESOL and language education this book marks a clear continuation to the field. It does so by drawing upon a wide range of data derived from focus groups, individual interviews, questionnaires, direct observations, textbook content and students' writing. This variety of methodologies and methods will enable readers to explore their own ways in designing critical research.

At the content level the four themes, which mark the four parts of the book, fit well within the main aims of critical research in TESOL raising questions about the status of English, related pedagogies and the effect of English and TESOL policies on the lives of teachers, learners and researchers.

Part I is dedicated to the issue of language policies emanating from the strong position of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in the Gulf region and beyond. Contrary to the rationale and arguments put forward by proponents of EMI in mainstream ELT literature, the authors of the three chapters in this part invoke a critical approach to policies on language of instruction to deconstruct the concept of EMI and expose its effects on the learning experiences of university students, their proficiencies and their sense of cultural and linguistic identity. The authors do acknowledge the role of English in the lives of the participants as well as the positive discourses of development, economic competition, access to world markets, global communication and a skilled workforce. This is the discourse of the protagonists of the expansion of English paradigm. However, the authors also expose students' lack of agency as they have no choice in the language of their education and are therefore forced to seek and develop additional strategies and efforts to cope with the demands of EMI, as all as those of their academic disciplines. In Oman, Chap. 2 by **Sawsan Al-Bakri and Salah Troudi** reports that EMI policy has detrimental effects on university students' writing abilities and records that many of them had to resort to plagiarism in order to write academic assignments. The demands of English were above their abilities; given that EMI does not seem to be reversible for the time being, the authors recommend stronger English for Academic purposes (EAP) courses to help the students cope with the demands of writing in several disciplines. In Kuwait, Chap. 3 by **Abdullah Alazemi** demonstrates that university students do attach importance to English for employment and career purposes, but they are also concerned about the negative effects EMI has on the status of Arabic as the language of science and academia. The study participants also expressed concern on how their ability in Arabic had declined because they were more focused on improving their competence in English. They would prefer to have more Arabic incorporated during their learning journey, either by moving to a complete Arabic as a

medium of instruction (AMI) policy or by implementing Arabic alongside English. These issues were echoed in Chap. 4 by **Taghreed Masri**, who raises the question about the effects of EMI on students' sense of linguistic and cultural identity in the United Arab Emirates. Results showed that many of the students seem to have lost their faith in Arabic as a language of academia and see EMI as the normal medium of instruction, but still consider academic Arabic an essential part of their identity, which raises questions about their sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

In Part II, issues of classroom pedagogy, students' voice in their learning, and discourses of EAP textbooks were investigated by four studies. In Chap. 5, **Reine Azzi** uses dialogue and reflexivity as research tools to challenge a group of Lebanese university students to think of the position of English in their learning experience and lives, its hegemony and effects on Arabic. Through a critical pedagogy intervention the study provided the participants with the space to discuss their own assumptions and prejudices. In Chap. 6, the second study in this part, **Alina Rebecca Circiui** challenges her Omani university participants to experience learning through a critical pedagogy approach in order to promote global citizenship skills. The study engages the participants in discussing global issues by developing multiple perspectives in reading and reacting to authentic texts. In both studies, Azzi and Circiui reported more criticality, awareness and tolerance of different perceives and views on the part of the students. The third study, Chap. 7 by **Antonia Patterson**, challenges the mainstream views and definitions of students' classroom participation often advocated by Western academic discourses that place speaking at the front of language skills that represent students' engagement and learning. Patterson's study is a critical action research that aimed to challenge dominant perceptions of what constitutes "voice" in the language classroom. Through classroom observations and focus groups in China, the researcher worked with her students to plan and implement an intervention aimed at establishing more equitable classroom practices that allow students' voices to be recognized in their multiple forms. Patterson argues that by engaging with students' perspectives and culture, the pedagogical space for the various forms of student voice in both verbal and non-verbal communication and practice can be created in the classroom. In Chap. 8, the fourth of this part, **Mubina Rauf**

applies a critical discourse analysis approach to analyze two commonly used EAP textbooks in pre-university English programs at a Saudi Arabian university. The study shows that the chosen texts served a neoliberalist ideology through an overt and covert use of lexical and visual techniques representing themes and concepts such as globalization, individualization, philanthropy, heroism, success, celebrity culture, environmental issues, economics, the free market, and production growth. The author calls for the development of alternative, context-specific EAP along with indigenous teacher development programs where teachers are trained to hone their linguistic analysis skills that determine the ideological content in ELT materials.

In Part III, the focus of the four studies is on teacher education and personal and professional development for TESOL practitioners. Chapter 9, by **Assia Slimani-Rolls**, demonstrates, through a longitudinal study conducted in the United Kingdom, that the exploratory practice model can help novice teachers contribute to their own professional development. This model is presented as an innovative form of practitioner research reaction that encourages teachers to work with their learners for better understanding of their own practice. As a model, exploratory practice is a critical reaction to mainstream and essentialist models of teacher education and professional development that view teachers as technicians and implementers of set programs and curricular instructions. In Chap. 10, **Paulina Sepulveda's** critical exploratory study in Chile challenges dominant forms of professional development for English teachers by providing a space for teachers to question top-down provision and to explore their own needs for development. The study recommends a number of activities that will put teachers in charge of their own agency vis-a-vis professional development. The final chapter in this part, Chap. 11, is a study by **Thuraya Al Riyami and Salah Troudi**. They employed a critical action research methodology to introduce critical pedagogy to EFL teachers in Oman. The participants represented four higher education colleges and offered different views and attitudes toward critical pedagogies, ranging between full acceptance, hesitation or caution and refusal towards applying a pedagogy that would challenge mainstream views on education in general and teaching English in particular.

Part IV address issues of voice or rather or voicelessness of English language professionals. Against educational contexts increasingly marred by aggressive forces of neoliberalism, neoconservatism and the normalization of discourses of commercialization, financial interests, customer satisfaction and evidence-based practice, teachers find themselves struggling to find a place, a voice, a role and a sense of dignity. These are unfortunately threatened and pushed to a lower level of priority by educational institutions that comply with the dominant narratives of measurement, performativity and monetization. The four studies in this part can be seen as counter-hegemonic initiatives on behalf of ELT professionals to achieve representation, equity and respect. In Chap. 12, at a university context in the Dominican Republic, **Federica Castro** demonstrates that the process of curriculum change cannot be efficient and successful if teachers are kept out of this process and not part of decision-making. The prevailing of a top-down approach to education in general and an exclusion of teachers from important processes and decisions has left them with a sense of frustration, powerlessness and uselessness. Among the recommendations made by Castro is the creation of an environment conducive for teachers to contribute to curriculum change and their own professional development. These issues and concerns are echoed in Chap. 13, **Kholoud Al Manee's** study conducted with female EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia's public secondary schools. The study shows that the introduction of performance management systems and other audit mechanisms to monitor and control teachers and teaching has a negative effect on teachers' sense of independence, professionalism and dignity. It is pushing many of them out of the profession or turning them into compliant individuals and automatic implementers of instructions and regulations at the expense of creative and imaginative teaching. Al Manee's suggestion that policy makers could reward teachers who show resistance to performative measures and goals and challenge corporate logic in an attempt to show tolerance of diverse ways of thinking, is a natural and critical outcome of the study. The thorny issue of non-native speaker teachers of English (NNSTE) and native-speakerism in the Gulf region is addressed in Chap. 14, **Amal Treki's** study conducted there. Despite the pedagogical and academic recognition of NNSTE, who are bilingual, multilingual or polyglots but still defined by the negative prefix

“non-”, as equally competent teachers to their colleagues whose first language is English, the reality on the ground is starkly different. Treki’s study demonstrates how market forces influenced by stereotyping, marginalization of NNSTE and racist discourses have affected the personal and professional lives of many teachers. The study critically examined common recruitment discourses, and sought teachers’ perceptions of labeling and their experiences with marginalization. Treki also identified ideas and tools for the empowerment of teachers through their engagement in critical praxis which might provide them with a step forward in the fight against discrimination in recruitment. Chapter 15, the final study in this part is by **Randa Al Sabahi**, who explores the controversial issues of students’ evaluation of teachers in Saudi Arabia. The participants varied in their view of the process and many saw it as inaccurate, unreliable and invalid. The study highlights the issue of unfairness and marginalization of teachers from decision making in their own evaluations. The results of a student’s evaluation of a teacher can have severe consequences on his/her professional life especially in rigid and top-down educational institutions.

# Part I

## Issues of Language in Education Policies



# 2

## Effects of the English Medium Instruction Policy on Students' Writing Experiences in Content Courses in a Public College in Oman

Sawsan Al-Bakri and Salah Troudi

### Nature of the Problem

The global spread of English has had a great impact on language policies all over the world. The Arab world, especially Gulf countries, is no exception. In order to participate in the globalized world, where English has become the language of business, communication, science and academia, many Arab countries have found it necessary to reform their educational systems. One of the steps taken was to adopt EMI at tertiary level. Gulf countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,

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Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman replaced Arabic medium instruction (AMI) at public and private colleges and universities and adopted the EMI policy. Students who would like to pursue their higher education, especially in scientific subjects, have no other choice than to study in English. The EMI policy has stirred concerns and debates among researchers, academics, administrators and officials. One concern is the impact of EMI on the quality of education and learning experiences of students. It has been observed that many students graduate from school with a low command of English (Al-Ali, 2008; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Al-Mamari, 2012; Sergon, 2011). This requires them to study in General Foundation Programs (GFPs) at their higher institutions for up to two years before they can start their tertiary study (Baporikar & Shah, 2012). GFPs are designed to support students in improving their English-language proficiency to the level required for the success in their academic studies. However, many students graduate from GFPs with poor English skills, but are still admitted to study in their degree programs. For example, students with equivalent scores of International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) 4.0 are allowed to enter a degree program at the college of technology where the study took place. A student with a band score of 4.0 is described by IELTS (2015) as “limited user of English.” IELTS (2015, p. 15) also mentions that the lowest acceptable score for linguistically less demanding courses is 5.5, but acknowledges that individual institutions should decide on the appropriateness of students’ English level. We would like to argue that the entry requirement for students to study content courses in English with an IELTS band score of 4.0 is too low for university studies, thereby supporting Sergon (2011, p. 23) in his argument that tertiary level education in English in Oman “must necessitate more than, at best, a ‘modest’ ability in English.” In fact, research has shown that students face many difficulties studying through EMI in important matters such as comprehending their lectures, reading their textbooks, participating in classroom discussions and writing their exams (Al-Bakri, 2013; Belhiah & Elhami, 2014; Troudi & Jendli, 2011).

Evans and Green (2007, p. 8) state that “Writing is arguably the most important language skill at university because students’ grades are largely determined by their performance in written assignments, tests and examinations.” Although research into EFL writing is vast, there seems to be a

scarcity of research into the writing difficulties encountered by undergraduate students in their content courses. However, there is evidence in the literature that students' writing problems in academic writing is mainly related to language rather than content (Evans & Green, 2007). In particular, lexis and grammatical aspects were perceived as most problematic by students (Evans & Morrison, 2011). While the students were concerned about their lexical and syntactic simplicity in their writing, they reported that teachers were more concerned about the content than grammatical accuracy and stylistic refinement when assessing students' writing. In fact, several studies noted that content teachers rarely provide their students with feedback on their writing (Barnard, 2015; Hyland, 2013) although the provision of feedback is seen as a potential tool for learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Ng, 2015).

In the Arab world, several studies have found that students face difficulties in academic writing in English (Huwari & Al-Khasawneh, 2013 in Saudi Arabia; Khuwaileh & Al Shoumali, 2010; Tahaine, 2010 in Jordan). The most problematic areas in writing for undergraduate students are related to grammar and lexical items (Javid & Umer, 2014; Hammad, 2014). In addition, Hammad (2014) found that undergraduate students' errors in writing are related to word-for-word translation, lack of academic style and cohesion. Nevertheless, most teachers do not provide the students with feedback on their errors. In Oman, students encounter many difficulties in writing in English (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014). Al-Badwawi (2011) investigated first year students' problems in academic writing in a public college. The study revealed that the main problems in writing are related to language skills, research skills, text-managing skills and time management. In regard to language skills, spelling and grammar were seen as the most problematic areas in students' writing. "Other problems include lack of vocabulary, especially technical or academic vocabulary, using informal conversational language, inability to organise ideas in a logical manner, and using memorised expressions that do not necessarily serve the purpose of their writing" (ibid., p. 122). Although teachers of all different departments acknowledge the linguistic problems of students, content teachers reported that they focus on content rather than language when assessing students' writing because they believe that improving language

is the responsibility of the English language teachers. In regard to research skills, students reported that they faced difficulties in comprehending the references that they had to read. Therefore, they listed summarizing and paraphrasing as the greatest challenges after grammar and spelling. In addition, students encountered difficulties in using appropriate in-text and end-text referencing. Finally, students mentioned that “they sometimes had to resort to plagiarism because they do not find the time to write and learn from the experience of writing academic assignments” (ibid., p. 121). In fact, some subject teachers do not mind that students copy and paste material from the internet. They also do not ask them to critically evaluate the information. We believe that such an attitude inevitably sends a message to students that plagiarism is an acceptable practice in academic contexts and that the aim of the assignment is to serve assessment purposes. This could explain why students do not see writing assignments in their subject courses as learning tools for the development of their language proficiency. Another strategy that students employed to write their assignments was the use of L1. Such an approach is seen to be a compensation strategy adopted by students to reduce the overload in L2 writing (Kim & Yoon, 2014).

The issue of plagiarism in L2 writing at tertiary level has received some attention in the literature (Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Hu & Lei, 2015; Li & Casanave, 2012; Pecorari, 2003, 2015). Even in the Gulf, some researchers and teachers have raised concerns regarding plagiarism in writing (Alhinai & Al-Mahrooqi, 2015 in Oman; Khan, 2010 in the UAE) a dilemma that attracted the attention of the media (Al-Shaabi & Al-Alwi, 2014, in Oman; Shabandri, 2015; Swan, 2014 in the UAE). Some researchers argue that students often plagiarize because they are not familiar with the appropriate way to write academic assignments that require the use of sources. Some might lack the linguistic ability to rewrite the collected information in their own words. In addition, Hu and Lei (2015) found that Chinese students had different perceptions about what should be considered plagiarism or not. Therefore, some researchers maintain that it is necessary to distinguish between intentional and unintentional plagiarism, the latter being referred to as patch-writing (Howard, 1993 in Li & Casanave, 2012). We believe that the integrity of writing should not be compromised as a result of low linguistic ability or lack of

knowledge how to appropriately reference sources. If students do not learn these skills in their undergraduate studies, they might face serious consequences especially if they intend to continue their higher education.

One of the researchers was a faculty member at the post-foundation program (PFP) of the college at the time of the study. The vision of the college as declared on its official website is to provide “high quality teaching and learning to prepare and empower the Omani professionals of the future so that they can contribute to national socio-economic development” (College Vision and Mission, 2015). Qorro (2006, p. 3) emphasizes that “Quality education requires that learners take an active part in knowledge creation through critical thinking, discussion, dialogue, asking questions and solving problems.” The majority of students are admitted into their degree programs while their English level is intermediate at best. To further support students with their English language and their academic studies, they are offered four courses in the PFP. At the same time they have to attend content courses. A common assumption in the Gulf is that students’ language proficiency will increase as a result of studying through EMI (Ismail, 2011; Rogier, 2012). However, content teachers, unlike English teachers, might not see it as their responsibility to support students with their English language and might rather be concerned about delivering their course material. Considering these factors, we wonder how students will be able to discuss, debate or ask questions in order to take an active part in knowledge creation.

Although it seems that the EMI policy has been adopted as a means for modernization and development, it is crucial to view this policy from a critical perspective. In fact, Ricento (2006) warns that language policy is not ideologically free and is affected by social and political forces, a concern shared by Shohamy (2006, p. 77) who notes that language education policy “cannot stand alone but is rather connected to political, social and economic dimensions.”

## Critical Agenda

This study is informed by a postmodern critical approach based on critical applied linguistics. Unlike Marxism, which relates human class struggle to mainly economic reasons, critical applied linguistics goes beyond Marxism to consider the elements of the local context. Its aim is to problematize and question assumptions and practices that have become naturalized and are taken for granted in the field of applied linguistics, which critical language policy is a part of. The critical questions are related to “access, power, disparity, desire, difference and resistance” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 6). This critical questioning can be linked to postmodernism which should be understood “as a way of thinking and doing, a skeptical view of the world that tries to take nothing for granted” (Pennycook, 2006, p. 62). It is important to mention that Pennycook (2001) argues for a self-reflexive stance on critical theory, since the notion of critical in applied linguistics indicates an awareness of the limits of knowing.

In line with this approach, this study adopts a postmodern-problematizing stance in which an alternative truth to the issue of EMI is not sought. Instead, it aims to challenge and problematize the seemingly taken for granted view that education at higher institutions in developing countries such as Oman is best provided in English, with the hope of offering possibilities that could influence future decisions on language education policies. Researching the appropriateness and effectiveness of the EMI policy in Oman from a critical stance is not a simple task taking into consideration the top-down nature of EMI policy decisions. Therefore, it is expected that an immediate change in the EMI policy might not occur in response to this research. Nevertheless, raising awareness to critical issues related to EMI and providing students with the opportunity that their voices are heard could have a positive impact on change for a better situation. In fact, Troudi (2015, p. 96) argues that it is “essential to acknowledge that change to attitudes, practices and policies is often very slow and necessitates vital stages of problematization and raising awareness.”

Most research on EMI, in Oman in particular, has adopted the apolitical approach, which serves to maintain the status quo, that is the belief

that EMI is necessary for the modernization and development of Oman. Although there has recently been a rise in the Gulf in critical studies (Al-Kahtany, Faruk, & Al Zumor, 2016; Habbash & Troudi, 2015 in Saudi Arabia; Troudi & Al Hafidh, 2017 in the UAE) research on EMI from a critical perspective is still rare in Oman. This research is significant in that it aims to critically explore the challenges students face in academic writing which is a main skill for academic achievement and which has so far rarely been investigated in a tertiary EMI setting. Tollefson (2013, p. 308) argues that in order to reduce inequality in education, it is necessary to find ways “to ensure that individuals and groups who are affected by policies have direct involvement and power in policymaking.” We hope that this research will raise awareness among policymakers, administrators and teachers to the detrimental impact such a policy could have on students’ learning experiences and academic achievement which might hinder students from contributing effectively to the socioeconomic development of the country.

## Research Framework and Design

In this study, a critical exploratory methodology was adopted with a two-phase sequential mixed-methods approach to data collection and data analysis. The first phase was quantitative and the second was qualitative. The adoption of a critical exploratory methodology reflects the research agenda of the study that seeks to understand the multiple perspectives of individuals in a certain social and educational context regarding their learning experiences under the EMI policy. The rationale for using a sequential mixed-methods approach is that we support the view that “we can often learn more about our research topic if we can combine the strength of methods focused on quantitative data with the strength of methods focused on qualitative data, while compensating at the same time for the weaknesses of each method” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 339). The quantitative phase consisted of a closed-ended questionnaire, while the qualitative phase consisted of classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. In accordance with the research framework, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. Do students face any difficulties in writing effectively in English?
2. How do students overcome these challenges?

## The Study Context

This study was conducted in seven academic departments in a large public higher education institution in Oman: Applied Sciences, Business Studies, Engineering, Fashion Design, Information Technology, Pharmacy, and Photography. It follows a credit hour system which allows for four levels of graduates: certificate, diploma, higher diploma and bachelor's degree. It should be noted that the faculties vary in regard to the levels which they offer. The faculties of Applied Sciences, Business Studies, Engineering, and Information Technology offer all four levels. Fashion Design offers three levels whereas Pharmacy and Photography offer only two.

Subject teachers are recruited internationally and are mainly from India, Philippines and Pakistan. Some come from Arab countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Tunisia and Syria in addition to few Omani nationals, while teachers of English native-speaker origin are very rare. As a requirement to join the college, teachers need to hold a PhD or master's degree in a specialized field. In regard to English, a good command of English is required according to a document for employment at this college. However, English proficiency is not formally assessed and teachers are not provided with any kind of training to deal with students' linguistic challenges. Teachers in content courses use mainly English to deliver the content and use mainly in-house prepared materials related to each subject, distributed to students in the form of handouts and PowerPoint presentations. All exams are carried out in English.

When the study was carried out, 13,960 students were enrolled in different faculties where female students ( $n = 7470$ ) slightly outnumbered the males ( $n = 6490$ ). Most students are Omani nationals, while a few come from Arab countries such as Iraq, Bahrain, Egypt and Syria. Very few students come from non-Arab counties such as China. Therefore, the majority of students share a similar background in terms of first language,

culture, religion and education. Students study in one of the seven undergraduate programs for 2–5 years after foundation depending on the department. This means that it may take up to 7 years for some students to graduate with a bachelor's degree. Students who have completed the diploma level and would like to proceed to the higher diploma level need to achieve the required Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) 2.5 and an equivalent IELTS score of 4.5, while students need to achieve the CGPA 2.75 and equivalent IELTS score of 5, if they would like to continue to the bachelor degree level.

## Research Methods

For the quantitative stage of the study, a self-constructed five-point Likert-scale close-ended questionnaire was employed. It consisted of two parts: the first part comprised 12 items and was designed to obtain background information of the participants while the second part consisted of 13 items that explored students' learning experiences of writing in content courses. Then the English version of the questionnaire was translated into Arabic to ensure that students would understand all the statements clearly. The questionnaire was piloted before its actual use on a group of 110 students studying in different specializations. One of the researchers administered the questionnaire in 20 classes in order to stay in control of the data collection procedure. After students provided their consent, they were asked to fill in the questionnaire to ensure a high rate of return results.

For the qualitative stage of the study, non-participatory classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were conducted. For the purpose of the classroom observation, an observation guide that allowed the taking of field notes during and after the observation was prepared. Overall, 14 classes of four different levels were observed for a period of 50–100 minutes: certificate (3), diploma (4), higher diploma (4) and bachelor's degree (3). The classroom observation supported in generating the interview questions needed in the final data collection stage.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the main research method in this study. Forming the interview schedule was mainly guided by the



research questions but was also informed by the preliminary analysis of the data collected in the previous two phases. The interview was piloted with one male student to identify ambiguous or confusing questions. All interviews were held in Arabic for the participants to feel comfortable and to be able to express themselves as clearly as possible. The interviews lasted between 38 and 60 minutes and were recorded with a small digital device. At all stages of the data collection, the participants were given an information sheet about the study and were assured confidentiality and anonymity, that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage of the study.

## Participants

The main sampling approach employed for the three research methods was purposive sampling, where the participants were identified according to specific criteria and characteristics (Dörnyei, 2007; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). The aim was to ensure that the sample was as diverse as possible to be able to identify a full range of perceptions and behaviors associated with issues on EMI. One of the criteria for selecting the sample was that it should include male and female students studying in different faculties and in different years of study.

The final questionnaire sample consisted of 328 participants, where the female students ( $n = 209$ ) outnumbered the male students ( $n = 119$ ). The descriptive analysis of the questionnaire revealed that most of the participants were between 18 and 25 years old although a few were above 25. All the participants but two were Omani nationals and the majority had studied in public schools in Arabic. Also, 62.2% of the participants started with level 2 at the college, i.e. they had to study three semesters in the GFP before they were able to join their specialization. Therefore, it can be noted that the sample was heterogeneous in more than one way. For the classroom observations, participants were selected based on the same criteria as that employed for the questionnaire. The sample for classroom observation consisted of 254 students (79 male, 175 female). The teachers were mostly non-native speakers of English and Arabic (nine)

while two were native speakers of English and three were native speakers of Arabic.

The questionnaire and classroom observation stage helped in selecting the participants for the semi-structured interviews. Out of the 328 students who completed the questionnaire, 61 provided their consent to be interviewed and wrote their contact details at the end of the questionnaire. Some students during classroom observations also expressed their interest in being interviewed. Through purposive sampling, 14 participants (6 male, 8 female) from different faculties and years of study were selected for the interviews, although an element of convenience sampling was also adopted.

## Data Analysis

All data for both parts of the questionnaires were entered into the SPSS v. 22 program. The analysis operations included reliability and descriptive statistics. Chronbach's alpha value for all items showed a reliable internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.773$ ). Frequency and percentages of agreement and disagreement among participants for each item were also calculated, while descriptive statistics were computed to ease the reporting of the data.

In order to analyze the collected qualitative data, the thematic analysis approach as described by Braun and Clarke was adopted because it "can be a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'" (2006, p. 81). This approach is therefore compatible with the theoretical framework of this study. The analysis of the classroom observation data was conducted in two stages. The preliminary analysis was conducted during the process of the classroom observations and consisted of manual coding of the data available at that stage. The main themes that were identified were incorporated in the interview questions. The second phase of data analysis was conducted after collecting all qualitative data. All handwritten notes were written on Word documents and were uploaded on Nvivo 11, a qualitative research-analysis software tool that speeds up the analysis process and allows for easy access to data. The interviews were transcribed immediately in English whereby

every effort was made to represent the oral language with, for example, run-on sentences and sentence fragments with the aim of keeping the original spirit and meanings of the questions and responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Richards, 2003). In order to ensure participants' anonymity, pseudonyms were used in the transcripts. The data were downloaded from Nvivo 11 into Excel sheets to facilitate further content analysis. For the final analysis phase, the data from all research methods were collated. Moreover, data were also linked to the literature review for discussion.

## Findings and Discussion

### Written Assignments

Writing was perceived as an important skill by 67.4% ( $n = 221$ ) of the questionnaire participants. However, perceptions of the importance of writing varied among participants enrolled in different faculties. While 81.3% of pharmacy students believed writing to be an important skill in their specialization, only 42.9% of fashion design students and 51.9% of photography students believed so. The interview participants explained that writing was mostly needed for reports, projects and PowerPoint presentations. However, the type and length of reports differ according to the specialization and the level of study. Some students mentioned that they had to write a report about a project they did or about the results of an experiment they conducted. For example, Ali (photography) noted that "we had to write a report about pictures we saw. We had to critique a picture or compare between two pictures." He further explained that he had to write about 5–6 lines for each picture. In contrast, Mariam (IT) explained that they had to write three assignments. She added that "One assignment is 3–4 pages long and there is a grade!" Basil (pharmacy) mentioned that they had to write two assignments and provided an example: "I had to write about a drug; everything like ingredients and so on, many things."

The interview participants also mentioned that for some assignments they had to write on their own while for others they had to write in

groups. “Sometimes the teacher gives us a report that has been previously written—as a sample—and we just fill in the information about our project. We divide the work because we are a group so everybody writes a part” (Aref). None of them reported that they ask someone from outside the college to support them in their writing assignments, while 29.0% ( $n = 95$ ) of the questionnaire participants stated that they seek such kind of support. Moreover, Salim explained that “If we have to write an assignment, we need to read from outside resources such as the internet.” During the classroom observations the researcher noticed that students from the IT department had to write a research paper on a topic of their choice. Students were asked to use the internet in order to collect information, but the teacher enjoined “do paraphrasing; do not do lazy writing.” He also provided them with links to what he called a “plagiarism tracker” in order to check their papers for plagiarism. In fact, few participants noted that their teachers warned them about plagiarism.

Overall, the findings show that students are required to write different kinds of assignments that are included in their overall assessments. For most of the writing assignments in their specialization, students need to search for information from resources such as the internet or books. This implies that students have the linguistic ability to comprehend these written texts, and are familiar with academic writing conventions to avoid plagiarism (Li & Casanave, 2012). In fact, the post-foundation courses are designed to prepare students for academic writing. However, teaching technical skills such as paraphrasing and referencing does not necessarily mean the students learned them well, especially when there is insufficient practice and students lack the adequate language proficiency in the first place. Considering students’ limited linguistic ability and limited knowledge of academic writing conventions raises concerns as to whether they are *able* to avoid plagiarism when writing their assignments. The findings also indicate that students are merely asked to put together information collected from a source or various sources rather than critically integrating information to support an argument or to critically evaluate the gathered information. In addition, students do not have to write lengthy term-papers, a common requirement in undergraduate studies. The reduction of writing requirements in an EMI context seems to be a common practice, in particular in the Gulf (Al-Badwawi, 2011; King,

2014; Mouhanna, 2016). While this could support students in their study, it means that the quality of students' tertiary education has been compromised. If students are to be prepared for the increasingly international job market, then the quality of education they receive should match the quality standards of international undergraduate programs.

Concerning assessment of writing assignments, 50.6% ( $n = 166$ ) of the questionnaire participants agreed with the statement "My content teacher is more concerned about the content of my assignment than the correctness of my English language." In one of the classroom observations, students had to do an English-language PowerPoint presentation on a topic related to photography. All PowerPoint slides contained grammatical and spelling mistakes. However, it seemed that the teacher did not mind this because he did not make any comment regarding language mistakes. Also, the interview participants clarified that the majority of teachers do not consider the students' language mistakes in their evaluation of their written assignments. In this regard Ali noted: "She [the teacher] tells us this is not a writing class; this is a criticism class, so I don't evaluate your language when you write—what your mistakes in spelling or grammar are." Mariam pointed out that such a practice leads students to become careless about their language. Ali believed that students continue to make spelling mistakes because teachers do not consider the spelling accuracy in students' writing. In contrast, Amer explained that some teachers do check the language and this has a negative impact on grades.

It seems that there is not a clear policy on whether or not teachers should include language accuracy in their assessment of the written assignments and that teachers handle these issues individually, which might be confusing for students. Overall, the findings reveal that the majority of teachers are more concerned about the quality of the content than the language in their assessment of students' written assignments. It is a common practice (Al-Badwawi, 2011; Evans & Green, 2007; Evans & Morrison, 2011). While such an approach is justified to avoid disadvantaging students with low English language proficiency, it has also a negative impact on students' willingness to consider the accuracy of their language when writing their assignments. In fact, only few participants reported to check their spelling mistakes. Manal, for example, stated that "the spelling mistakes—any teacher can correct them for me." The

questionnaire analysis also showed that only 22.0% ( $n = 72$ ) of the participants ask their friends to check their writings for mistakes. If teachers believe that students should be responsible for their language development, as reported by Dearden (2015), then such an approach does not encourage students to work hard to improve their English-language competence. It also indicates that content classes are not appropriate for the development of writing skills. This suggests that there is a gap between the goal of the EMI policy at the macro level to enhance students' English-language proficiency and its implementation at the micro level, where content classrooms are seen as sites to enhance the learning of content, an issue that should be considered by policy planners.

## Writing Difficulties

The questionnaire and interview findings reveal that almost all participants face problems in writing mainly in regard to language rather than content. In relation to grammar, 61.9% ( $n = 203$ ) of the questionnaire participants and all interview participants stated that they make grammar mistakes when they write in English. For example, Ali asserted "I find it very difficult to write. I have many problems. The main problem is how to write in a proper way. When someone revises it then there are always many mistakes—grammar—is a complete mess." Considering spelling, 59.1% ( $n = 194$ ) of the questionnaire participants agreed with the statement "I always make spelling mistakes when I write in English," a problem that has been shared by most interview participants. Salim explained that spelling is important because "if we make a mistake in one letter the meaning of the word might change." The knowledge of technical vocabulary and general vocabulary seem to cause fewer problems for students' ability to write, since only 33.8% ( $n = 111$ ) and 34.5% ( $n = 113$ ) of the questionnaire participants acknowledged facing problems with technical and general vocabulary receptively. Lamia explained that "When I don't know some words, then I translate them or I check with the internet." Aref was the only interview participant who reported that "Most [writing] problems are related to vocabulary that I have to use in English and how to put them in a sentence."

Writing explanations in exams caused also a problem for students with weak language proficiency. For example, Hussam explained: “I understand the question but how to write the answer in English. In Arabic I would know how to answer, but how to formulate it in English?” In this case he stated “I leave it blank and hand in my paper.” Similarly, Azhaar stated “When I was studying business, we had to write in English in the exams. We had to write explanations. I used to fail. I failed in all the subjects in business.” It is worth mentioning that Azhaar studied business administration for one year but had to change her specialization because she could not cope with the linguistic challenges of studying business in English.

The participants perceived difficulties with grammar and spelling and to some extent with vocabulary in academic writing. However, only few participants expressed their concerns about the effect of their language deficiencies on their ability to write assignments related to their majors, as Lamia’s quote shows: “I have problems in grammar I think, but I manage to write.” This could be related to students’ belief that language mistakes do not have a great impact on the grade they receive, as already discussed. It seems that what is expected from these students is below what is expected from students at bachelor level. This might be problematic for students who intend to continue their postgraduate studies at universities of an international standard, where language accuracy is required. In addition, if students are not able to write assignments in accurate English, one has to question the efficacy of these students in future jobs where accuracy in writing in English is expected.

## Writing Strategies

Writing the assignment in Arabic first and then translating it into English was a survival strategy followed by 23.5% ( $n = 77$ ) of the questionnaire participants. Two of the interview participants admitted that they sometimes write first in Arabic and then Google Translate what they have written into English. Aref pointed out that the translation is sometimes not accurate. This requires him to replace some words, which is time-consuming. In fact, teachers in Mouhanna’s (2016) study in the UAE

were concerned about students inappropriate use of translation applications such as Google Translate for text production because students translate word by word and as a result produce a text that is not correct. In addition, such a strategy requires not only effort but also time and might have a negative impact on students' learning experiences.

The analysis of the questionnaire data showed that 28.0% ( $n = 92$ ) of the participants admitted that they sometimes copy and paste sentences and paragraphs from the internet because their language is weak. However, the interview findings revealed that almost all students adopted this survival strategy at least occasionally, as Amer explained: "I copy the information. But this depends on the teacher. Some teachers don't mind, for others this is not accepted. You have to read the information and then rewrite it in your own words." Basil noted that he does not face any difficulties in writing his assignments "because everything is there on the net. There is a website, you just need to write the name of the drug and you get a detailed description of the drug. So I read and copy/paste the information." Huda explained that "Sometimes I write my own sentences but sometimes there are sentences that cannot be changed so I copy/paste these sentences." Safaa maintained "We copy/paste because last time we had to write about eBay. We don't know anything about eBay—where should we get the information from? From the net, so we copy/paste."

It has been discussed in the literature that plagiarism is a common feature in L2 writing at tertiary level. It seems that the participants in this study do not see that this strategy is an academically unacceptable practice and therefore unintentionally resort to plagiarism (Li & Casanave, 2012; Pecorari, 2015). There are several reasons why students adopt the copy and paste strategy in addition to their inadequate English level. First, some teachers do not mind if students copy and paste the information from a source. In fact, during the classroom observation a teacher told the researcher that she does not assess students' language in their written assignments because "they copy everything from the net." Another reason is that such a strategy reduces the effort and time to write and could ensure that students receive good grades, as Muzna highlighted: "The teacher might ask for three side-effects of a drug. So it's clear, you get them from the net; so no worries about losing grades." With respect to referencing the source, Amer stated that "Some teachers ask for the



reference, others don't ask for them" which has been confirmed by the participants. The participants also noted that in order to reference the source they "need to mention the link" (Azhaar). Safaa assumed that "There is no way for referencing. We mention the link and that's it."

Although students in their post-foundation courses learn the APA referencing style for different kinds of resources such as books, journals, newspapers and online resources, it seems that not all teachers in the specialized departments ask the students to apply this referencing style and take mentioning the link as sufficient. Some teachers do not even require students to reference the source. This shows that there is inconsistency between what students learn in their post-foundation classes and what they have to apply in their content classes. It also seems that the threat to adopt programs that detect plagiarism in students' writing is something to which lip-service is paid, not applied in reality. It could be that these teachers are aware of their students' linguistic weaknesses and therefore do not penalize them for the offence of plagiarism. This is a serious issue and raises several concerns. First, the benefit of these writings assignments regarding the enhancement of content knowledge has to be questioned. When students just copy and paste information from the internet into their assignments, there is no guarantee that the students have in fact understood what they have written and thereby enhanced their comprehension of a certain issue. Second, when students do not rewrite in their own words what they have understood, then the benefit of these writing assignments to their writing skills has to be questioned. Moreover, students who intend to continue their study in international higher institutions might find it difficult to comply with the rules and regulations regarding plagiarism because in their own context it was considered an academically acceptable practice. From an institutional perspective, Alhinai and Al-Mahrooqi (2015) argue that "The validity of the assessment can be threatened." We would argue that this could not only jeopardize the reputation of the institution but also the credibility of the educational system in a country, which might have a negative impact on students' future employment opportunities.

## Teacher Feedback

Feedback is widely seen as a potential tool for learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) since the provision of feedback on students' writing could contribute to the acquisition of content knowledge and writing conventions (Hyland, 2013; Ng, 2015). In fact, 46.3% ( $n = 152$ ) of the questionnaire participants agreed with the statement "My content teachers help me improve my writing skills through correcting my mistakes." However, this was not apparent in the interview findings. For example, Safaa explained that "We just submit the paper and then we don't see it again," a practice that all interview participants confirmed. Lamia added that "They [teachers] don't tell us anything about the language." Muzna expressed her disappointment by stating "This is wrong. We need to see the report again. Why? To see our mistakes."

That content teachers do not see themselves as language teachers has been established in the literature (Airey, 2012; Ali, 2013; Costa & Coleman, 2013; Dearden, 2015; Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013; King, 2014; Wilkinson, 2013). If the rationale for the implementation of the EMI policy is to enhance the students' English level, then teachers should have a clear understanding of what their role entails. It seems that the college did not take this into consideration when the EMI policy was adopted.

## Theoretical and Pedagogical Contribution

The value of this study is that it is to our knowledge the first study in Oman that critically explored how students studying in different faculties manage to write in English in content courses. Through a focus on students' accounts of their experiences with writing in content courses, the study gave a voice to otherwise voiceless students. Adopting a post-modern problematizing stance as advocated by critical applied linguistics, these voices were not merely presented as reflecting multiple realities but were interpreted in light of the social and historical context that affected

their views. Therefore, this study contributes to critical research on EMI, which is rather scarce in Oman.

The value of this research also lies in its research design which adopts a sequential mixed-methods approach. The use of three research methods to investigate issues related to EMI has so far rarely been employed. In particular, the use of classroom observations is considered to be a valuable tool for investigating language education policies, but is the least-used research method in an EMI context. While students could express their opinions through the questionnaire and the semi-structure interview, the classroom observations were opportunities to gain first-hand insight into students' learning environments. Pedagogically, this study provided comprehensive insight into the strategies that students use to manage writing in content courses, which is an area that has not received much attention in research on EMI.

Reviewing the findings regarding students' writing in disciplinary courses, several implications emerge. The fact that students manage to study in English despite the challenges they face and eventually graduate from college suggests that EMI might be an appropriate choice for equipping students with the necessary professional knowledge and skills to function efficiently in the local and even global job market. However, adopting a critical perspective, the current EMI policy has to be contested for several reasons.

The EMI policy which is imposed on students does not take into consideration that they are linguistically not ready to study in English. The fact that students are accepted to study in their degree programs with an IELTS score of 4.0, can be seen as an indicator that English is an added burden for students (Troudi & Al-Hafidh, 2017). Students' ability to succeed is not only related to their ability to deal with academic content but also related to their English-language competence, a concern also raised by McLaren (2011).

The quality of academic knowledge gained through EMI has also to be questioned, since a core skill like writing is reduced to an information-gathering activity; students often just lift material from the internet without applying appropriate academic writing conventions, an activity which is seen as acceptable bearing in mind the students' English level (Al-Badwawi, 2011). We would argue that although this measure

supports students in passing their courses it does not allow them to gain academic knowledge appropriate for undergraduate bachelor's degree programs. Therefore, the quality of academic content knowledge gained has to be questioned (King, 2014; McLaren, 2011; Mouhanna, 2016).

Keeping in line with the critical agenda of this study, we would like to put forward some recommendations that are hoped to improve the learning conditions of students studying in higher education in this particular context in Oman.

## **Enhancement of Students' English Language Proficiency**

If Oman intends to continue implementing the EMI policy at higher education institutions, then appropriate measures need to be taken in order to better prepare the students for their study in English. Firstly, it is essential that schools enhance the quality of English language teaching (Mouhanna, 2016; Troudi, 2009). This could be achieved through revising the current curriculum, pedagogy and teaching materials. GFPs could be designed for each faculty to further enhance the acquisition of specialized terminology which students might encounter in their study. This would allow a smoother transmission from foundation to academic programs.

## **Revision of the EMI Policy**

Adopting a strict EMI policy is unfair to students especially to those with low English-language proficiency. Therefore, we would recommend that the institution introduce AMI in all its faculties. If courses were offered in Arabic, then students would not need to resort to plagiarism in order to write academic assignments. However, it cannot be ignored that there is a demand for English in Oman. Adopting a monolingual AMI policy would not necessarily fulfill students' needs regarding future employment. Therefore, we would suggest that students' English level is further enhanced through offering courses for English for academic purposes

(EAP) and for specific purposes (ESP) as suggested by Troudi (2009) while students follow their specialized courses in Arabic. Also, some courses should be offered in English taking into consideration students' English proficiency. This suggestion would be in line with other studies where a bilingual approach has been promoted (Al-Mashikhi, Al-Mahrooqi, & Denman, 2014; Mouhanna, 2016; Raddawi & Meslem, 2015). What we have in mind is an additive bilingual approach where Arabic is further developed and English is added but not at the expense of marginalizing Arabic as a language of academia. Preparing the curriculum in Arabic could be done in consultation with universities and colleges in Arab countries that have experience with AMI. This would also require hiring competent teachers who are specialized in teaching subjects in Arabic in addition to increasing the number of bilingual teachers because they would be better able to interact with students in Arabic and English. Due to their profound understanding of students' cultural, social and religious background they would also be better able to bond with students.

## **Enhancement of Teacher Competence**

Institutions should make sure to hire teachers who are competent to teach at tertiary level. This does not only include having a degree in a specialized field and having the linguistic competence to teach especially EMI classes, but should also include having the pedagogic competence to teach college students. Therefore, teachers should be provided with ongoing support through professional development opportunities that are designed to enhance teachers' pedagogic competence. The institution should also have clear assessment criteria which all teachers have to follow especially in regard to language issues. This would avoid the current confusion that is prevalent among students regarding assessment criteria.

## Support for Students

Institutions could create support centers for students who face some difficulties in their study. Teachers and qualified students could be of great help to low performers. This would not only support these students academically but also psychologically, an aspect that is often neglected at higher education institutions. Moreover, teachers should provide students with feedback on their performance so that they could build on their strength and weaknesses. In regard to writing assignments in English, students should be able to receive support from English teachers. This could be achieved through the coordination of the faculties with the ELC. To support students during exams, it would be useful to present the questions in English and Arabic. Since the aim of the test is to assess students' comprehension of the subject matter, then the language of the question should not be part of the test (Shohamy, 2006). Overall, students should feel that the institution is a place for learning in a supportive environment and not a place for struggle where they find themselves being left alone.

These recommendations are an attempt to advocate a more egalitarian and comfortable learning environment. We also believe that the recommendations of this study are not only of value for policymakers in Oman but could be worth considering in other countries with similar conditions. Overall, we believe that the findings of this study contribute to existing knowledge and research on EMI by providing further evidence, based on students' perspective, on critical issues that have arisen as a result of the adoption of the EMI policy in Oman. In addition, the findings are significant since some have been identified for the first time whether in the Gulf in general or in Oman in particular.

## Further Reading

Dearden, J. (2018). The changing roles of EMI academics and English language specialists. In Y. Kırkgöz & K. Dikilitaş (Eds.), *Key issues in English for specific purposes in higher education* (English Language Education) (Vol. 11, pp. 323–338). Cham: Springer.

This paper considers the changing roles of English specialists due to the rapid growth of teaching academic subjects through the medium of English rather than through the language of the majority of people of the home country. It also highlights common help assumptions that are not necessarily supported by research evidence, for example, that students' proficiency in English will improve as a result of immersion through English medium instruction.

Graham, K. M., & Eslami, Z. R. (2019). Attitudes toward EMI in East Asia and the Gulf: A systematic review. *Language Problems & Language Planning*, 43(1), 8–31.

This paper investigated attitudes toward EMI in East Asia and the Gulf from a macro perspective. It used systematic literature review to synthesize findings on attitudes toward EMI from twenty studies of ten countries. The paper, therefore, provides an overview of similarities and differences between countries and what factors can be attributed to them.

Lasagabaster, D., & Doiz, A. (2018). Language errors in an English-medium instruction university setting: How do language versus content teachers tackle them? *Porta Linguarum*, 30, 131–148.

This paper deals with the issue that content teachers in an EMI context are willing to teach content but do not regard themselves as language teachers. The authors argue that this aspect of EMI programs has a negative effect on students' learning outcomes. In this paper, language and content teachers' approaches to error correction are compared.

Sinha, Y., Roche, T., & Sinha, M. (2018). Understanding higher education attrition in English-medium programs in the Arab Gulf States: Identifying push, pull and fallout factors at an Omani University. In R. Al-Mahrooqi & C. Denman (Eds.), *English Education in Oman. Current scenarios and future trajectories* (English Language Education) (Vol. 15, pp. 195–230). Singapore: Springer.

This chapter presents the findings of a longitudinal study that investigated causes of attrition at a private EMI university in Oman. Disillusionment with the teaching and learning culture were major contributors to dropout rates.

Solloway, A. J. (2018). Make them take an “IELTS Test” in Arabic! Resentment of and resistance towards English and English-medium instruction in the UAE. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 9(3), 458–478. Retrieved from <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3258866> or <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3258866>

This paper presents the findings of a study in the UAE that investigated whether there is any evidence of resistance towards the place of English in the present-day UAE on the part of Emirati higher education students.

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# 3

## The Effect of the Policy of English as Medium of Instruction on Arabic in Kuwait

Abdullah Alazemi

### Introduction

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has become an established phenomenon at tertiary level in Kuwait and the rest of the Arabian Gulf countries. The educational authorities in these countries believe that the benefits of EMI are so great that its implementation is a necessity rather than an option, as EMI is perceived as a gateway to technological and scientific advancement. Universities and colleges were required to take drastic financial and educational measures to implement the EMI policy. This research aims to study how students see the possible effects of EMI on Arabic, and to see how students react to such an issue by exploring their experiences and perceptions of the status of Arabic.

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## Nature of the Problem: The Case of Kuwait

EMI has been implemented in Kuwait's higher education institutions, specifically at the scientific colleges at both the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) and Kuwait University (KU) since the 1990s. The current status of English in Kuwait results from a combination of historical, economical, sociogeographical, and political factors (Al-Yaseen, 2000). The introduction of EMI required these colleges to adopt English-language textbooks and conduct their examinations in English, and meant that Arabic would not be relevant at any stage. Since the introduction of EMI, there have been continuous issues arising regarding students' academic achievement and comprehension of lectures, as well as issues pertaining to the prominence and status of Arabic (see Alazemi, 2017 for more details). With the recurring academic issues related to EMI, research studies in Kuwait have primarily focused on low student achievement and low competence in English, and responses to the issues have continuously focused on implementing new ideas and introducing new textbooks and new curricula to promote a better level of English. However, such issues are yet to be resolved, and students' poor level of English is still a major concern (Kuwait University, 2016). Nonetheless, very little research has dealt with critical issues, such as the probable effects such a policy has on Arabic.

In schools, English is treated as a foreign language; from primary to secondary, in one lesson (50 minutes long) a day, students are exposed only to English. Students at school level learn basic English, such as grammar and writing paragraphs about hobbies, family, and travel experiences. Then, after graduating from school, students are taught their scientific majors and subjects via an English-only policy. At this stage, English shifts from a foreign language taught in school to a second language taught at tertiary level. Thus, it is important to evaluate and understand the probable negative effects a policy of English being the only medium of instruction has on Arabic, and research should uncover other hidden issues that go beyond classroom settings.

The language policy in Kuwait is not a matter of interwoven issues of ideological contexts, policy formulation, and administrative systems that

favor one national language at the expense of another. Nor is it an issue of promoting assimilation or bilingual education, as in Asia (Coulmas, 2002) or Europe (Phillipson, 2003). Rather, as Khan (2009) and Wiley (2006) note, GCC countries have implemented language policies that acknowledge the development and force of globalization and the perceived need to follow the footsteps of the powerful.

The provision of English in the current language policy in Kuwait contradicts itself in theory and practice. At tertiary level, English is offered as the language that is needed for graduation and career purposes. However, most graduates tend to work in the public sector (Kuwait University Report, 2014), which offers better job security, a more flexible environment, and better salaries, and most importantly, requires only Arabic. This contradiction in linguistic ideology has resulted in students learning English only for graduation purposes rather than for personal development and cultural endorsement. Studies conducted in Kuwait have demonstrated how students experience multiple obstacles in acquiring the language, and thus become demotivated to continue their English courses (Al-Bustan & Al-Bustan, 2009). Such outcomes reinforce the idea that English becomes an obstacle and a burden rather than satisfying the government's claim that English is important for international, social, and personal advancement. Arguably, this shows the limitations of mainstream applied linguistics in providing a better language policy that could promote better educational outcomes; it also contradicts the official arguments regarding "the best method" and what suits Kuwaiti society best.

It is important to note that Kuwait is a monocultural country: the entire population shares the same language, traditions and culture; the Kuwait constitution states that Arabic is the only official language of the country; and, crucially, more than 70% of students are taught in public schools where Arabic is the only medium of instruction. Apart from the 50 minutes a day devoted to English, all subjects, including science subjects, are mainly taught in Arabic.

This study focuses primarily on how the EMI policy has affected the status of the Arabic language amongst Kuwaiti students. It also addresses how students perceive Arabic's ability to revive as a language of science and academia.



## Relevant Literature

UNESCO States “language and, in particular the choice of language of instruction in education is one such concern and often invokes contrasting and deeply felt positions. Questions of identity, nationhood and power are closely linked to the use of specific languages in the classroom.” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 8).

Language policy (LP) is a complex, multilayered, and interdisciplinary field that deals with many issues relating to education, identity, and other languages. It is a field that involves many disciplines: linguistics, political science, psychology, ethnography, sociology, geography and social sciences (Canagarajah, 1999). In most cases, the shape of any LP emerges from educational, cultural, religious, social, and historical conditions (Schiffman, 1996). In the case of Kuwait, educational and personal development reasons have been put forward for the implementation of EMI. Regardless of the sheer volume of interwoven issues related to LP, this chapter will deal with EMI’s effect on the local language, Arabic.

It is important to understand that language is more than a means of communication; rather, it represents the history and identity of a given person or community. Languages, in this instance Arabic, offer a means of expression of religious and cultural heritage (Al-Askari, 2013). The spread of EMI has several potential consequences for social, political and educational aspects in a country like Kuwait (Abd Al-Salam, 2001; Al-Dubaib, 2006). Its effect on the Arabic language is one of the most important. Scholars (Canagarajah, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2009) have argued that the spread of English has diminished and devalued the status of local languages, and Arabic has been no exception. Some locals see Arabic as a language limited to social contexts or as just the language of the Quran (Troudi & Jendli, 2011). Arabic is not seen as a language of science and academia that is capable of competing with other major languages. The view that Arabic is limited to certain contexts and usages has serious repercussions on its status and value, most importantly with native speakers.

A major issue with LPs is that such policies can be uncritically developed and implemented by those in authority without addressing the

social and political issues surrounding languages (May, 2006; Pennycook, 2001). As Shohamy (2005) argues, most LPs are created by a top-down approach with no input from those who will deal and comply with the LP. The concern here is that LPs are intended to deliver societal and individual benefits, and thus a true LP caters for the views and input of those groups and individuals that act with it. Several studies in the Arabian Gulf region have shown that there is anxiety and fear of the effect English has on Arabic, such as in Qatar (Pessoa & Rajakumar, 2011), the UAE (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015), and Saudi Arabia (Habbash & Troudi, 2015).

In light of the critical movement in the 1980s and 1990s, critical applied linguistics (CALx) has tried to uncover the hidden ideologies, agendas, and effects of the spread of English (see Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992, 2009). Researchers began to raise critical issues and question the taken-for-granted notions of mainstream applied linguistics. Furthermore, CALx has criticized traditional analyses that often uncritically accept the claims of policymakers and fail to capture the complex social and political context of LPs. As Pennycook (2001) argues, CALx is about going beyond the relationship between language and social contexts, and instead raising critical questions dealing with desire, difference, disparity, power and access. After the implementation of EMI in Kuwait, passing the English admission test has become the main acceptance criterion. Therefore, regardless of the students' attainment and how well they demonstrate their intellectual ability in science subjects while at school, they will not be admitted to university if they have not fulfilled the English requirement. Thus, access to education is restricted, as acceptance rests largely on linguistic ability rather than on academic ability, and thus the superiority of English is reinforced.

### Linguistic Human Rights

Along with the aforementioned critical matters, other issues emerge from EMI concerning linguistic human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006; Walter & Benson, 2012). These rights stress that people are entitled to choose the language of the medium of instruction, and governments must respect and comply with their language preferences. The

propaganda behind implementing EMI policies claims that it leads to technological and scientific advancement, and consequently, this promotes English as the language of modernization. Therefore, multilingualism is seen as an “unmodernized” feature, whilst monolingualism becomes the best solution. As Phillipson (1992) shows, one of the five major tenets underpinning the nature of English language teaching, to support the spread of English, is to teach it monolingually, without the use of other languages. Kuwait seems to have absorbed such notions and statements, and has advanced the view that English is the only way to progress and excel in science and technology. Consequently, this policy is having a major impact on Arabic in Kuwait and other Arab countries.

There is a breach in human rights when students have no choice but to learn through a certain language, particularly one that is not their mother tongue nor an officially declared language of the country, as is happening in the case of Kuwait. Furthermore, this LP sets targets that are usually unattainable and students are viewed as failures if they do not cope with the demanding linguistic requirements. The matter becomes critical when students are held accountable for their linguistic failure, which results in the termination of their education and, subsequently, their career prospects. Advocates of linguistic human rights draw on the work of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen and his contributions to “welfare economics.” Sen argues that many educational systems do not develop their students’ capabilities but rather reduce them and thus perpetuate poverty. Language barriers limit students’ intake of knowledge and could negatively affect the quality of their learning journey, which might reduce their productivity and creativity (Beghetto, 2005). It is therefore important to understand how languages relate to deep inequalities in poverty, education, and health (Pennycook, 2010).

## Preserving Arabic

Several Arab scholars have discussed the effects of English on Arabic, and have stated that the continuous implementation of EMI policies in the Arab regions have resulted in limiting Arabic’s status and use. These scholars have presented several recommendations for preserving Arabic

and promoting its capability as a language of science and academia. Troudi (2009) presents four precautionary measures to revive and maintain the status of Arabic. First, research funding must be made available for researchers to promote Arabic as the language of academia and science and to discuss the challenges it faces with the continuous spread of English. Second, linguistics, educationalists, and academics must raise awareness of the impairment of Arabic and help to promote its capabilities in becoming a leading language that is not limited only to social contexts. Third, teacher training courses should facilitate the transfer of teachers to an Arabic teaching mode rather than an English teaching mode. Finally, Troudi recommends increasing the role of translation, and states that ministries of education, research centers, and educational institutions ought to play an important role in encouraging such a movement.

Alaskri (2013) also recommends three additional measures to preserve Arabic and promote its status. First, more Arabic language councils should be established to present solutions for the problems faced by Arabic and support its spread. Second, Arab leaders should refrain from using foreign languages in international events and instead rely more on Arabic. Finally, Arabic literature should be translated into English and other languages to facilitate its spread throughout the world. These recommendations are vital in promoting Arabic, as the disadvantages of Arabs in promoting their language are evident. However, these recommendations need serious collaborative work from many political, social, and educational authorities from different countries. The promotion of a language is not an impossible goal to reach: the Welsh and Icelandic languages are good examples of how reviving languages is possible.

## Critical Agenda

Arabic has been affected by the continuous spread of English, particularly as a language of academia and science (Troudi, 2009). Whilst Arabic has been limited merely to social interactions and religious applications, English reflects the image of modernity, along with academic, social, and economic advancements (Clarke, 2007). CALx researchers have argued

that implementing EMI policies does not come without a cost, and that it is unwise to overlook the possible underlying effects such a policy has on local languages. The aim of this chapter is to focus on the possible effects EMI has on Arabic in Kuwait by identifying the policy's effects on Arabic, and pointing out that it has been shown to be the least effective approach.

This research is a continued attempt to raise critical issues related to the “newly born” movement in Kuwait that calls for a re-evaluation of the EMI policy and to consider all possible negative outcomes of such a policy. As CALx researchers have noted, it is naïve to think of the education system as related only to the classroom and school/college settings. Instead, it is important to delve into the intertwining critical issues that could affect local languages and “harm” their prominence within the society.

This chapter aims to raise awareness of, and to stimulate debates amongst academics, students, and policymakers about, the consequences of adopting EMI on Arabic. Potential negative outcomes need to be discussed and scrutinized, and all possible angles need to be taken into consideration to produce a more holistic solution. As Troudi (2009) illustrates, science and technology are not the product of one language; indeed, such a claim is supported by the fact that Japan, Germany, and Russia have successfully built and conducted their inventions through their respective languages. Furthermore, the existence of Arabic is evident in many Arabic-medium publications in many disciplines, including engineering and medicine, and currently universities in Syria and Iraq teach science majors and subjects in Arabic, which shows Arabic's capability to be a language of science and academia.

Also, students are at the heart of any learning process, and their voices should not be ignored. The lack of attention paid to students' views and opinions within the literature has meant the views of those who interact with the LP on a daily basis have not been explored. It is important to work within the system and build from the bottom-up to properly evaluate all the possible outcomes of LPs. Therefore, students' daily and personal encounters with the Arabic language and regarding its status are a vital source of information on how much EMI has affected Arabic.

## Arab Educational Systems

It is unfortunate that most Arab educational systems have failed to adopt current trends in education. Their shortcomings in producing generations of critical thinkers and lovers of science have in some way affected Arabic's capacity. Watfa (2007) argues that Arab educational systems since the 1950s to the present day have worked to remove all signs of criticality. These systems have intentionally eradicated critical thinking and the development of self-learners from school curricula and classroom adaptations to produce generations of students whose value has been consistently degraded. Therefore, the problem is not based solely on Arabic and its ability to become a language of academia and science; educational systems have intentionally worked to disable awareness and stifle creativity, and have focused on how to turn students into world-class copiers and first class consumers (Watfa & Al-Rashed, 2004).

Simultaneously, English and EMI have become viewed as the source of liberty, freedom, science and technological advancements. The failures of the Arab educational systems have led to Arabs believing that it is only through English and the implementation of EMI that we are able to thrive as nations.

## The Study

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What are students' views on the possible effects EMI has on the Arabic language?
- Has students' ability in Arabic been affected by their engagement with EMI?
- Are there alternative approaches that could maintain the status quo of Arabic?

## Methodology

The nature of the research questions necessitates an exploratory research design, one that is conducted when a topic is underdeveloped and has not been addressed clearly (Shields & Rangarajan, 2013). As stated above, Kuwaiti students' views on EMI have been neglected in the previous literature, and this study aims to reflect and explore their views. The study does not seek to make generalizations or predictions, but will focus only on understanding students' justifications and reasons for their actions and/or choices.

In line with the exploratory nature of this chapter, the research design employs a sequential mixed-methods approach, which seeks to collect, integrate and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the research questions (Creswell, 2005; Perry, 2011). Mixed-methods research has particular value when investigating a phenomenon that is embedded in a complex educational and/or social context (Mertens, 2010). Quantitative findings are used to assist in the interpretation of the qualitative. (Creswell, 2009). Such a design will help to produce a holistic and detailed overall picture of a complex situation (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

## Participants

A total of 96 students (male and female) with ages ranging from 17 to 23 years participated in this study by answering a five-point Likert scale questionnaire to elicit their responses on the research questions. The questionnaire participants ranged from different academic disciplines, including chemistry, biology, engineering and medicine. Each of these disciplines implements an EMI policy in their respective colleges whereby their textbooks, exams, and the medium of instruction are mainly in English with the exception of few and relatively brief occasions when some teachers resort to Arabic during certain parts of their instruction during lectures.

From those participating in the questionnaire, eight bachelor's degree students were invited to take part in the interviews. The interviews, which

averaged 45 minutes in length, were conducted over a 3-week period. Prior to the interviews, participants' consent was obtained, and the aims and purpose of the study were explained to them. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time and to decline to answer any question they did not feel comfortable with. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. After the interviews had been transcribed, they were shared with the participants so they could make any addition or deletion and ensure their opinions and perceptions were represented accurately. The eight participants were all Kuwaiti students who came from both public and private schools.

Semi-structured interviews are one of the main methods used in qualitative research, as they focus mostly on individual experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Their open nature encourages participants to discuss issues in an exploratory manner (Dornyei, 2007). This method also has the advantage of ensuring the researcher keeps to the agenda of the research while being flexible in accepting any emerging and spontaneous themes that are constructed in such social settings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014).

## Findings

### EMI's Effect on Arabic

Students in both the questionnaire and the interviews were asked to express their views on EMI's effect on the status of Arabic within the academic domain and the general domain. For the latter issue, students seemed to be almost unanimous in their view that Arabic's status today as a beneficial language for their studies and future careers has deteriorated. Indeed, 82% of the participants expressed their agreement that English is more important than Arabic for their studies and future careers. The participants during their interviews provided reasons for reaching such a conclusion, which Ahmed summarized as follows:



Most of us plan to pursue our careers in the private sector or the oil sector which consider attaining a good level of English as a necessary requirement. That is why English, to us, is more important than Arabic for our careers.

The relationship between English and students' jobs is a strong one, as proficiency in English has consequences for employment. The students believed that without English, they would not be able to achieve their goals and aspirations.

The effect of English on Arabic progresses further into the general domain, as students' ability in Arabic writing and sentence formation has been affected. With all the importance attached to English, Arabic's importance seems to fade away; 78% of the participants in the questionnaire agreed that college and university students care more about learning English than Arabic. During the interviews, students gave examples of how such an issue affected Arabic. Mohammed said:

I have started to form sentences in English quicker than I do in Arabic. I feel that my ability to express myself in Arabic is regressing, as I feel that I am distancing myself from my own language. I can't even remember when I last wrote a lengthy essay in Arabic.

Mohammed clearly showed that after he engaged with English, his use of Arabic diminished, which consequently affected his writing abilities in Arabic. He stated that the fluency he used to have when writing in Arabic had been affected, a point also expressed by Mariam:

I need some time to think and try to remember words when forming sentences; I do not have the fluency and smoothness I once had. I have been focusing more on writing in English and improving my sentence structure in that language.

Both Ahmed and Miriam, as well as the questionnaire results, show that more attention has been given to English than to Arabic, which has affected their writing ability and fluency.

The issue of students' ability in Arabic might continue to be an issue even after graduation, and could be evident after they engage in the work force. As Deema stated:

After graduation, I will be going for a teaching position at the ministry of education. In public schools, science subjects are taught in Arabic, and I have learned and acquired my specialty in English. So how am I able to teach students the terminology if I do not know them in Arabic? I would then need to resort to translating the words from English to Arabic to understand them.

Other students during their interviews expressed similar concerns. This means there is a repetitive continuum with shifting between languages. Students learn science subjects in Arabic, they then need to cope with their majors in English, and then return to Arabic after graduation. Other students commented on the uselessness of learning through English for their future goals. Salem explained:

I have already set my mind on going to the public sector for better job stability, and in that sector I do not need to learn through English; it is just a waste of time.

For students such as Salem, the EMI policy is perceived as an obstacle they need to overcome. They do not need English to achieve their aspirations, and learning the medium of through English could become a serious obstacle if students do not properly cope with English and consequently their grades are affected.

The students also showed how English has started to replace Arabic when they discuss with their colleagues matters related to their studies. Ali explained:

We can see how English has gradually replaced Arabic during our talks about our modules and subjects. We have replaced simple terms such as 'mokhtabar' with the English equivalent 'lab' and many other similar cases. Even when we think we are using Arabic, in reality, we are using Arabic with many English words inserted in every sentence. The English counterparts tend to be easier to use, and it begins to be natural to use them.

The natural flow of English vocabulary in students' conversations shows how English has permeated students' daily conversation even outside the classroom setting. What students are exposed to during lectures seems to reflect on their daily conversations, and the participants could not easily talk in complete Arabic about their modules and courses. Sara corroborated this view with other participants and raised her concern about this matter:

When you come to think about it, yes, we tend to use English unknowingly in our daily conversations outside the classroom. This could well mean that things will get worse, and this is only the beginning. It could be using English words now, and later on more Arabic terms will be replaced.

This concern about future applications of English and its probable spread in replacing more Arabic words is a point that needs further research, and should be addressed in more depth.

On the other hand, other students, either in the questionnaire or in interviews, showed that being taught in English has not affected their Arabic. They demonstrated that they are capable of separating both languages from each other. Abeer touched on this point:

I understand that I only need English for my subjects, and I make sure that it does not extend further than the campus walls. I am aware that English is a language that I need for a certain time and context.

Other students who agreed with Abeer, stated how continuous reading habits in Arabic and activities such as writing poetry enabled them not only to keep their ability in Arabic intact, but also they believed such steps helped them to be more competent in their own language.

Although some students were aware of the importance of their language for personal and societal reasons, this might not be the case for the rest. Many of the students above expressed a contradictory view during their interviews, and clearly stated that their ability in Arabic had been affected. The case here is that the preservation of Arabic should not rely merely on personal contributions and measures; rather, the language of a

whole society should be preserved by official administrative procedures from local political and educational authorities.

### **Arabic as a Medium of Instruction**

The students showed a tendency toward using Arabic as a medium of instruction. Although the degree to which Arabic was used varied, the students approved of the idea of having more Arabic introduced in their subjects. Some students appreciated the idea of having only Arabic as a medium of instruction, basing their logic on the fact that they were more comfortable in using their mother tongue, and their learning journey would be simpler with a familiar language. Mohammed echoed this view:

I am more comfortable with Arabic, and I don't need to translate a lot ... using my mother tongue will ensure that I get a better learning experience. Now, I need to translate the technical terms as well as the general English words that I come across when studying so as to understand the technical term as well as the meaning of the whole sentence. It is time consuming.

Such results reflect students' search for an easier way to improve their learning experiences and so gain better knowledge and understanding of their subjects. Translating material between languages in areas under EMI policies has become a recurring trend. Students feel that they have an additional task of finding more information and need to spend extra hours merely to cope with the language. In the questionnaire, 62% of the participants agreed that they would prefer to be taught in Arabic while 22% expressed their disapproval of such an approach. The remaining 16% stated that they did not know if such a proposal was useful or not. The "Don't knows" in the interviews justified their response by stating that they were not sure of the repercussions and whether it would be beneficial for them, bearing in mind that this means the whole job market should also change.

On the other hand, other students preferred the incorporation of Arabic alongside English to develop a dual -program. Those students saw such an approach as providing them with the benefits of both languages,

as it would allow them to comprehend the technical terminology in English and at the same time, convey such knowledge through Arabic. This approach would minimize the time they have to spend on translating many vocabulary items and allows them to focus on those needed for their subjects and majors. As Mariam commented,

When only the necessary terms and sentences are presented to me in English, this allows me to be more focused, as I don't waste more of my time on general sentences that are not related to my subjects.

Students who agreed with Ahmed's point wanted to gain their knowledge in a straightforward manner. They did not want to exert more effort on linguistic challenges and obstacles. It is evident from the results that the students who suggested that instruction be either totally or partially in Arabic, seemed to perceive it as an "escape route" which would lead to better learning experiences, and a way to put their study time to better use. As Salem and other students, explained:

If I am learning through Arabic, then I do not need to waste time to understand the language. English necessitates that I put more effort into dealing and coping with the language. It is better to use this time to understand the content and increase my knowledge or even spend time on gaining new information or even looking deeper into what I learned. My main role as a student is to become competent in my discipline, and English is becoming a distraction that limits my intake of knowledge.

The results show that the incorporation of Arabic would provide students with several benefits that could enhance their knowledge acquisition and broaden their intellectual ability. The results also show that students do not want to waste time on matters not related to the content of their subjects, but rather want the time they currently spend on translation to be used for collecting more information and trying to raise their understanding of their subject matter.

## Pride in Arabic

The results demonstrate that the students seemed to show a degree of sentimentality when talking about Arabic's abilities and prospects. The interviews revealed that the students see Arabic as a source of their identity and a preserver of their history and heritage. They talked about Arabic's past as a language of science and academia; they see Arabic as a language that has made a significant contribution to humanity particularly in the sciences. The participants referred to Arabic's glory in its golden age as evidence that it is a language that has produced many scientific terminologies. Sara reiterated what other participants had said:

There was a time when people from around the world travelled to Al-Andalus [currently Andalusia in Spain] to study Arabic because it was the language of science at that time, and they used to use Marhaba as a sign of where they studied, like what we do today when we say 'Hi' in English to show that we are advanced.

Sara's comment was supported by her other colleagues when they highlighted the works of famous Arab/Muslim scholars and scientists such as Al-Razi and Ibn-Sina as proof of Arabic's ability to be a language of science. The participants argued that such contributions were written and documented in Arabic, which influenced the Islamic as well as the European world during the Middle Ages. For the participants, such examples made them realize that Arabic has already proved itself as capable of being a language of science and modernity, as well as bearing their ancestors' heritage and accomplishments on a scientific as well as on a social level. Such a result was supported by the questionnaire findings: 82% of the participants disagreed with the statement that Arabic is not and could not be a language of science and academia.

Furthermore, students attributed Arabic's current failure to compete with English and other languages to the failure of its speakers and those in authority rather than the language's ability and prospects. Hassan stated that the main factor in the failure to preserve the status quo of Arabic was the inability of those in authority to find solutions and ways to face the continuous spread of English; he said,

Our governments and policymakers should have prevented the retreat of Arabic's prominence. One such way would be to not stop the translation movement; the textbooks we use here, the general books, and novels should have also been translated into Arabic. We ourselves have put Arabic aside and have kept importing English textbooks.

These statements show the immense pride the students had in their language, and indicated that the reduction in the status of Arabic was due to the shortcomings of those in authority rather than because any lack of the linguistic richness and flexibility necessary to be a language of modernity, science and technology. Indeed, participants continuously rejected the notion that Arabic does not possess the necessary attributes to become a leading language in many scientific disciplines.

Participants also cited several possible measures that could maintain and elevate the presence of Arabic. The recommended steps, along with the policy of AMI as discussed above, could help bring Arabic back to its leading status. Ahmed stated:

There should be a specialized center that promotes Arabic terms in the fields of science and technology. The center should enrich Arabic's vocabulary and keep with current trends in science on a periodic basis. Furthermore, it should raise awareness amongst government officials and bodies, which could lead to having annual symposiums and conferences about Arabic, its history, and its ability as a language.

In addition, some students expressed their preference for having specialized centers which focus mainly on coining new terms to keep up with the new scientific and technological advancements and inventions.

## Discussion

Continuing the critical movement in Kuwait should propose several possible positive outcomes that at least ignite debates and discussions on how to resist the current trends in mediums of education. It is likely that policymakers still prefer "going with the flow" and continue the

implementation of EMI regardless of its effects on Arabic. However, shedding some light on these critical issues would be a starting point in simulating further discussions that lead to more extensive research. As we have seen in the results, the students clearly stated that they found forming sentences in English easier because they had not written at length in Arabic for some time. This is alarming in the long run, as it could mean that future generations could become less familiar with their mother tongue, and gradually, English will begin to replace Arabic even on the social level. These voices ought to be heard, and the concerns of those dealing with the language policy should be taken into account. What is missing in the Kuwaiti literature is the students' voice, as they provide an "insider's view" of the current LP. Including students' perceptions along with policymakers' and experts' views will present a holistic picture of all the possible outcomes and provide a policy that caters for the needs of those working with it. It is more effective for educationalists to present an LP that is built from the bottom up rather than the usual top-down approach.

Said (1993, 1994) warns of taking the role of the "intellectual," one who unwillingly accepts easy formulas and ready-made clichés presented by the powerful or the conventional. It seems that educational institutions in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Arab world have become consumers of imported LPs without any adaptations, resistance (Canagarajah, 1999) or accommodation. This consumer mentality amongst policymakers, teachers, and students is affecting both the status of Arabic and students' abilities and capabilities in their own language. The results have shown that students believe they need EMI if they want to pursue their careers in the oil or private sector, where English is a necessity. However, according to Kuwait University's report 2014–2017, only 5% of their graduates actually work in the private sector. This shows that in reality, the current EMI does not serve the needs and aspirations of 95% of the university's students. It also demonstrates the consumer mentality, as students in this study as well as other studies in Kuwait (see Alazemi, 2017) claimed the importance of English for their employability in theory, but in practice the reality is different. The notion of the superiority of English is enforced through the implementation of the EMI policy, though for many students the opposite is true. Nonetheless, students at the tertiary level in



Kuwait, and elsewhere around the world, have been given to understand that the only way to achieve their future career goals is to attain a good command of the English language. Thus, this marginalizes the role of Arabic and affects its potential as a language of science and modernity.

Discussions of the effect of English on Arabic extend beyond the linguistic domain and the debate on which language is more capable than the other. In addition, it is a matter of identity and historical heritage: it is naïve to perceive language as a merely linguistic vehicle; rather, it is central to the construct of identity (Crystal, 2003). Realistically, when we discuss the effect of EMI on Arabic, it becomes a matter of social and personal identity. It is for such reasons that raising critical issues and developing critical skills makes applied linguistics politically and socially accountable (Pennycook, 2001).

As the results show, some students do not gain any advantages from the EMI policy, as their aspirations are to work in the public sector, where the use of English is minimal. Educating nations with notions of linguistic human rights will make policymakers and educationalists listen to the views of students and take the necessary steps to preserve the Arabic language, as well as looking at the effects of EMI on students' comprehension, academic achievement, and learning experience as a whole. Furthermore, the current EMI produces cohorts of well-informed teachers who are not competent in the subject matter when they engage in schools. Such teachers need to re-educate themselves in Arabic with what they have already learnt in English so as to be able to teach scientific school curricula. This continuous shift that students go through is contradictory and confusing, as students learn the technical and scientific terminology in Arabic while at school, then they need to re-study them in English while at university and college level, then for a third time, they need to understand them in Arabic if they work in the public sector. This raises financial issues, as LPs are expensive to run (Dearden, 2014), and this inconsistency between LPs that are contradictory and do not lead to an ultimate result involves a waste of financial resources. Serious evaluations need to be made of the current EMI policy in Kuwait, as the LP issues under discussion lead to further economic, educational and social issues.

CALx keeps a wary eye on neutralized and taken-for-granted notions about medium of instruction policies and what is best for students.

As shown by the results, and by the points raised by Arab scholars above, the decline of Arabic's prominence and status is not due to its capability, but rather is due to the lack of effort by Arabs themselves. The cumulative failure of Arab governments and educational systems has led to the contraction of Arabic, as it has been neglected at tertiary level from which future leaders, teachers and workers emerge. Some European countries, such as Norway, have implemented dual-language programs to cope with the language trends around the world and the spread of English, while at the same time preserving their local languages. It is time for Arab countries to take such a step, one that will take into consideration the preservation of the Arabic language, which entails the preservation of the Arab identity and culture. Furthermore, incorporating Arabic in tertiary education might well lead to better learning experiences and academic achievement for students. Thus, there needs to be collaboration on many levels, starting from different government bodies, and between schools and universities.

It is clear that without any awareness of sociolinguistic issues raised above, English will continue to hold its position as the language of empowerment, academia and science in the Gulf region. A critical voice is lacking within the continuous research conducted in Kuwait, which has focused for over three decades on fixing the flaws and trying to improve the current EMI policy. Since extensive research on the importance of the EMI policy and how to better utilize it has failed to address the negative outcomes, it is time to investigate the main tenets of the policy and to put it under scrutiny. A critical voice helps to unravel any hidden issues, such as students' academic progress, the extra burden they deal with in having to understand the language, the different educational challenges they face, and more importantly, the possible effects on Arabic.

## Conclusion and Contributions

The findings have demonstrated the students' sense of agency, and refuted the notion that Arabic should be limited to social contexts. Instead, the students were proud that their language has the necessary capabilities to be a leading language, whilst referring to its history as a proof of its ability. However, they attributed the current failure of Arabic not to the language itself but to policymakers and those in authority. There is a missing correlation between the aims proposed by the implementation of EMI and its outcomes. It has been argued throughout this chapter that the notions of CALx and critical issues will help to scrutinize the current policy and provide solutions based on local needs to cater for the many intertwined challenges that emerge from the current policy.

## Implications

Despite the message put forward by the educational systems that Arabic is not sufficient for academic and scientific subjects because of the demands of the global market, the students stated clearly that AMI is a better policy because of how comfortable they are with the language. Thus, it is not simply a matter of which language is more suitable; there are several hidden issues that need to be uncovered and discussed thoroughly. The matter here is not about choice and following trends in language teaching, but rather a question of suitability and what fits best for a certain society. Prabhu (1990) and Kumaravadivelu (2008) argue that there is no best method to suit all contexts; therefore, implementing a ready-made EMI policy from Western societies is not necessarily applicable to Kuwait or other Arab societies. Thus, our educational establishments and experts need to devise an LP that is appropriate for and adapted to the needs of Kuwaiti society and based on rigorous empirical research.

## Further Reading

Dimova, S., Hultgren, A. K., & Jensen, S. (Eds.). (2015). *English-medium instruction in European higher education: English in Europe* (Vol. 3). Boston: Mouton de Gruyter.

This book, through its several chapters, discusses the “Englishization” of many European universities. It shows how English has not only affected Arabic and Asian languages, but also extended to Europe.

Mahboob, A., & Elyas, T. (Eds.). (2017). *Challenges to education in the GCC during the 21st century*. Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre.

This book includes several papers that focus on EMI language policy in the Arabian Gulf countries. It discusses several social and linguistic issues, mainly affecting the Arabic language.

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# 4

## The EMI Policy in UAE Universities and Its Impact on Arab Students' Identity and Faith in their Academic Arabic

Taghreed Masri

### Nature of the Problem

Al Suweihi wrote, the danger lies not only in the fact that English is the language of instruction, but in that “it has become the language of off-campus communication between students, and in some cases, between them and their parents at home” (Arabic language is losing ground, 2013). In the UAE, “speaking English is often associated with better education and is an ostentatious sign of upper social standing” (Badry & Willoughby, 2016, p. 188). As a result, “Arab youth move away from their native tongue because they feel superior when using English” (Arabic language is losing ground, 2013). The students who were not “lucky” enough to study in English medium instruction schools feel that they are stigmatized because they lack the language fluency and proficiency that other students have. They may whisper in Arabic to hide the fact that

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they communicate in Arabic and do their best to excel in English in order not to be the outcast of this English-dominant sphere. One Emirati Master's student was reported in *The National* saying: "If I open my mouth and speak in English, people say 'Oh she's amazing'. If I open my mouth and start speaking in Arabic, it's like, 'Oh she's regular'" (Zacharias, 2012).

Albirini (2016) warns that it is likely that the spread and adoption of English in the Arab region may result in disconnecting Arab youth from their Arab heritage, history and belonging. This is a "likely scenario because 'modernity' and 'sophistication' ... are associated more with English than with SA [Standard Arabic]" (Ibid., p. 158). Cho (2012) pointed out that English has become a "class marker" among Korean students; those with weaker English suffered from lack of interaction with teachers, subsequent impacts on their academic studies, lower grades, and more importantly were stratified into the English haves and have-nots, which is in some way a microcosm of the wider society that suffers "collective neurosis of English fever" which is very similar to the case in the Arab region.

The study aims to let the students' voice be heard. Giroux (2011) asserts that voice provides a critical referent for analyzing how students are made voiceless in particular settings by not being allowed to speak, or how students silence themselves out of either fear or ignorance regarding the strength and possibilities that exist in the multiple languages and experience that connect them to a sense of agency and self-formation (as cited in Pennycook, 2001). In the Arab world particularly, Zackaria (2010) points out that "youth have been at the center of recent development interests and agendas ... but their views are seldom heard" (p. 157).

## Research Questions

The study was informed by the following questions:

1. What are students' views of the utility of academic Arabic versus English?
2. How do students perceive their Arab identity?

## Theoretical Framework

Based on my belief that medium of instruction policy is a political decision that has been normalized and accepted without questioning, but is resulting in the marginalization of Arabic and the powerlessness of its speakers, this study is informed by a postmodern critical approach based on critical applied linguistics that is concerned with “a critique of ways in which language perpetuates inequitable social relations” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 11) through “turning skeptical eye towards assumptions, ideas that have become ‘naturalized,’ notions that are no longer questioned” (p. 7). Even though Critical Applied Linguistics (CALx) has been affected by critical theory, it differs from its emancipatory modernist version that develops a critique of social and political formations but offers only “utopian” alternative visions. CALx proposes a postmodern, problematizing practice that is unwilling to accept the taken-for-granted components of our reality and the “official” accounts of how they came to be the way they are. However, this critical stance does not seek an alternative truth but rather advocates the constant questioning of these assumptions (Pennycook, 2001). Thus, critical applied linguistics, in this frame of thought, is not concerned with producing itself as a new orthodoxy, with prescribing new models and procedures. Rather, it is concerned with raising questions about knowledge, politics and ethics, with the aim of raising awareness through problematizing concepts and practices that have become naturalized and taken for granted (Ibid.).

### Critical Language Policy

Critical language policy (CLP) eschews apolitical language policy and planning (LPP) approaches. Pennycook (2001) argues that there is nothing inherently critical about language policy, but the problem mostly lies in these apolitical approaches to language policy that maintain a “vener of scientific objectivity” that deliberately avoids addressing the larger political and social matters within which language change, development, use and planning are believed to be embedded. Instead, CLP entails an implicit critique of these approaches and considers that policies have the

power to create and to sustain multiple forms of social inequality. It “takes up an overt political agenda to establish or to argue for policy along lines that focus centrally on social justice” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 18). CLP perceives policymakers as people in power who are able to promote the interests of dominant social groups (Johnson, 2013). CLP researchers believe that an important political principle should be to enable the people who will experience the consequences of language policy to play a major role in creating these policy decisions (Tollefson, 2006). Accordingly, it is suggested that language planning can be either a tool to empower groups and individuals, create and strengthen national bonds and maximize educational and economic development or it can be used to perpetuate oppression, social discrimination and educational inequality.

Spolsky and Shohamy (2000) argue that “the process of making a language policy is complex” (p. 9). What makes it more problematic and complex is that the nation-state is under many pressures that may be beyond its control which turns language policy into regulating and addressing the symptoms rather than the causes (Phillipson, 2006b). Language policies are successful when they adopt a feasible plan to change the existing language practice into the desired one while considering the existing users of the language and their willingness to accept these changes and modify their repertoire (Spolsky & Shohamy, 2000). It is so important because language policy may have no effect if they ignore the existing language practice, or if they are refused or resisted by the people who are expected to effect the change (Ibid.). Within the CLP paradigm, the spread of English is not seen as a process for an individual to willingly learn a new language, “but rather as a mechanism for the destruction of cultural identity and the imposition of an economic order ... in a capitalist economy” (Tollefson, 2006, p. 47). Tollefson (2006) argues that an important area of current concern in CLP is the value of language rights in education.

## EMI in the UAE

Studying in AMI schools and then moving to EMI universities is one of the hurdles that students face. Students are granted the right to study via Academic Arabic at school while they study in English at their university.

Shohamy (2006) argues that violating human rights has two forms: When students are forced to learn in the prestigious language without recognizing their previous knowledge or their home languages which results in loss of academic knowledge, and when these rights are given and then taken away as it is the case in the UAE when students are granted the right to learn via Arabic language but then this right is taken away at the university level when they have to learn through the medium of English. Shohamy (2006) says, “Not all rights can be viewed positive” (p. 89). She explains that when home language is used as a medium of instruction in schools and not in higher education, and then the language of education at tertiary level is the dominant language, “in such cases when rights are granted at a certain point but taken away at another point” (2006, p. 89), it is severe human rights violation. Sayahi (2015) argues that the impact of the change in the language of instruction is so sharp that it is very similar to immigrating from one educational system to another in a different country.

## EMI in Higher Education

The sweeping power that English enjoys in academia has forced many postcolonial countries to choose English that has become so deeply rooted in their soil, and consciousness (Canagarajah, 2005, p. 1). In global higher education, “English has become the dominant teaching language” and “a medium of knowledge production and dissemination” (Shin & Kehm, 2013, p. 3). This overwhelming prevalence of English as medium of instruction comes at a cost. Phillipson (2006a) argues that when English learning occurs in combination with neglect of local languages, “the likely result is cultural rootlessness, blind acceptance of the dominant world disorder, and uncritical endorsement of more English, irrespective of the consequences for other languages” (p. 210). He adds that “if English-medium universities are part of this ‘global’ project, they are more likely merely to oil the wheels of the current inequitable economic system, contributing to social injustice” by adopting exclusive English-medium instruction which manifests their monolingual myopia and their complicity in linguistic neoimperialism (Ibid., pp. 210–211).

In a response to the increasing use of English as the medium of instruction in schools and universities in countries like the UAE, many are voicing concerns about “the Arabic language being sidelined and relegated as ‘non-useful’ and the Arabic culture being cast aside” (Ahmed, 2011, p. 119). The imported education and emphasis on English have begun sidelining Arabic, resulting in the Arabs’ linguistic and cultural loss because of the “incorporating institutional policies that require courses to be taught in English to the exclusion of Arabic” (Ibid., p. 122). Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir (2001) argue that if indigenous languages are not seen as a priority at tertiary level, and if they are not developed further, “their ability to compete on the national as well as international level will be significantly impeded” (p. 297). Cullinon (2016) also suggested that using English as medium of instruction at higher education “could have a dramatic effect on the native Arabic, as it takes a secondary role in academia and economy and could ultimately lead to Arabic being undervalued” (p. 65).

## The Impact of the Use of English as MI on Arab Identity

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate [my language], and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate... , and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate [sic] me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (Anzaldúa, 1991, p. 207, as cited in Kouritzin, 1999, p. 7)

### Identity: Definitions and Perspectives

Identity has recently moved to the center stage of social sciences and has been perceived from two contrasting views (Zhou-min, 2013). From the essentialist perspective, identity is regarded as fixed categories, a static

entity and a complete whole (Ibid.). The essentialist stance on identity as stable or non-changing is mostly rejected because “there is an absence of flexibility and it is difficult to apply such a theory to social reality, especially when this concerns language and its various manifestations in identity and culture” (Said, 2012, p. 192). Besides, the idea of static identities seems irrational because the concept of identity cannot signify anything static, unchanging or stable, but is “always situated in the flow of time, ever changing, something involved in a process” (Wodak, Reisigl, & Cilia 1999, p. 11).

From the perspectives of social constructionism, critical approaches and postmodernism, identity is perceived as a social construct, not as a property of an individual, but as interactively initiated over and over, “so that the same individual can have different identities in different contexts” (Verschuere, 2008, as cited in Zhou-min, 2013, p. 79). Grad and Lusia (2008) consider identity as a unifying framework for the individuals’ processes of creating meaning while participating in all spheres of social activities as social actors (as cited in Zhou-min, 2013). Higgins (2015) argues that in the current era of the new millennium, the mechanisms of globalization have allowed to produce cultural and linguistic hybridity where “new millennial hybrid and alternative identities are made possible” (p. 377), especially with digital technology and the advent of social media where transnational learners connect the past, present and the future and access conversations on- and off-line (Norton & De Costa, 2018).

The discursive construction of identity is circumscribed by various forms of power abuse and domination, as Zhou-min (2013) observes. In the critical approach, the process of identity is related to social conflicts and struggles that are derived from the particular structure of the social and discursive orders and the ideologies that support them (Zhou-min, 2013). Norton and De Costa (2018) argue that “power circulates in society at both micro and macro levels, constructing modes of inclusion and exclusion through and beyond language” (p. 92). Thus, “through this critical lens, researchers can examine more systematically how micro-structures of power in communicative events are indexical of larger ideological practices and diverse forms of capital that impact learner identity” (Norton & De Costa, 2018, p. 92). The attitude and language identities

that favor one language over another are not signs of the strength of any given language but of the political allegiance and language policy that reflect choices favoring one language (Zwisler, 2018).

Llam and Watt (2010, p. 3) argue that “in spite of the ubiquity of the notion of identity in linguistic discourse, its exact nature remains elusive and its manifestations through language uses are as varied as they are complex” (as cited in Zhou-min, 2013, p. 81). Ting-Toomey (2005) argues that the way individuals present their identities in social interactions depends on their feelings of social self-worth of themselves and of others. In this context, “conflict of any kind is an emotionally laden, face-threatening phenomenon” (as cited in Tananuraksakul, 2012, p. 91). Tananuraksakul places security and dignity when communicating in English at the heart of students’ linguistic identities. Security refers to students’ self-confidence when they communicate with different cultural groups in English, while dignity refers to their self-worth when they communicate in English. He says that their confidence and dignity depend on their perceptions of their English performance. When they feel insecure, they perceive their ability in English to be incompetent. When they feel a lack of dignity, they perceive their English competence as low. Self-confidence is related to self-worth, “so self-confidence is a source of security that can boost speakers’ dignity” (p. 82). Tananuraksakul (2013) argued that “feeling confident or secure can neutralize the low level of non-native speakers’ English competence” (p. 103). Confidence is the essence because it is the key affective domain that facilitates learners’ spoken production which can significantly contribute to their readiness to speak in a foreign language (Ibid.).

## Arabic Language and Arab Identity

Ramzi Baalbaki, the prominent Lebanese scholar and historian of Arabic language, argues that the Arabic language is the “DNA of a nation”; a repository of the common cultural lineage of all Arabs (as cited in Said, 2012). Suleiman (2003) argues that the constituents of Arabs’ national identity are: a common language, shared traditions and religion (as cited in Belhiah & Al-hussien, 2016), but he prioritized language over religion

as the bond among Arabs saying that Arabic language became “the bond of identity over religion, among those for whom the language is a common tongue” (Suleiman, 2006, p. 126). Abdulaliim (2012, p. 12) argues that “our way of escape from the trap of globalization is by supporting our Arabic and Islamic identity through realizing our unity in different spheres, particularly the linguistic one.” To preserve Arab identity, he suggests that Arabs should focus on strengthening the position of SA in education, media, and society at large. Hashimi (2012, p. 10) says, “if Al-Fus’ha becomes extinct, the Arab nation will lose its identity.” Said reported Tamimi saying that what we need is not more economic restructuring as much as we need a reinvigoration of our national consciousness as Arabs because despite the awareness of the centrality of Arabic language to the future of a common Arab identity, using Arabic is facing a constant attack, especially that “modern Arabs no longer consider Modern Standard Arabic as their only language of literacy” (Badry, 2012, p. 86). Al-Issa (2012) concludes that “if we view language as a standard bearer of identity, then the gradual loss of Arabic in the UAE is a serious problem in need of immediate attention.”

## Methodology

### The Critical Paradigm

The critical paradigm, influenced by Habermas and his predecessors in the Frankfurt School, has a deliberate political intention, which is the emancipation of individuals and groups in an egalitarian society (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). This paradigm is based on critical theory that considers much behavior is the outcome of illegitimate, repressive and dominatory forces that operate in the interest of powerful persons or groups at the price of others’ freedom and power (Ibid.). Thus, it seeks to uncover these interests and to interrogate their legitimacy. Critical theory is not “critical” in that it voices disapproval of social inequalities but in that it attempts to distil the historical processes that are responsible for systematically distorting subjective meanings (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The ontological reality is historical realism; the view that reality has been



shaped by social, political, economic, and ethnic values (Scotland, 2012). In this reality, language contains power relations in that “it is used to empower or weaken” (Scotland, 2012, p. 13). In the reality of the context of the study, English is used as a language of instruction to empower English and its speakers and to weaken and marginalize Arabic, the mother tongue of Arab students. Reality, in the critical paradigm, is connected to power. Power relations and social bias form reality in the critical paradigm.

The exploratory critical methodology aims to go beneath surface appearances to disrupt the status quo, and to unsettle neutral and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light the underlying and obscure operations of power and control. Thus, its aim is to explore the students’ perceptions of their competence in academic Arabic and their identity and to examine their interactions and proficiency in Arabic in the natural context which is their Arabic classrooms. Arab students’ perceptions of their language and identity must have been shaped by several factors imposed by the prevailing political, educational and social systems. The goal of the study is to empower individuals studied in order to facilitate social change (Barab, Thomas, Dodge, Squire, & Newell, 2004).

## **Research Methods and Data-Collection Procedures**

A mixed-methods research design, a procedure that combines the use of quantitative and qualitative methods, provides a better understanding of the research questions and research problems than using either method by itself (Creswell, 2012). Miles and Huberman (1994) state that “at bottom, we have to face the fact that numbers and words are both needed if we are to understand the world” and to convince the readers from different schools of thought (p. 40).

## **Questionnaire**

The main objective of using the survey was to get a general idea of the perceptions of students towards their proficiency in Arabic. 268 questionnaires were completed by undergraduate Arab students who are now

in their third, fourth or fifth year of study. Prior to joining the EMI universities, they studied in AMI schools. Five hundred questionnaires were distributed in the three universities; 200 in the first university, 200 in the second university and 100 in the third university. Because I had to exclude the students who were in international schools, who were in their first and second year, I ended up with 268 questionnaires completed by 137 females and 131 male students from different Arab nationalities in the three universities. Out of the 268 surveyed students who met the criteria of the research, 127 students volunteered to be interviewed by providing their details: names, emails, and mobile numbers in the last page of the questionnaire: 58 in the first university, 37 in the second university, 32 students in the third university.

### **Semi-Structured Interview**

The interview is the most prominent tool for data collection in qualitative research. Interviews provide “descriptions of the lived world of the interviewees” which can “give voice to common people, allowing them to freely present their life situations in their own words” (Kvale, 2006, p. 481). All interviews were one-to-one interviews because students’ experiences vary with their different backgrounds and their experiences would not be identical or similar, so it was much better to allow each student individually to be interviewed and to describe and elaborate on his or her unique experiences. Students who went to Arabic-medium schools, who spent three and more years in the university were interviewed. The semi-structured interviews aimed to examine whether the shift in the language of instruction has impacted them, and to see how the transition from Arabic schools to EMI university was at social, educational and emotional levels.

### **Purposive Sampling**

In purposive sampling, which is often considered a feature of qualitative research, the cases to be included in the sample are chosen on the basis of their typicality or the possession of particular characteristics, who are in a

position to give in-depth information (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, nonprobability purposive sampling was used. Twenty students were interviewed: 12 female students and 8 male students. They were from different majors: chemical engineering, electrical engineering, industrial engineering, nuclear engineering, biotechnology, nutrition, business, pharmacy and media. Three students chose to be interviewed in English while 17 interviews were done in Arabic with a lot of codeswitching from Arabic to English at some points.

## Qualitative Data Analysis

The process of analyzing the data was very iterative. Even though it went through stages, I kept going back and forth between the phases. In doing the analysis, I followed thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke with its eight phases. After I transcribed the audiotapes from the interviews I read them several times to familiarize myself with the data and to obtain a general sense of them. During these readings, I took some notes on the margins of the similar questions and interesting quotes that I thought would form the core of the themes. Because “researchers have a choice about whether to hand analyze data or to use a computer” (Creswell, 2012, p. 239), I chose the hand analysis of qualitative data. I felt as a researcher that I wanted to be “close to the data and have a hands-on feel for it without the intrusion of a machine” (Creswell, 2012, p. 240). I first highlighted and coded the interviews using my computer. Then, I printed out the interviews, read them, marked them by hand, wrote on the margins, circled interesting quotes and grouped them based on their relevancy to the research questions. I, then, analyzed the data using color coding to mark the parts of the text, and divided it into parts by “identifying text segments, placing bracket around them, and assigning a code word or phrase that accurately describes the meaning of the text segment” (Ibid., p. 245). Themes were grouped but “the ‘keyness’ of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures—but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Quantitative Data Analysis

To prepare the survey data for statistical analysis, I coded all the questionnaires from 1–268. For the quantitative data analysis, I used Excel Sheet where I inserted all the data of the 268 surveys to prepare them for statistical analysis. For the first part, I inserted all the data without converting them into numerical form. For part 2, I converted the data into numerical form. Frequency and percentages of agreement and disagreement were calculated for each item. Descriptive statistics was used to compute the data for easier reporting.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical transparency and commitment should be observed throughout all the stages of research. Ethics are so important that they “should, without doubt, be at the heart of research from the early design stages right through to reporting and beyond” (Webster, Lewis, & Brown, 2014, p. 78). Following Bryman’s framework (2012) of what ethical research should involve, I obtained the consent of participants, assured them that their participation is voluntary and free from pressure, respected the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and did not make unreasonable demands on the participants, with the assurance that participating in the study would not yield any harm for them (as cited in Webster et al., 2014).

## Findings

### The Language of Instruction: “I Have Not Seen a Single Science Book in Arabic”

Findings suggest that 72% ( $n = 193$ ) suggested that their competence would have been better if they were studying in Arabic, while 27.7% ( $n = 69$ ) said it would have been the same and 2.2% ( $n = 6$ ) said it would have been worse.

Almost two-thirds of the questionnaire participants believed that studying via Arabic can improve their Academic proficiency in Arabic. Also, interviewed students pointed out that if they were studying their majors in Arabic at university, their academic Arabic would have been better. Hadeel said, "I feel if I studied in Arabic, I would be more successful at university if I continued my higher education in Arabic. English distracts me." Marah said, "If the study was in Arabic, I would work harder but my distinction would be greater. I would participate more. I would answer questions in class, I would save time for translation." She also pointed out, "If my study was in Arabic, I would have added more words in Arabic. My scientific words would be much more. The scientific words I had in school, I know now their equivalents in English. This is addition."

However, even though 72% ( $n = 193$ ) of the questionnaire participants said that their competence in Arabic would have been better if they were studying in Arabic, in response to a question of which language they prefer to study in at university, only 20% ( $n = 54$ ) chose Arabic, while 44.7% ( $n = 120$ ) chose English, and 35% ( $n = 94$ ) chose Both.

## Preference of MI

Students' choice of language reflects their perception of the utility of each language. Only 20% prefer to study in Arabic while double this number prefer to study in English; 35% prefer to study in both, which is a good percentage that shows that students want bilingual programs to be implemented, although in the interviews, students showed that they wanted more electives in Arabic while they wanted their majors to be in English. In the interviews, 16 of the 20 participants suggested that English should be the language of instruction, while four students suggested that Arabic can be a medium of instruction. Despite her huge love of Arabic, Marah, driven by pragmatic reasons, suggests that English should continue being the language of instruction. Justifying her preference for using English as the language of instruction, Marah said,

Academically, it is better if we have one language, which is now English. English is the language of science because we need an international language whether it is English or not; a language that all scientists use and write in.

Rotana shares with Marah the view that English should continue being the language of instruction. However, she thinks that Arabic should be the language of instruction at school. She said,

But I think that students should study for twelve years in Arabic so that they have the base in Arabic and then study at university in English because it is the language of science. I don't think that four years of studying via English will wipe out the twelve years of studying via Arabic.

Abdulrahim feels that English should continue being the language of instruction because all scientific books are in English. He said,

I think we need to consider this point. Most of the books or actually all the books I have seen are in English. I have not seen a single science book in Arabic. Science is now in English.

Ayat also prefers to study in English because she feels that if she studied in Arabic, it would be harder. She says,

If I studied in Arabic, it would also be hard because everybody uses English and it is easier in English. The words are harder in Arabic because most of the words are translated from English. So, it is more of English in Arabic alphabets.

She also believes that learning in English improves her English language. She says,

Also, I want to learn English. When I take my courses in English, I learn English beside the content.

Faten said referring to Arabic,

It is not the only language that is marginalized in academia. English language is the international language and all other languages are marginalized and excluded.

On the other hand, four students believed that Arabic can be a medium of instruction. Aziza says,

Yes, Arabic language can be a medium of instruction but there will be literal translation a lot.

Sama is also an advocate of using Arabic as medium of instruction. She said,

Being in an Arab country, I am against teaching in English. It can be in Arabic. Biotechnology is taught in Syria in Arabic. It is easier to understand the information in Arabic.

What students have said shows that they have mostly lost their faith in Arabic as the language of academia and sciences. Being exposed to sciences in English has only made most of them believe that Arabic cannot be the language of sciences, which is an alarming perception that is completely untrue. Even though most of them suggested that studying their major in Arabic would improve their competence in Arabic, they still prefer to study in English, driven by pragmatic justifications and the assumed benefits for studying in English. The overwhelming power of English and the absence of Arabic from the academic scene or its restriction to humanities and some electives has shaped students' perceptions of the two languages. Troudi and Al Hafidh (2017) warned of this when they said that "the real problem lies in the official educational position of Arabic when compared to English and the unwritten messages that the current language of instruction policy sends out about Arabic" (p. 104). Using English to teach science courses promotes the hegemony of English among Arab students who "may fail to appreciate their mother language, concluding that it is not good enough to be used as a medium of instruction in higher education" (Alhamami, 2015, p. 114).

## Arab Identity and EMI: “Arabic Language Is my Identity, Like My Name”

In regard to the centrality of Arabic language in the surveyed students' identity, the response to the statement of “Arabic is important for my identity as an Arab” showed that almost all the surveyed students consider Arabic important for their identity as Arabs. The findings show that the agreement was massive with 92.9% of the surveyed students strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement: 63.8% ( $n = 171$ ) strongly agreed and 29.1% ( $n = 78$ ) agreed with the statement, while only 1.8% ( $n = 5$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed and 5.9% ( $n = 16$ ) were neutral. This shows that almost all surveyed students still feel that Arabic is important for their being Arabs. This finding contradicts the findings that Badry (2012) concluded when she found out that Arab students in a private university in the UAE did not consider Arabic language as an essential component of their identity and that they can be Arabs without speaking Arabic. She suggested, using Hofstede's “onion metaphor,” that Arabic “language has moved away from the center of the onion to become one of the intermediate layers that can be peeled off” (p. 106) and that “the influence of a second language on native culture and identity must be interpreted outside of the earlier paradigms which placed language at the core of cultural identification” (Ibid.).

In the interviews, 19 of the 20 interviewed students gave Arabic language as a component of their identity. Marah said,

Arabic language is our culture, identity and expression.

She added,

As a language, three years would never be able to change the 16 or 17 years of my life in Arabic. This is my life and my culture in Arabic. Whatever these four years added to me, I will return to Arabic. Arabic is my life. AUS added me things but would never wipe out my Arabic.

Lara feels that Arabic is central to her identity that cannot be complete without Arabic. She said,



I feel like people are not aware how bad it is to lose Arabic language because Arabic language is our identity. I mean, we are known as Arabs and it is so important for us. We will not be as Arabs.

Hatim said,

Arabic language is my identity like my name.

For Fadi,

Arabic language is the most important thing that unifies Arabs.

Aziza feels that

Arabic is the origin of the person. It is also the religion; the Quran was revealed in Arabic.

That is why she sees that it is Standard Arabic rather than colloquial Arabic that “connects us together as Arabs.” For Imad,

The components of Arabic identity are Arabic language, civilization, traditions, religion.

Thaer is very emotional about his Arabic language and identity. He says,

A person who rejects his roots, his language, or his identity, or who does not have an identity is in a crisis; his life is going to be in crisis. He is never going to be secure. He will follow people blindly. He is going to fall for anything. It is like somebody treating his parents in bad manners. Then, you know this person will be doomed in the end.

Also, findings suggest that mastery of Academic Arabic is not important for being an Arab for half of the surveyed students. For the statement of “I can be an Arab without mastering Academic Arabic,” almost half of the surveyed students agreed or strongly agreed to the statement with 48.8% ( $n = 131$ ), while 25% ( $n = 67$ ) were neutral and 26.8% ( $n = 72$ )

disagreed or strongly disagreed. This shows that students do not accept that they have to be very proficient in Arabic to be Arabs, which is what they are now. Their academic Arabic has mostly declined and most of them do not seem any more interested in improving it. So, from their perspective, it is not affecting their identity because full mastery of Arabic is not important for being an Arab, as half of the surveyed students believed.

Academic Arabic is an essential part of the surveyed and interviewed students' identity, but this Arabic should not be the language of instruction and is inferior to English, according to these students. So, how do students see themselves? Will that affect their perception of their cultural and linguistic identity? They are marginalized because of English at university and they suffer academically, socially, culturally and psychologically but they still feel that it should be the language of instruction. Students are driven by pragmatic and economic motives. They feel that despite all the marginalization and suffering, English is the language that will help them in their future.

## Discussion

### Troubled, Fractured Identity

Students consider Arabic a constituent of their Arab identity. However, they feel that Arabic has no future and cannot help them propel in academia or in their studies. It is a language that they perceive as so weak that should be revived outside the gates of their English-medium universities. This raises questions about their perceptions of themselves and explains their social suffering coming from Arabic schools. They feel inferior because their mother tongue is inferior to English and is not a linguistic capital that has any weight in the academic or economic spheres. Bull contends, "As soon as I open my mouth to utter a phrase I am assigned a specific place in a hierarchy; I am ranked linguistically and thus socially, according to the market value of my linguistic variety" (p. 36). Bull (2013) argues that pronunciation, grammar, the way one

speaks index one's positioning in society and reflect the value not only of his or her linguistic capital, but also of his or her social, cultural and economic capital.

Language users choose from "a 'linguistic market' where languages have symbolic worth and power" (Bourdieu, as cited in Zwisler, 2018, p. 258). This is expected in the light of the shift in the perception of identity from its "being an essential marker of nation-state and heritage identity to becoming a more dynamic and commodified good in the economic market" due to the prevailing neoliberal market and capitalist economy that perceives linguistic skills and abilities as commodities (Sharma & Phyak, 2017, p. 231). Zwisler (2018) points out that "language users and learners may choose from a 'marketplace' of languages according to their identity needs and desires, and the value of a language may be directly tied to its relationship with the speaker's identity" (p. 258). Bull (2013) contends that "different languages ... carry unequal social weight, depending on the positions in society of the language users" (p. 35). Tulloch et al. (2017, p. 449) argued that "many young Indigenous people have felt silenced when they try to use what they know of their Indigenous language, teased because of the stigmas attached to the language, or criticized because their language does not meet someone's standard of how the language should be spoken."

Students' fractured identities might be a reflection of the wider Arab identity issues. Khashan (2000) argues that "today, the Arabs are at a loss. They suffer from a severe identity crisis" (p. 1) and are at loss because they suffer from intellectual stagnation, blurry vision, sanctuary in past glory, and "a severe political identity in crisis and a society at war with itself" (p. 128). Arabs suffer from "an internal and self-inflicted defeatism" because the Arab world suffers from psychological defeat and skepticism regarding its language and political institutions (Troudi & Al Hafidh, 2017). More research is still needed on identity and language in the context of language learning. As Zwisler (2018) pointed out, we currently lack research on the effects of language learning on the national identities of the language learners in the countries of the original national identity.

## Acceptance and Submissiveness

The participants in this study have been coerced into EMI by the language policy of higher education that did not give them the choice to study in academic Arabic or in English. The participants had no choice but to study in English. The reason that most of the students in this study do not object to studying in EMI is because of their false consciousness. These students' failure to recognize the unjust face of using English as a language of instruction is due to holding these notions "with false consciousness" (Shelby, 2003, p. 170). They see EMI as the best choice for studying their majors. This means that EMI and its proponents have so far succeeded in "presenting it as a norm, a requirement, and a fatality, a universal destiny" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 84), especially in the Arab world. Arabs have mostly endorsed it and accepted it as the normal language of instruction without questioning it because it seems that the whole society believes that "Auntie English' has, in fact, been invited to stay" (Troudi & Al Hafidh, 2017, p. 94). The wider societal and educational submissiveness to the hegemony of English has influenced students' perceptions of English and has made them believe that it is the best and only medium of instruction. In a study that Kuteeva and Airey (2014) carried out, they reported that "in the sciences English use is a pragmatic reality for both lecturers and students" (p. 541). They report one of the survey participants saying, "The use of English and the proficiency of native speakers may seem unfair to many, but this is life—internationalization demands a common language, and English is it, for now at least" (p. 545) which is in line with what interviewed students said in the current study who "surrendered to the belief that the world needs English, but without any attempt at protecting their own language from possible extinction" (Al-Issa, 2017, p. 12, *Italics added*). Tulloch et al. (2017) argued that "many indigenous people have felt silenced by formal education and by the hegemony of English" (p. 449).

From a critical perspective, this acceptance has to do with the oppression that has been practiced on the students that has become normal. This false consciousness has brought these students to powerlessness (Cohen et al., 2011). The exercise of power is done "through the

manufacture of consent to or at least acquiescence towards it” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 4). Power, as defined by Engelstad (2010) is “the ability to move people, to impose changes on them, to change people, or the opposite, the ability to keep people in place, to maintain the status quo, to prevent people from moving or changing” (as cited in Bull, 2013, p. 37). The relation between those with power and those without varies from direct pressure to convincing the disempowered through brainwashing, which is more efficient way of communicating power (Ibid.). Bull (2013, p. 37) explains how the disempowered habitus is shaped saying:

The disempowered become affected or even brainwashed, thus internalizing the hegemonic definitions, linguistic norms, perceptions (including self-perceptions) and attitudes. The disempowered take over the worldview, ways of thinking and attitudes of the powerful, making it all an integrated part of their habitus. In this way, a disempowered habitus is shaped and developed.

Students have been sent messages that studying in English, even if it entails suffering and pain, is worth the trouble because of its utility in their future. Students confuse the political agendas with the linguistic ability of Arabic being the language of instruction. Freire explained very precisely the psychological being of the oppressed when he said that oppressed are almost unaware of being downtrodden because their perception of their oppression is “impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression” (p. 45). Freire explains that the oppressed feel an irresistible attraction towards their oppressors and their ways of life because they perceive sharing this way of life as an overpowering aspiration. Thus, they want at any cost “to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them” (Freire, 1972, p. 62). This is how most of the participants see English language. What is needed is “linguistic emancipation.” A concept that refers to “a process that results in a development or a shift upward of a given underprivileged language on an imagined hierarchical scale of languages” (Bull, 2013, p. 34).

## Loss of Faith in Academic Arabic

Most of the participants have lost their faith in academic Arabic. They believe that Arabic has lost its duel with English in science and technology. None the less, Arabic *is* a language of sciences, as reported by Arab university scientists who said that they had supervised masters and doctoral theses in Arabic, which were excellent scientifically and linguistically (Alhamami, 2015). Syria still teaches science and medicine in Arabic. Arabic is used at Damascus University to teach medicine, and one of the entry requirements is proficiency in Arabic (Ibid.). However, students cannot see this because they have been sent wrong messages that English is equivalent to science, and Arabic is connected to religion, humanities and literature. Also, some of the participants believed that Arabic is a hard language. Bani-Khaled (2014) pointed out, “Many see Arabic as a difficult language, or even the most difficult language on earth!” This might be shaped by the students’ attitude towards Arabic because as Richards and Schmidt (2002) argue, “Expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of ... degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc.” (p. 286).

## Conclusion

Students were forced to study in English as it is not possible to be educated at tertiary level in the UAE in any other language. This “choiceless choice” as described by Troudi and Jendli (2011, p. 41) shows that the language policy is driven by political and economic agendas. However, the participants were mostly satisfied with choosing English as a medium of instruction because they were made to believe that it is the only way to achieve success. It seems that it is ingrained in their consciousness that English is the language of world sciences and that if they seek to work or do further studies, they should be good in English only.

The discourse of accepting the current situation is very negative. Students seem to have lost hope and have surrendered to the language policies and accepted their powerlessness and their marginalization. As

Freire (1972) says, “Hopelessness is a form of silence” that should be rejected because it is sterile. Instead, we need to embrace hope because the dehumanization that results from an unjust order should not be a cause for despair but for hope (Freire, 1972, pp. 91–92). Hope should be at the center of the move towards creating pedagogical conditions that can produce individuals and social agents who can use the freedom they have “to acquire the freedom they are told they have but have not” (Ibid.).

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# Part II

## Issues in Critical Language Pedagogy



# 5

## Linguistic Imperialism and Attitudes Towards Learning English in Lebanon: An Exercise in Critical Pedagogy

Reine Azzi

### Nature of the Problem

Open minds Operate best.  
Critical thinking Over tests.  
Wisdom can't be memorized.  
Educate! Agitate! Organize!

These lines are from a children's book I recently came across, *A is for Activist*, meant to introduce children to the alphabet while renouncing the 'A is for Apple' genre which would not widen a child's liberal world perspective. This reminded me of critical pedagogy's goals. To critique rather than memorize and respond to tests, and to educate in order to change minds.

In an attempt to include both thought and action, I embarked upon a journey of critical pedagogy in my Advanced Academic English class at a

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private university in Lebanon. This class is the last in a sequence of English courses that emphasize academic writing through a thorough review of academic language and phraseology. It is also a multi-section course with a unified syllabus and learning outcomes. In order to complete the course, students must write a research paper following the IMRD structure—with an introduction, brief literature review, method, results, discussion, and conclusion. However, the emphasis is less on the research involved and more on the language used to write the different sections. McLaren (2009) would most probably categorize this knowledge as technical, with the aim of objectively assessing a student's command of academic English. One restriction of such a course objective, though, is the absence of the additional "meaning" necessary to motivate students and connect the classroom environment to the external world. Many faculty members make it a point to select topics that "matter," at the very least. From discussions over the use of marijuana, to gender equality and the environment, this has been an attempt to create greater understanding of daily concerns. This is what McLaren (2009) refers to as practical knowledge. In my own classroom, and for this research study, I decided to move beyond understanding towards the critical.

The theme I selected was "English Imperialism," which inherently includes an explicit critique of our current connection to, and reliance on, the English language. Some of the assigned readings focused on the commodification of the English language, the impact on other languages such as Arabic and French, the role of American and British publishing houses, myths of language learning and teaching, language policy, and solutions to preserve other languages. The objective of my research was to critically evaluate how the students engaged with such critical material, and the extent to which their awareness increased upon conducting their own individual research.

Thus, the specific questions my study seeks to answer are the following:

- Are undergraduate students in Lebanon aware of the power and influence of the English language? And how critical are they of its impact on their personal and academic lives?
- What impact will discussing linguistic imperialism have on their choice of research topics and their final conclusions?

- What are their attitudes to their “critical” class experience overall?

## Critical Agenda

### The “Critical” Consciousness

Before attempting to review the elements of critical pedagogy and critical applied linguistics, it is vital to gain an understanding of the term “critical” and the way it is used in the literature. Giroux (2011) believes the power of education lies in the student’s ability to “transform knowledge rather than simply consume it” (p. 7). In this sense, critical thinking, pertaining to critical pedagogy, aims at viewing the world beyond simply learning skills and theory, but through obtaining the means with which to “think and act differently,” leading to “hopeful transformation” (p. 14). McLaren (2009) further develops the need to both interpret this world and act upon our awareness. This notion of praxis is an essential factor in Paulo Freire’s theory, which necessitates action and reflection going together. Praxis allows action and reflection to take place simultaneously (Freire, 2005). This can be traced to Marx’s “active philosophy.” While traditional theory “merely reflects the current situation,” critical theory “seeks to change” it (As cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 130). According to Freire, “cut off from practice, theory becomes abstraction of ‘simple verbalism’. Separated from theory, practice becomes ungrounded activity or ‘blind activism’” (as cited in Darder, Balodano, & Torres, 2009, p. 13). The challenge is to incorporate such reflexivity and self-awareness throughout the phases of any critical stance, in order for thought and action to intertwine, creating a critical fabric, a critical mode of operating, or of simply being.

This dynamic nature of critical thought can play a powerful role in the critique of our reality. In critical theory, the researcher’s view of reality is affected by hegemonic ideology, also known as historical realism. Hegemony exists when “power is exercised through consent rather than force” and where the oppressed “consent to their own domination” usually through ideology transmitted through the media and other

institutions like schools and universities (Howell, 2013, p. 78). Gramsci explains this theory of hegemony in terms of historical changes, as power is being exerted through “reinforced universal ‘common sense’ assumptions of ‘truth.’” According to Gramsci, this becomes even more significant as it is enforced through the “moral leaders of society” (as cited in Darder et al., 2009, p. 6). The reality we operate under can also change, depending on the present ideology and its influences on the subject—sometimes without our awareness. This is why the critical researcher’s epistemological position “places the researcher in the world that is constructed through people manipulated by power” (Howell, 2013, p. 79). So where does that leave the critical thinker? With hegemony enacted through moral leadership instead of brute force, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify these influences and act upon them.

Thus, there is a need to challenge what appears to be normal. This thought process lends itself to the critical research paradigm, and one of the previous paradigms to fall under critical scrutiny is that of positivism and “empirical” research associated with the Enlightenment. Instead of an oversimplified trust in “objective reason,” critical theorists emphasize freedom and emancipation while labeling such scientific tendencies adopted in the natural sciences as “a form of recognition and acceptance of existing conditions” (as cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 128). Another important stance adopted by the critical researcher is the need to embrace facts, values, and worldviews equally. While positivist researchers give more credit to facts they deem more objective, the critical researcher does not allow for such an objective–subjective dichotomy. Instead, values and facts go hand in hand in influencing reality as we see it. Trede and Higgs (2010) explore this dialectical nature of critical inquiry, where “subject–object, knowledge–value, truth–myth dualities need to be seen in a reciprocal relationship” (p. 249). Such notions of fluidity allow a critical researcher to embrace reality in all its elements. In other words, the comfort and certainty that some people gain from compartmentalizing facts is not as necessary, and as a critical researcher, I can opt for the continuum and freedom associated with the unknown.

## The “Critical” Teacher

However, where does this freedom and critical theory find itself in pedagogy and academia? What keeps us tied down as educators? Which “guidelines” are we being restricted to? We may sometimes feel constrained by the demands of the syllabus and the book, what we need to teach compared to what we may want to teach. When we are being given common course syllabi, many restrictions are being placed, causing educators to focus on the technical. After all, the course learning outcomes, grading criteria, and even texts used are geared towards accomplishing technical tasks. But what is sacrificed in terms of critical pedagogy in order to maintain such conformity? Is educator freedom a worthy objective?

Michel Foucault’s (1989) work highlights the role of student resistance in the classroom, along with the need to fully understand the complexities of the power relationships embedded within teaching (as cited in Darder et al., 2009). What form will that resistance take though? Due to its emancipatory nature, it is quite difficult to identify one “template” that signifies critical pedagogy. This should not come as a surprise though, since the “critical” would, in its very nature, resist such stringent compartmentalization. Instead, there are certain principles one can associate with the practice. Common among them are the social and historical constructions of knowledge, the role of culture, the politics of economy, the need for counter-hegemony, and the importance of self-reflection and dialogue (Akbari, 2008; Darder et al., 2009; Giroux, 2011). Central among all these principles, and one point I wish to highlight, is Freire’s notion of “Education as the practice of freedom.” Freire offers educators a handbook on pedagogical freedom, with dialogue as the starting point, where there is no dichotomy between “teacher” and “student”; instead both parties work together to achieve conscientization. One such practice would be to make underlying assumptions more explicit as part of the educational process, which would allow better dialogue among educators as well. This is the form of freedom I tried to instill into the course despite the limitations of working within a multi-section course with a common syllabus. In a similar light, Marx’s goal of a philosophy that “ascends from



earth to heaven” (as cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 117) would also prove difficult to achieve. But can we still attempt to create room for such a philosophy in the classroom? One means would be to identify topics that affect members of our society on a daily basis, part of their active “Earth,” and hold them up to criticism, thereby bringing reflection into the continuous state of action that many students experience beyond the classroom. Crookes (2013) also explains the challenging process involved when a teacher begins to explore critical pedagogy, with an emphasis on language. The teacher’s evolution will be created through critical language pedagogy, “embracing certain aspects of the approach on one level, attempting to apply this preliminary understanding in practice, bumping into problems that trigger further reflection, then applying this new understanding, bumping into new problems (or the same ones), and so on” (Crookes, 2013, p. 46). This process of trial and error is in itself quite invigorating, allowing room for the teacher to relinquish “control” over the classroom, and leading to more dialogue. Freire believes human beings to be “in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (2005, p. 84). This “unfinished” trait and “transformational” reality would be a part of the classroom, ensuring that education, too, is an ongoing activity, and this is where educators like me might need to step out of their comfort zone in order for everyone to truly transform. Very little research, to my knowledge, has been conducted on this aspect of criticality in Lebanon. One such study by Ibrahim (2015) explores critical literacy while working with teachers of English at the public Lebanese university. A few other studies discuss peace education and critical thinking. Would more focus on critical teaching lead to Freire’s “revolutionary leadership” where educators and students “unveil” their temporal reality and begin to critique it during the TESOL classroom?

## The “Critical” English Language Classroom

Pennycook (2001) defines criticality in applied linguistics as “a constant skepticism,” where we practice active “problematization.” This involves questioning all underlying assumptions—what Pennycook calls the

“givens”—and this is a challenge that could be quite stimulating in the English language classroom. Cox and De Assis-Peterson (1999) challenge language teachers to address their role in today’s ideological climate. In terms of application, Crookes (2013) identifies the characteristics of this classroom. While some of these were not possible in my context as a multi-section course with a “ready-to-wear” syllabus, other factors could be incorporated. My own classroom attempted to include the following: critical or otherwise oppositional stance by the teacher, dialogue, and critical/participatory content in materials (p. 47). Akbari (2008) calls for an inclusion of themes from “the wider society,” allowing students to “think about their situation and explore possibilities for change” (p. 278). This echoes James Gee’s call for language teachers to accept their role “at the heart” of political and cultural issues (as cited in Pennycook, 2001, p. 23). My students were also able to participate in the “creation” of course material. Though I provided most of the articles they were to review, they had the opportunity to add their own sources. This is in line with Wallace’s (2001) view of the critical classroom design. However, negotiating the syllabus and participatory assessment were not possible, which limited the degree of freedom involved. Students were able to survey their communities in order to take the topic “into” the society, but the extent to which that would signify a critical lens is up for debate. While they weren’t able to effect change, their “action” was oriented towards gaining a critical understanding of the communities they chose and discussing their findings in the classroom. This also facilitated dialogue in the critical sense, where students considered “the basis for their thinking” (Crookes, 2013), and most importantly the specific underlying assumptions pertaining to their own context.

This importance of context and particularity is central to Kumaravadivelu’s (2001) discussion of a “postmethod,” comprising “particularity, practicality, and possibility” (p. 538). When educators follow an “international” course book for their classrooms, they end up following one “set of pedagogic aims” (p. 538) instead of resorting to a more context-specific learning experience. Through the means at their disposal, critical language teachers would then be able to practice elements of criticality in order to maintain what Pennycook (2001) would call “preferred futures” and a “model of hope and possibility” (p. 9). Kumaravadivelu

(2006) provides further suggestions relating to how teachers could use “macrostrategies,” such as the need to promote learner autonomy and ensure social relevance, in the creation of “microstrategies” enabling specific task development and classroom activities. This is where the topic of “Linguistic Imperialism” allowed me to include critical classroom material. This is central to critical sociolinguistics as well in its struggle towards “questions of access, power, disparity, and difference” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 18). The area of focus in the classroom became centered on the issue of “language rights” and the risks associated with the hegemony of English over other languages, especially, in our specific Lebanese context, in the Middle East.

## Our Specific Critical Context

These critical topics became the trigger for extensive dialogue in our classroom. Currently, the spread of English as a lingua franca is a political and economic tool for power and control, with American and British policies aiming towards the spread of English. Phillipson (2017) provides a detailed analysis of these policies. In our classroom, we discussed the critical notion of a “superculture” (Anchan, 2012) and our tendency to sometimes assume that other ideals must necessarily outweigh ours. This “new form of Western cultural colonialism” (Ahmed, 2011) and cultural subversion, in addition to the role of American-style academic institutions in the Arab world, was a central recurring theme in our dialogue on causality. We also focused on current language myths and assumptions (Phillipson, 2009, 2017; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) in order to “problematize” these “givens” (Pennycook, 2001). One such “given” that was discussed at length is our understanding of the “monolingual fallacy” (Ismail, 2012). This inevitably led to a comparison of bilingualism in countries like the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to that of Lebanon, in an attempt to further highlight our own specific context. A major shift has accompanied the changes in higher education in Lebanon. While the UAE might have resorted to an educational system “exclusively tied to the Anglo-American model to a large extent” with academics from Western countries using English as a medium of instruction with its accompanying

cultural package (Ahmed, 2011), Lebanese institutions have used a “softer” but similarly detrimental approach. The role of modernization (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) as another contributing factor towards “language death” was also debated. This “linguistic genocide” affects both minority children and those in the dominant group opting for English as a medium of instruction, which happens to be the case in Lebanon. While a discussion of solutions mostly focused on the role of education, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) calls for supporting linguistic human rights. This places the “ecology of languages” paradigm, one that promotes multilingualism and diversity, as a solution, with English teachers at a turning point, employing critical pedagogy as the tool of choice.

## Research Framework and Design

The research paradigm guiding this research study is undeniably critical. In this light, I attempted to focus on two means of seeing our current notion of “reality.” One centered upon an “understanding of individuals’ interpretations of the world around them” and the need for this awareness to “come from the inside not the outside” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 18). This is why the different angles the study participants took when they were conducting their own research were revealing, as they allowed for individual interpretation. A critical approach, though, was also necessary in order to illustrate “reality shaped by history” (Howell, 2013) while looking for “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). This was therefore employed throughout the study in order to create the critical environment discussed at length in this paper. The views of knowledge that shaped this study were therefore both interpretivist and critical. Furthermore, due its participatory nature, with material provided by both the teacher and students, a constructivist framework allowed for a greater connection between the investigator and the investigated, and the findings were “created as the investigation occurs” (Howell, 2013, p. 29). As such, the objective of this study is to gain sufficient knowledge on this complex linguistic issue from diverse sources in order to identify and challenge common practice and possible limitations, leading to increased emancipation.

## Action Research

After reviewing the diverse definitions of Action Research (AR), Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, and Zuber-Skerritt (2002) conclude that “action research is enquiry with people, rather than research on people” (p. 130). This allows for data gathering by participants, problem posing, power-sharing without hierarchical structures, and collaboration in the creation of a “critical community.” As such, the specific steps taken during the semester allowed for the following tasks:

- Stage 1: Introductory Discussion. This was meant to introduce the topic through dialogue, while sharing experiences and assumptions. I had prepared a few themes to initiate dialogue, but students added their own. They reviewed their own linguistic choices, compared these to the language(s) they had studied at school, and discussed their beliefs.
- Stage 2: Review of the literature. The next phase was a critical reading of the literature. This is a task common to all other classes that had to read and critique at least six articles on the topic. My selection included the following sub-topics: “Global English”, “Higher Education and Linguistic Dualism,” “The Arabic Language Challenges,” “Globalization and Linguistic Imperialism,” “Globalization, Corporatism, and Critical Language Education”, and “The Monolingual Fallacy.” In order for students to further participate in the research, they selected two additional articles relevant to their specific research angle.
- Stage 3: Oral briefing and selection of student topics. Afterward, students had to select their topics and brief the rest of the class. During these sessions, they identified their research question, the target group they would survey, and any other concerns they might have.
- Stage 4: Ethical awareness and data collection. To remain critical of our role as researchers, my class included a session on research ethics.
- Stage 5: Writing the IMRD paper. Originally, I had planned to conduct sessions focusing on orally sharing student findings and allowing room for dialogue. This did not materialize during the semester, as I was not able to allocate the time for that during the hectic weeks leading up to the writing of the actual paper. I had to also be fair to my students who would be graded based on the paper. There was no flexibility within

the grading criteria, with 80% of the course grade on the final paper. As such, I focused on the papers themselves, and the students' analysis of their own work, in order to generate any common themes or trends. Stage 6: Final "exit" Survey. The survey covered their attitudes towards the English language in general, learning English, and their classroom experience. This survey also allowed for an anonymous representation of their feedback, as there is always the concern that the power dynamics between a teacher and students will continue to influence their interaction.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 25 students completed the course. Their ages ranged from 19 to 25, and the class was predominantly female with only three male students. This was, in itself, an anomaly as our classes are usually more representative. Students came from a number of different majors: Interior Architecture, Business, Interior Design, Architecture, Nutrition, Performing Arts, Fashion Design, Pre-Pharmacy, Civil Engineering, Chemistry, and Education.

### Data-Collection Tools

The data for this course was collected between January and May 2018. The three tools used for gathering data were an introductory discussion session, the resulting student papers and a final exit survey. The student papers were analyzed, specifically looking for references to the critical themes we had discussed. The survey consisted of three major sections (22 questions in total): the first part (14 questions) adopted a Likert scale to gauge attitudes towards English in general, the learning of English specifically and their critical classroom experience (see Appendix); the second part was an open-ended subjective question on a learning experience they had completed within the course that they found particularly

memorable; the third part (seven questions) focused on demographic data, specifically their personal linguistic background. Each item was analyzed individually in order to identify patterns, and items within each subtheme were also assessed.

### **Thematic Analysis (Following Grounded Theory)**

Opting for grounded theory would allow me to identify “emerging patterns” (Creswell, 2009) in order to collect data and conduct “comparative analysis” (Howell, 2013). Following an emic model of bottom-up research, participants’ words and interactions are the starting point. Using Nvivo, I analyzed the students’ interaction during the first introductory session, the discussion/conclusion sections of their IMRD papers, and the open-ended question in the final survey. Through the coding, analysis and reflection tools, I was able to develop a picture of the common themes pertaining to critical applied linguistics.

### **Ethical Dimensions**

Students were also aware of the objective of the research beforehand, the importance of anonymity, any risks involved, and the ability of respondents to withdraw from the research process at any moment. This last point was extremely relevant, as my students were able to “opt out” of the research without jeopardizing their performance. This allowed the data-collection process to flow smoothly, and students were interested in my study as well, since they had signed the consent form at the beginning of the semester.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings will be examined in terms of their connection to the study’s three research questions. They are also divided into three sections pertaining to each data collection method.

## Initial Discussion Session

This session introduced the class to the theme and tackled issues of identity, language choice both at home and in other environments, attitudes to the use of English both personally and academically, awareness of the power of the English language over others like Arabic, and finally, their attitudes towards English as a medium of instruction. This discussion was quite interesting, and many students were passionate about the choices their own parents had made in placing them in English-medium vs. French-medium schools. Only one student had been to a school where Arabic was a medium of instruction. Some felt genuinely sorry that they couldn't speak Arabic at home, citing issues like living abroad. One student particularly discussed the difficulties of communicating with her Palestinian grandfather, especially since the family as a whole mostly spoke English at home. This made the generational gap clear.

Attitudes towards English. The majority felt that the use of English, especially in a country like Lebanon, was mandatory. They cited the lack of work opportunities, the need to travel, and the importance of English for finding a good job. One student stated that, in a way, "parents are preparing their children to leave the country" through teaching them "international" languages. Another also mentioned the pride she felt in learning more languages, and the need for multilingualism, not just bilingualism. Students admitted having greater fluency in written English, while most used Arabic at home with their parents, and a mix of Arabic and English with their siblings and friends. This is consistent with the results of the survey as well. Students are simply more fluent in English than in Arabic, and mostly speak the Lebanese colloquial language, which feels different from the written Arabic they had studied in school. Some of them had also been given the option to drop any Arabic courses they didn't wish to take in the 9th grade. This does not seem unique or surprising within our context of an American-style university, especially since many of our students also come from similar American-style schools. One student expressed how sad he felt upon hearing all these testimonies, and another brought up the issue of "colonialism," even though I had been careful not to mention that word in class up to that point. This



shows, right from the beginning, that my students had a critical stand-point when it came to their use of English. However, this session allowed all of us to reflect upon our current practices and assumptions.

### **Attitudes Towards Arabic**

Students also identified cases where they felt more comfortable in choosing English over Arabic. Surprisingly, these contexts were not all academic. When asked about the language they would use to write love letters, for example, students preferred English to Arabic. One explains that Arabic is too “dramatic” and “intense” with a lot of expressions that can’t even be “translated.” Bringing up translation here was revealing as it meant the student was thinking of her language in relation to others and their context. Arabic “romantic” expressions are clichés as well, and over-used in soap operas according to another student. The class expressed surprise when a female participant confessed that she would not become romantically involved with someone who wrote her a letter in Arabic. This attitude was also apparent when discussing academic contexts. While answering a question on whether a subject like mathematics could be taught in Arabic, students generally agreed that teachers would not be able to teach such as a course as they had been educated in English and/or French. Additionally, one student shared a “mind-blowing” experience when she had seen two students discussing a math formula using Arabic; she felt this was “odd” and “behind the times.” This is also consistent with the literature stating that students appear to find English the language of technology and the future, while Arabic is more frequently associated with traditions and the past.

### **Student Research Papers**

After completing the first four stages of the intervention, students were now ready to write their final papers. It is important to reiterate, though, that this course is not a research methods class. The focus is on a student’s ability to analyze data and write a coherent academic paper. As such, a lot

of the conclusions that my students reached cannot be considered reliable, for the reason that their data collection methods were quite restrictive. However, in terms of my own needs for this class, I am more interested in the conclusions they reach based on these limited data sets. The reflection they underwent, regardless of the reliability of their evidence, is sufficient for me to gauge their connection to the topic. This is why I decided to focus on the discussion/conclusion sections of their papers, as this is where students are able to reflect on the topic. I was able to identify the following four distinct emergent themes in descending order of frequency: Importance of English (24); attitudes towards the use of Arabic (22); the role of education (15); possible solutions (4).

### **Importance of English**

As the most frequent theme, many students continued to reflect upon the need for English in our globalized world. For example, one student concluded that Lebanese citizens might not really have a choice. She claimed the reason they prefer English is “a reality imposed on them by the global and international standards.” Similarly, one student addressed the need for English at work, concluding that there appeared to be greater emphasis on English when surveying students in the School of Business, who consider it necessary to interact with people from different countries. Another student who had worked on the choice of following American or local medical social media channels observed that students believe English is “the language which would allow them to have more medical knowledge, discuss medical issues in future international conferences, and be successful in their medical career.” She further concluded that social media might be a new tool for linguistic imperialism. The student who surveyed education majors reached a similar conclusion. The future teachers who participated in her study preferred to teach in English, citing the fact that complex scientific terms are “easily explained” in English. One of her participants claimed that “the world is depending on English” and also placed the “blame” on social media.

## **Attitudes to the Use of Arabic**

Ironically, another student, who had researched theatre preferences, found that many participants preferred watching Arabic plays, while the theatre directors offer them English scripts. This is a major rift between what the “people” want and what the theatre is training its students to give. The same attitude prevailed in the music club, with young artists preferring English-language songs. Those same singers expressed their awareness of the public’s proclivity for Arabic music, but still opted to train in English. These two student papers clarified a particular tendency to avoid context-specific cultural needs and base artistic choices on presumed international standards. More importantly, there were participants in another study who mocked the Arabic language or even reported “feeling ashamed of it.” In the same study, the student claimed that the negative attitude towards Arabic was mostly due to “teachers, universities, and governments,” which had brought about the marginalization of the language.

## **Role of Education**

The study which identified performing arts students’ need to work on English scripts, attributed this phenomenon to studying at an American university. In addition, according to a professor who was interviewed, this might also be a result of learning terms in English without the Arabic translation. Nutrition students also cite “the birth of several private universities” as a major reason why there was a clear preference for using English over Arabic, especially when discussing scientific topics like nutrition. This was echoed by the participants from the education program, who believe change should start from the schools that choose to de-emphasize the importance of Arabic, treating it as a “peripheral” language.

## **Possible Solutions**

Though students were not required to provide solutions, a few felt the need to make some recommendations. When it came to employment, one student believed we had to re-evaluate our need for English at work.

Another cited multilingualism as the way forward, in order to preserve Arabic while inevitably learning English and other languages. The final recommendation was to revise the Arabic courses taught at university, ensuring they are relevant to current needs, and thereby causing students to take them more seriously.

## Final “Exit” Survey

This served as the final “reflection” on the process we had undertaken. I chose to conduct it in the final session after students had submitted their papers. Unfortunately, four students could not attend. As such, the results below are based on the 21 students who did complete the survey. Eighteen students were Lebanese, one was Lebanese-American, another Lebanese-Brazilian, and a third Palestinian. Twelve students had studied at schools using English as a medium of instruction, while the remaining nine studied using French. The majority spoke Arabic with their parents, while three students spoke English, Portuguese-Arabic, or Arabic-French. This picture changed when communicating with siblings: only nine students spoke in Arabic while the rest used a combination of Arabic-English, Arabic-French, or all three; one student spoke in English and Portuguese. With friends, those speaking in Arabic become even fewer (only seven respondents). Others use a mixture of the aforementioned languages, English being the most dominant. These results clearly showed the evolution of English among these students; it also demonstrated the generational gap, where Arabic becomes a language they speak with their parents mostly, opting for other “newer” languages with their siblings and friends.

## Attitudinal Study

The largest section of the survey was meant to investigate student attitudes towards the English language, the ideal way to learn English, and the specific classroom intervention they had participated in. I felt that those three categories encapsulated the discussions and themes we had raised throughout the semester. This section of the survey was made up of 14 Likert scale questions, the results of which can be seen in Table 5.1 (Appendix).

## Attitudes Towards English

While the emphasis of the classroom intervention was on identifying our current assumptions regarding the English language in order to pinpoint any “givens” and critique them, the results were mixed in terms of the efficacy of this method. Students might have critiqued the hegemony of English; however, they continue to believe in its importance at work, with students strongly agreeing (24%) and agreeing (66%) that it remained necessary. Additionally, 24% and 63% strongly agreed or agreed that English grants people social advantages. This shows that their critique of reality might not necessarily mean they would ignore this status quo. These results revealed that my students were ready to continue playing along with “the game,” despite being quite aware of its negative consequences in their particular context.

## Attitudes Towards Learning English

The next section pertaining to student attitudes towards learning English further supported this conclusion. For example, despite our extensive discussion of the monolingual fallacy, many students continued to believe teachers should only speak English in class (9% strongly agreed and 48% agreed). However, this attitude changed when they were asked about the language students could use during group work. The majority here believed they should be able to use other languages. The difference between their attitudes to these two questions is quite interesting. One inference I deduced might be because the “teacher” is meant to exemplify the “ideal,” providing instruction in only the target language, while students might be able to use other languages while working towards that ideal. Students, generally, continued to feel that English was easier to study than other languages (38% strongly agree and 43% agree), while 66% believed that it should be used for Math and Science. In contrast, though, many claim parents should not speak English at home with their children, which is not consistent with current practices in Lebanon today. The majority (43%) disagreed with this strategy, while 24% remained neutral. This last part seems to show a change in attitude, or at the very least, a break from societal practices.

## **Attitudes Towards the Advanced Academic English Classroom Experience**

This section was of particular interest as it gauged student reactions to everything we had worked on. This is why many of the questions targeted student motivation, as a way of measuring whether our critical discussion had led to increased engagement. The results here were quite promising. While the clear majority (43%) strongly agreed or agreed (19%) that they had not thought much about this topic in the past, 52% strongly agreed and 33% agreed that their research questions were interesting. They were clearly motivated to work on this issue, and the overwhelming majority (48% and 38%) felt that their findings were relevant to society and their particular context, one of the goals of critical pedagogy and critical applied linguistics. One less positive finding, though, was related to classroom discussion. While many appeared to be pleased with their participation in the discussion, those who remain neutral are more interesting. A remarkable 43% of students felt “neutral” about their contribution to the classroom discourse. Considering critical pedagogy’s focus on dialogue, this is problematic. When conducting a similar exercise in the future, it will be necessary to review the dialogue sessions, allowing more students to have a voice.

## **Final Student Conclusions**

The final section of the survey prompted students to “provide details of an assessment item or learning experience.” This open-ended question generated two major running themes: “increased awareness” and “the importance of Arabic.”

### **Increased Awareness**

Twelve students expressed this sentiment. This mostly concerned lack of awareness when it came to appreciating how dominant English has become, and how it may negatively affect some students’ progress. A few

expressed the assumption that Arabic is too difficult, but would now be more willing to try. The monolingual fallacy was a particular revelation to two students, especially since they had faced its repercussions at school. In contrast, this classroom topic caused one student to feel left behind, as, in their own words, they concluded that they “started learning English late.” Ironically, another student also expressed further need to study English: “I usually say that English isn’t important. However, while taking this class and because of other factors I am now self aware that I need to be fluent in English to achieve what I want.”

While reading these last two student experiences, I am reminded of the psychological notion that raising an issue, even in the negative, makes it more concrete. In this case, the discussion of the hegemony of English caused these students to re-evaluate their position and realize its increasing importance on the economic and political levels. I must admit that was not the intended outcome of the course.

### **Importance of Arabic**

The other common theme is students’ renewed value for Arabic. This, in itself, could be considered an achievement. One student claims we should stop thinking of Arabic as an impediment; it can sometimes “provide better job opportunities.” Another spoke of how it is being “neglected” especially by their generation. This student called it a “tragedy,” stating that “a balance between English and Arabic creates sustainability.”

All of the themes generated from the three data-collection tools allowed me to conclude that a critical discussion of this topic made the issue of language more concrete. My students, for the most part, had not questioned the role of language in their lives, and this class allowed them to explicitly identify their assumptions, raising questions about the causes behind these “givens,” and allowing some of them to try and find alternatives that could allow for more multilingualism.

## Limitations

This research does not come without limitations though. The major challenge was my restricted ability to drastically alter the course. Crookes' (2013) vision of critical pedagogy and its application in the classroom recommended even more collaborative work in the absence of a rigid syllabus. These were issues I could not negotiate within this multi-section course, with students who, inevitably, worry about their final grades and whether their course-load appears more overwhelming than that of their peers in other sections. However, the topic itself, which many found of particular interest, allowed me to make the course more critical. In retrospect, conducting a survey before the "intervention" and one afterwards would have been even more valuable as I would have been able to concretely determine whether student attitudes changed after their "critical" semester.

## Pedagogical and Theoretical Contributions

I started this chapter by referring to the bestselling children's book, *A is for Activist*. Innosanto Nagara, its author and illustrator, felt the need for a "pro-activist, pro-social justice, pro-gay, pro-labor, pro-diversity, progressive ABC book." He felt that the young generation needs to begin thinking of these issues even at the tender age of 1 or 2 years old. This activist ideal is one I happen to echo. Our students deserve the space to discuss their own assumptions and prejudices. As an English language teacher, my responsibility lies beyond the mere teaching of ABCs, albeit at a higher level of the language teaching "food chain," and this is where more practice on such critical teaching strategies within my English classroom will provide me with the tools needed. My students discussed their heightened awareness, their new realizations, and their skepticism of common practices they had been exposed to, all of which are objectives central to critical pedagogy. The intervention itself will need to be revisited and improved upon, a critical practice in itself, in order to maintain the continuous need for a complex intertwining web of action and reflection.



## Appendix

**Table 5.1** Student attitudes

Statement	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
<i>Attitudes towards English</i>					
Children have a limited capacity for language and need to prioritize English over other languages.	5	19	14	38	24
Learning English is necessary to remain competitive at work.	24	66	5	5	0
English proficiency affords learners a social advantage over others in Lebanon.	24	63	9	5	0
Using English as a language of instruction negatively affects student progress.	0	5	48	43	5
<i>Attitude toward learning English</i>					
English is an easier language to study.	38	43	9	9	0
Teachers should only speak in English in order for students to master the language.	9	48	9	29	5
Group work in class should only be done in English, without resorting to other languages.	9	14	24	38	14
In order to learn English, one must speak this language at home.	19	14	24	43	0
Some courses, especially natural sciences and math, need to be taught in English.	33	33	19	5	9

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

Statement	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
<i>Attitudes toward the ENG 202 classroom experience</i>					
I hadn't thought much about this theme before attending these class sessions.	43	19	19	19	0
I always felt that I had something to contribute to the discussion.	14	43	43	0	0
I was able to choose the research question that interested me.	52	33	9	5	0
My research findings were relevant to our society.	48	38	14	0	0
Classroom material should help students avoid their current social problems.	29	52	25	0	0

## Further Reading

Boyd, S. (2017). *Social justice literacies in the English classroom: Teaching practice in action* (1st ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Through closely following the strategies used by three English classroom teachers, this book offers tactics that allow the language classroom to remain successful in preparing students for their academic tasks while embracing social justice, identifying particular cultural contexts, and creating future change-makers. Though based on only a few vignettes, it illustrates how the English classroom curriculum can become more relevant to students and the world beyond academia.

Godley, A. J., & Reaser, J. (2018). *Critical language pedagogy: Interrogating language, dialects, and power in teacher education*. New York: Peter Lang.

This book offers a valuable look at teacher education with an explicit focus on particular contexts and the need to challenge common assumptions. Some of the chapters specifically identify the latest research on language and dialect, while discussing the need to broaden teacher knowledge. It also provides

sample “mini-topics” and a more comprehensive curriculum, making it a valuable resource for those seeking critical tools to enhance pre-service teacher education.

Lewis, M., Leland, C., & Harste, J. C. (2015). *Creating critical classrooms: Reading and writing with an edge* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

The need to critique underlying assumptions and “givens” is central to an understanding of critical applied linguistics, and this text’s focus on critical literacy establishes such heightened awareness. Through relying on life experiences, popular culture, young adult literature and sociopolitical trends, this book transfers the student’s particular context into the language classroom and aims to “disrupt the commonplace.”

Macedo, D. (Ed.). (2019). *Decolonizing foreign language education: The misteaching of English and other colonial languages*. New York: Routledge.

A discussion of linguistic imperialism inevitably creates the need to evaluate the impact of colonialism on the language classroom. While this anthology has a few chapters that are mostly theoretical, it also provides insight on educators and researchers who have attempted to include criticality in the language classroom. It further places importance on the historical influence of Latin along with more recent linguistic hegemony.

Valenzuela, A. (Ed.). (2016). *Growing critically conscious teachers: A social justice curriculum for educators of Latinola youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.

The purpose of this book is crucial to the discussion of critical pedagogy. The need to empower teachers is vital, and this resource offers models for critical thinking and action research. It also advocates the need for more social, cultural, and political awareness in teacher training. The concept of reflection and action, through theory and change-making practice, is central to the discussion on praxis brought forth in this study.

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# 6

## Global Citizenship in the English Language Classroom: Student Readiness for Critical Reform

Alina Rebecca Chirciu

### Nature of the Problem

#### Critical Thinking and Global Citizenship in Language Education

As the drive for standardization and uniformity along with a desire for competitiveness and productivity has spread to the domain of higher education, there has been an increased focus on implementing critical thinking skills in various areas of teaching and learning. However, according to Romanowski & Nasser, (2011), critical thinking should move beyond knowledge application and the Bloomian equation with higher-order thinking skills towards an ability to challenge one's own thinking and considering various perspectives. Citing Paul (1983, 1994 in Romanowski & Nasser, 2011) they contend that there are two forms of critical thinking: a weak form which involves reasoning skills based on

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logic such as distinguishing fact from fiction, inferring, identifying argument and applying knowledge, and a strong form which involves the ability to question cultural and societal givens while developing “an awareness of their own understandings of the world and the ideologies and knowledge that govern one’s own life experiences” (Romanowski & Nasser, 2011, p. 121).

It is worth mentioning that most of the research in Oman’s ELT context has approached critical thinking in its weaker form. The work of Busaidi and Sultana (2015) illustrates this approach as it lists the ability to problem-solve as one of the major attributes of a critical thinking oriented educational framework while contending that it does not only come under the purview of scientific education, but it has a place in the domain of the study of literature. Similarly, Al Issa (2007) contends that the Omani education system has been insofar characterized by “an adherence to one fixed and mandated syllabus... which prevents students from thinking analytically and critically” (p. 201). Engagement in weaker forms of critical thinking in the Gulf region can be attributed, according to Romanowski and Nasser (2011) to a lack of challenge in the existing metanarrative that eliminates any space for doubt and questioning of political establishment or religious beliefs. The same view is shared by Samaranghe (2014) who argues that cultural norms in Oman, such as the prevalence of a hierarchical societal and family system is detrimental to stronger versions of critical thinking; that attempts to promote critical thinking skills in the English language classroom have so far been minimal.

Yet historical events such as the Arab Spring of 2011 would contradict the above-mentioned views and recent research, a relevant example is the paper by Machouche and Bensaid (2015), connecting the works of Muslim philosopher’s Ibn Khaldoun to critical thinking, follow suit. Thus, an essentialist view of whether or not stronger versions of critical thinking can find spaces of expression in the local context cannot reflect the complexity of this concept and its application in real-life situations, nor can it be stated that critical thinking is essentially a product of Western thought dating back to Aristotle’s syllogism, or logical reasoning and Socrates’ *phronesis*, that is, what should be done in real life situations.

Benesch’s (2011) distinction between monologic critical thinking and dialogic critical thinking seeks to address the a-priori assumption that

critical thinking can be applied only in Western contexts. She argues, citing Gieve (1998, p. 124 in Benesch, 2011) that monologic critical thinking is based on “the informal logical movement” whereas the dialogic thinking “includes a thorough study and consideration of various view points” (Benesch, 2011, p. 576). A more moderate perspective is thus necessary to appreciate the readiness for critical thinking and implicit global citizenship education among English language students in Oman. I wish to stress that I interpret global citizenship in the vein of Schattle’s framework (2008 cited in Grimwood, 2018) which emphasizes the values of awareness, responsibility and action at a personal as well as societal level. Thus, this study interprets critical thinking in its stronger version which equates directly to Benesch’s perspective of dialogic critical thinking, arguing that developing an awareness of multiple perspectives is fundamental to developing empathy and awareness which can be translated further into responsibility and agency or action. My stance stems from a view of education in general and English language education in particular as a transformative act through a constant questioning and engagement in emotional labor (Kincheloe, 2008; Ahmed, 2004; Benesch, 2013).

## Critical Agenda/Theoretical Framework

The study draws upon critical theories and classroom practice and intended to explore the link between the two within the dynamic space of the classroom. At a theoretical level, it is based on the principles of critical pedagogy as laid down by Freire (1998) and (Giroux, 1997). It thus, presents a progressive view of pedagogy (Freire, 1998) where “the analysis and level of experience shift from a preoccupation with transmitting positive knowledge, to developing forms of pedagogy that recognize and appropriate cultural traditions and experiences that different students bring to the school setting” (Giroux, 1997, p. 139). It implies forms of teaching to create possibilities for the production and construction of knowledge (Freire, 1998). Students and teachers cannot be seen as mere objects of instruction through their obedience to prescriptive curriculums and methods as “critical pedagogy’s chief concern is the humanization of students and teachers” (Mochinski, 2008, p. 139).



At the level of classroom practice, the study is based on the principles of post method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) and becoming-appropriate pedagogy (Holliday, 1997, 2007) and the principles of exploratory-understanding level teaching (Allwright, 2005).

The critical pedagogy principles presented above, constituted the foundation of the action research intervention I conducted with my students whereby the materials and strategies used, served to stimulate a whole range of emotional response.

## **Emotional Labor, Empathy and Global Citizenship**

The concept of emotional labor stems from the work of Arlie Hochschild and can be defined as the constant negotiation of one's emotions between what she calls "feeling rules", i.e., the way the individual is expected to respond emotionally in certain social situations and the actual individual feelings towards a social situation (Hochschild, 2003). In her vast body of work, Hochschild details the "invisible processes of 'emotion work'" and the effects of this inner management of feelings, which, taken together, constitute "emotional labor" (2003).

While research has been conducted regarding the emotional labor faced by teachers on a daily basis there has been little research into the emotional labor faced by students during classroom events or in response to learning materials and activities. In Hochschild's work, emotional labor has been associated with emotional burnout and the constant struggle between social expectations and professional identities and private emotional lives. Teachers are deemed to be in a constant emotional labor as most teaching events vacillate between elation and frustration.

In this study, however, I adopted a more positive, student-centered perspective on Hochschild's concept of emotional labor as I wish to argue that emotional labor in both students and teachers leads to reflective acts hence could possibly result in feelings of empathy and compassion.

I also wish to argue that materials and teaching strategies need to be conducive to emotional labor, and neutral, politically-correct, standardized topic and materials have an opposite effect leading to disengagement and negative perceptions of language learning. Furthermore, politically

correct topics fail to prepare students for their increasingly globalized lived reality. This being said, adopting a global focus in education, in general, and English language education in particular has proved challenging as teachers have been taught to teach defensively in order to avoid controversy, student resistance and administrative objections (Andrzejewski, 1996).

A great prevalence of expatriate English language teachers in Oman has led to a culture of defensive, politically correct teaching, thus seeking to avoid emotional labor and its effects. In this study, I intend to show that feelings like sadness or anger are not a source of controversy or conflict but an integral part of a constructive, transformative emotional labor leading to an overall emotional engagement from which empathy, compassion could germinate, and multiple perspectives develop. This study also seeks to take the first step in raising awareness of the importance of multiple perspectives awareness in English language education, as being an important tool in developing global citizenship. Furthermore, it advocates a pedagogy that includes the students' lived realities and identities as they would ultimately be communicating and negotiating in a global context through the medium of English language. Thus, the following research questions reflect the focus of this approach.

## Research Questions

1. What were the participants' perspectives on the materials used and activities implemented in the course?
2. What was the participants' reported effect on their prior-held perspectives of the materials and activities implemented in the course?

## Methods

### Participants

The students who took part in this study were 17 females, with ages ranging from 17 to 22, all enrolled in a first-year vocabulary and reading module mandatory for their major, English language. This module was

meant to support them with their reading and vocabulary-building skills, hence was awarded no credit but passing was mandatory for moving to undergraduate from Foundation level. The students enrolled in this course all presumably possessed a higher level of English as their admission to the pathway depended on their having obtained high grades in the Foundation program. They came from various backgrounds, some with more exposure to English than others as they were based in the capital, Muscat, where opportunities for using English are more frequent. These students also had experienced more exposure to the cosmopolitanism of the capital as they lived at home, not in the college's accommodation, were mobile, some of them already having a driver's license and a car, hence having more freedom to go to shops and malls, were more sociable and carried themselves with more confidence.

A few other students had come from a more conservative background in various remote areas of Oman and lived in the college's accommodation and hence were more restricted in terms of mobility and opportunities to practice English in a real-life context.

The student population being entirely composed of female students can be attributed again to their pathway choice; not many male students would opt for an English language degree as they perceive it limiting in terms of employment opportunity and liable to lead to what they deem as female-dominated professions in the Omani context, such as teacher or translator.

The sample was convenient in nature as I had easy access to the participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) having been assigned to teach the course for the academic semester. As mentioned above, my experience as an ELT practitioner and a doctoral student has brought me to the realization that, all too often, theories of various aspects of teaching and learning, including critical pedagogy, occupy the front seats of the academic debate, ignoring the need for real practical accounts of critical teaching and learning hence "being more concerned with the philosophy and the philosophical discussions of teaching rather than the actual practice of teaching itself" (Akbari, 2008, p. 645). Thus, the current study methodology was based on an action research design.

From the various action research models (Burns, 2010; Norton, 2009; Somekh, 2006) I chose McNiff's model (2001) as it best fit my research

purpose and design. McNiff's model emphasizes the cyclical aspect of action research while including the social and socially mediated aspect of critical pedagogy. It allows a reiteration of the creative cycles subject to the workings of classroom forces hence allowing "generative transformational processes" to take place (McNiff, 2001, p. 36; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000). Action research also allowed me to employ multiple research methods that I briefly discuss below.

## Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions are important tools in the process of creating a negotiated curriculum and establishing a collaborative relationship with the participants (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2002). I decided that during my first class of the semester I would present students with the curriculum plan for the semester and ask them how they felt about it as well as explaining about my research and the critical intervention I had planned and see how they felt about that. Apart from being an introductory lesson, this discussion would also yield initial data for the study and ensure the presence of the participatory element which is essential for a critical pedagogy intervention. I also decided on using focus groups as a research method as this would be perceived by students as being less intrusive than other methods, as classroom discussions are a form of interaction that is commonly accepted as a classroom activity whereas the group provides "a socially legitimated occasion for participants to engage in 'retrospective introspection' to attempt to collectively tease out previously taken-for-granted assumptions" (Bloor et al., 2002, p. 4). Furthermore, focus groups provided data which could not be obtained through individual interviews "as the hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (Morgan, 1997 in Hatch, 2002, p. 30). A total of three focus groups were conducted with the 17 participants. During the first focus group, at the pre-intervention stage, all the participants were present although few of them contributed to the group discussion. The second focus group discussion, during the intervention stage, had the same number of participants as the

first, with most them contributing to the discussion. The third and final focus group discussion had only seven participants as the post-intervention stage was carried out at the end of the academic semester hence attendance was low due to final exam pressure on students.

Furthermore, focus groups and interviews complement each other as research methods, the former providing insights into the reaction and interaction of groups to specific tasks and the latter providing individual insights into the students' reflections on specific tasks.

## Observations

According to Burns "Observing and describing have a key role to play in Action Research" (2010, p. 57). Indeed, observation is a natural process which takes place during the teaching act. As teachers we constantly observe our actions and reflect on their impact. In this respect, teaching and observing form an almost organic relationship that can hardly be separated from one another. However, in the context of this study observations were used as a research method, which requires that the teacher/researcher look at her classroom from a stranger's point of view (Altrichter et al., 2005; Burns, 2010). Thus action research observation is:

focused: you are seeking specific information about something rather than looking in a general way; objective: you are aiming to see things as they really are and not just through a personal, subjective or intuitive lens; reflective: you are observing in order to see things from a position of inquiry and analysis; documented: you deliberately make notes or records of the information; evaluated and re-evaluated: you check out your own interpretations later by yourself or collaboratively with others. (Burns, 2010, p. 57.)

Teacher/ researcher duality made it challenging for me to engage in objective observations, hence I decided to use an audio-recording device as an observation-recording tool as it would allow me to take a step back from my role as a teacher, which was primordial during the intervention, and slip into the researcher's shoes so to speak while listening to the recording and reflecting on the data gathered. Thus, a total of 17 recorded

observations conducted during the intervention stage were carried out. Each observation lasted between 1 and 2 hours depending on the topic and the tasks at hand. This type of unstructured observation was another way of ensuring that I remained true to my role as a researcher while inhabiting my teacher's role.

My observations were unstructured as their purpose was “hypothesis-generating rather than hypothesis-testing” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 397).

## Findings and Discussion

### Paving the Way for Criticality: Students' Voices and Their Silences

In the context of a critical project, student voice takes a dominant role (Giroux, 1997; Taylor & Robinson, 2009; Vibert, Portelli, Shields, & LaRocque, 2002). The reasons for this lie at the heart of critical pedagogy epistemology which, in turn, relies on the countering of what Freire (1998) calls the concept of “banking education” with a pedagogy of possibility and hope which promotes emancipation and democratic participation (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Thus, through the process and practice of conscientization, students turn from objects, recipients of education, to subjects displaying agency and engaging in negotiated forms of learning in the classroom (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Student voices are heard during an education process that encourages reflection, dialogue and action on issues that concern students' lived realities (Fielding & McGregor, 2005 in Cook-Sather, 2006, 2007; Dewaele, 2013). Straightforward as the above statement may seem, student voice and its place in the ESL classroom is a complex construct as students' identities differ, hence their classroom experiences would be very different as well.

Thus, while, one of the students, Zahra, admitted to having felt a sense of empowerment provided by the classroom environment and the fact that the teacher was perceived as an equal, allowing students' opinions to come freely:

One of them is the environment that we discussed, like a friendly discussion we didn't feel this is the teacher, it's just like one of us. You ask the questions you didn't enforce us because you want our opinions to come freely. The other one, is the topics that you choose. It's related to us as women, as girls, to our identity. It's related to our society. This is what I really find it is very useful in this class. I learn vocabularies a lot of them but indirect way. I didn't learn it in that direct boring way which I faced in all modules.

Other students used silence to express resistance and to get their point across. The following excerpt from the teacher's diary supports this observation. Here are a few examples of classroom activities where I experienced this. When asking them to google other articles related to the one about the Saudi Arabia school fire incident and asked them how they were related there was a long silence which invited a lot more elicitation from my side after which Adnana answered:

Long silence....

Adnana: The websites are totally different from the title. Some of them are news.

Another instance was while discussing the homework for the same topic. I had asked students to tell me what they would do if they were the relatives of one of the girls that perished in the school fire in Saudi Arabia. I presented them with some options: (a) write a letter to the international press. I asked to see the letter; (b) write a petition to the government of Saudi Arabia and present it to their classmates; (c) organize an awareness campaign and provide me with the elements of this.

Only Zahra out of all 17 students presented me with the letter to the international press. She explained why she had chosen this option:

By sending letters or papers. Because if I joined the human rights in my country, I mean in Saudi Arabia I don't think I will do much. Talking to the international press, that I think will make the people know about our case and maybe they can press the government to do something.

When I asked other students to come forward there was a long silence again:

I: Next. Who else?

Long silence...

I: No one else? No one else wrote anything?

After trying to probe into the source of this withdrawal Adnana mentioned the topic as being a little bit boring as it was not related to Oman (Teacher's observations, February 6, 2015).

Contradictory and often conflicting student voices were part of the interweaving dialogue in the critical classroom, an integral part of the day-to-day classroom negotiations, successes and challenges. Most importantly, they created opportunities for the continuation and development of critical pedagogy in the classroom. Thus, students' debates on various topics represented opportunities of student voice inclusion in the classroom decision-making process, opportunities for negotiation and for expressing various emotions: anger, distress, indifference, excitement. The students' emotional labor during these often-heated debates and negotiations led to critical reflection and a reassertion of their voice and their contribution to the critical intervention (Yanuzzi & Martin, 2014). As a result, I and my students had the opportunity to engage with the unfamiliar and translate ourselves in various versions of teacher/researcher/ participant and as well as co-interpreters and co-explorers of classroom complexities. Students' voices thus reflected the emotional intricacies of the critical classroom while presenting possibilities for critical awareness development and growth.

Since the student sample was entirely composed of women it is no wonder that women's-issues-oriented themes took a central position and represented sticky objects. The purpose of examining the emotional value of these themes or objects was to see whether they generated interested, hence varied, responses and whether they could facilitate critical awareness along with language learning. A shift in perspective as a result of the emotional investment in the topic happened during a class debate. As we had been discussing the issue of religious wear and its relation to rights, as a spin-off from the diagnostic test, I thought it would be a good idea



to close the topic with a debate. I borrowed the idea for this debate from Hillary Janks's book *Doing Critical Literacy* (Janks, 2010). The proposition for debate was "Wearing any markers of religious faith should not be allowed in schools". When dividing the class in two debating teams, the majority wanted to be against the proposition, however, I decided that the more democratic way was to let students pick random numbers which would assign them to one of the teams. The team for the proposition, although reluctant at the beginning, came up with some interesting arguments. Here are some excerpts from their testimonies:

Zahra: I understand when they say that markers of religious faith are part of identity. But this is not all your identity and your identity changes when you are in school or when at home, in your society so this is my point. I don't understand why you need this identity in school when you are focusing in study and learning things. It is something important than your religion in school.

Safyia, another participant, who was against the proposition countered her by saying:

But you know that in our religion, Islam we have some points which are related to our culture, you know that.

Mariya, another participant, who was for the proposition replied:

We are not talking about Islam; we talk about all religions... Because students and teachers should be equals. No need to show our religions.

Adnana who had been the unhappiest with being allocated to the team for the proposition, gave an interesting argument in favor of the motion:

There is a point here. If the teachers are from a certain religion maybe they will treat the other students in a different way from the students of his religion. But when all students don't wear the religious markers that will make all students and teachers judge them and treat them equals.

During the discussion that took place after the debate, she added that:

Actually, this topic makes me understand better why in countries like France and Turkey why they not allowing any markers of religion.

Similarly, Busaidi and Sultana (2015) in their study on critical thinking through translated literature in the Omani EFL class, evidence the range of emotions experienced by participants when dealing with the English translation of an Arabic short story. Thus, in his reflections on the text one of the student participants avows the level of emotional attachment he/she experienced when one of the characters, an old man, called a younger man “my son,” by stating that “this is truly an Omani practice” (Busaidi & Sultana, 2015, p. 19). He/she further adds that when reading the word “Sheikh” in an English text he/she could not understand it for a moment but then he/she “realized what it was and felt a kind of happiness and closeness with the text and the story” (Busaidi & Sultana, 2015, p. 19). On the other hand, in the same study, one participant points out his/her shock at one of the practices presented in the text, namely the practice of worshipping a dead holy man by saying “This is idol worship” (Busaidi & Sultana, 2015, p. 19). However, he further states that reading about this practice exhorted him to research more about it to discover that such practices are common in some areas in the Islamic world, such Asia or Morocco.

The findings in the above study thus demonstrate the emotional labor involved in critical reflection and understanding of various perspectives.

## **Student Emotional Engagement: The Key to Student Readiness for Criticality**

This critical study was carried out as part of an ESL vocabulary and reading module which had a module outline and learning outcomes centered on the achievement of language skills. Thus, the functional aspects of language were the main reason for the respective module’s presence in the curriculum. As mentioned earlier, the module was something of a blank slate, with both teachers and students who had been involved in it acknowledging the need for a reconceptualization and refocus.

These themes did not only serve to generate response but were a cause of great emotional labor, which led to complex emotional dynamics that served as a catalyst for the critical intervention.

Kincheloe (2008) emphasizes the emotional aspect of such themes or sticky objects (Ahmed, 2004) as “they engage the fears, anxieties, hopes and dreams of both students and their teachers” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 11).

The students interviewed mentioned the role of emotionally charged, controversial topics as they would appeal to the participants’ humanity and hence capture their interest in the taught material. In the focus group Badria, one of the participants, mentioned the changes this module generated in her mindset:

Also, it helps us know what other people think about hijab, not just us. We know what we know how things are, but we don’t know how other people see us and that make us know how people look at us.”

Zahra also added:

This module, it forced me from the beginning to think how the others think and why we should actually really understand the others.

She also mentioned that:

Actually, one of the subjects made me understand how others think about me.

Other students mentioned an awareness of various world issues and real-life situations and envisaged opportunities for solutions as a result of the critical intervention. A comment by Safyia from the mid-term survey illustrates this point:

Because all issues are from our society and it is related to the real life, so it is good to explain these issues and find some solutions for it.

Maryia also commented:

I get out from this module feeling different, thinking about things I didn't used to think about, look at life from different angles. It simply makes me grow up!! And open my eyes. It's the first time I get from a class thinking about each word and can't wait to know what we are going to talk about in the next class.

They saw these topics as a vehicle for language functions, hence an indirect method of improving their language skills.

During the intervention, the student participants reiterated this opinion, as they emphasized the impact this intervention had on their language skills. What is interesting about this is that they viewed their emotional attachment to the topic as being directly linked to the improvement of language skills. During the intervention mid-semester survey, one of the students emphasized the link between the heart, the emotional side of learning, and the mind, the cognitive side of learning, in her experience with this course: Zahra, one of the participants interviewed talked about her experience of having learnt vocabulary in an indirect way and as a result, feeling a relatedness to the topics discussed as they dealt with her identity as a woman and her society:

My general opinion about the module is taking vocabulary indirect way. By talking and reading about issues that we face at this time or affect us as a women or human being.

She also mentioned that this way of teaching and learning represented an antithesis to a feeling of boredom generated by the mechanical teaching of language items experienced in other classes.

Similarly, Safyia, added:

Because learning in this module improve our language skills and other skills come with it. Also, this module talks about real social issues that we face every day, which help us to explain our opinion honestly.

This goes against the mainstream belief that knowledge is divorced from feeling or affect (Kincheloe, 2008). It also goes against prior beliefs that in order to become a successful language learner a certain level of

intelligence or aptitude is necessary (Gardner, 2001 in Ross, 2015). Language learners are seen as social actors, who are not only moved by static and more quantifiable constructs such as motivation but rather by an emotional investment in their learning (Norton Pierce, 1995 in Charalambous, 2013).

Studies by Pavlenko and Dewaele (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002 in Charalambous, 2013) show that bilingual individuals perceive one language as being the language of proximity and the other the language of distance. The language of proximity is the one related to lived experiences, to memory, to affect, while the language of distance is related to functionality, to professionalism, to a clearly defined purpose hence it is reserved for specific areas of one's life. While these studies capture the psychological dimensions of second language acquisition processes, they fail to capture the sociocultural dimension of emotional attachment to learning another language. English has a functional role for many students, being the language of their academic studies or rather, a language of imposition (Auerbach, 1993) hence their emotional attachment to the language comes from their experiences with it, and its contribution to their identity building. This is the reason why relatedness to the material and the bridging of the classroom–lived reality gap through the provision of affect-laden experiences was perceived by the students as being an effective way of learning a language. Their testimonies show that they felt they had experienced a holistic improvement of their language skills while at the same time gaining more knowledge about different world issues and how to tackle them. Some of them also mentioned that this module was an eye-opener and an antidote to indifference through the empathy, compassion and solidarity that it stirred in their hearts and minds.

Students admitted to having appreciated the things they had learnt during the course. Their comments were mainly focused on two benefits: a development in language skills and a development of new ideas and perspectives. Although I discuss these two aspects in separate sections they are closely interwoven as shown in the students' testimonies.

## Language Skills Development

In the one of the focus groups, Zahra, reiterated this opinion:

One of them is the environment that we discussed, like a friendly discussion we didn't feel this is the teacher, it's just like one of us. You ask the questions, you didn't enforce us because you want our opinions to come freely. The other one, is the topics that you choose. It's related to us as women, as girls, to our identity. It's related to our society

Her testimony covers not only the importance of skill development but how these can be acquired within what Kincheloe (Kincheloe, 2008) calls "participatory, affective, situated, multi-cultural and problem-posing pedagogy" (p. 231). The dialogic aspect of this form of learning is also emphasized in her excerpt. Similar to Benesch's (2011) dialogic critical thinking experiment where she examines the root of homophobic fear through classroom discussion, my students felt that the topics were related to their lives hence could discuss the issues faced by women in the region and all over the world and could dialogically examine the causes and possible solutions for these issues. Through exposure to multiple perspectives, either those of their classmates or those of other global actors such as reporters, spokespeople and so on, they were exposed to an equally complex linguistic and social discourse.

Few students reached, however, the higher threshold of conscientization which goes beyond an awareness of various points of view and translates it to a change in one's perspective, an ability to put oneself in the position of the Other (Freire, 1998; Hinchey, 2004). This shift in perspective marks a readiness for responsibility and desire for agency, in other words, the desire to act to address injustice and work for the common good.

## Change in One's Perspective

Several students admitted having experienced a change of the confirmed views they had held prior to the intervention. The same is valid for myself

as I was often intrigued and educated by the students' perspectives. As Freire put it "whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning" (Freire, 1998, p. 11). Thus, in this particular section, I will be presenting my observations on action in addition to students' testimonies.

In the focus group Badria mentioned the changes this module generated in her mindset:

Also, it helps us know what other people think about hijab not just us. We know what we know how things are, but we don't know how other people see us and that make us know how people look at us.

Zahra added:

This module, it forced me from the beginning to think how the other think and why we should actually really understand the others.

She also mentions that:

Actually, one of the subjects made me understand how others think about me.

I found more indirect evidence in change in students' perspective during class activities.

A shift in perspective also happened during a class debate. As we had been discussing the issue of religious wear and its relation to rights as a spin-off from the diagnostic test, I thought it would be a good idea to close the topic with a debate. I borrowed the idea for this debate from Hillary Janks's book *Doing Critical Literacy* (Janks, 2010). The topic of the debate was "Wearing any markers of religious faith should not be allowed in schools." When dividing the class in two debating teams, the majority wanted to be against the proposition, however, I decided that the more democratic way was to let students pick random numbers which would assign them to one of the teams. The team for the proposition, although reluctant at the beginning, came up with some interesting arguments. Here are some excerpts from their testimony:

Zahra: I understand when they say that markers of religious faith are part of identity. But this is not all your identity and your identity changed when you are in school or when at home, in your society so this is my point. I don't understand why you need this identity in school when you are focusing in study and learning things. It is something important than your religion in school.

Safyia, another participant, who was against the proposition countered her by saying:

But you know that in our religion, Islam we have some points which are related to our culture, you know that.

Although Safyia said in the end that the arguments of the opposing team would not make her change her mind, I felt that, generally, all students had benefitted from seeing things from the Other's perspective, the Other that they normally vilify and consider an agent of persecution against their religious freedoms.

The same dialogic examining happened during another lesson where we were talking about gender bias. To spark some discussion, I let the students watch a video of a washing powder advert intended for the US market where the male parent, the dad, was the star, speaking about the benefits of this washing powder in cleaning his little girl's clothes. After showing the video, I asked the students what they thought about the man in the advert. Most of the students replied that he was okay. I continued with the questioning and asked them if they thought he was feminine because he was doing what was traditionally considered a woman's job. The majority answered no, he wasn't, and Fatma, one of the participants, added:

He is a responsible person, helpful, kind... Because he is taking all the responsibility for his daughters because he is doing both women and men jobs.

However, Rawyia had a counter-argument:



I think miss women do this job much better. Because if you just looked at the house. It is all dirty and the girl's things are all over the place.

To which Fatma replied:

He is cleaning. Maybe he cleans better than me.

When I asked them if such an advert would be aired in Oman and if people bought the product if they saw it, the students replied:

Fatma: Yes.

Adnana: No, people would not find it strange.

Badriya: It might be strange to some people because we only see women in these ads.

Fatma: Yeah, like a new thing.

Adnana: Yes, it's a new thing.

The above excerpt suggests that students accept the possibility of this kind of ads airing in the local media, although Badriya did mention people might find it strange initially and Fatma and Adnana said it was a new thing. However, their tone is one that is open to change and to the possibility of such instances occurring in their clearly defined gender-role society. These discussions generated a higher awareness of other, even contradictory, perspectives, thus encouraging students to embrace a more critical stance.

Consequently, Fatma and Adnana were able to relate this to their own life experience:

Adnana: My sister's husband is cleaning and washing and doing everything in the home except cooking because he don't know.

Fatma: My father, when my grandma she travelled, he took the responsibility of the house. And he does the washing and the cleaning and the cooking because he is the eldest.

A similar exchange of ideas took place during a subsequent lesson on gender bias. Here I showed the students several pictures with children in atypical play roles i.e., little girls playing with tools and little boys playing

with dolls. I asked them what they would do if their son asked for a doll to play with. Most students said that their reply would be:

It's not for you.

However, Adnana said:

Maybe he wants to be like a doctor, to do something.

I asked them what if their son asked for a cooking set:

Adnana: It's OK miss.

Badryia: No it's not normal.

Adnana: Yes, it's normal maybe he likes to cook.

Badriya: I would think he is confused.

Badryia further related her opinion to her lived experience and told us the story of her little cousin who likes to play with dolls and wear little girls' clothes as he is the only male in a family of eight sisters. She expressed worry at his confusion over gender roles and mentioned that it might be detrimental to his development, particularly in a male-dominated society such as Oman. I found her story touching not only because of her emotional investment in this issue, but also because of her ability to read through society's bias when it came to men who were more sensitive or performed tasks that were generally considered a woman's job. I believe her awareness is a first step in challenging this bias and educating Omani men and women to perceive their societal roles as more equal in both family and career aspects.

While Badryia's view aligns more with the prescribed view of specific gender identity and roles in society, Adnana's view leaves room for alternatives.

Although, displaying resistance through silence, non-participation along with adherence to a confirmed view, during most of the course delivery, Adnana experiences a shift in perspective and shows that dialogic critical thinking is a first step in dealing with human complexity.

My students may not have taken these insights further into day to day actions, as this was a short-term intervention and not a longitudinal study, I cannot report on their post-intervention views. However, their conscientization of multiple perspectives generated an engagement with the global citizenship value of awareness (Grimwood, 2018) but also, at an individual level, an engagement in deliberation, discussion and extension beyond the confines of the narrow self, all essential attributes of critical thinking (Lim, 2015).

The students' responses were filled with emotion and a sense of "empathic provocation" (Mills, 2002, p. 123). Through empathic provocation students are challenged to examine and justify their personal values, paving the way to an increased awareness of their positioning and perspectives vis-à-vis various world issues. Empathic provocation can produce feelings of shock, awe, anger, frustration, pity and shame. Although these feelings are traditionally viewed as negative attitudes that impede the teaching and learning process (Mills, 2002), they result in an emotional involvement with the issues presented and hence generate an increased sense of awareness and a desire to take possible actions toward change. Mill's study (2002) starts from the contention that for students to think critically they must be provoked to think. His role-play exercise during an ethical parenting course which allowed parents who were in favor of corporal punishment to put themselves in the punished children's shoes and say how they felt, resulted in parents' experiencing a powerful sense of empathy hence realizing the "dubious nature of corporal punishment" (p. 127).

This tension between empathic provocation and the path to an increased sense of awareness, compassion and empathy for Others, marked by a desire to explore the unknown, has been a prevalent element in the critical project I and my students embarked on and is supported by their views and my observations presented in this paper. According to Sedgwick (2003), teaching and learning has a "reparative" role (Sedgwick, 2003 in Chinn, 2011, p. 19) where both painful and pleasurable emotions are interwoven into a nourishing experience for both teacher and students. Chinn further argues that even the discomfort produced by feelings "can be a pedagogical tool, unmooring us from our uneasy anchors" (Chinn, 2011, p. 17).

Thus, I believe the key finding of this critical study was the possibility that critical literacy raises awareness of various perspectives, which in turn leads to the possibility of developing compassion that can translate into civic responsibility and social action.

Most students who took part in the study admitted having experienced either an awareness of various perspectives on different societal issues or a complete shift in perspective. However, this intervention moved beyond identifying positioning stances and multiple perspectives and provided both students and myself as teacher/ researcher with an opportunity to take “risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience and to envisage versions of the world which is ‘not yet’—in order to be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived” (Simon, 1987, p. 375). I believe this struggle is paramount to developing global citizenship skills as it not only creates an appropriate environment for students to become aware of global issues but also of their role in bringing about change, hence it facilitates a pathway for awareness turning into action.

Furthermore, the designing and re-designing forces that formed during the classroom interactions provided the climate for change and for future explorations of possibility. They also allowed emotions to surface and provide further opportunities for growth and awareness. This study offers opportunities for further research into critical pedagogies of possibility, into the emotional value attached to knowledge and the politics of student resistance, voice, silence and participation. There is also further opportunity to research the multivalence of the teacher/ researcher/ participant role and the transformatory impact of critical pedagogies on these roles.

## Theoretical and Pedagogical Contributions

I believe this study’s theoretical contribution has been to show that critical pedagogy is anchored in the art of possible, and is the inherent product of classroom interaction. The intervention evolved organically, shaped by students’ participation and contributions. This, I believe, shows the

transformative role critical pedagogy played not only in the participants' consciousness but also at the operational, day-to-day classroom-event level. The challenges faced during this winding road journey, often dotted with participant resistance and silence, had a transformatory role and ushered in new possibilities for classroom materials and practice. In Kincheloe's view, critical pedagogy is a constant reconstruction of educators' work through the empowerment of students, thus the students are not merely the objects of the action but, along with the teacher, subjects in the critical process.

The pedagogical contribution of this study ties in with its theoretical contribution mentioned above. Pedagogical decisions, although primarily shaped by the teachers' will are constantly negotiated and re-worked according to the students' will but also according to the evolution of the critical process. The study shows that critical methodological guidelines are entirely classroom context dependent. Furthermore, critical pedagogy or critical endeavors have not yet been attempted in the Omani higher education system hence, due to its lack of precedence, I believe the study made a distinct contribution in this area and may serve as reference and, I hope, inspiration for future research.

The study has also raised the need for further exploration of the emotional impact of critical topics and the resulting awareness of multiple perspectives. An EFL/ESL education that is in the service of caring, compassion and solidarity that ultimately forms globally responsible citizens needs to be further explored. Emotions and provocations have generally been left out of the purview of academia as they were considered detrimental to the knowledge-building process (Mills, 2002). Second and/or foreign language education needs to be more inclusive with regards to the emotional aspects of learning, of classroom dynamic building and the emotional consequences of being exposed to a provocative discourse (Zembylas, 2012).

The students' emotional attachment or lack of it in the ESL/EFL learning process needs to be further explored while keeping in mind the imposition aspect of English education in Oman where the EMI policy is still associated with "discourses of social progress, economic and technological advancement, global communication and trade" (Troudi & Jendli, 2011, p. 3). Although the students who participated in this study had

opted for an English degree hence had expectations and motivation that were different from the majority of students, who have no other choice but to study English in order to succeed in their academic endeavors, the module where the intervention was carried out possessed an inherent element of imposition as it was a further preparation, post-foundation, no-credit module which served to provide additional skill input necessary for tackling an English major. Thus, the impositional aspect of these type of courses and their curricula deserves further attention in terms of students' attitudes and emotions associated with them. Finally, student readiness for critical pedagogy can only be given a prominent role in the ESL field if teacher awareness and readiness exists along with a more humanistic approach to teaching and learning, where the learning experienced becomes a goal in itself and not only a means towards achievement. Thus, we, as English language teachers, need to be ready to explore language teaching from a transformative, socially, globally aware and engaged perspective (Al Ryiami, & Al Issa, 2018), to be prepared to experience and actively engage in the emotional labor inherent to this perspective and to listen to students' voices, silences through continuous critical dialogue.

## Further Reading

Al Ryiami, T., & Al Issa, S. (2018). Investigating TESOL teachers' awareness of critical pedagogy at higher education institutions in Oman: Implications for critical professional development. *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 21(32018), 35–66.

This paper provides an insight into the teacher perceptions of critical pedagogy (CP) in the Omani higher education context. It also discusses the lack of awareness regarding CP or its practical approaches in the Omani context as well as the challenges of implementing CP in a context governed by rigid syllabi and regulations.

Benesch, S. (2017). *Emotions and English language teaching: Exploring teachers' emotional labor*. London: Routledge.

Taking a critical approach that considers the role of power and resistance to power in teachers' affective lives, Sarah Benesch examines the relationship between English language teaching and emotions in post-secondary class-

rooms. The book discusses teachers' emotional labor as a framework for theorizing emotions critically and as a tool of teacher agency and resistance.

Grimwood, R. (2018). Producing global citizens? How New Zealand universities implement the concept of global citizenship. *New Zealand Sociology*, 33(1), 97–120.

This article explores varying understandings of global citizenship and examines how universities in New Zealand promote a sense of global citizenship for their students. An analysis of graduate profiles at three major universities in New Zealand demonstrates that a very “neoliberal” understanding of global citizenship, essentially marketing skills such as language acquisition and networking, has been adopted at these institutions. The paper discusses the need for the adoption of active global citizenship skills such as reflexivity and participation in order for students to challenge the perpetuation of global inequities.

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# 7

## Critically Contextualizing Student Voice in the TNE Classroom

Antonia Paterson

### The Nature of the Problem

Transnational Education (TNE) can be defined as “credit-bearing learning undertaken by students who are based in a different country from that of the awarding institution” (Mahony, 2014, p. 8). However, it is generally the programs and providers themselves, rather than the student, who cross national borders (British Council, 2013, p. 12). Students pursuing education through TNE institutions in countries such as China may therefore find themselves entering an alien learning environment, in which cultural differences in education traditions and communication styles (Zhuang, 2009) and customary teaching styles and expected classroom behavior (Leon, 2000) can present barriers to success.

A frequently noted area of difference encompassing such factors is established oral participation practices exported from Western academic traditions. With a strong emphasis on the value of speaking, students

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who do not willingly engage in such practices are often labelled with terms such as “silent,” “passive” and “reticent” (Holmes, 2004; Jones, 1999; Zhang & Head, 2010). In contrast, oral participation is often conflated with active participation, learning and even critical thinking ability (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009). Yet this BANA (British, Australasian, North American) classroom ideal of oral participation and control of students through verbal elicitation techniques has been critiqued (Holliday, 1997). For concurrent with the emphasis on speech comes a “deprivileging of silence” (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009, p. 204) in which educators view lack of oral participation in class as a problem to be solved, a sign of disengagement, passivity or deficiency. Overall, “silence is not seen as part of the learning process” (Mariskind, 2013, p. 601), thus negating the value students may ascribe to silence in the classroom.

Indeed, the stress on verbal activity may in fact be at the expense of students’ “inner activity” and may conflict with valuable socioculturally influenced learning processes (Hu, 2002). Despite their non-verbal activity, students can still be actively engaged in class, and may be consciously employing their own silent learning strategies; for example, they may be memorizing vocabulary, monitoring classmates’ speech to identify gaps in their own language, or taking time to build the confidence for their own speech (Karas, 2017). Bernales (2016) thus purposively recognizes L2 classroom participation as encompassing both silent and articulated participation, redefining participation to include both thought processes and speech production as valid forms of engagement in the learning process.

Extensive research has explored the causes of “silent behavior,” offering reasons such as “Confucian heritage” cultures, teacher–student interaction patterns, personal characteristics, language proficiency, teaching methodology and province of origin (Cheng, 2000; Liu, 2000; Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005; Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Xie, 2009; Zhang & Head, 2010; Mack, 2012; Galletly & Bao, 2015). Concurrent with such discussions come warnings of the dangers of cultural stereotyping and the need to avoid over-generalizations. Research has revealed the complexity of the situations leading to student choices for silence in the classroom, rebutting the culturally stereotyped myth of the passive “East Asian student” and calling for a more nuanced understanding of the

factors that influence oral participation (Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Cheng, 2000; Zhou et al., 2005; Mack, 2012).

Indeed, Zhou et al. (2005) redefine silence as a relational reality produced by interaction of teacher and students in a specific context, calling attention to the interplay between actors in a given situation. Within TNE, the impact of context and the learning environment created is an essential factor to consider. Following Bourdieu (1991), students each have a unique “habitus,” formed from previous experience and situations, and their entry to a transnational university represents entry to a new “field.” Their “linguistic sense of place” and sense of social worth (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 82) faces a process of reconstruction upon entering this new field, to be modified continuously throughout their academic journey. Confronted with an imported methodology emphasizing expression through oral participation practices, students may not be accustomed to or willingly adopt such practices. This may create conflict between their existing “habitus” and new “field,” which, Bourdieu (1991, p. 82) argues, may lead to the imposition of silence or hyper-controlled language on some. In this way, students’ voices may be silenced by restrictive classroom practices centered on oral participation. However, an opportunity for more equitable relations can be found in the questioning of existing practices and renegotiation of established norms; conditions can be established for students to utilize voice in modes they are comfortable with, thus reclaiming agency and their own “symbolic power.”

With this comes a need to reconsider perceptions of silence, and definitions of voice, in the classroom. Teachers and students may experience feelings of frustration, failure or marginalization if students choose to remain silent or do not participate as hoped or expected (Ryan & Viète, 2009; Zhang & Head, 2010). However, such feelings may be the result of a mismatch between teacher expectations for a particular mode of participation focused on verbal interaction, and students’ own preferred modes of voice and participation. The perceived “danger” of non-communication (Jones, 1999, p. 244) arising from lack of oral participation often leads to calls for remedial training for the students. To this end, Ryan and Viète (2009) suggest creation of safe environments and adequate time to formulate responses. While asserting the “right to reticence,” Chanock (2010) nonetheless suggests training students in

discourse conventions. Jackson (2002), meanwhile, urges use of incentives such as extra marks, singling out students for questions, and small group work. However, rather than seeking to encourage expression of voice in the form of oral participation, an alternative approach can be found in exploring diverse expressions more readily accessible to students who may not wish to participate verbally.

Indeed, a critical approach can be found in the literature, seeking ways to make participation more equitable. Recognizing participation as a “normalising practice,” Mariskind (2013, p. 604) foregrounds the power relations enacted through the “pedagogical norm” of learning demonstrated through verbal activity. Interrogating and reflecting on her own practice, Mack (2012) applied participatory processes through policies collaboratively formed with students for the promotion of more equitable oral participation practices. Many studies have further called for a broader understanding of what constitutes “participation,” to ensure it is not inadvertently conflated solely with oral participation (Mariskind, 2013; Bernales, 2016; Karas, 2017). Focusing on the value of diversity, Ryan and Viète (2009) recognize a need for a multi-voiced learning environment, respectful of students’ individual voices and knowledge. However, while these offer useful perspectives on achieving more equitable participation practices, they do not necessarily provide practicable alternatives to oral participation as the primary mode of voice in day-to-day classroom practice. To build on this possibility for more equitable classroom practice in which student voice can be expressed in ways that more fully embrace the diversity of our students, we need further exploration of modes of voice employed.

## Critical Agenda

The research was conducted in an English Medium of Instruction (EMI) Sino-British university in China. Yearly undergraduate student enrolment has increased to approximately 3500 students, the majority of whom are mainland Chinese nationality. Students entering the university take a Foundation Year course in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) aimed to take them to a CEFR B2 level of English. The students are of

varying English levels, averaging CEFR B1, and are expected to focus on academic reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, alongside general academic skills.

The EAP module which provides the focus of this study utilizes a communicative style of language teaching favored in Western teaching practices. It features a heavy emphasis on spoken communication and discussion skills, with 30% of students' grade dependent on a speaking exam and a Participation Coursework focused on spoken contributions in class. My teaching practice can therefore be seen to be influenced by a "hidden curriculum"; hiding ideological agendas, this curriculum teaches and evaluates both academic and non-academic values and practices, including "institutional adjustment" and "personal qualities" (Giroux & Penna, 1988, pp. 33–34). The students' own background and educational style is negated in favor of assimilation into imposed practices. By following such a curriculum without question the teacher is thus complicit in perpetuating these values and norms, and denying the student their own voice.

A common frustration voiced by tutors in this context is students' lack of oral participation in seminars. Yet I have come to feel for many of my students "silence" is a much deeper issue of struggles to negotiate voice and agency in their new setting, and a withdrawal from an overwhelming and alien educational situation, in which silence is not accepted. I feel a "difference-as-deficit" (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 13) attitude is fostered in which students who struggle to master academic English and digest Anglo-centric academic content and teaching methodology are perceived as lacking or labelled "failing" by assessments such as the "Participation Coursework." Dissatisfied with my acceptance of established norms in my classroom and my daily emphasis on spoken participation in class, a critical reconsideration of my practice was needed.

This study aims to challenge the "hidden curriculum" that privileges oral participation as the desired mode of expression (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009). I contend that students can be "active" and "silent" simultaneously, and the issue is not the perceived reticence of the students, but rather the dominant perceptions of what constitutes "voice." Rejecting an "accommodationist" approach which endorses current conditions and assimilates students into established norms (Benesch, 1993, p. 710), I

call for the negotiation of classroom practices in order to rethink the modes available for expression of student voice. Rather than remedial assistance to conform to Western academic norms imposed through imported teaching methodology and practices, there is a need instead to foster greater understanding and respect through creating the pedagogical space to appreciate multiple forms of student voice, manifested through both verbal and non-verbal communication and practice.

“Voice” will be used here to encompass the means by which people, through available discourses, make themselves understood and listened to, defining themselves as active participants in their world, with the power of self-expression (Giroux, 2009, p. 454). While I acknowledge the myriad factors that may lead to student silent behavior, in my context I interpret it as a multi-layered situation, on the one hand symptomatic of the lack of recourse for student voice, and on the other representing resistance to dominating cultural practices. Hence, consideration will be given to the power relations that can enable or hinder student voice.

While other studies argue the “onus is on these Chinese students to reconstruct and renegotiate their primary culture learning and communication styles to accommodate another way” (Holmes, 2004, p. 303), I argue for the teacher’s “duty to listen,” advocating the students’ “right to speak” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 40). I seek to problematize the direct equivalence of speaking with the concepts of voice and participation, rethinking what it means to be an active, participating agent in the TNE classroom. I further aim to renegotiate classroom practices with students in order to enable students’ voice to be recognized in its multiple forms. The research questions were:

1. What are students’ feelings towards oral participation and what modes of expressing voice are currently available in our class?
2. What modes could be implemented in class to better support expression of voice?
3. How do students feel about the new modes of expressing voice?



## Research Design and Methods

Critical action research was conducted during the second semester of students' study at the university, to emancipate myself and my students from unseen constraints of assumptions and ideology imposed in the structures of oral participation expected in my class. With its emphasis on collaborative involvement and mutual understanding, it offers participants the empowerment of claiming agency, creating more democratic education (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 205). Indeed, this agency can itself be seen as a first step in the agenda of this project to create greater pedagogical space for authentic student voice.

Of the 24 students in my class, 20 agreed to be observed, with six volunteering for pre-intervention focus group interviews and four for post-intervention focus groups. An information sheet was first distributed, and the students were invited to ask questions about it either in person or by email before deciding whether to participate. A consent form was then collected from students who agreed to participate. It was made clear that participation was completely voluntary, with participants free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage. Observations were not made of those students who declined to participate. To protect anonymity, each participant is referred to with a pseudonym and identifiable data about them is not shared. Data pertaining to the participants, including observation notes and journal entries, consistently utilized these pseudonyms.

Two data-collection tools were used:

1. Overt, natural setting, classroom observation of regular EAP classes. Observations took place in the researcher's own EAP class, with researcher as "full participant observer" (Perry, 2011, p. 120). Observations were semi-structured, with an agenda of issues to address (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 457), including teacher-student interactions patterns, perceived levels of student engagement, topic/ material use and student reaction, purpose and levels of oral participation, and possible modes of voice employed; they included

both student and self-observation. The researcher made notes of observational data in a journal.

2. Semi-structured focus group interviews, focusing on themes drawn from classroom observations. Through their open-response format, focus groups provide an appropriate medium for exploring students' perceptions, and lend themselves to collecting "rich amounts of data in the respondents' own words" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015, p. 45), helping to present students' own voices. Discussions centered on students' preferred modes of expressing voice, feelings towards oral participation in class and suggestions for ways to improve classroom practice to enable expression of student voice. Focus groups were held in English, MP3 recorded and analyzed by the researcher, with analysis added to the journal.

Based on student feedback from the pre-intervention focus groups, a three-question multiple-choice questionnaire (focusing on topic choices, desired skills, and reasons for using English) was subsequently used as part of the intervention to elicit student input into lesson content and help to provide a channel for their individual voice through a non-verbal mode. Thirteen students completed the questionnaire and responses informed choice of topic and lesson content in the following classes, based on student preferences.

Throughout the research, a journal was kept for observation notes, reliable documentation of what happened, descriptions of events, notes, comments, and personal reflections; additionally, a portfolio of evidence (folder) was kept, including documentation relevant to the study, such as copies of materials used in class (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p. 98). However, it is acknowledged that observational data is prone to bias (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 459). The reliability of answers is necessarily questionable in that individual participants may not accurately judge themselves, providing misleading answers, and the researcher's own views (particularly as the class tutor) may bias the interaction (Girden, 2001, p. 24).

## Data Analysis

Informed by the critical agenda of the study, data generated from the pre-intervention observations and focus groups were coded under the three broad categories of attitudes to speaking, modes of voice available and topics and materials, with the findings then providing focus for the intervention. The post-intervention data was analyzed and coded according to student reactions to the intervention. Coding took place directly from the MP3 recordings and observation notes, with notes taken during the process, and relevant direct quotes transcribed verbatim at each stage of coding until the final selection was made for inclusion in the report. Data was cross-checked between observations and student interviews to enhance concurrent validity through checking information from one source against another to help verify the data produced (Brink, 2016). Overall, data analysis was iterative, ongoing and recursive, with data revisited numerous times in light of the emerging themes and literature. This supported engagement in the action research spiral of self-reflective cycles to maintain a self-critical stance and awareness throughout the research process (Kemmis et al., 2014).

## Findings and Discussion

### Attitudes to Speaking

Observations suggested students were not engaging comfortably in speaking activities. Questions were generally met with extended silence and unresponsiveness, leading me to pick an individual student to answer. Initial focus group interviews revealed that existing views towards speaking were mixed.

The majority of students expressed negative feelings towards speaking in class. A sense of embarrassment was a strong theme, with the word “embarrassed” and “shy” used by Gina, Evelyn, Vicky and Elaine. This was also apparent in class observations: students frequently kept their eyes down when asked to speak. When asked to have group discussions,

a number of students would disengage from the task, either chatting in Chinese, or taking out their mobile phones and checking their Instant Messaging application (WeChat), a popular communication tool in China. Constant monitoring was required to keep students on task. Behavior such as this could be viewed as resistance to the communicative based practices and my teaching, with students seeking a form of “pedagogical safe house”; unable to express their own identities in class, students may resort to secretly adopting behaviors and discourses not authorized or rewarded by the teacher, through online discussions and codeswitching, for example (Canagarajah, 2002, 2004).

A sense of constraint was a common thread in student attitudes to speaking. Students referred to past learning experiences in High School, when Gina explained “if you can’t answer, the teacher makes you feel very embarrassed,” leading to two students explaining they felt a need for accuracy and a concern with getting the right answer. Claire explained speaking feels “not very natural,” with others adding comments such as:

I would like to speak English but my English is poor... I can’t express my thoughts completely (Claire).

When I talk about something in English my mind went blank and I don’t know what to say (Evelyn).

In line with many of the studies investigating student silence, my students mentioned a sense of low language proficiency as a constraining factor to speaking in class (e.g. Zhou et al., 2005; Cheng, 2000; Hsu, 2015), specifying “vocabulary,” “grammar” and “sentence structure” as problems.

However, all students did view speaking as important, and James felt positively towards it, saying it made him feel “excited.” Evelyn and Gina specifically expressed the desire to be able to “make foreign friends.” Many of the students are on a 2+2 program, meaning they will go to the UK to study at the end of their second year of study, and this concern influenced them; they wanted to practice speaking in order to cope with studies and daily life abroad.

Citing Bourdieu (1991), Findlow (2006, p. 20) notes how language can be used as a tool for symbolic violence, forming knowledge and socializing students through particular methods. Students' views towards the importance of speaking could have been influenced by existing institutional practices; students undertake an induction week upon entering the university in which expectations for active oral participation are explicitly taught. The use of a participation coursework assessed through speaking contributions could have further reinforced this image to students, with Elaine commenting that speaking is necessary to be "active." Vicky went on to state:

If they don't speak, how do you know they are participating?

In this way, I had perhaps already established core expectations for speaking as the favored mode of voice in my class, and in the process inadvertently devalued alternative modes of voice and recognition of student participation. For the sake of more open expression of authentic student voice, I needed to change such a situation.

## Modes of Voice Available

Analysis of observation data and focus group interviews revealed that the primary mode for expression of voice was oral participation. Pre-task discussions were used each class, during which time students were supposed to share opinions on the topic. Questioning was used each class to elicit responses vocally. I noted a frequent way for me to check understanding was to ask "Any questions?" thus expecting students to ask me verbally for clarification: in this way, if students had concerns or questions, and did not want to speak, they would not feel able to express their concerns.

Speaking was also the primary mode I used to elicit expression of students' thoughts and opinions, meaning students who did not wish to speak might have a more limited opportunity to share their thoughts. This resulted in a sense of compulsion to speak for those who wanted to share ideas:

You just take everything in your heart, don't speak out, nobody will know what you are thinking about... so you have to speak out and express your opinion. (Gina)

Yet the conflicts some students may experience in trying to reconcile expected oral participation and their own inner voices were also clear. Vicky explained:

I think I couldn't express myself accurately so I don't want to answer ... but actually I think it didn't mean I haven't participate—I am thinking but I just don't want to say to others...

While setting up expectations for oral participation in my class, I had failed to acknowledge and respond to the active voices within students' choices for silence, and the myriad reasons behind these choices. Indeed, James felt choice was an important aspect of students' engagement in speaking, saying "it all depends on themselves, what they need." He explained that some students would not necessarily need strong oral communication skills in English for their future careers, for example, and so might choose not to focus on developing these skills. Vicky, on the other hand, commented that:

Sometimes we have the same opinions, so we keep silent (Vicky)

The students then explained that their engagement with the topics affected how they engaged with the speaking; if they felt the topic was not meaningful, or if they already felt everyone knew the answer, they might choose not to participate.

I needed to reconceptualize our classroom perceptions of voice to show students I value and recognize their participation beyond speaking, and to ensure I start engaging with the active choices they make to shape their classroom experience. I wanted to seek ways to expressly incorporate a broader range of mediums for the expression of their authentic voice, so that each student would feel a medium for expression of that voice was available to them and valued in our class.

Through discussion, I found that some students favored writing as a mode of communication in which they could more comfortably and freely express themselves. Ellwood and Nakane (2009) call for dialogic processes, challenging assumptions that students must develop their capacity for oral participation and instead urging the “mainstream” to develop their own capacity for silence and an understanding of the positive associations it can hold.

Vicky further highlighted a preference for a more “private way to express”; she explained “that is a good way to know about the students’ real thoughts,” elucidating that students are not always “willing to let others know.” This is an important consideration when seeking to encourage expression of voice, in that it can be a deeply private area, and it should not be assumed students want to share their opinions in a group or class discussion.

## Topics and Materials

Topics were taken from the required course textbook. Activities were set up to provide structured practice in skills required for the exam; for example, describing a graph for a presentation, or practicing a timed writing on a topic related to a textbook unit. In this way, I realized that there was little opportunity for students to have control over content or relate it to their lives. This was confirmed in the focus group interviews, with students commenting:

I think we are not so clearly connected with English (Evelyn)

English can’t express our feelings (Claire)

Students expressed a desire to be able to express their feelings more, and said they favored topics that have “connection” with them. Drawing on an example from one of our textbook discussion topics related to healthy lifestyles, Gina commented that some topics were perceived as boring and the choice of question affected how students engaged in the task:

You will say “Oh, such a boring question” and we will just talk something in a typical way, something like we are not interested in, but just want to show the teacher we are talking. (Gina)

By setting up the expectation for speaking as the primary mode of showing their participation, and by focusing on the topics from the set textbook, I seemed to be creating a false engagement in the class. In so doing, I had inadvertently restricted the expression of their authentic voice. In order to help students to express that voice, a primary factor was creating space for topics that students had personal interest in and had value to their lives.

## The Intervention

Through discussion with the students, the following changes were planned:

### 1. Incorporating Written Modes of Communication

Students had commented that they liked a written survey I had conducted at the start of semester, eliciting their thoughts about EAP classes. I therefore used an additional survey to help students voice their goals and gain their input into class content and topic choice. I also introduced to our class a system of “Exit tickets”: small “tickets” with a question to complete and hand in to me at the end of each class. These contained a number of closed and open-ended questions to try to elicit student voice.

### 2. Providing Topic Choice

Following feedback from the focus groups and survey, I aimed to incorporate topics and content that students selected. These included: more social English, rather than just formal academic English; celebrities and fashion; sport; wildlife and nature; world news and current events; business (related to their major). In the classroom we covered sessions on “slang,” including British slang, as many students will go to the UK in the future. We also covered some conversational vocabulary in a business



context and activities to practice talking informally about TV shows. Other topics and materials were made available to students via a Wiki page (point 4 below) for self-study.

### 3. Utilizing the L1

I had observed students using Chinese in class when I set up speaking activities or pair work, and questioned why I saw this as a negative action. Students explained that they used it when they could not find the words in English, or wanted to express a more specific meaning, or share a funny meaning; these are all important functions for expression of authentic voice. I therefore tried making use of the L1 an “institutionally accepted” mode of voice in my class by incorporating it into discussion, allowing 5 minutes of Chinese talking time before English group discussions.

### 4. Facilitating Autonomy

Kumaravadivelu (2001) states that a postmethod learner is an autonomous learner, and in reconstituting classroom practices for greater expression of voice, I felt this was a key point. Working towards the goal of increased self-expression, student choice needed to be central. I therefore established a Wiki page on our university online Moodle system. I uploaded a range of sources, including videos, reading texts, and online activity links, related to the topics students had chosen as their preferences. Due to limited class time and a set curriculum, I set up these activities to be used as self-study, with an accompanying “Source Guide” worksheet to try to help them analyze and respond to the sources in a way that is personal but could still be helpful to them in their studies. For example, questions aimed to elicit personal responses such as agreement or disagreement, encourage them to make connections between ideas in different sources, and to extract key ideas from them. Whereas previously I had given a set homework to do each night, this method encouraged students to choose their own source and activity. Through autonomy and choice, they are asserting their voice and acting as active agents of their world, directing their own learning and not just being driven by the requirements of imposed education.

Overall, a key constraint was the pressure of assessments. This had two effects: first, the teacher could not change the core content required to be taught; second, students were very concerned about their exams and wanted content that served to prepare them for those.

## Post-intervention Reflection

Focus group interviews were conducted to gather feedback on the new methods.

## Incorporating Written Modes of Communication

Shifting my emphasis from spoken to written modes of communication was received positively. Survey use was regarded as “helpful” or “useful” by all students, and I noted that whereas students generally stayed silent if I asked questions orally in class, every student who was given the survey completed it. An additional feature surprisingly favored by students was the use of pre-defined options to select from. While careful to add an option for students to write open responses, I gave a list of tick box choices for each question. Gina commented:

If you just ask me and you don't give me some choice and ideas maybe I couldn't...um...I think choices could remind me [of] something.

She clarified that:

Maybe I know some idea but I don't know how to express it in English and then ... err ... many students will choose to say nothing.

This shows that the language problems students encountered in relation to expressing themselves in speaking also apply to written communication, but the use of methods such as carefully designed surveys give students the time and linguistic resources to better overcome such issues than with spontaneous speech. This provides a way for the teacher to support students in scaffolding expression of their voice, though care is

needed to ensure such methods do not inadvertently limit their voice; open ended choices thus form an essential component of any such surveys.

The “Exit tickets” were found to be useful as a method overall:

It can make us thinking more and show more and you can know better about us, what we are thinking, how we are thinking (Elaine)

This student also valued the extra time available when using written feedback, contrasting it to oral responses which could lead to “long silence and embarrassing” while the student searched for words. However, Gina also commented that the questions asked could be more “meaningful” and because it often contained a pre-defined question was thus sometimes limited (for example, asking students if they had a question about the class content). I would therefore seek to build more flexibility and student directed input into the content of Exit Tickets in the future.

### **Providing Topic Choice**

The use of topics chosen by students, including social English, slang and TV, was received well by students, who felt it was “more close to our daily life” (Evelyn) and “interesting” (Vicky), with a feeling that “everyone can have...can say more about these topics” (Gina). Notably, it seemed to help students open up communication with classmates to reveal genuine voice, rather than simply using set phrases to complete a task. Elaine felt:

This interesting topic can help us do more communication and can help make a friendship

I found I had previously overlooked this fundamental need of young people entering university life: forging friendships to support and sustain them through the transition to their new environment and evolving university life. Despite the heavy workload of required EAP materials, I therefore found the time spent on non-academic and social topics selected by students was time well spent. It seemed to help generate a more

comfortable class atmosphere, perhaps also because it supported students' own goals and concerns about using English to make friends, particularly if they study abroad in the future. As Gina commented, for many students "learn English is not only for study but for life."

Nonetheless, finding appropriate topics to inspire students' interest, have relevance to their life, and yet provide adequate practice in required academic skills proved challenging in this context. A key predicament in this situation, in which students who may be of a relatively low English language proficiency are thrust into learning entirely through the medium of English, was also captured by Gina who stated:

When a topic is interesting, we don't have the ability, vocabulary, to express what we want to say but when give boring but easy topics, are able but lazy to answer, because it's boring!

The problem of vocabulary and language proficiency is a recurring one constricting expression of voice. It was interesting to note that Evelyn in fact felt discussing the alternative topics and having some input on key vocabulary related to each topic was "a good way to expand our English vocabulary," while Vicky found the open topics let students "think more" and noted "it's good for our critical thinking." Indeed, students seemed to engage well with the topic discussions, and interest in the topic and some control over topic choice seemed have a positive motivational effect overall.

Yet, reflecting on my day-to-day classes, I noted that in the EAP course generally there was little grammar and vocabulary input, with more time devoted instead to aspects such as essay structure and citation conventions, with an expectation that students will pick up language along the way. Caught between lack of interest and lack of linguistic resources, these students' voices may be stilted in their English-medium environment, suggesting a need for more explicit language support to be consciously built into the curriculum.

## Utilizing the L1

Allowing use of Chinese at set times in the class received mixed feedback from students. Evelyn strongly favored it, saying “I think it is helpful.” She explained that it helps her to prepare for speaking in English, and to generate more ideas on a topic through the freer and more “flexible” communication. She found it enabling in that her friends could help her find the English vocabulary for the topic, thus ultimately helping her express herself more effectively in English. However, Gina disagreed, feeling that “in EAP we have no need for Chinese” and asserting that “even our English is poor we can use English, even Chinglish, express ourselves.” To her, the importance of trying to use English was key and she seemed to feel use of Chinese undermined her efforts. In future classes, I would therefore discuss this matter openly with my class and try to collaboratively establish a class language policy we all agree on for use of the L1.

## Facilitating Autonomy

Students were all in support of having more autonomy and choice. Recalling how in the past her teacher had always pushed her in High School, Gina noted how difficult coming to university and trying to study by herself was, saying students “can’t control themselves”; while in school she would do homework with “unhappy feelings” for fear of punishment, she showed how students coming to a TNE university with a different expectation for how to study independently (with 10 hours self-directed study expected per week) had been struggling silently to adapt. Having a carefully selected bank of resources and guiding worksheets to help her engage with those sources was therefore helpful to “give some suggestion about what’s the important part of this... and we can have more thinking about it.” Additionally, in light of the unhappy associations students may have with the idea of “homework” trying to generate interest through topics students can choose and related to their lives is essential. While Vicky enjoyed using the Wiki as a medium and being able to “by our own ideas and interests choose,” Elaine commented that

its access through our university Moodle system was off-putting. As a general rule she only used that official system to review class materials, thus preferring to use other websites or phone APPs for extra reading. The association with institutionalized learning and requirement seemed to create negative associations in her mind; I would therefore explore use of external webpages, materials or source banks with my students in future.

## Pedagogical Implications

By introducing written modes of communication, providing topic choice, utilizing the L1 and facilitating greater student autonomy, I sought to increase the pedagogical space for student voice in this TNE classroom. Engaging in this project with my students, I recognize that oral production and silent participation are two equally valid forms of engagement (Bernales, 2016). Yet I also recognize the struggles and assumptions that can lie behind oral participation, and the need for alternative spaces for students to express their voice. While the action research spiral (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) is viewed as incomplete, with further cycles of re-planning, implementation and reflection needed, this project nonetheless hopes to offer a step towards developing an alternative valuation and embodiment of student voice, in its multiple forms of expression.

I had begun to “walk unreflectively through a labyrinth of procedures” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 124), divorcing myself from the power relations at work each time I made my students speak, or complete another set worksheet. As Mariskind (2013) highlights, it is important for teachers to become aware of their own position in the power relations at work each time they require students’ oral participation, and to reflect on the subject positions this then ascribes to students who engage in the classroom in diverse ways. Taking a less normative view of participation and engagement, we can increase the respect for diversity in our classrooms (Zhou et al., 2005; Ryan & Viète, 2009; Mariskind, 2013) and begin to explore the full potential of our classrooms as equitable spaces for expression of student voice.

Conducting this research led to a sense of shared endeavor with my students, reminding me that students have social needs underlying their academic ones; to ignore these is to negate an important aspect of their voice. Indeed, language teachers cannot satisfy their pedagogic obligations without attending to their social obligations (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Through the process of holding focus groups, I realized that students who may seem disengaged are facing their own struggles and are waiting for the chance to share those, and communicate on their own terms. Ensuring students have choices in how they participate in our classrooms can help us as teachers to be responsive to our students' voices.

Seeking to avoid the deterministic cultural stereotyping of Chinese learners as "passive" or "silent," requiring remedial training to fit Western norms, it is important to take a more context-sensitive approach to learning and teaching which values and engages with students' perspectives and culture, rather than blindly applying imported pedagogical practices (Littlewood, 2013). Reflecting on how my own training, background and delivery of materials constrained the voice of my students and essentially "silenced" them while perpetuating inequitable power structures served to change my perception of good classroom practices. In TNE, and contexts of international education more widely, more critical reflection is needed to consider the practices we import and the debilitating impact this can have on our students' ability to express themselves in our classrooms, thus constituting a form of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 1991). Viewing ourselves instead as "pedagogic explorers," we can question our taken-for-granted assumptions and engage with learners to build context-sensitive, location-specific pedagogical practices that respect the sociocultural reality of our learners (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

Methodology, set materials, time pressure and assessment requirements can lead us to inadvertently constrain the accepted modes of voice in a classroom. Rather than expecting students to conform to oral participation practices and filter their voices through pre-defined institutional structures, for more equitable relations we must engage dialogically with students. It is important to recognize, legitimize and engage with the choices, feelings, attitudes and resistance that may lie behind perceived silence (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Ha & Li, 2014) and broaden our view of "voice" to encompass its multiple forms. Valuing students' voice in its

authentic form must occur through validation and inclusion of the diverse modes preferred, necessitating development of a “multivoiced” learning environment (Ryan & Viète, 2009). In this way, students may claim their own “symbolic power” to begin shaping the academic discourses in which they are engaged, asserting the right to have their authentic voice heard.

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## Further Reading

Bao, D. (2014). *Understanding silence and reticence*. London: Bloomsbury.

Stimulating further reflection on the role of silence in the classroom, Bao proposes a pedagogy that draws on the benefits of silence. Arguing for its value in learning, Bao elucidates how it can contribute positively to language acquisition, including for self-monitoring, reflection and language rehearsal. The various functions of silence in learning are explored, drawing on research from various contexts.

Darder, A., Baltodano, M. P., & Torres, R. D. (Eds.). (2009). *The critical pedagogy reader* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Providing a comprehensive introduction to critical pedagogy in action in various contexts, this volume brings together a collection of powerful essays to stimulate reflection on our practice. Arranged by topic, issues covered include class, racism, gender/sexuality, language and literacy, and classroom issues. With useful further readings provided for each section, this volume provides an invaluable starting point for exploring critical pedagogy theory and practice.

Ha, P. L., & Li, B. (2014). Silence as right, choice, resistance and strategy among Chinese “Me Generation” students: Implications for pedagogy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 35(2), 233–248.

Taking silence as right, choice and resistance, the authors explore the views of Chinese “Me Generation” students born in the 1980s. The favoring of talk over silence often found in current pedagogy is questioned, with interesting discussion of the causes for and values of silence among this particular generation of students.



Shao, Q., & Gao, X. (2016). Reticence and willingness to communicate (WTC) of East Asian language learners. *System*, 63, 115–120.

This special editorial reviews ten articles that focus on East Asian language learners' perceived oral reticence and willingness to communicate (WTC). The concept of WTC itself provides another interesting angle on the issue of student silence and this paper introduces a collection of articles that offer an overview of related ideas, concepts and pedagogical implications.

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# 8

## A Critical Discourse Analysis of Neoliberal Discourses in EAP Textbooks

Mubina Rauf

### Nature of the Problem

Textbooks are a key component of language programs and are taken as an accurate, necessary and valid source of knowledge (Apple, 2013; Richard, 1998, 2001). Hutchinson and Torres (1994) opined that textbooks bring order to a potentially complex and chaotic language classroom, but in the context of this study, as McGrath (2006) claimed, textbooks tend to dictate what is taught, in what order, and also how and what the learners will learn. Invariably, there is a synergetic relationship between teachers and commercially published textbooks and the publishers rely on this relationship to gain substantial monetary returns (Gray, 2010). Sheldon (1988) argued that textbooks not only work as a pedagogical tool but also as a political investment by powers who can skillfully market compromised “masses of rubbish.” (Brumfit, as cited in Sheldon, 1988, p. 237) to gain profits. They are produced by powers that possess capitalist

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outlook (Bell & Gower, 1998), hence endorsing neoliberal policies. Subsequently, the selection of texts may have hidden agendas to promote the desired ideologies of the powerful sections of society. These economic and political aspects give rise to suspicions about these groups who may exploit the power of language and education by controlling the content of textbooks and hence mold the minds of learners to the benefit of their own economic and ideological gains.

This study aimed to problematize, challenge and critically analyze how neoliberal ideologies have penetrated the discourse of the mainstream English for Academic Purposes (EAP) textbooks to serve the vested interests of the powerful and shape the minds of students when they are at a crucial stage of developing their opinions about their environment and the world in general. Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) has been applied to analyze two EAP textbooks taught commonly in Saudi universities during their foundation year English programs.

## Critical Agenda

### Which EAP: Neutral or Critical?

Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) defined English for Academic Purposes (EAP) "as teaching English with the aim of facilitating learners' study or research in that language" (p. 2). EAP can be also be defined, more specifically, as second-language English education designed to help students successfully negotiate the language of higher education (Gillett, 1996).

EAP programs for non-native speakers of English have grown into a billion-dollar industry all over the world (Pennycook, 1994). Chun (2009) has raised the issue of marketing EAP to a specific segment of the world who can afford it. He further added that EAP has turned into a "commodity" that can be bought and sold. However, Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) argued that in addition to the commercial side, EAP is a matter of great concern for countries who are trying to play an important, global role at the economic front. They need graduates who are

equipped and capable of representing their countries in the global arena through English.

Benesch (2001) claimed that a critical approach to EAP permits a nuanced and dynamic approach between “target situations and students’ purposes, desires and aspirations” (p. 33) instead of taking it as a neutral discourse. The context of this study being the Preparatory Year Programs (PYP) in Saudi public universities, it is interesting to note that Saudi Arabia, along with other oil-rich Gulf States, is a key market for EAP consumption. Since the 1970s, extensive research in the unprecedented demand for learning of English in the Middle East informs us about the need for teachers, materials, funds and Western expertise flowing towards these countries, but there is no reference to its impact on the local culture and society (Benesch, 2001; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Swales, 1977). Benesch (2001) criticized the role of the Western governments and companies in creating markets for EAP after the oil-crisis of early 1970s, “driving the demand for English-speaking workers and customers” in the Middle East where US and UK companies were established (p. 25). She further argued that teaching EAP/ ESP in the Middle East is not fulfilling the need of a neutral company or “delivering the required goods” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) which she elsewhere called the “ideology of pragmatism” (1993). The goal, as Benesch (2001) put it, was “acculturation” or “reculturation” presented as “a benign and expansive process benefitting both the workers and the company[ies] equally” (p. 27). Gray (2012) argued that ELT industry is a kind of culture industry in which the standardized EAP textbooks have become the core product that aim at the global market to perform the ideological task of strengthening the link between English and professional success.

Benesch (2001) opted for “critical” EAP that creates opportunities for students to participate in activities they are required to carry out in academic classes and be able to question and transform these activities as per their needs. Thus critical EAP broadens the scope of academic purposes by setting it in the context of globalization and the social changes it brings, through which EAP students can “explore the relationship between academic English and the larger sociopolitical context” (Benesch, 2009, p. 82; Chun, 2010). In the same vein, Pennycook (1997) refuted Allison’s (1996, as cited in Pennycook, 1997) idea of changing “students

to fit them into existing structures, thereby perpetuating mainstream academic culture” (p. 253) and suggested moving towards a critical approach to teaching EAP.

## The Neoliberal Nexus in EAP

Neoliberalism is the “central guiding principle of economic thought and management” and is presented as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Giroux and Giroux (2006) argued that neoliberalism is the most threatening ideology introduced in the twenty-first century, according to which the world is a “vast supermarket” and the “ideal citizen is the purchaser” (Apple, 1999, p. 10).

The “free” market of neoliberalism has wrecked societies, as is manifest in “their environmental degradation, social alienation, and vast disparities of wealth leading to increased poverty and despair” (Chun, 2009, p. 112). According to Chun (2009), any critical analysis must address how the neoliberal discourses (NLD henceforth) work in specific dimensions which, in this study, is the academic content of EAP textbooks.

In the English Language Teaching (ELT) field, neoliberal discourses have become sources and ideologies that have resulted in the commodification of the language (Heller, 2003). English as a language is learnt for no other purpose than gaining profit and seeking employment. Language programs are designed to serve the corporate sector to the point that what, how and when language should be taught has gone from the hands of students and teachers into the hands of those who are experts in marketing the language and getting money out of it. Education seems attractive to these powerful people and it is increasingly being used to “train workers for service sector jobs and produce lifelong consumers” (Giroux & Giroux, 2006).

## Critical Evaluation of EAP Textbooks

Material evaluation is a central topic in applied linguistics and ELT (Cunningsworth, 1995; McGrath, 2002; Tomlinson, 1998). However, the critical aspect of textbooks, their analysis and evaluation have seldom been discussed. Littlejohn (2011) presented three levels of material analysis: what is there, what is required of users and what is implied. The last step directs us towards analyzing language materials as a whole and inferring the hidden meanings.

A rare example of critical textbook analysis is Stevick (1972) who presented one of the first frameworks for critical inquiry of published materials. He proposed a three-dimensional approach (linguistic, social and topical) based on three qualities (strength, lightness, transparency) that evaluated materials with reference to their social and topical appropriateness.

It is difficult to say that textbooks are not based on ideological and cultural values which do not coincide with the real needs of students. The curriculum, pedagogical materials and choices, and classrooms, are essentially ideological in nature and are closely related to the learners' socio-economic positions (Auerbach, 1995; Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). Furthermore, McLaren (1995) argued that classrooms are "cultural arenas where... ideological, discursive and social collide in an unremitting struggle for dominance" (p. 30).

Based on the above discussion, it can be argued that the discourse of textbooks should be analyzed critically (Fairclough, 1995). CDA proponents take textbooks not only as part of the curriculum but cultural artefacts that play a significant role in mediating knowledge and constructing ideological and legitimate realities (Gray, 2012; Van Dijk, 2008; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). Using a historic approach, Gray (2010) questioned how celebrity culture and white-collar individualism are idealized in the world of work, which is a perennial topic of ELT textbooks. Other common NLD words recurring in this discourse are globalization, information age, entrepreneurship, deregulation, choice, change, flexibility, mobility, urbanization, production, growth, output, free market and



human capital (Fairclough, 1995; Holborow, 2006; Wodak & Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 2004; Gray, 2012; Harvey, 2005; Keil, 2009).

Essentially, textbooks are not neutral and they play an important role in disseminating specific ideologies around the world. They are the main source of interaction in language classrooms and construct discourses of their own choice without letting the learners and even teachers realize how they are interpreting the content.

## Theoretical Assumptions and Methodological Approaches

Fairclough (2012) defined CDA as a social critique that views social realities as “humanly produced constraints which... reduce human flourishing... and increase human suffering.” It seeks “historical explanation of how and why such social realities have come into being and possibilities for transforming existing realities in ways which enhance well-being and reduce suffering” (p. 10).

For the sake of this study, CDA can be defined as the systematic investigation of “opaque” and transparent relations of power and inequalities in language that stem from neoliberal and capitalist policies which are produced and reproduced in discourses (Fairclough, 1995, 2001; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Wodak & Fairclough, 2010; Mayr, 2008; Wodak, 2001, 2009). It can be claimed that CDA is a collection of various interdisciplinary approaches that are tied together by common theoretical assumptions, which are problem-oriented and eclectic (Wodak, 2009; Lin, 2014). CDA sees language as a form of social practice tied to historical contexts through which social relations are contested and reproduced (Janks, 1997).

### What is Discourse?

Viewing from a critical perspective, Giroux (1986) argued that discourse is both a medium and product of power. It is deeply connected to the ideological and material forces that develop the voice of different groups and individuals. Wodak and Meyer (2009) associate discourse with text

linguistics, written and oral texts and the Foucauldian tradition of taking discourse as an abstract form of knowledge that entails cognition and emotions (Jager & Maier, 2001). Fairclough (1993) presented two versions of discourse, as an abstract and as a countable noun. As an abstract noun, it refers to the “language use conceived as social practice” and as countable noun, it refers to a “way of signifying experience from a particular perspective” (p. 138).

## Language as a Social Practice

CDA is not about studying language as a fixed linguistic entity; rather it is taking into consideration the social and discursive process and their consequences. It is based on the theoretical assumption that language should not be taken as a reified object of study, but as an ideological and social construct that is produced and reproduced mainly by political agendas and actions (Pennycook, 2001, 2010). It is this perennial link between discourse and its interaction with social structures that is the main characteristic of CDA (Van Dijk, 2009). CDA upholds that language is “intrinsically ideological” which produces and maintains inequalities in society (Lin, 2014). Therefore, the focus of analysis should be on how the semiotic resources are added and used in language and discourse to construct a range of cultural categories that legitimize and reinforce social inequalities. The main approaches presented by key researchers manifest the interdisciplinary and methodological characteristics of CDA.

Using his Sociocognitive Approach (SCA), van Dijk (2001) presented a three-layered framework of the relationship between discourse, cognition and society in which he focuses on the relationship between text and context and the way in which power and social structures mediate through a cognitive interface (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Wodak’s Discourse–Historical Approach (DHA) has been greatly influenced by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School. It focuses on the naturalization and masking of ideologies in everyday language and discourse. Wodak (2001) claimed that DHA follows the sociophilosophical orientation of critical theory. It follows a complex system of social critique that entails three features: text critique, sociodiagnostic critique and prognostic critique.

Fairclough's Dialectical–Relational Approach (DRA) integrates social, practice and linguistic theories. He draws on Halliday's (1985) systemic functional linguistics (SFL), semiotic theories and conversation analysis in developing text analysis methods. His approach to CDA moves between a focus on structure and focus on action (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Fairclough's work has focused on medical interviews, political and news media discourses and uncovering the neoliberal ideologies embedded in government and economic crisis discourses (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012).

## Research Questions

Problematization is defined as being skeptic about the beliefs and assumptions which have become “naturalized” notions that are never questioned (Pennycook, 2001, pp. 7 & 8). This study aims to problematize and explore how neoliberal discourses within the academic content of the published materials interact with and influence students. The study will be guided by the following questions:

- What features of neoliberal discourse are shown in the academic content of the selected textbooks?
- How are these features articulated lexically?
- How do these features limit the scope for the interpretation of texts in a specific social context?

## Research Design

### The Critical Element in CDA

Pennycook (2001) presented two aspects of “critical”: modernist emancipatory position and postmodern problematizing position (p. 4). The first is about maintaining objectivity and distance in critical work and the second engages with questions of power and inequality. According to Wodak (2007), critical does not imply being negative but rather

skeptical. It means not taking things for granted, opening up complexity and challenging reductionism, dogmatism and dichotomies. Fairclough (1995) argued that CDA is critical in the sense that it addresses the social wrongs of the day which include injustice, inequality and lack of freedom by analyzing their sources and causes

The “critical” element in CDA is related to the critical theory of the Frankfurt school and its intellectuals. Earlier critical theory studies have used structuralism to investigate the social concepts of power, equality, control and ideology (Pennycook, 2001). CDA, as a research methodology in discourse studies, is a recent phenomenon adopted by applied linguists in their discourse studies (Kress, 1999; Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Chilton, 2005; Mayr, 2008). The focus of these studies was to uncover the linguistic structures (Kress, 1999) of “power,” “ideology” and “hegemony” (Foucault, 1979; Althusser, 1971; Gramsci, 1971).

With the advent of poststructuralism, CDA research moved from a structuralist position to poststructuralism. The prominent poststructuralist intellectuals, e.g. Habermas (1972) and Foucault (1972), argued that systems cannot be understood by studying their static and pre-positioned structures. Based on this, Halliday’s (1975, 1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) proposed to study language together with its form and functional aspect. Additionally, the poststructuralist stance saw capitalism and neoliberalism from a wider perspective. For example, Fairclough (2001) stated that “new” capitalism is a re-networking of economic practices through non-economic practices which are colonized and in which discourse plays a critical role (p. 127). This restructuring, Fairclough (2000, 2003) argued, transforms the economic and political domains and is facilitated by neoliberalism (Bourdieu, as cited in Fairclough, 2000). Undoubtedly, CDA provides invaluable critical perspectives to unravel the hidden discourses of capitalism and neoliberalism in various social domains.

## Methods

This study undertakes CDA of two EAP textbooks used in the foundation year of Saudi universities. Although there is no consistent methodological framework for CDA, there are approaches that vary from inductive (DHA) to deductive (DRA) studies. For the purpose of this

research, I will follow a combination of three approaches: SCA (van Dijk), DHA (Wodak) and DRA (Fairclough) to uncover the neoliberal discourse in the selected texts.

Fairclough (2005) used the term “transdisciplinary” for his version of CDA. By this he meant an ongoing dialogue with other disciplines and theories that are addressing contemporary social transformations such as globalization, neoliberalism, knowledge-based economy etc. This dialogue, according to Fairclough (2005) should facilitate the theoretical and methodological development of CDA. I have adopted Fairclough’s (1989, 2001) three-dimensional model in such a way that it includes the sociocognitive aspect: discourse studies mediate between society/ culture/ situation, cognition and discourse/ language, and the discourse-historical approach: focusing on the historical dimensions of discourse formation, within its dimensions.

Fairclough (2005) stated that CDA involves some form of detailed textual analysis and includes interdiscursive analysis of texts and linguistic and other forms of semiotic analysis. Data selection and collection depends upon the object of the research.

## Suggested Framework for CDA

Fairclough’s DRA has its roots in SFL (Halliday, 1978, 1985). The main goal of CDA is to give accounts of how social change brings changes in discourse and how discourse reconstructs social life. Also, Fairclough (2005), through CDA, intended “to identify through analysis the particular linguistic, semiotic and ‘interdiscursive’ ... features of ‘texts’ ... which are a part of processes of social change, but in ways which facilitate the productive integration of textual analysis into multi-disciplinary research on change.” (p. 76).

Fairclough (2001) argued that language is a social process conditioned by the non-linguistic parts of society. According to Fairclough (2001), a text is a product of the process of text production. The term “discourse” is a process of social interaction that includes the process of text production and interpretation. The features of the text can be taken as “traces” of the production process as well as “cues” for the interpretation process.

However, Fairclough (2001) claimed that no text can be complete without determining its social context. This brings in his third point of seeing language as a social practice, conditioned by the non-linguistic parts of the society. He further stated that when language is taken as a discourse and a social practice, it is not only the production and interpretation that is important but the relationship between the texts, processes and their social conditions or as Fairclough (2001) puts it, “the relationship between texts, interactions, and contexts” (p. 26). Along with these three dimensions of discourse, Fairclough (2001) put forward three dimensions of critical discourse analysis:

1. Description: related to the formal properties of the text.
2. Interpretation: manifests the relationship between the text and interaction.
3. Explanation: concerned with the relationship between interaction and the social context.

The text analysis at each of the three stages mentioned above is completely different in nature and depends on how the analyst sees and interprets the text. Language texts are generally taken as objects that can be described mechanically without interpretation, but Fairclough (2001) claims that human products, texts, are not neutral as they involve humans. So, one should engage with them in a “human, therefore an interpretive way” (p. 27). Therefore, I have integrated SCA (Van Dijk, 2001) at the interpretation level to demonstrate how social actors share their collective frames of perceptions, called social representations, along with their individual experiences and strategies. These social representations serve as the link between the social system and individual cognitive system and “perform the translation, homogenization and coordination between external requirements and subjective experiences” (Wodak, 2008, p. 26). Further to the above, I have employed DHA at the explanation level. As this domain is concerned with issues of power, power being a construct that is realized through interdiscursivity and hegemony, integrating the historical dimension has added to exploring the ways in which discourse operates in the various domains of the society.

## Data Collection

As there is no well-defined methodology or data collecting procedure for CDA, I collected and analyzed the data in the following steps in a cyclical form according to McGrath's (2002) proposal of material evaluation:

1. Using Cunningsworth's (1995) impressionistic approach and Littlejohn's (2011) "what is there" method, skim through the selected textbooks and get an overview and general information about the layout.
2. Select suitable texts that present a version of dominant discourses of power and hegemony.
3. Analyze the content to identify the emerging themes of neoliberalism.
4. Read repeatedly and further analyze the content to determine the NLD recognizable words.
5. If needed, analyze the content of activities before or after the text that determine wider social implications of NLD).

## Analysis

The analysis covers the texts with neoliberal themes and associated lexis following the procedure of description, interpretation and explanation integrated with SCA and DHA (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2001; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Akincioglu, 2012). The interpretation stage, including the cognitive dimension (van Dijk, 2004) manifests how discourses are reconstructed and changed, leading to different discourses (O'Halloran, 2011), misinterpretations (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999), pedagogical limitations and eventually knowledge formation. Lastly, the explanation level connects the texts and discourse to the wider social, cultural and historical context (O'Halloran, 2011; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009).

## CDA Criteria

Prominent CDA scholars have provided a criteria to review CDA studies in applied linguistics (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; van Dijk, 2009). They emphasize that CDA is committed to contributing to the understanding and tackling of social problems, caused by text and talk, and their long-term implications. Thus, CDA is problem-oriented rather than based on theory or specific discipline. The aim is to present its practical implications and applications to general public comprehensively. It emphasizes flexibility and diversity in its approaches and methods to handle complex issues. It considers the interests, expertise and resistance of marginal groups. Lastly, it puts special emphasis on researcher reflexivity—the need to keep both the subject and the object transparent and justify the interpretations of discursive events.

## Limitations

1. An investigation of two textbooks does not provide a broad perspective to make generalizations.
2. Focus on one topic, neoliberal ideology, restricts the scope of CDA to a limited critical angle.
3. The selection of texts may depend on the reviewer's choice and her own value system and understanding making the study less objective.

## Analysis and Discussion

In this section, a CDA of four texts will be undertaken following the description, interpretation and explanation levels as described in the methodology section.



## Oxford EAP

### Text 1: Unit 2, Task 3.

#### *Description*

This text is taken from *Economics Course Companion* by Blink and Dorton (2006, pp. 401–404). It begins with a brief history of free market economy in the West, continues with a detailed explanation of how it was adopted by the developing countries despite all the challenges, and ends with mentioning how the Third World could not gain much benefit from this system due to its own weaknesses. Moreover, suggestions are given to find solutions following the footsteps of IMF (International Monetary Fund).

In this text, neoliberalism is evident through the claim that the “best way to achieve growth and development” (line 3) is the “market-led approach.” Using NLD recognizable words such as “economic growth” “trade liberalization” (lines 9, 18) the benefits of free market economy are skillfully connected to the success of “export-led Asian Tigers” (line 14), that was possible because of their adoption of Western financial systems and their strictly guarding their vested interests with the cover of “government intervention” (line 14). Interestingly, this text was published in 2006 and there is no reference to the Asian financial crisis between June 1997 and January 1998 and the constant volatility of the Asian markets in the following decades.

The pre and post-reading activities are packed with NLD recognizable words. Task 1 prepares students to think of “control” of the main infrastructure needed to run a country, for instance the “supply of goods, transportation, education.”

#### *Interpretation*

This text explains in detail the role of the “free market economy” in the developing world. Although the text seemingly elaborates the “concerns” (line 5) raised about market-based (line 6) financial policies, the undertone suggests a message of the failure of the developing world to catch up

with the stable financial policies of the West. For instance, “protectionism” policies in the developed countries have kept their own interests safe, whereas, the developing countries have neither been able to come up with a system to protect their countries’ interests nor “achieve growth” (line 28) from the “free market” profits. This is because of their weak “infrastructure,” lack of “government intervention” and “political stability,” “rural–urban divide” (lines 14, 23, 28). There is no mention of how financial deregulation policies led to excessive lending by Western banks in Asia, the result of which has been perpetual debt crises and financial insecurity (Wade & Veneroso, 1998).

The extensive “growth” mentioned thrice in the passage (line 3, 18, 28) is certainly the fruit of “free-market strategies” (line 22) and it is “long-term” (line 18). On the other hand, the problems of the free market approach (line 22) are toned down by making them look like “short-term costs” (line 19). Indeed, the meaning-making potential (Chun, 2009) of EAP students will bend more towards long-term financial planning and ignore the issues of “poverty,” “income inequality” and “slum” living (lines 21, 24, 25).

The related activities before and after the text, (Task 2/ Task 7, Q. 3) limit the scope of interpretation of the text, leading to a frame of mind that legitimizes the concept of free-market approach. Task 7 questions the need for high-level cognitive processing for language production. This could internalize the notion of the free market economy as presented in Task 1 and Task 3. The profuse usage of NLD-recognizable words could facilitate the process of internalization of the information acquired from the text about free-market economies.

### *Explanation*

The reading text performs an authoritative role by validating the long-term benefits of free-market strategies and downplaying the many problems related to it. This newly acquired knowledge can be easily transferred to wider social contexts, as the discussion questions in Task 7 do, where students are asked to think and discuss the benefits of economic growth. Learners are also led to understand the global economic discourse as

promoted by IMF as a legitimate regulatory body without considering its implications at local level.

## **Text 2: A Planet under Stress**

### *Description*

This text is taken from “A Planet under Stress,” a chapter by Lester Brown in *Debating the Earth: The Environmental Politics Reader*, edited by Dryzek and Schlosberg (2005, pp. 38–39). It starts with the issue of “population” (line 2) growth and depletion of Earth’s resources. The word “population” is used four times, one of which is in agent form (line 9) and “growth” is used three times (lines 3, 6, 9). Neoliberalism is manifest in the text as environmental issues and population growth are some of the main themes of NLD (Haque, 1999; Wilson, 2013). In this text, both these issues are presented as global issues that seriously affect the whole world.

### *Interpretation*

The way this text is organized and placed within other activities leads to misinterpretations. The word “population” is used in agent form (line 9) which predominantly hides the real agent behind the depletion of natural resources, which is a manifestation of NLD (Neoliberal Discourse). The reader is led to interpret that “population growth” is depriving the Earth and its inhabitants of its precious natural resources. For instance, Task 3 in the speaking module, in which students have to fill in suitable phrases, prepares students to think that “over-population,” not cars, is a major cause of environmental degradation. The fact is that affluent nations, where population growth is not a problem, consume 70 to 80% of natural resources and are home to 90% of cars in the world (Haque, 1999). In task 1 of the reading module, the example given to think about is the demand for “oil.” What exactly is being communicated here is again twisted information of blaming all for something done by few.

Paragraphs 8 and 9 discuss the UN's plans to feed the hungry in the coming years and then not being able to implement the plans. There is no mention of reasons for failures in the execution of plans, hence we see NLP manifested again. In this account the factual reasons that lead to failure to feed the hungry are not given, but rather the notional complete inefficiency of the UN. There are contradictions in their intentions and their policies (Houtart, 2005). Poverty and hunger are socially constructed and not created by nature. Finally, the essay right after the reading task strengthens the concept of "population growth" as the main culprit of the environmental disaster the world is being led to.

### *Explanation*

This text is a good example of how neoliberalism has become hegemonic as a mode of discourse (Harvey, 2005). This discourse, perpetually reconstructed in EAP textbooks, manipulates the interpretation of texts, limits their pedagogical scope and alters the course of readership. Neoliberalism, although not always literally visible, prevails throughout the text. This is an example of how it remains hegemonic as a mode of discourse

## **Q Skills for Success 4**

### **Text 1: Everyday Heroes**

#### *Description*

This text is adapted from an interview with Katrina Fried, the author of *Everyday Heroes: 50 Americans Changing the World One Nonprofit at a Time*. The text starts with describing how everyday heroes are made—not by performing physical acts of bravery but doing humanitarian work. They are ordinary people and don't expect rewards for their services. The text continues with telling stories of eight young people, all "social entrepreneurs," who serve poor people, give them homes, facilities for children and so on. The words "empower" "humanitarian" "entrepreneur" tell a lot

about the “representational repertoire” (Du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997, p. 39) of the text. It represents entrepreneurs as philanthropists whom Gray (2010) calls “philanthropic capitalists” who give capitalism a “much-needed human face” (p. 726).

### *Interpretation*

The organization and the layout of the text is a good example of misinterpretation. The word “entrepreneur” has been used six times altogether, five times with the adjective “social.” According to the *Cambridge English Dictionary*, “entrepreneur” means “someone who starts their business, especially when this involves seeing a new opportunity” and this opportunity is that of profit-making. A “social entrepreneur” is an individual with innovative solutions to society’s dire needs (Holborow, 2015). This is how business, social enterprise and philanthropy are interlinked, and their discourses influence the students’ minds under the logic of neoliberalism (Ball, 2012; Saura, 2016).

The eight stories of young “social entrepreneurs” highlight Holborow’s (2015) concept of “neoliberal entrepreneurialism” and its emphasis on the individual being the “novel hegemonic regime” (p. 84) who is capable of influencing the whole society. The new capitalism idealizes the individual and views individualism as a “necessary fiction” to promote its vested interests (Gray, 2010, 2012, p. 15). Individuals are encouraged and pumped to “brand” themselves and give themselves a “distinct market identity” (p. 718). On the same lines, the interviewee in this text talks about “entrepreneurs” ...who “have walked to the beat of their own drum”... “never been satisfied in a conventional professional setting” (lines 84, 86, 87).

The word “nonprofit” has been used five times in the passage the meaning of which may be assumed to be no earnings from the hard work you do. The interviewee talks of how hard it is to get funding and then gives examples of some rich people who run “self-sustaining” (line 105) businesses that “fight poverty and disease with profitability” (line 106). This creates doubts in the reader’s mind whether the “social entrepreneur” is fighting poverty or trying to “sustain the business” with “profitability.”

The fact is that neoliberal governments want the nonprofits to focus on a “business model” and become “quasi-markets” rather than being conventional, free service providers (Evans, Richmond, & Shields, 2005, p. 74).

### *Explanation*

This text is a classic example of how neoliberal ideology has infiltrated into textbooks and hence into the minds of students. In order to find and free the entrepreneur within individuals, the neoliberal discourse hints at the “abandonment of the social welfare system” and shifts responsibility on to the individual to rule over themselves in a capitalist society free from the government. Thus it is the individual who has to improve and adapt to changes and be flexible in their social reality (Chun, 2009; Lemke, 2002).

Moreover, there is a “hidden curriculum” in this kind of text that ensures the “preservation of existing social privilege, interests and knowledge of one element of the population at the expense of less powerful groups” (Apple & King, 1977, p. 34). Students are given a lesson in promoting the culture of giving, charity, philanthropy with the undercurrent message that the poor are incapable of participating in these activities as they don’t have the “capital” to start any kind of business.

## **Text 2: Successful People**

### *Description*

This short text is a model essay from Q Skills for Success: Reading and Writing level 4 (Student’s book) for students to analyze and base their writing on. It begins with a question to the reader about “fame” and “fortune” and dreams of being a “billionaire or famous actor” (lines 1, 2). It continues by informing students how success can be achieved by following certain set rules and developing the qualities all successful people share in common. At the end, the author advises the reader not to “despair” (line 16) as the three “behaviors” (line 16) mentioned can always be learned and concomitant success achieved.

### *Interpretation*

From the first line onwards, this text constructs the concept of individual success which is the hallmark of NLD. The two questions manifest the obsessive association of neoliberalism with individualism, individual responsibility and celebrity culture. Gray (2012) argued that this is “integral to market fundamentalism which lies at the heart of neoliberal ideology” (p. 2).

This pro-individualism discourse leads the students to make two connected interpretations. Firstly, using an intimate voice directly addressing readers, the author seeks to make them accept that becoming “famous” and a “billionaire” is the right thing to do, the ultimate goal of life. Secondly, to be “focused” “single-minded,” to “maximize efficiency” “to set and accomplish goals” (lines 8, 9, 12) are the qualities to be developed, notwithstanding the heartlessness and loneliness that accompanies them (McGuigan, 2014). This is the promotion of an individual who aims to achieve self-actualization and self-determination through the market rather than engaging in collective work to change society and make the world a better place to live (Fevre, 2016).

These interpretations are also pedagogically limited by giving restricted options to students about success and role-modeling when they write an essay on this topic.

In the EAP context, this text enables the construction of neoliberal discourse which encourages students to view individualism, therefore self-centeredness and disregard of others, in a positive manner, which will certainly lead to further support for this attitude in wider social contexts.

## **Pedagogical and Theoretical Implications**

This study aimed to identify and uncover the neoliberal discourses in EAP texts. As has been established, neoliberalism is either hidden or openly represented in all kinds of symbols and concepts including globalization, individualization, philanthropy, heroism, success, celebrity culture, environmental issues, economics, free market, production growth

and many more. All the four texts contained NLD recognizable words, often used as nouns (agents), and hence lexical manifestation of neoliberalism. The pedagogical limitations are implicit and manipulated through the activities before and after the texts. There are repeated examples of misinterpretations that make the reader think in particular ways provided in the texts instead of thinking on their own and interpreting the situation themselves.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the ELT publishing industry is a massive, global phenomenon. It is unrealistic to think of writing indigenous EAP material to displace the variety of EAP books used in English language skills development departments. As Gray (2010) pointed out, it is the teachers who need to develop skills to analyze teaching materials. Teacher development programs should include modules or courses in critical and reflective thinking where they are trained to hone their linguistic analysis skills and how these skills can be used to determine the ideological content in the textbooks. Further research on textbooks can enhance awareness about pedagogical limitations and misinterpretations that hinder knowledge formation.

Working on this project enriched my experience and made me realize the importance of being aware of what knowledge my students actually get in the class and how it leaves a lasting effect on their thought process. This also made me think to spend more time in reflective teaching and inculcate the habit of reflecting regularly on my own actions and thoughts.

## Further Reading

Hart, C., & Cap, P. (2017). *Contemporary critical discourse studies*. London and Oxford: Bloomsbury.

This book is a cutting-edge, interdisciplinary account of constant theoretical and empirical development of different methodological frameworks to analyze evolving aspects of language in a wide range of sociopolitical and institutional contexts. It presents an up-to-date survey of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) covering both the theoretical and analytical territories.

Rogers, R. (2011). *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education*. London: Routledge.



This is a collection of eleven papers whose main purpose is to seek a place for CDA within the theories of learning and education in the American context, drawing particular attention to form–function interface.

Jones, D. S. (2014). *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman and the birth of neoliberal politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

The book describes neoliberalism's road to power, starting from Europe but shifting to the United States after World War II. Neoliberalism was a political message conveyed through a transatlantic network of think tanks, businessmen, politicians, and journalists that was held together by Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. During Reagan's and Thatcher's era, a guileless faith in free markets became dominant in politics.

Roger, R. (2017). *Reclaiming powerful literacies: New horizons for critical discourse analysis*. New York: Routledge.

This book offers a unique framework for CDA, emphasizing the discourses of hope, transformation and liberation, and manifesting a variety of powerful literacies in action. Roger presents the case that critical social theories which are often associated with CDA have not been aligned with a recent shift towards the positive, also known as Positive Discourse Analysis. With a new way to looking at the constructs of power, action, context, critique and reflexivity, the book exemplifies the potential of theorizing discourse analysis from a positive perspective.

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# Part III

## Issues of Critical Language Teacher Education





# 9

## Exploratory Practice for Language Learning and Teaching

Assia Slimani-Rolls

### Introduction and Nature of the Problem

The practitioner research family (action research, exploratory practice, narrative enquiry, reflective practice, teacher research) evolved from the larger social, political and philosophical movements of communism, feminism, socialism, civil rights and other emancipatory movements prevailing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These movements aimed to promote social change and have confronted issues of inequality and forms of alienation, exploitation and marginalization in order to denounce a “conception of society as stratified and marked by inequality, with differential structural access to material and symbolic resources, opportunity, mobility and education” (Talmy, 2010, p. 128). They were mirrored in educational developments by such influential figures as John Dewey in the United States, Paulo Freire in Latin America and Lawrence Stenhouse in the United Kingdom.

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Dewey (1963) called for social change and genuine democracy through a more liberal democratic agenda which recognized that “education is essentially a social process” (p. 58) that could ease the way to democratic citizenship. Responsibility to oneself and to others to enable emancipatory education is a critical agenda that was taken up under the banner of Freire (1970) in his struggle to provide literacy programs in adult education in Brazil. Education, to Freire, is not a transmissive process of amalgamation of facts and information. Rather, it is about “bringing into question known structures, and examining conventional or taken-for-granted ‘explanations’ of reality” (Taylor, 1993, pp. 73–79). For his part, Stenhouse (1975) modernized innovatively the field of curriculum research with his view that “we are constrained by assumptions and habits built up in the past and that it is the business of education to make us freer and more creative” (p. 82). His legacy in curriculum studies is the transformation of curriculum developers’ and evaluators’ thinking away from conventional and bureaucratic models whereby new curricula were designed by outsiders, implemented by local authorities, schools and teachers, and assessed by expert evaluators preoccupied with quantitative measurements of outcomes. Indeed, these externally managed reforms overlook the context in which teachers work. They underplay “mental lives of teachers” (Walburg, 1977) and ignore “the emotional dimension ... of how teachers change” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835; Zembylas, 2003a, b).

Inspired by such formidable thinkers, many educational researchers (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Zeichner, 1995; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001) called upon teachers as reflective and self-directed professionals capable of researching their own classrooms. They argued that what teachers know about teaching is largely socially constructed out of the experiences and classrooms in which they work closely with their students. “Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835) and so knowledge about good teaching that is claimed to be useful to enhance teachers’ lives, their students’ and schools’ cannot be created solely by outsiders who know little about teachers’ dynamic relationship with their environment (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Hence, boundaries must be re-negotiated so that teachers re-engage with classroom

decision-making as “transformative intellectuals” (Pennycook, 1989) and agentive teachers capable to take their practice forward.

Indeed, teachers were considered as “doers” rather than “thinkers” and doing the teaching was best seen as the application of methods which, if applied appropriately, will lead to the desired effect independently of the contexts in which the teaching takes place (Johnson, 2016). This reductionist view, however, was challenged by the large-scale methodological research projects (Scherer & Wertheimer, 1964; Smith, 1970) whose goals were to establish the superiority of the prevailing specialist-designed teaching methods of the time. These projects, however, failed to establish which method worked best because researchers failed to see that teachers are not mere technicians applying externally produced global methods. Teachers do not achieve teaching through mechanistic implementation of outsiders’ prescriptions. Rather, they pick and choose their instructional tools depending on their individual beliefs and subjective interpretation of their contexts (Hall, 2018). This “principled eclecticism” (Rivers, 1981) is integral to teachers’ approaches to classroom teaching. Prahbu (1990) argues that seeking which method is “best” is unyielding and ignores teachers’ “sense of plausibility”—their capacities to mix and blend methods knowingly within their situated practice. Teachers’ particular, individual, and multifarious ways of using methods in the classroom have, indeed, eroded the experts’ concept that there is a single best way to teach and has, therefore, broken their superiority over teachers thus moving the ELT field to the postmethod era (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) whose practice is characterized by the “principled eclecticism” reported above. Both the teacher research movement and postmethod echoed the themes of teachers as reflective practitioners and self-directed researchers capable of moving their practice forward.

From a critical perspective, Pennycook (1989) contends that all knowledge is “interested” because knowledge can reflect particular views on how society should be organized. Essentially produced in the Anglo-Saxon world, methods have been exported across the world to represent favored ways of teaching language; publishers embrace method promoters and textbook authors who serve their interest and keep their products in demand; methods favor experts and theorists, who are mostly male, rather than teachers, who are mostly female. In this way, methods keep

teachers under control and so they are “deskilled,” perpetually implementing other people’s ideas (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Pennycook, 1989; for further discussion, see Hall (2017, p. 112).

## 2. Teacher Research

### 2.1. Do Teachers Actually Engage in Research?

In spite of the encouragement for teachers to engage in research, the literature reveals, decades later, that their engagement in research is scarce in English-language teaching (e.g. Zeichner, 1995; Burns, 1999, 2005; Borg, 2010; Nassaji, 2012; Tavakoli & Howard, 2012; Hanks, 2017), in modern foreign-language teaching (Macaro, 2003; Macaro, Graham, & Woore, 2016; Marsden & Kasprovicz, 2017) and, in fact, in the field of education in general (e.g. Anwarudin, 2015; Ball, 2012; Dagenais et al., 2012; Hammersley, 1993; Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003). This makes examination of the situation all the more important as research engagement is commonly considered to be a potentially powerful force in teachers’ professional development (Stenhouse, 1975; Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Borg, 2010; Tavakoli, 2015; Anwarudin, 2015).

### 2.2. Dos and Don’ts of Teacher Research

Practitioner research (PR) is not, generally, regarded as a legitimate form of research in ELT. Various writers have questioned its value condemning, for instance, the reliability of its methods, such as narratives (Huberman, 1996) and its methodological limitations which render it “of little value to the academe” (Ellis, 2010, p. 189). They mistrust the validity of its findings (Foster, 1999), the supremacy of description over analysis (Elliott & Sarland, 1995) and its negligible place in the field (Dornyei, 2007). It has also been accused of being strong in theory and difficult to implement in practice (Block, 2000) and of producing accounts that are not directed toward resolving educational issues (Brown, 2005). Overall, Somekh stresses that “knowledge generated from action research is neither taken seriously nor disseminated widely and effectively... [it] is seen merely as an outcome of a professional development

process ... [that is] local, private, and unimportant [...] in this way, the operation of power in the social system works to neutralize the voice and influence of practitioners and promote the hegemony of traditional academic researchers" (p. 28).

Some writers have, however, shed light on the benefits of how PR has impacted on teachers' behavior in the classroom having enabled them to develop feelings of empowerment and belonging (Roberts, 1993), a capacity for self-determination in making their own professional judgments (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004), to become reflexive, critical thinkers and analytical of their teaching behaviors (Atay, 2006), more able to defend their views and confront instructional challenges by-passing external help (Donato, 2003) and capable of forging communication networks between teachers and researchers (Crookes, 1993). Among many other features of practitioner research presented by Olson (1990), this activity reduces the gap between research findings and classroom practice. On the whole, positive findings are reported in the United States, where "evidence of direct links between conducting teacher research under particular conditions and improvements in students' attitudes, behavior and learning have been observed" (Zeichner, 2003, p. 317). In the United Kingdom, Sharp (2007) remarked that "teacher research has the potential to make a real difference to pupils and staff, the whole school and the wider community" (2007, p. 22). See Borg (2010, pp. 402–405) and Hanks (2017, 2019) for further discussion on the benefits and critiques of PR.

### 2.3. What Has Prevented Practitioner Research Becoming Part of Teachers' Lives?

Various barriers stand in the way of practitioners engaging in research: lack of time, resources, access to research, training, energy and support and, just as importantly, the lack of respect and understanding that researchers and teachers have for each other's work (e.g., Hanks, 2017, pp. 67–73, 2019; Borg, 2010, p. 409). Conventional research, as carried out by academics, is claimed by teachers to be irrelevant to their reality in the classroom (e.g. Tavakoli, 2015). Similarly, research carried out by teachers is found to be of little value to academe. Hence there has

developed a rift between the two communities. Both have a distinct conceptualization of their work, different goals, agendas, and working conditions, all of which separate their professions.

#### 2.4. A Critical Agenda

The ELT field is, however, said to be currently in the postmethod era, in which teachers are freed from experts' shackles and are entrusted by the teacher research movement to be local experts and research-oriented professionals. As such, they are expected to take action in order to understand what works in their classrooms, what does not, why and what other alternatives would be. In other words, they are asked to take a more responsive approach to make better sense of their practice. This is particularly important given the competing language learning and teaching theories that are prevalent in language education. Teachers must be able to question their tacit understanding in order to identify what good teaching is (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 197). They cannot rely "simply" on "their instinct and experiences" (Paran 2017, p. 499). The best way to reconcile the two communities of teachers and researchers is, however, considered differently by different writers. While some, like Clarke (1994), confirm that any bridge "would involve a major change in our thinking and in our behaviour and, however reasonable it may appear to be, I do not see this happening any time soon" (p. 18); others, like Medgyes (2017), are adamant that "never the twain shall meet" (p. 2). Yet, conciliatory views favor bridging this gap by developing communication networks between the two communities (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Allwright, 2005; Anwarudin, 2015; Paran, 2017). Segregation seen to be due "to the limited mutual engagement, absence of a joint enterprise, and lack of a shared repertoire between them" (Tavakoli, 2015, p. 37).

The next section of this chapter introduces exploratory practice (EP), an innovative form of practitioner research (PR) whose principled theoretical framework is proposed to bring together teaching and research or "practice as research" (Hanks, 2017, 2019) to empower language teachers and their learners to understand what it is that they are trying to achieve together in the classroom (Allwright, 2003).

## Exploratory Practice and Its Principled Framework

Exploratory practice (EP) sits within the emancipatory movement discussed above and is inspired by the theoretical fusion of the work of Freire (1970), Allwright and Lenzen (1997), Allwright (2003), and other contributors to the field of Critical Applied Linguistics (e.g. Pennycook, 1989, 2001; Zeichner, 1995; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). EP has emerged as a reaction to “parasitic” researchers who carry out research on teachers and learners without sharing with them their research goals or findings and, consider them as subjects of, rather than contributors to, research. Allwright (2006) believes that teachers’ privileged knowledge about the classroom environment and their uniquely close contact with learners are the ultimate providers of opportunities for teachers to develop “locally helpful understandings” (p. 15).

EP is part of the PR family, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, and is defined by a set of distinctive principles which set it apart from its siblings (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2017, 2019). These principles are: prioritizing quality of life; working for understanding; working collegially, including working with learners as co-partners; and maintaining research sustainability via the use of pedagogic activities as investigative tools. These principles, which are briefly presented below, constitute EP’s theoretical framework; as the force that drives the teachers’ search for understanding their classroom environment.

EP prioritizes quality of life in the classroom because it is believed that working in a socioemotional climate that supports the well-being of teachers and learners is fundamental to creating a platform for collaborative relationships that would stimulate both parties to stay in the classroom and want to develop quality of work (Gieve & Miller, 2006). Seeking to understand quality of classroom life should precede attempts at bringing any change, because understanding it is essential for making good classroom decisions. The search for understanding requires that working collegially for mutual development is embedded in the research enterprise. Involving everybody that can help understanding, including learners, is paramount for EP, which sees learners as key developing

practitioners of learning. If we accept to consider teachers as practitioners of teaching then “why not try to think of learners as practitioners of learning, and not just as ‘targets of teaching?’” (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 2).

Like teachers, learners are not empty receptacles waiting to be filled with others’ plans and procedures. They are complex individuals who can influence the course of events in the classroom (Slimani-Rolls, 2005, 2009; Tudor, 2001) and should therefore be considered as co-partners in the search for understanding. Their engagement in the learning, teaching and research processes is taken as “a constructive response to (inter) national policy drivers emphasising the importance of student engagement and teaching quality for the transformation of a HE fit for a contemporary world” (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2016, p. 1). Working in partnership with learners and collegially with peers, researchers and other interested parties highlight the value of learning in communities as a powerful insight for developing understandings (Boreham, 2000). Finally, sustaining the search for understanding requires time, effort and numerous other resources that are not necessarily accessible to teachers. Therefore, EP recommends that teachers integrate work for understanding into their everyday teaching routine by using Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs) or normal classroom activities as investigative tools. These can be classroom discussions, group or pair work, presentations, brainstorming sessions and so on rather than conventional research methods, whose use can lead to burnout (Allwright & Miller, 2012) when carried out alongside a full-time teaching position and an already crowded schedule. In this way research is integrated into teaching rather than added to it, thus making it sustainable.

## Research Methodology

The way that the above EP principles actually work in the language classroom is the question that has motivated me to develop a two-year long project with six volunteering neophyte language practitioner researchers (LPR) teaching languages in a university in London. The aim of this LPR project is to enable me, as a researcher and project leader, to understand



how the EP principles work by enabling the six volunteers to implement it in their classrooms.

#### 4.1. The Participants

The LPR participants are three experienced English and three modern foreign language teachers (Italian, French and Spanish) teaching languages for business purposes. Except for one English teacher who had a postgraduate diploma, the remaining five teachers had an MA in Applied Linguistics and their experience with research was limited to the research that they carried out for their MA dissertation. Given, however, that the present book addresses the teaching of English in different contexts in the world, I shall limit myself to reporting on the English language practitioners' reactions and attitudes regarding the implementation of EP in their classes. All three taught English for Academic Purposes to their international undergraduate students who were also taking courses in business and management studies. It is, however, important to stress that the six teachers worked closely with each other and have evidently impacted on each other's self-esteem, self-efficacy and agency throughout the duration of the project.

#### 4.2. Method

I organized a workshop specifically dedicated to EP for the six volunteers, covering its philosophy and principled framework. EP encourages teachers to puzzle about their classroom lives as a way of theorizing about their practice (Hanks, 2017, 2019; Slimani-Rolls & Kiley, 2014) leading them to identify and investigate teaching puzzles which are, in effect, research questions that they have about their teaching environment. The puzzles are "why do I feel that it is a challenge to obtain meaningful feedback and evaluations of the learning experience?" (Banister, 2018); "what makes student presentations and discussion boards work well?" (Goral, 2018) and "why do learners rarely use recently taught lexical/ grammatical items during speaking activities which are intended to facilitate their language performance?" (Houghton, 2018). These puzzles have been the purpose of the three English language teachers' investigations and have

appeared in their individual narratives published in Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2018).

Following the EP principle of collegiality in particular and the participatory nature of EP in general, I debated with the practitioners what methodology would be best to scaffold their investigative efforts. We agreed on the following processes: First, the teachers were to request individual help in case they stalled in their inquiries, given that their research experience was limited. I offered to act as their mentor on a one-to-one basis, agreeing on the privacy of our discussions unless we conceded that parts of these could usefully be shared to progress the of their peers' understanding. Second, I recommended that they undertake peer observation of teaching with each other to encourage conversations about their teaching, their students' learning and puzzle investigation. Third, we engaged to meet all together every six weeks, including the external project leader as a critical friend, to empower the practitioners by discussing their agenda regarding their needs, (mis)understandings and anything else that was helpful to them. Characterized by the guidance afforded by the project leaders and the practitioners' own sense of agency and autonomy, this inclusive and collegial multimodal research design, aimed to enhance collaboration and shared leadership amongst the team members, thus chiming with the sociocultural theories that underline the fundamental social nature of cognition and learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Poehner, 2008) and theories of situated cognition, which maintain that knowledge entails lived practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The three methodological processes reported above, i.e. the peer observation of teaching that the ELTs undertook with each other, the mentoring processes that they underwent throughout their EP journey and the discussion groups (which were missed only once, over two years, by one teacher for unforeseeable circumstances) were claimed to be invaluable by the participants to keep their research going. They empowered the participants' investigative efforts and brought out the relevance of collegiality in the search for understanding and work for mutual development which created transformative synergies. The latter have enhanced the participating teachers' lived experiences and generated various interrelated

and concurrent personal, social and professional developments that are related in Section 5, the findings and discussion section.

Before moving any further, however, it is crucial to indicate, that in view of the successful take-up of the project by the teachers, I asked them if they were willing to share their individual reflections and understandings with the wider community through the publication of a book containing their narratives. This proposal stimulated further the enthusiasm of the participants and they readily agreed to continue with the project in this manner. To enable them to put their reflections on paper and facilitate the re-storying of their narratives, I invited them to brainstorm, as a group, the major stages that they passed through to elucidate their puzzles with the intention of jogging their memories throughout their EP journey. Several headings emerged under which the teachers have constructed their narratives: introduction of themselves and their expectations as neophyte teacher researchers, their search for understanding, problem identification, rationale for their chosen investigative method(s), data collection, data analysis, understanding and discussion, and finally their reflection on the EP processes and the way forward. The teachers' narratives were subsequently published in Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2018) and so ethical considerations were addressed, and consent forms signed by the volunteering teachers to meet the requirements of publication. As such, in the rest of this chapter, I shall refer to them by their names, as authors, when I quote from their published narratives in Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2018) to illustrate their reactions to the implementation of the EP core principles.

## Findings and Discussion

I shall present and discuss below the practitioners' reactions to some of the EP principles and claims of what most influenced their learning experiences; that is, the impact that collegiality has exercised on the mutual understanding of the groups' individual puzzles, the difficulties and the benefits that they derived on discovering the relevance of working with learners and peers, and, finally, the challenges and personal satisfaction that they draw from the efforts that they spent on disseminating their

understandings with the wider community. Once introduced by their authors' names, I shall refer to them by their first names in an attempt to keep alive the spirit of collegiality in which the project was conducted. There was no hierarchy in the relationships between the team members as Banister (2018), one of the ELTs, explains: "(d)iscussions with the internal lead became deeper as trust emerged and our relationship evolved to a point where I felt more of an insider in the process" (p. 147). For further details about the narratives and their authors, see Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2018).

### 5.1. Collegiality in the Search for Understanding and Mutual Development. Teachers Working with Researchers

The volunteering teachers felt strongly about the support of the community that they formed with each other and with the project leaders through the peer observation of teaching, the one-to-one mentoring sessions and the discussion forum. Marianna Goral (2018) asserted that "these meetings were invaluable as they provided a platform to share our understanding of EP and support its practical implementation in the spirit of collegiality that EP requires" (p. 172). John Houghton (2018) confirmed "I have gained a sense of raised professional esteem and have formed stronger collegial bonds with the group members" (p. 164.) adding further that "[t]he reason I was able to remain motivated and continue with my research was very much due to the fact that it was a 'collaborative enquiry' with my peers, my students, and the lead researchers" (p. 165). Indeed, the practical, personal and psychological benefits were felt tangibly as Chris stated that he had "witnessed the project collaborative approach generating a positive ripple effect as other [...] members' progress with their puzzles provided an impetus when my own research seemed in danger of stalling" (p. 147). The collegial and inclusive structure of this EP team-based professional development strengthened the relationship through regular pair and group face-to-face communication, and enabled trust to grow amongst the team members as they got to know each other and "empathise with the challenges they are going through" (Gast, Schildkamp, & van der Veen, 2017, p. 749).

It is important to reiterate here that the aim of these communicative processes was not to improve the volunteers' teaching practice. Rather, they were set up to enhance their confidence and empower them to believe in themselves as professionals from whom the project leaders hoped to learn how the teachers would go about using their knowledge to operationalize EP in their classrooms. In this sense, the teachers' participation was "in part socially motivated" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 973) and sparked the participants' self-efficacy, self-esteem, autonomy and agency as they thrived in developing an understanding of their practice and shared it with each other and with the project leaders.

"Working together ... allowed me to see that the puzzles we each brought to the project were actually, issues which had been important to each of us as teachers for some time. However, what took our discussions beyond the usual staffroom exchanges [...] was having experienced research-practitioners leading explorations into both the literature and the students' perspectives" (John, p. 164). To John's reflections on the relevance of centrality of the students' consideration and the teachers' involvement in the literature that they themselves had requested, Chris acknowledges "[t]he feedback from the research leads drove exploration of the puzzle as they identified common themes in workshops. Both project leaders [...] kept me on track without removing my agency or negatively impacting my self-efficacy" (p. 147). EP created a facilitative environment for teacher learning that required dialogic feedback from individuals to bring knowledge, insight and similar histories to the teachers' lived experience within their specific and sensitive context. As a result, teachers appreciate the supportive network that is afforded by peers and researchers just as academic researchers benefit from the working circumstances that favor their advancement. Various studies have highlighted teachers' and teacher educators' appreciation of working collaboratively on continuing professional learning opportunities based on experiential learning and led by experienced colleagues and researchers (e.g. Czerniawski, Guberman, & MacPhail, 2016; Kennedy, 2016).

Enriched by the collegial and collaborative EP experience, Marianna commented on the quality of the staff development that was prevailing around her and which focused mostly on "new technologies [...] or demonstrating new classroom activities. My impression was that this type of

training did not fully engage with my practice requirements and the complex ecology of my classroom” (p. 170). Her views echo those of Breen (2006), who maintains that the “majority of professional development opportunities available to teachers at present are short training largely serving central policy imperatives or teaching resources industry updating. Follow-up development is rare” (p. 209). Indeed, the omnipresent focus on the “new” does not build-up on or extends the teachers’ knowledge. Instead, it considers that “whatever teachers achieved before is inadequate and that systems of bureaucratic surveillance of teachers’ work will improve their students’ performance” (Breen, 2006, pp. 206–207). Such professional development (PD) is transmissive in its purpose, power-dominated and expert-dependent while what is needed is the teacher’s reflexivity on their actual practice within the complexity of their context (Wedell & Malderez, 2013; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001) in which the learner is recognized as knowledge-seeker and co-creator (Allwright, 2003). Hence, instead of “just accumulated information” (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 2) from top-down transmissive so-called program development, EP offers PD that “emerges from a process of reshaping teachers’ existing knowledge, beliefs, and practices rather than simply imposing new theories, methods, or materials on teachers” (Johnson and Golombek, *ibid.*). Such opportunities have better chances of enhancing their professional identity as the teachers are centrally placed in this process-oriented enterprise are working on their own agenda rather than the project leaders’.

*Working with Learners as Co-Researchers and PEPAs as Research Methods*

Prior to the LPR project, the participating teachers viewed the teacher’s role as “a transmitter of knowledge to learners” (Houghton 2018, p. 153) who are seen “as empty vessels [to be] filled with knowledge’ (Goral, 2018, p. 179). As such, it is no surprise, as indicated below, that EP posed epistemological challenges at the outset of the project in relation to working with learners as “co-researchers” and PEPAs as “research methods” in the teaching, learning and research endeavors. These notions seemed alien to the participants because they are generally relegated by teachers to the realm of conventional research (Freeman, 1998). Hence, the LPR teachers needed some time to get their heads around these notions. Chris highlighted that “[A]t first, PEPAs took considerable time to develop

although gradually it became easier” (p. 147) while John affirmed that “[o]nce I understood better how to use classroom activities as investigative tools, [...] these activities were no more difficult or time consuming than preparing for any typical lesson” (p. 165). As to regarding the learners’ contributions to puzzle explorations, John reported that “[i]t took the whole of the first year of the project before I began to involve my learners as co-researchers” (p. 157) because he “felt that [l]ike other colleagues on this project, I considered such an investigation to be a teacher’s concern and that it is we, rather than the students, who are trained to be knowledgeable of the teaching and learning processes” (p. 157). Regarding the learners’ contribution to the investigatory processes, Chris explained “[f]rankly, I doubted whether my learners would be sufficiently motivated to engage deeply with classroom research” (p.147).

The Eureka moment came from a journal article by Rowland (2011) which inspired Chris to transform a research paper into a reading comprehension text with questions targeting his puzzle. This communicative task spurred the students into providing him with the feedback that he was seeking, stating that “my learners’ insight in relation to obtaining feedback and evaluations reminded me that teaching is a learning profession” (p. 147). As to John, when using continuously video transcriptions against EP’s recommendations to understand his puzzle, he realized that he was “teaching and researching rather than researching via teaching” (p. 157), and this had exerted much pressure on his time. Hence, he finally invited his students to puzzle with him as to why they rarely use recently taught lexical/ grammatical items during speaking activities. He asked the learners as researchers to develop a survey to bring about insights into the puzzle, disseminate its outcomes in a class presentation and submit a written report about the processes and results of this investigation. Each task was in accordance with the students’ expectations and program requirements and made sense to both the teacher and the learners who, together, turned their “practice-as-research” (Hanks, 2019, p. 163). The PEPAs have evidently always existed as part of the classroom reality but their use was so entrenched in teachers’ routine and taken for granted that they “remain hidden in plain sight.”

Marianna commented on the creativity that PEPAs brought to the classroom finding it “particularly engaging as it afforded a route of

research that built on the skills [she] already had” allowing her to source texts and adapt them to engage the learners to work with her to develop a better understanding of their environment. In reaction to the student–teacher cooperation, Marianna remarked that “[a] team mentality’ arose from this and led to a very positive shift in the classroom dynamic ... the students preferred working alongside their teacher rather than for the teacher .... The students became more active and involved ..., their confidence grew” (pp. 177–178) thus showing that “learners are capable of taking learning seriously” (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 5). Bringing others in the search for understanding opens up dialogue of common interest and concern and sparks active engagement with others’ views and opinions in a way that leads everyone in this process to re-examine and reset their perspectives, attitudes and boundaries (Martin, Sugarman, & Hickinbottom, 2010).

## 5.2. Dissemination of Teachers’ Learning

It was not part of the LPR project to expect the participating teachers to disseminate their learning in national and international gatherings, although they performed extremely well at institutional level to acknowledge the time abatement that was allocated to the project. However, on their own accord, they agreed to present in conferences either individually or with peer(s) because as stated by John “[I]nvolvement in this project has taken me out of the classroom bubble ... allowing me to engage with wider debates and communities” (p.164). Hence, the mentoring sessions were extended to giving, when requested, constructive feedback on the writing-up of conference abstracts. Although they initiated the will to participate in such events, they had also reservations at the beginning of this process as illustrated by Marianna’s long apprehensions:

Part of me was extremely excited at the prospect but there was a big part of me that was riddled with self-doubt. I had never spoken at a conference before, and suddenly the prospect of this felt incredibly daunting. Quite a few questions came to mind ...: Did I have anything significant to contribute to the wider academic community? Had I found a meaningful puzzle, something worth researching? Were my findings relevant or groundbreaking in some ways? I knew it was important and relevant to my learners and myself but would anyone else benefit beyond my



classroom? ... Further concerns revolved around findings in a qualitative format rather than a quantitative format, where qualitative data is typically descriptive and as such is harder to analyse (pp. 180–181).

Indeed, Marianna and her peers had evidently been influenced by conventional research norms (Freeman, 1998) from the outset of the project. The mentoring sessions and forum discussions helped to demystify research and clarify that the role of researchers and their interests, as they stand currently, are not quite accessible to and relevant to teachers' everyday classroom practice and therefore the teachers' voice needs to be heard.

Eventually, the practitioner researchers developed the confidence to overcome their doubts as Chris points out: "Disseminating my research helped me identify a legitimate aspect to my professional identity. Presenting and publishing consolidate the notion of a researcher dimension to identity in a way which personally I would find hard to achieve through reflective practice alone" (2018, p. 149). Marianna concluded her narrative by adding that implementing EP in her classes "enabled me to reshape and establish my new identity of 'research practitioner' thus boosting my teacher self-efficacy beliefs ... regarding my own practice [...]. These interrelated identity developments allowed [me] to gain more confidence as a teacher and a researcher" (p. 182). Stimulated by the EP learning context, both Marianna and Chris have, during the project, applied successfully for their Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (professional body for staff in the tertiary system) and for their Senior Lectureship (within their institution), having demonstrated their professionalism through their attitude towards their continuing professional development and the learning that they acquired in the community of practice to which they have contributed. Indeed, professional identity develops depending on how individuals perceive themselves, "how they enact their profession in their settings" (Varghese, 2006, p. 212) and whether they see "possibilities in the future" (Norton, 2000). The participating ELT teachers have engaged with two important sources of identity formation (Wenger, 1998): They realized that they own the competence that their community values, and that their professional identity has been reified beyond their legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) when they started as neophyte teacher researchers. See Slimani-Rolls (2019b) for further discussion on professional development identity of language teachers through EP involvement.

### 5.3. Theoretical and Pedagogical Contributions

By volunteering to be part of the LPR project, the ELTs have demonstrated their willingness to learn about exploratory practice, whose theoretical framework provided them with an appropriate model of development, which they embraced in spite of the challenges that the implementation of EP in their classes threw at them. EP enabled them to adopt a scholarly approach to their teaching. Puzzling about situations that they encounter in their everyday teaching led them to theorize and problematize them into teaching puzzles about which they took action by engaging in ongoing investigations in order to understand them. The scaffolding provided by the methodological set-up described in Section 4 enabled them to harness the potential of peer and mentor support into a collaborative enterprise which was enhanced further by the inclusivity of the learners for whom they regained respect while considering their perspectives. Although difficult at first, the ELTs discovered the benefits of working with PEPAs, which ignited the potential creativity that they normally use when developing their own teaching materials. Along the same lines, although challenging, the dissemination processes allowed them to enhance their identity as researchers.

Why did the teachers stay on task in spite of the tremendous amount of work that the EP project generated? They realized that EP had created for them facilitative working conditions which sparked their curiosity and creativity, sustained their interest and motivation, activated their individual and collective prior knowledge, developed relationships with their students as co-partners and enhanced their confidence as agentive teachers and professionals capable of taking their practice forward.

## Further Reading

Slimani-Rolls, A., & Kiely, R. (2018). *Exploratory practice for continuing professional development. An innovative approach for language teachers*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book reports on a two year-long investigation of how a group of six three ELT and 3 MFL teachers developed their thinking and practices while imple-

menting the principled framework of Exploratory Practice (EP) in their classrooms in collaboration with two researchers as facilitators in this process.

Hanks, J. (2017). *Exploratory practice in language teaching. Puzzling about principles and practices*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book traces the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the EP framework and uses case-studies, vignettes and narratives from teachers and learners across the world as they experience EP.

Allwright, D., & Hanks, J. (2009). *The Developing language learner: An introduction to exploratory practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Allwright and Hanks supplement EP with five propositions about learners that they present as key developing practitioners of learning to enhance the classroom participants' learning processes and enrich their human relationships.

Hall, G. (2017). *Exploring English language teaching. Language in action* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

This book provides a single-volume introduction to the field of ELT from an applied linguistics perspective. It addresses four central themes in English language teaching: classroom interaction and management, "method, post-method and methodology"; "learners"; and the "institutional frameworks and social contexts" of ELT, all of which are related to and help explain the emergence of EP.

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# 10

## Bringing to Light English Language Teachers' Voices for Continuous Professional Learning in Chile

Paulina Sepulveda-Escobar

### Introduction

As teaching practice is indefinite and changeable, “bureaucratic solutions to problems of practice will always fail” (Darling-Hammond, 1997, as cited in Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 718). Korthagen (2017, p. 391) brings up the centrality of teachers in continuous professional learning (CPL), claiming that “if we wish to promote teacher learning, we will have to take their thinking, feeling and wanting into account” tailoring the initiatives to teachers’ circumstances and settings. Muijs et al. (2014, p. 246) support this view and claim that continuous professional development (CPD) activities are “usually divorced from the specifics of how to teach particular groups of students in a particular context.” Continuous professional learning (CPL) initiatives should, therefore, be related to learners’ contexts and linked to teachers’ personal and professional needs (Bubb &

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Earley, 2007), which will enable them to empower and commit to their own CPL. Teacher's agency, defined as the power of teachers to act decisively and constructively (Calvert, 2016), accentuates this role of teachers as active agents in directing their CPL. I am purposefully establishing a difference between the terms "development" and "learning" as I completely agree with Evans's (2019) argument that development only implies a behavioral change while learning requires intellectual and attitudinal growth. Also, I regard the term development as implying imposition upon teachers, ignoring their agency and suggesting that others' agendas actually govern their professional learning.

The critical stance of CPL incorporates teachers at the heart of the process, including their voices, the disclosure of their needs, examination of their teaching contexts and the experiential-based practice over theories and knowledge generated somewhere else and expected to be faithfully adopted in a variety of contexts. Alternative approaches to CPL challenge issues of power and raise awareness of whose agendas are actually being implemented through the mainstream models of CPD (Kennedy, 2005). Webster-Wright (2009) argues that part of the CPD discourse infers the notion of professionals in need of being developed and directed rather than a professional who can engage in self-directed learning. The basis for teacher's CPL relies upon their power of having a say, setting their own goals, deciding how to achieve them and being provided space to collaborate with colleagues (Parker, Patton, & Tannehill, 2012), shifting the paradigm from being delivered PD initiatives towards developing and supporting authentic CPL (Day, 1999). Teachers seem to be more willing to take CPL initiatives and to identify them as significant when they feel supported and heard (Hunzicker, 2011). Hence, CPL has to be considered as a collective investment that addresses teachers' own particular needs and the purposes of the profession (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003).

## Nature of the Problem

In Chile, initial teacher preparation is carried out by state and private universities. EFL initial teacher education programs typically last between 4 and 5 years and comprise modules in oral English, phonetics, grammar,

linguistic, literature, language teaching methodology, curriculum, assessment and field experiences in schools. After finishing this program and obtaining a Bachelor of Education with a major in ELT, newly-qualified teachers can immediately start working in schools. Public schools are the largest category of schools in the country and they are mainly managed by local municipalities. The number of students in these schools ranges from 1 to over 4000 (MINEDUC, ACE, & ES, 2016), and they tend to have a large number of vulnerable students, whereas semi-private schools include lower-middle class students, and private schools target members of the elite (García-Huidobro & Bellei, 2003).

Ávalos (2001) emphasizes the excessive responsibility allocated to Chilean teachers for the educational system's outcomes, bearing in mind that their voices explaining how to improve themselves and education in general have for long been neglected. The Chilean Ministry of Education has attempted to expand the ongoing support provided for school teachers to keep learning through the Center for Training, Experimentation and Educational Research (Centro de Perfeccionamiento, Experimentación e Investigaciones Pedagógicas, hereafter CTEER). This ministerial center focuses on teachers' professional path throughout their careers by supporting initial teacher education, honing teachers' competences and monitoring the new Teachers' Professional Development System (Ministerio de Educacion, n.d.-b). For English Language (EL) teachers in particular, the English Opens Doors Program (Programa Inglés Abre Puertas, hereafter EODP) facilitates ongoing support for professional development, offering methodology courses, language proficiency test opportunities and funding for communities of teachers from different schools that participate in school projects to promote the learning of English (Ministerio de Educacion, n.d.-a).

As teachers, we are frequently asked to pay attention to our learners' particular needs, creating spaces for them to generate knowledge and make meaningful and contextualized learning experiences available to them. However, when talking about teacher CPL, all this verbose discourse seems to evaporate. Decontextualized workshops that are viewed as the panacea for language learning are usually imposed on teachers, ignoring their particular professional needs and agency, and resulting in frustration and lack of commitment to continue learning. Despite the

great effort that the CTEER made to encourage Chilean school teachers' voices regarding professional development (Ministerio de Educación, 2017a), the claimed report only presented a broad overview, not including sufficient details from language teachers, whose particular perceived needs and critical insights into the current CPD initiatives remained concealed.

Bearing in mind that EL teachers are seen as voiceless regarding their continuous learning and the absence of critical research challenging CPD mainstream activities in Chile, this study aims to provide this group of practitioners a voice to question the uncontested local activities for CPD and to raise awareness of their professional needs in order to possibly change the status quo. In this study I attempt to cast doubt on the existing initiatives offered by the EODP and suggest alternative CPL opportunities for EL Chilean teachers, based on the participants' outlooks. Having myself being involved in teacher education and "delivered" top-down initiatives for school teachers, I venture to say that EL teachers' voices have constantly been overlooked in this country where most of the possibilities to continue learning are imposed and delivered by out-of-school professionals.

## Local Initiatives

There is a certain degree of optimism that CPD programs will gradually move towards a more local, collaborative and bottom-up approach. One initiative that has been reported as providing Chilean teachers with opportunities to continue learning and increasing the level of collaboration with colleagues is the "teacher professional development groups for high school teachers." Avalos (1998) reported how these groups enabled the participating teachers to make changes in their practices and beliefs about teaching and learning while attempting to try out new teaching strategies. Teachers in Noguera, Fuentealba, Osandón, Portales, and Quiroga's (2002) and Cornejo's (2002) studies stated how being involved in these groups enhanced their disciplinary knowledge and ability to work in teams.

Action research has also provided hope as a bottom-up initiative to teacher learning since it aims to effect changes to teaching practices through reflection and inspires teachers to self-direct their ongoing professional learning (Elliott, 1991). In the study of Salgado and Silva- Peña (2009), Chilean teachers participating in an action research project reported that they valued how this initiative enhanced their reflective process in such a way that it encouraged them to find solutions to their practical problems in collaboration with their peers. A study of Chilean in-service science teachers from a central region of the country also reported on an inspiring strategy whose fundamental pillars were collaborative work, reflective practices and researching their own teaching practices. Teachers met once a week to inquire about their practices, advance their knowledge base and build on a shared vision about teaching sciences. The authors reported the success of this initiative as being dependent on the high level of commitment and support of the participating schools and the disposition of teachers to continue learning (González-Weil et al., 2014).

## **EODP Initiatives**

The range of activities that the ministerial program, EODP, has offered since its establishment seemingly aims to provide technical and ongoing support for EL teachers to continue learning. First, two seasonal workshops (i.e. English Winter Retreat and English Summer Town) are carried out each year to provide methodological strategies and the opportunity for public school EL teachers to reflect on their practices. Second, as defined by the Good Teaching Practices initiative (Taller de Buenas Prácticas), the EODP offers workshops delivered by US fellows to promote teaching strategies that are based on classroom observations conducted in 2011. Other seminars include the analysis of curricular changes and its potential practical implementations in the EFL subject. Third, EODP promotes the creation of communities of learning among EL teachers, called English Teachers' Network (Red de Docentes de Inglés, hereafter ETN), in order to encourage collaborative work and enhance the reflection process among peers (Ministerio de Educación,

n.d.-a). Finally, one initiative that became available to public scrutiny in June 2019 is the Teachers' Academy. As a part of a large-scale project, English in English, whose goal is to increase the use of the target language in EFL classrooms, Teachers' Academies have been designed to assist teachers in areas such as evaluation, oral skills, planning and the student-centered approach (Ministerio de Educacion, 2019). Even though these academies are actually guided by peers, in-service EL teachers work in bilingual and private schools, whose contexts differ significantly from those participating teachers from public schools.

One local alternative that has provided EL teachers with seemingly significant opportunities for their professional growth has been the project sponsored by the British Council and supported by EODP, Champion Teachers (Smith, Connelly, & Rebolledo, 2014). This "effective form of bottom-up teacher CPD" (Connelly in Rebolledo, Smith, & Bullock, 2016, p. 3) aims at engaging EL school teachers to examine their own teaching contexts through exploratory action research. This newly created initiative may be seen as an alternative to the top-down approach that generally characterizes CPD projects and regards teachers as in need of development. Yet more research is needed in order to examine its impact on teaching practices and teachers' own learning, their agency and empowerment.

Considering all the contextual features presented above and the initiatives offered by the EODP, the message of this article could reverberate around national policies that aim to enhance EL teachers' CPL, being mindful of these professionals' voices, the local sociocultural features and the fluctuating role that learning English plays in Chile. This study could also inform future CPL, empowering innovations that place EL teachers at the center of the process, exerting their agency and power to self-direct their professional learning. It is important to state that I do not disagree completely with the purpose of CPD mainstream strategies as they all aim to improve teaching practices and consequently students' learning, contributing greatly to the development of language teachers around the world (Borg, 2015, p. 5). Nevertheless, what I inquire into here is how they are planned and implemented, neglecting teachers' power and agency to have a voice to claim their professional needs and challenge the taken-for-granted area of CPD.

## Critical Agenda

This research project has been informed by the theoretical underpinnings of the critical paradigm, which aims to empower people and transform political and social realities (Creswell, 2003), recognizing that multiple truths are contextually situated and associated with issues of power (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). There seems to be a growing movement to uncover these political, cultural and economic manifestations that may influence education, as it would be quite naïve to talk about the subject without referring to these complex domains wherein education is located. Providing a voice to participants, raising awareness, and creating possibilities for change to improve their lives are the main tenets of this critical paradigm (Creswell, 2003).

Specifically in language teaching, critical applied linguistics aims to critique the unchallenged assumptions and practices through the problematization of educational issues. It is important to note that its philosophical understanding goes beyond providing “utopian visions of alternative realities.” Instead, it emphasizes its emancipatory and transformative goal that would potentially lead to change (Pennycook, 2001, p. 8). The contextual, critical and reactive agenda of this study calls for the acknowledgement of this group of professionals' CPL whose voices have been overlooked by research, national policies and the performative agenda that presently characterizes Chilean education. It seems imperative then to research how policies and their administrative power have influenced the area of CPL serving the interests of the current government and neglecting teachers' voices and agency to self-direct their learning.

## Research Framework

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are Chilean EL teachers' perceptions of the current unchallenged professional development opportunities offered by EODP?
2. To what extent do these initiatives address their professional needs?
3. What are Chilean EL teachers' professional needs?



## Methodology

This small-scale study was guided by a critical exploratory methodology, as this matches my theoretical stance and best serves to answer my research questions. The exploratory design seeks to understand the perceptions and experiences of research participants, paving the way for further research (Babbie, 2013). The critical element added to this methodology aims to challenge the current situation of the participants in order to possibly effect changes and “to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018, p. 138). Critical qualitative research focuses not only on the understanding of social relationships, but also attempts to challenge social inequalities (Bhavnani, Chua, & Collins, 2014). Considering this critical part in the study, my position as a researcher has to be acknowledged as being not neutral and not only accepting the participants’ experiences, but also aiming to present alternatives to transform their current situation.

## Data Collection and Analysis

A semi-structured interview was conducted in order to give teachers the possibility of having a voice to question the current state of affairs. The interviews, which lasted between 35–45 minutes, gave the participants the opportunity to develop in-depth natural responses which were useful in capturing their professional priorities and existing perceptions of EODP’s initiatives. Online interviews were conducted with the six EL teachers who volunteered to participate for this research. The use of interviews as a method to collect qualitative data has gained great popularity among researchers (Grix, 2004). Kvale (2008) defines this method as an interchange of views between two people on a common topic where the ways in which the participants describe their experiences and understanding of the world are explored. Indeed, as the interview process triggers in-depth reflection, the participants can discover new aspects of the situation they are describing that might have been unfamiliar before. Wellington (2015, p. 139) argues that “the research interview’s function

is to give a person, or group of people, a 'voice'." Thus, using interviews in this study gave the participants the chance to make their voices heard in order to question unchallenged CPD activities and raise awareness of their current professional needs.

My ontological and epistemological position as a researcher played a pivotal role in choosing this method to collect data. I was not only interested in exploring how the teachers verbalized their thoughts and made connections between their ideas and experiences about CPD, but also in raising awareness about their lack of power and attention from both research and national policies, questioning the existing CPD activities and how they have (not) addressed their needs. An interview goes beyond asking the participants their views about a particular topic; instead it tries to reveal participants' rationale and judgment of events that have happened in their lives (Manson, 2002). An online semi-structured interview was used as it enabled a certain level of flexibility between the predetermined questions I had listed to cover in the interview and interaction with the interviewees. Semi-structured interviews allow the participants to have enough freedom to digress and develop their answers in their own length and depth (Miller & Brewer, 2007, p. 167). Despite being susceptible to technological difficulties, two huge benefits of conducting online interviews are the flexibility regarding time and location for both the participants and the researcher, and the level of anonymity which might encourage further discussion of sensitive topics (Cohen et al., 2018).

As the participants had the opportunity to decide the language they wanted to use to answer the questions, five interviews were conducted in Spanish and one in English. They were transcribed in Spanish and subsequently some excerpts were translated into English. After piloting the questions as a way of practicing interviewing, some questions were modified in their wording, the topics were ordered to get richer data, and the interview schedule was finally developed. All interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was conducted keeping in mind the research questions, objective and literature review (Saldaña, 2003). A qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo12, was used for the analysis and management of the collected data where codes, themes and subthemes emerged.

## Participants

A non-probabilistic purposive and snowballing sampling procedure was carried out to select the participants for this study. I established contact with two experienced public school EL teachers who agreed to take part in the study. I then asked them to identify more teachers who would potentially be interested in participating. They then referred to some colleagues who referred to others and so on. These participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the voluntary, confidential and anonymous nature of their participation. After reading the participant information sheet and signing the online consent form, online interviews were scheduled. Ethical approval was sought and consent to conduct this study was granted by the university where I am currently pursuing my doctoral study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the six participants and third parties.

## Findings and Discussion

The presentation of the findings will be defined by two main themes: EODP initiatives and teachers' professional needs.

### Their Voices Regarding EODP Initiatives

As can be observed in the above Table 10.1, all the participants have partaken in at least two initiatives developed by EODP. The motivation to take part of these activities varies. Some register to be immersed in an English-only speaking environment to practice their oral skills, while others register only when it is going to be beneficial for their students. Yet others get involved as a way of avoiding stagnation regarding both their language proficiency and their teaching skills, which was also found to be a motivating factor in Noom-ura's (2013) study on Thai EFL teachers' perception of CPD.

**Table 10.1** Research participants

Name	Age	Contract hours per week	Grades taught	Region <sup>a</sup>	Teaching experience at schools	EODP initiatives they have participated in
María	37	43 hours	Years 1–8	VII	11 years	EST-EWR-SIA
Daniela	36	35 hours	Years 9–12	RM	11 years	EST—EWR
Isabel	32	37 hours	Years 4–8	XVI	9 years	EST-ETN-EWR-GTPP
Loreto	52	32 hours	Years 9–12	VII	28 years	EST-ETN-EWR-GTPP- SIA
Carlos	44	43 hours	Years 1–12	VIII	9 years	EST-ETN-EWR
Tamara	26	32 hours	Years 1–6	VII	4 years	EWR—TA

CTP: Champion Teachers Project; EST: English Summer Town; ETN: English Teachers Network; EWR: English Winter Retreat; GTPP: Good Teaching Practices Program; SIA: Internship abroad; TA: Teachers' Academies

<sup>a</sup>Chile's first level of administrative division is in regions. Currently there are 16 regions including the capital city, RM

## General Characteristics

The activities offered by EODP are usually published in their official website and their social media pages. The participants added that information is also transmitted by regional EODP representatives through the ETNs. For each of these initiatives, teachers have to follow a defined application procedure which they describe as “selective” (Isabel), “restrictive” (Daniela) and “discriminatory” (Carlos), since there are not enough places available, the reasons to be left out are unknown and there is a feeling that priority is given to members of ETNs from the capital city. This seems to be done despite knowing that a lot of teachers are not part of one ETN due to their remote geographical location and the restrictive requirement of having at least eight teachers to establish one in isolated and rural areas.

Follow-up procedures after attending these workshops are also scarce. Teachers emphasize the lack of monitoring techniques to keep track of how the knowledge and skills shared in the workshops are relevant to

their teaching contexts. Isabel's quote illustrates this: "they (EODP) do not care if I implement or not what they taught, they do not know if I actually learnt or not, they do not care about anything." As the mainstream approach to CPD typically implies that "professionals' knowledge can be topped up" (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 713), there seems to be an implicit belief that there will be an automatic successful transfer of knowledge and skills to their teaching practices.

Despite considering the seasonal workshops (i.e. EST and EWC) beneficial for novice teachers who may need assistance from an external source at the beginning of their careers, most of the participants argue that these activities have become repetitive and not beneficial throughout the time. Loreto fiercely states that "when you have been attending for a long time you realize it is just more of the same; the same game that was called apple now it is called pear, so they are not significant and they stagnate." Isabel and Daniela emphasize how these initiatives are constantly developed and taught by people who are not currently teaching in similar contexts which make them even less meaningful as they do not relate to their teaching contexts.

## Decontextualized CPD Activities

A recurrent characteristic that emerged from the collected data was the lack of consideration of the context where these teachers work. Based on their voices, most of the initiatives offered by the ministerial organization are distant from their realities; the initiatives address an ideal classroom. Isabel exemplified daily-life situations she experiences in her teaching context which prevent her from implementing what she has taken from the workshops:

People who prepare these workshops seem to forget that we have students who are starving, students who did not sleep because dad beat mom up last night. We just go to these workshops to sit down and listen to these people because our reality is completely different. Most of the public schools have the same issues; vulnerable students, SEN students and nobody has considered these issues when planning these workshops.

In a similar vein, the arguments used to launch the initiative Teachers' Academies completely disregard the particularities of Chilean public schools and neglect teachers' actual working conditions. When referring to this project that is held in private bilingual schools, Tamara claimed:

For example, they (people delivering the workshop) tell us: you can go to this website, do this and do that—but they have ultra-fast broadband internet connection—their speakers work—they have a comfortable and warm classroom and their whole environment is immersed in the foreign language—you can even find posters in English in the toilets! But, I am sometimes working without water or without electricity, so you cannot relate to the activities they offer.

Loreto, who claimed to have attended all these initiatives for many years, also considered that the workshops are not applicable to their classrooms as the contextual features that characterize the vast majority of public schools are not taken into account. She went further and stated that she has never been to a workshop that considered “how to work with quiet speakers and a broken data projector, which is what we have.” Indeed, in her four-week internship in England, which was funded by the Regional Governmental Administration, Loreto visited an international school where English was taught in an uncommon environment for her which prevented her from relating the experience in any way to her daily teaching context.

Day and Sachs (2004) suggest that one-day workshops and training days do not change teachers' practices or their competence as teachers, which may cause frustration among teachers as they see how all those good ideas only work within an ideal social setting. María clearly remembered how “one warm-up activity they taught us there took me 45 minutes, just the warm up!” Isabel seconds this perception by declaring that “most of them (the activities) are for the ideal class, with 20 students, so I feel HOW I am going to do this with my students!” These CPD activities might indeed perpetuate social and economic inequalities, as teachers who have all the advanced resources can implement these initiatives faithfully and have potentially fruitful results, while the vast majority have to

struggle to adapt them to the lack of facilities and poor classroom conditions existing in public schools.

It is important to mention that the participants are not disregarding the activities per se; instead, what concerns them is how formulaic and prescribed they are, addressing an unrealistic classroom and a group of students not only with advanced linguistic skills and lots of facilities but also a large amount of cultural capital, bringing into the activities the powerful social inequities present in Chile.

## EL Teachers' Professional Needs

Data analysis revealed that despite the assistance they receive from CTEER, which provides support in broader areas of the profession, there is a lack of significant opportunities that actually cater to their needs as teachers of English. Zein (2017, p. 295) argues that CPD initiatives “that attend well to teachers' needs are more likely to lead to teachers' enhanced instructional practice, deepen pedagogical knowledge and increase beliefs and self-efficacy.”

There is a recurrent shared concern among the participants, which has also been reported by teachers participating in TALIS 2013 (OECD, 2014), to gain further insights into how to deal with SEN students in the language classroom. Based on these Chilean teachers' experiences, elementary SEN students used to be exempted from being assessed in the English class before decree 83/15 came into force in 2017. This new regulation encourages teachers to develop multiple teaching and assessment strategies and to make the necessary adaptations to the curriculum in order to address the complexity and diversity in the classroom (Ministerio de Educación, 2015). Daniela clearly states that there is an urgent need to assist EL teachers in this area as teacher education programs in the past did not consider this task as part of the curriculum. It seems crucial, then, that these programs and the current CPD initiatives adapt to a society striving to become inclusive, rapidly.

Another area that EL teachers reveal as part of their professional needs is related to assessment which was also presented as the main need in the 2017 CTEER's report. Despite acknowledging the efforts made by

EODP to provide opportunities to continue learning, the vast majority of the participants agree that more initiatives should be developed to examine assessment procedures and instruments to use in a language lesson, bearing in mind their contexts. As Isabel puts it “I’d like to know more about how to assess our students, but considering our reality and how much they know about English.” The participants also related this area of interest to the particular requirements they have to meet when being assessed as part of the enactment of the new Teachers’ Professional Development System (Ministerio de Educacion, 2016). They state that there is also a lack of disciplinary guidance on how to face this process and a complete absence of feedback detailing the strengths and areas that need to be improved.

In spite of not having an ample diversity of contexts where EL teachers work in Chile, EODP has failed not only in meeting mainstream school EL teachers’ professional needs, but also in considering teachers whose professional contexts are not conventional (e.g. adult high schools, one-teacher schools and multi-grade rural schools). Working a few hours in an evening adult public high school, Carlos demands more activities for teachers working under these circumstances. The same request is made by Tamara who works in multi-grade rural schools where, in her own words, “the context is precarious and vulnerable and most of the students go to school not to study but to get fed.” She added “despite thinking that my students have improved, I need more support to see if I am doing the right things or not. I am alone.” The 2017 OCED review of Chilean schools reported that “both initial teacher education and professional development do not adequately prepare teachers for their work in rural areas (Santiago, Fiszbein, Garcia Jaramillo, & Radinger, 2017, p. 12).

All these issues apparently arise as a result of the scant needs assessment that EODP has developed. This limited examination was also shown in a report conducted by an external consultancy organization that analyzed the initiatives for teachers’ CPD offered by the Ministry of Education. It concluded that there was a persistent lack of needs analysis that provoked these initiatives where the existing conditions were not analyzed before implementing CPD activities (Cartes y Le-Bert Limitada, 2010); consequently, an analysis of how these activities contribute to CPD would be imprecise. Widodo (2018, p. 2) argues that needs assessment in CPD



“remains scantily address in the TESOL literature.” With all the advances in technology, it does not seem implausible for a ministerial organization to reach a large number of teachers from distant areas in order to bring to light their voices regarding CPD, beyond geographical limitations.

Participants acknowledged the possibility they have to suggest topics they would like to examine in greater depth at the end of each workshop; however, their recommendations have not been taken into account. Loreto states: “one of my suggestions has been assessment, but no, they haven’t taken my opinion into consideration.” It is, therefore, imperative for EODP to seriously enquiry into EL teachers’ professional needs and working conditions and then to collectively design context-sensitive initiatives for CPL including all the main actors in the conversation of above public school enhancement (i.e. teachers, initial teacher training programs, policy-makers, administrators and experts).

## Contribution to the Local Conversation about CPL

As part of the critical agenda that underlies this study seeking to go beyond understanding people’s perception, but attempting to change them, I will present some context-sensitive contributions for CPL that emerged from the interviews. It is beyond the scope of this study and my role as a researcher to present a to-do list. My main aim is to provide these teachers with a voice to express how to potentially meet their needs as “[they]are the experts—[they] know what is happening in [their] classrooms” (Isabel) and they “know the schools’ features and needs” (Tamara). Garet et al. (2001) call for CPD programs to be congruent between the training contents and the teachers’ needs in order to have a more positive influence on student achievement outcomes. Therefore, first and foremost, affording opportunities for EL teachers to identify their needs should be a frequent, consistent and constant process over time (Widodo, 2018).

Firstly, workshops should be developed for teachers and by teachers, treating CPL as an entitlement rather than a privilege. The participants argued that it would be more significant for them to attend a workshop that is actually being delivered by someone who has experienced the same situations as they have had in schools. Isabel’s quote reflects this suggestion:

workshops should be developed by teachers who have vast classroom experience in public schools and not only people who have just worked in an office doing administrative work.

It would be empowering for EL teachers to be able to share successful teaching practices and it would potentially encourage more teachers to examine their classrooms in order to design, implement and share their own contextualized teaching strategies, similar to what the Champion Teachers project has been working on. This attempt to teacher research would have to be embedded in the school culture (Groundwater-Smith & Dadds, 2004) where teachers would be able to solve issues or identify successes by themselves without resorting devotedly to what theory or so-called experts have claimed.

Loreto and Tamara suggest holding these events in public schools as a way of raising awareness of the lack of facilities they have. One suggestion that Loreto proposes is that these workshops should be done at one school with a 'real' class. For example, they (EODP) could choose a year-9 class and implement a teaching strategy to evaluate its impact. They could record the lesson and then colleagues can be invited to analyze collaboratively how this strategy was implemented and how it could have been improved.

It could potentially be useful for EODP administrators to get to know the daily life of students and teachers at public schools. Loreto mentioned that her school was selected as part of the 2011 initiatives wherein US experts observed English lessons throughout the country to come up with contextualized strategies to teach English in Chile. Despite using these data to publish a local book (Epperson & Rossman, 2014, *Strategies for motivating and managing the Chilean classroom*), Loreto argued that her lessons were observed only once and she never received feedback from the US experts.

Secondly, collaborative work has also been proposed as a key activity to continue learning professionally which will potentially foster teacher's professionalism (DelliCarpini, 2009). It is of paramount importance to enhance EL teachers' collaborative CPL by increasing the role that ETNs play, increasing the number of networks currently available and providing more administrative possibilities, resources, funding and guidance for

these networks to design and create projects together. Tamara, who has only four years of teaching experience, advocates working with colleagues from the same city or region as key for PD:

most of the time there is only one EL teacher at school and you feel isolated, you don't have somebody to share your practices with ... you believe you are doing a good job, but you may be wrong, especially when you are a novice teacher. It would be great to get together with other teachers to talk about our teaching practices.

This bottom-up approach would reduce isolation and call for a more local postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), one that is constructed by teachers and for teachers bearing in mind their contextual specific features. Further, considering the formation of regional committees to work in the area of CPD in 2017 (Decree 495, Law 20.903), more local opportunities focusing on the particularities of each region should be offered for teachers to develop their own CPL activities.

Finally, assistance could also be sought in EFL initial teacher education programs in order to strengthen the partnerships between universities and schools. Daniela believes that

“CPD should be an extension of your bachelor degree, I mean, universities could offer long-term workshops for school teachers to develop new teaching strategies linked to assessment”.

It is important to note that the formation of these partnerships has to be grounded on the identification of a mutual need in order to promote changes (Day & Sachs, 2004) and be constantly monitored and regulated. Even though there is an annual call for universities to present innovation projects to enhance this relationship, few projects have been selected. Indeed, in 2018 only two projects throughout the country were selected by EODP. Likewise, tertiary education programs should include modules focused on developing teaching and assessment strategies for the classroom diversity embracing multigrade methodologies and teaching SEN students. Lastly, the new Teachers' Professional Development System currently ignores teachers' involvement in CPD activities, which may decrease teachers' motivation to continue participating. As Maria argues “there is no point in attending PIAP [= EODP] activities, they are

not going to help me move through the new 'teaching career', there is no connection." Their salaries and their progress in the defined stages of this new system will not be affected by participation in these initiatives. It would be helpful to value all these CPD activities in the progression teachers make through this newly created system.

## Conclusions and Contribution

It is hoped that this study has provided further evidence to support the claim that effective and significant CPL opportunities are those that meet teachers' professional needs and interests (Garet et al., 2001; Kennedy & McKay, 2011). It is beyond the scope of this study to generalize the results, but it does help in understanding teachers' perceptions and critically suggests opportunities for change. From this study, it can be concluded that the participants did not disregard the activities offered by EODP completely, but they questioned them in terms of their lack of context-sensitivity and appropriateness to professional needs. The teachers also describe the activities as beneficial for novice teachers, but repetitive and highly theoretical for people who have been attending for a long time. Further, they argue that they do not address the current complex and diverse professional needs of public schools. They describe the activities as being distant from reality, addressing an ideal classroom and an inaccurate context that perpetuates the social and economic inequalities in Chilean educational establishments. EODP initiatives also generate competition among peers to obtain a place in some short-sighted activities (mainly internships abroad) that lack appropriate support, monitoring and feedback procedures.

Teachers' critical perception of EODP activities calls for more local and collaborative initiatives that consider the particularities of their contexts, paying far more attention to their currently perceived needs and attempting to meet them. Initiatives that aim to bring about change in teacher learning should also take into account the political, social and professional context that teachers are immersed in. Darling-Hammond et al. (2009, cited in Zhang, Shi, & Lin, 2019) suggest that teachers would learn best and find the initiatives more significant if these CPD

activities addressed their needs. In this study, the three key areas that teachers reported needing professional development in were teaching of SEN students, varieties of assessment strategies, and tools and teaching strategies for diverse contexts.

It is also suggested that teachers need to take control over their CPL and commit to investing time and effort in their own learning, having the financial and administrative support from their employers. Thus, teachers could be more than mere transmitters of knowledge and skills that serve the interests of the current government; they could generate more significant opportunities to transform their practices and augment the value given to the profession (Sachs, 2007; Widodo, 2018). This would potentially enable the transformation of the narrow conceptual interpretation that CPD is primarily seen as a factor to improve student achievement, equating CPD initiatives with students' test results. Thus, bottom-up initiatives could be intensified if teachers were allowed to have a pivotal role in the decision-making and design processes of these CPD activities. It seems essential, however, to further this study through an in-depth and large-scale investigation that seeks to conduct a more extensive needs assessment of EL teachers in Chile.

## Further Reading

Calvert, L. (2016). *Moving from compliance to agency: What teachers need to make professional learning work*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward and NCTAF.

Changing the term professional development to professional learning, as the former implies a certain level of imposition upon teachers and does not recognize them as agents of their own growth, Calvert examines the importance and role that teacher agency plays in transforming teacher learning. For too long, professional development has been understood within the exercise of compliance, neglecting the active role that teachers have in their own learning. Through several stories from school teachers, the author presents strategies and conditions that school leaders and policy makers may adapt to create venues for teacher agency that will transform and effectively support teachers' professional growth.

Patton, K., Parker, M., & Tannehill, D. (2015). Helping teachers help themselves: Professional development that makes a difference. *NASSP Bulletin*, 99(1), 26–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636515576040>

Bearing in mind that teacher professional development goes beyond mere acquisition and transferability of knowledge and skills, these authors illustrate eight core features of effective and sustained professional development initiatives that move beyond the traditional one-day workshops that do not meet the needs of either teachers or learners. Based on a review of the literature on professional development and the authors' experience, these core features are exemplified with evidence from practice and are linked to three main areas: teacher engagement, teaching practice and student learning.

Rebolledo, P., Smith, R., & Bullock, D. (Eds.). (2016). *Champion teachers: Stories of exploratory action research*. London: The British Council.

This enthralling book presents the illuminating stories of nine Chilean EFL school teachers who conducted exploratory action research within their teaching contexts. With the aid of welcoming visual aids and a reader-friendly form of presentation, the stories provide examples to other teachers of what an exploratory action research project may involve, despite the difficult and far-from-ideal working conditions in Chile. According to the authors, this form of bottom-up initiative seems to have been an effective and successful approach to teacher growth.

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# 11

## Introducing Critical Pedagogy to English Language Teachers at Tertiary Education in Oman: Definitions and Attitudes

Thuraya Al Riyami and Salah Troudi

### Nature of the Problem

In recent decades, the Higher Education (HE) system in Oman has achieved substantial growth in the number of institutions, students, teachers and specializations. Every year hundreds of Omani students join HE institutions to continue their first degrees where English is used as a medium of instruction (EMI). These students aim to develop their English because it is considered the gatekeeper to technology, jobs and modernity (Al-Jadidi, 2009; Al-Jardani, 2011; Al-Issa, 2014). However, as in other Arab countries, there is a lively discussion about the quality of graduates of these HE institutions including their proficiency in English

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(Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016; Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Mahmoud & Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Tanveer, 2013). This could be attributed to the fact that education in general, and English Language Teaching (ELT) in particular, are centered around passive learners, authoritative teachers, centralized systems, ready-made materials that do not correspond to students' needs or cultures and tests that require mostly memorization. Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2012) asserted that "students exiting the ELT system in Oman suffer from various inadequacies in their English language proficiency, which has had negative implications for Oman's national development" (p. 141).

Thus, there is a pressing need to revolutionize the ELT system in Oman in order to overcome the challenges facing the country, including globalization and the advance of knowledge and technology (Al-Nabhani, 2007), where English is used as the main global language. Moody (2012) argues that this status of English calls for changes in approach, methodology, curriculum and overall perceptions. In addition, Al-Issa (2007) asserts that "times have changed and so have the reasons and purposes for learning English and the way through which it is learnt" (p. 213).

Adding to this, there has recently been a growing interest in viewing the learning of English as a complex sociopolitical process which cannot be achieved through the mainstream teaching methodologies in which the student's role is marginal and the teachers are consumers of Anglo-American materials (Kumaravadivelu, 2011; Norton & Toohey, 2004). Thus, critical pedagogy (CP) has been viewed as one of the alternative pedagogies capable of meeting the demands of the complexity of teaching English within its sociopolitical context (Akbari, 2008b; Canagarajah, 1999; Norton, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 2001). Although CP is not an easy philosophy to define, it is mainly

a perspective on teaching, learning, and curriculum that does not take for granted the status quo, but subjects it to critique creates alternative forms of practice, and does so on the basis of radical theories of language, the individual, and society that take seriously our hopes for improvement in the direction of goals such as liberty, equity, and justice for all. (Crookes, 2013, p. 1)

In light of the above issues, there is a pressing need to seek new ways of conducting ELT in which the social and political issues affecting students are taken into consideration; where Anglo-American textbooks, materials and methods are problematized; and where teachers' and students' voices are heard and given legitimacy. The top-down approach to ELT cannot last forever. This study does not claim that implementing CP can solve all the problems of the ELT system in Oman, but it does provide a window on to what critical teaching is all about and on to the possibility of critical reflection, thoughtful questioning and creative action. Thus, the aim of this study is to introduce CP to ELT teachers at territory level in Oman because teachers are "the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. ix).

## Critical Agenda

The critical agenda of this study can be summarized in the following points:

- Rejecting the idea of the banking model and teaching for the test and believing that "what happens in the classroom should end up making a difference outside the classroom" (Bryman, 2012, p. 28).
- Rejecting the idea that ELT teachers are skillful technicians whose role is to explain a grammatical rule or teach a reading passage, and who are told what to teach and how.
- Raising ELT teachers' awareness of their role as intellectual transformative agents who are able to empower their students by questioning the assumptions and materials governing ELT, including themes from the wider society, in their classes, incorporating topics from students' day-to-day lives to enable them to think about their situation and explore possibilities for change.

## Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Freirean Critical Pedagogy (CP) (1973). CP is primarily concerned with challenging individuals to investigate, understand and intervene in order to ameliorate their lives. CP is not a method, rather it is “an attitude to language teaching which relates the classroom context to the wider social context and aims at social transformation through education” (Akbari, 2008a, p. 276). Freire (2000), drew on critical theory in his influential book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he calls for emancipatory and liberatory education. He criticizes “banking model” in which education is an act of depositing, whereby students are depositories and the teacher is a clerk with good attention. The educational process is seen as an authoritarian transfer instead of a democratic experience (Shor, 1993). The banking model dehumanizes learners and perceives them as objects in the classroom. Thus, Freire puts forward problem-posing education as a way to empower learners, since it involves “a constant unveiling of reality” (Freire, 2003, p. 64). This can be achieved by presenting knowledge as problematic, whereby teachers negotiate with students about the problem through five essential stages (Izadinia, 2009, p. 13):

1. Describing the content: the teacher presents the students with a code which can be a word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph or a picture, a drawing or a video clip. The teachers ask the students to describe the code.
2. Defining the problem: the students uncover the problem or the issue.
3. Personalizing the problem: the teacher asks the students about their feelings so they can relate the problem to their personal life.
4. Discussing the problem: the teacher leads the discussion and encourage students to think of the social and economic reasons for the problem.
5. Discussing alternatives to the problem: the students think about solutions to the problem.

The problem-posing model helps students to reflect on the proposed problem and create their knowledge about it, which leads to

empowerment since this method gives them a voice that can be heard by their teachers and their peers in the classroom. Students are subjects who, with help from their teachers, develop “their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves” (Freire, 2003, p. 65). This problem-posing model enables teachers to generate their syllabus based on students’ experiences and concerns, engage in dialogue with their students and raise their consciousness of the social and economic ideologies surrounding their communities. This means students are empowered when education is used as a means to attain personal growth through “developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality, and change” (Shor, 1993, p. 15).

CP is also a moving to address “the marginalization and exclusion of schooling by encouraging students to develop their own voice” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 130). Voice refers to “a broader understanding of developing possibilities to articulate alternative realities” (ibid., p. 130). This can be done through promoting and practicing dialogue, problem-posing, shared decision-making, valuing students’ previous experiences and their ways of knowing (Breuing, 2011; Freire, 2000). Within CP, any educational institution should be “a place where teaching is not reduced to learning how either to master tests or to acquire low-level jobs skills, but a safe space where reason, understanding, dialogue, and critical engagement are available to all faculties and students” (Giroux & Giroux, 2006, p. 30).

## Critical Pedagogy in ELT

Recently, ELT has moved from technical approaches to more critical work, where it is essential to teach students how to be aware of the world in conjunction with teaching them how to communicate in English successfully. This is to say that criticality in ELT does not only involve thinking about theories and assumptions; rather, it should address change, resistance and alternatives (Pennycook, 2001). This means, in a simple way, “to use English as a weapon for social transformation” (Kubota,



1998, p. 304). Such a critical turn in TESOL has resulted in the appearance of CP as one of the alternatives to mainstream methods.

CP has increasingly been implemented in ELT in different parts of the world. For example, Fredricks (2007) underscores how critical pedagogy was implemented in an EFL reading program in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. He concluded that CP allowed EFL students and teachers to explore issues of power through dynamic student-led discussions about cultural and political issues that they encountered in readings as reflections of their lives. Similarly, Derince (2011) studies the effectiveness of applying CP in a Turkish EFL classroom which was test-oriented. She concluded that through interaction that addressed social and political issues related to local concerns she and her students were involved in real learning and teaching experience. Through such discussion, her students were able to develop their English proficiency and to question the power and ideology that govern Turkish schools and society in general. However, she stressed the importance of the teachers' readiness to implement CP since it requires the teachers to work hard taking extensive time to work collaboratively with their students to challenge the hidden curriculum of education with its wider power relations where it influences teachers, students, individuals and communities. The two previous studies are important in relation to this study because they emphasize the role of the teachers in the success of CP, including their willingness to implement it although they know little about their students' cultures. Teachers who follow CP should view themselves as agents of social change (Breunig, 2009). Therefore, they are required to have certain characteristics that ease their path to play such a role, including compassion, patience, respect, impartiality, care and dedication.

In addition, Chi (2011) details how CP can work in Taiwanese EFL writing classrooms at university level starting from negotiating the topics for writing assignments, limiting the teacher's power through giving a voice to the students and problematizing the issues that are taken for granted in the educational system in Taiwan. However, he stresses the importance of minimizing the grade threat in order for the CP to be successful and for education as a transformative process to be achieved. He highlighted that although teachers tried to minimize their power and authority, the moment teachers started assessing students and giving

them grades was the moment when the teachers' power came to the forefront, which creates a paradox for teachers who want to implement CP.

Despite the challenges that teachers may face when implementing CP, most of these study findings suggest a promising future for using CP in EFL/ESL classrooms. However, what will happen when teachers practice CP in other countries, especially in Gulf countries including Oman, remains unknown. This study aims to address this research gap by exploring the potential and challenges of integrating CP into the territory of EFL classes in Oman from the perspective of teachers. We decided to examine teachers' perceptions because any reform of the educational system depends on the teachers' willingness to apply it (Al-Lamki, 2009).

Teachers' perceptions and beliefs as a crucial element for any reform in educational system.

It is needless to say that the way teachers perceive the importance of implementing a new teaching method will to a large extent determine the level and degree of its usages. According to Al-Nadabi (2003, p. 12), "teachers are viewed as important agents of change in the reform currently under way in education and are expected to play a key role in changing educational patterns and practices" (p. 12). In addition, it is found that teachers' perceptions and beliefs play a major role in accepting new approaches and proposed changes. Thus, such perception needs to uncover for development and change can occur (Al-Lamki, 2009). Consequently, it is vital to understand teachers' beliefs about CP because such perceptions will affect their willingness to implement it or not, especially that teachers bring to the classroom their own agendas, experiences, beliefs and hidden curricular (Al-Issa, 2015).

There have been many studies that investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of CP. For instance, Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012) surveyed Iranian school teachers' perceptions concerning CP using a questionnaire. The results indicate that teachers had full agreement and approval of CP; however, centralized top-down educational management in Iranian schools is considered a major challenge for teachers to put the principles of CP into practice. Norooziasiam and Soozandehfar (2011) surveyed EFL teachers' perception of CP in three institutes in Iran through observation and semi-structured interview. The results showed that teachers believe that teaching English should go beyond words and

texts and learners should question the discourse, ideas, words and their implications. However, there are many challenges that face teachers while implementing it which are centered on the lack of the necessary resources to update curricula or materials to better match learners' needs, interests and experiences. Cox and Assis-Peterson (1999) examined 40 Brazilian EFL teachers' awareness and attitudes towards CP. The results showed that Brazilians EFL teachers were unaware of it. The authors suggested that for CP to find its way into Brazilian education EFL teachers would need to question the ready-made packets of principles, methods and materials in teaching English and stop emphasizing only linguistic competence while teaching English.

From the above, CP can be implemented in EFL classes and teachers have crucial role in establishing such an approach towards teaching English. Thus, the aim of this study is to introduce CP to EFL teachers in my college and examine how they feel about it. However, it is worth mentioning that from the above studies that CP is not easy to implement, and teachers may face a lot of challenges that should be highlighted, especially "dialogues about the difficulties in practicing and implementing critical pedagogy strategies in everyday classroom life are less common" (Fobes & Kaufman, 2008, p. 26). However, Freirean pedagogy, in essence, is "pedagogy of hope" (Freire, 2000) and without hope, education will not make much sense at all. Thus, this study is also looking at the potentialities of implementing CP in teaching English in ELC.

## Research Methodology

This study adapts Action Research (AR) as its methodology. AR has a long history in educational research that makes it hard to pin down its meaning. However, since its emergence, AR has been always associated with "promoting positive social change" (Lewin, 1946, cited in Noffke, 1997, p. 311). It starts from the assumptions that reality is produced by human beings and they are themselves able to change it through their realization of problematic issues and taking action towards improving them. Reviewing the literature, there are three types of AR that serve

different interests: technical, practical and critical, and emancipatory (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2013; Punch, 2014). This study espouses the critical vision of AR, which sees it as “a social practice—a special kind of social practice that aims at transforming other social practices” (ibid., 2013, p. 27). Thus, this study sees AR as part of a broader agenda where raising teachers’ awareness of their role as intellectual transformatives and resisting the technicality in their profession can change the ELT realm at tertiary level, which could promote positive changes in schools, education and society in general.

The study utilized interviews as its data-collection method. Interviews are considered to be one of the powerful data-collection tools. This is because they “give voice to common people, allowing them to freely present their life situations in their own words, and open for a close personal interaction between the researchers and their subjects” (Kvale, 2006, p. 481). In this study, interviews were used to trace teachers’ perspectives of CP after the intervention and tackle how they defined it. In this study, interviewing is seen as “not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 409). In other words, the interview has been seen as a social endeavor, not merely a data collection tool. Therefore, a decision was made to use a semi-structured interview approach because of its advantages in terms of giving the interviewees a degree of power and control over the course of the interview and giving the interviewer a great deal of flexibility (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). All ethical procedures of consent, anonymity and confidentiality were followed. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants.

## Research Questions

1. How do teachers define critical pedagogy?
2. What are ELT teachers’ attitudes towards critical pedagogy?

## The Study Interventions

In order to introduce CP to ELT teachers in the four institutions, two main interventions were used. First, sending an article entitled “Transforming lives: introducing critical pedagogy into ELT classrooms” by Akbari (2008a) via email to ELT teachers in the four institutions before conducting the workshop. We chose this article because it has sufficient background about CP and includes some practical examples of how to implement it in the classroom. It is also short enough (only eight pages) to encourage teachers to read it and think about its applicability in their contexts. In addition, the article was written by an Iranian scholar which sends a message to teachers that CP is not only about Anglo-Saxon countries; rather, a neighboring country like Iran has encouraged it in their ELT setting.

Second, conducting a two-hour workshop for 160 teachers. The workshop included eight tasks, as shown in Table 11.1.

**Table 11.1** Tasks set in a two-hour workshop

Task	Aim
1. Introduction	Talk about the factors that shape learning experience and show participants that the teacher plays a great role in shaping students' learning experience
2. Types of pedagogy	Introduce models of pedagogy (Transmission, Generative, Transformative) and relate them to the participants' context
3. Introducing critical pedagogy	Understand the meaning of critical pedagogy
4. Introducing the banking model and the problem-posing model	Differentiate between the banking model and the problem-posing model
5. Examining ELT textbooks used in their context	To raise ELT teachers' awareness of the ideologies presented in ELT textbooks and realize the importance of implementing aspects of critical pedagogy in the ELT realm
6. Critical pedagogy in practice	Give teachers examples of how to put critical pedagogy into practice
7. Classroom scenarios	Determine the level of criticality in the given classroom scenarios
8. Comments and feedback	Complete the workshop evaluation forms

## Interview Participants

Twenty teachers were interviewed, based on their willingness to participate in the study. Teachers' ages ranged from 33 to 62. Their nationalities included eight Omani, three Indians, two Filipinos, one Armenian and one Pakistani.

## Data Analysis

Interviews were analyzed qualitatively. Looking at the literature, there are no quick fix rules to analyze qualitative data. This is to say that "there is no one single or correct way to analyse and present qualitative data: how one does it should abide by the issue of fitness for purpose" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 573). Nonetheless, there is an agreement that the aim of qualitative analysis is to reach the richest possible data (Holliday, 2010). Having said this, we benefited from the work of Burns (2010) in analyzing qualitative data: four steps: assembling the data, coding the data, building meanings and interpretations, and reporting the outcomes.

## Findings and Discussion

### Questioning Dominant Dogmas

Teachers associated the meaning of CP with the ability to question and reflect. They defined CP as an approach that enables both students and teachers to question the common ideologies around them. First, teachers thought that CP assisted students to question what was going around them, so that they could think differently about things. For instance, Don, during his interview, said that CP served "to encourage learners to become critical individuals and take active parts in the debated issues in and outside Oman." This corresponds to Giroux (2011), who maintained that part of CP is concerned with addressing problematic issues in society inside the classroom and scaffolding students to form their own

understandings. What is more, the teachers underscored that this ability to question and reflect necessitated giving students the opportunity or “space” to rethink about themselves and their societies, which was currently unavailable to them due to the hegemony of the banking model. This resulted in full power being in the teachers’ hands, while students were totally passive. Amal explained:

Critical pedagogy [CP] for me is to give our students space to think and question things around them and even to be by themselves in the classroom. Unfortunately, what we are doing here is the teacher-centered approach; we are trying to control everything. We do not give students a chance.

Other teachers associated the meaning of CP with the teachers questioning their teaching. In other words, CP is about moving from a level where the teachers’ teaching may be guided largely by routine to a level where their teaching is guided by interrogation and reflection. This is to say that the role of the teacher should be that of a transformative intellectual (Giroux, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008) who can analyze and problematize their teaching rather than technicians or materials implementers who approach their teaching blindly and technically. For instance, Aysha said CP is “a reflective approach which helps teachers to learn better ways of teaching” Similarly, Saif emphasized that CP is about pushing teachers to critically examine their performance, think about ideas to enhance their students’ learning and create change in their lives. Saif summarized his understanding of CP by stating:

It is about questioning our teaching. It is not a matter of teaching level after level but instead it is about questioning ourselves about how much our students can learn from the opportunity they are given here in the college. By learning I mean affecting them in one way or another by making a change in their life.

## Mutual Construction of Knowledge

Like the teachers in Ruiz and Fernández-Balboa's study (2005), teachers in the current study viewed CP as a way in which students and teachers equally construct the knowledge addressed in the ELT classroom. In other words, CP rejects the teacher/ student dichotomy where teachers know everything and students know nothing, as in the traditional methods that render students passive (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Rather, CP views both students and teachers as lifelong learners who construct knowledge together. Sara underscored that CP is about:

giv[ing] students and teachers an opportunity to construct knowledge in the classroom. Teachers are no longer the sole authority inside the classroom. Students are not blank tablets who need to be fed with information, as it is readily available everywhere.

## Empowering Approach

The third definition of CP provided by teachers in this study is that it empowers learners to think critically in order to improve their lives. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2007) underscore that CP is meant to empower individuals to play their role as agents of social change. Similarly, Jack in this study believed that "CP empowers my students, so they can participate in building a better tomorrow." This can be done via raising their awareness of what is going on around them locally and globally, as teachers maintained in various data tools. For instance, the majority of the teachers interviewed mentioned that, in order to empower learners, the content of textbooks should reflect students' communities and concerns. This is in tune with Akbari (2008) and Chandella (2011), who stated that localizing ELT materials enables learners to ponder about the society where they live and think about ways to change it. This is because addressing local concerns makes learners feel connected to what they learn. In addition, students would be able to use their schematic knowledge to learn the language. It would thus be easier for the students to comprehend and understand the issues discussed and teachers would be



enabled to discuss them in depth. The following extract from Linda's interview demonstrates this:

In order to empower our learners, it is necessary to base our teaching on students' background, so it becomes easier for the students to personalize, comprehend, and digest.

In addition, the teachers in this study attributed the meaning of CP to empowering students through raising their awareness of the global issues around them. They underscored the necessity of raising students' awareness of what was going on around them in order to empower them. For example, Joseph defined CP as a way of:

Empowering students by using English classes as a springboard in introducing the social issues faced by a particular group of people, so learners can become aware of the world and their social responsibility.

## Humanizing Teaching

The fourth definition of CP provided by participants was of CP as a humanizing approach which encourages teachers to look at students as people who have their own opinions, values and interests. This is in line with how teachers in Sadeghi and Ketabi's study (2009) viewed CP as a way to respect learners' opinions and thoughts. For instance, Linda, in the interview, stated that CP:

is a matter of opening up the person and looking at students as subjects, as people, not objects, loaded with a lot of information. They are not washing machines, they are people with their interests, values and priorities.

## A Holistic Approach

Some teachers mentioned that CP for them was a holistic approach. Within these responses, teachers emphasized that, unlike other approaches, CP does not consist of steps to do things inside the

classroom. Rather, it is a way of looking at teaching as consisting of intimately interconnected aspects related to how to teach and deal with students which lead to development in students' lives. This definition is exemplified by Crookes and Lehner's ways of looking at CP not as a pedagogical method but as a social and educational approach that is rooted in how ELT can enhance students' personal and social growth (1998, p. 327). For example, Aysha summarized this by stating:

When I read the article you sent to us ... It is as a writer of the article said: it is a way of doing teaching, so it is not a technique or a method. I came to know in the workshop that there are not certain steps of doing it like 1, 2, 3 but it is a way of how you behave in the class, how you deal with students and even how to introduce the content of the lesson.

Other teachers emphasized that CP as a holistic approach enables teachers to achieve large goals such as going beyond the classroom, exploring new ideas and developing students' personalities. For instance, Jack maintained that:

CP means that we should not be limited to the classroom but we should go beyond the classroom and discuss issues that are current and relevant to students' life and culture. Students should be allowed to explore new ideas, not within the limits of the classroom but should be outside the classroom and that should be incorporated into their own personality.

From the above, it is not surprising that teachers provided various definitions of CP, including questioning dominant ideologies, the mutual construction of knowledge, empowering learners and being a holistic approach. This is because, as discussed, CP cannot be reduced to a homogeneous body of discourse. In addition, I could observe in the interviews how teachers struggled to give a definition of this approach, especially those who were hearing of it for the first time. Some of them could not even articulate its definition in words. This is in line with Ruiz and Fernandez-Balboa (2005), who found that most teachers were unable to define CP when required to do so.

## What Are ELT Teachers' Attitudes Towards Critical Pedagogy?

After attending the workshop, the findings suggested that the teachers had various attitudes towards CP, ranging from full support for applying it to caution about its implementation. There were also teachers who resisted some of CP's premises while others were in between. The following four sub-sections detail these various attitudes toward CP.

### Acceptance of CP

The majority of the teachers showed willingness and enthusiasm to incorporate CP in their teaching after attending the workshop. This is in line with other studies which found that teachers are willing to teach through CP after they are introduced to it (Baladi, 2007; Ko & Wang, 2009). Emran in this study expressed:

I totally agree with critical pedagogy and I totally believe in bringing the world to the classroom and discussing relevant issues in the society, especially about marginalized people like old people and disabled people.

Sofia was enthusiastic to implement CP in her teaching since she believed that the teacher's role should be more than one of transferring the language to the students but should also involve adapting the materials to suit the students' backgrounds. Put differently, she believed that the ideas and thoughts carried in the language classrooms were as important as the linguistic elements of the language per se. She asserted:

I believe in CP because you cannot just teach any content for the sake of language. You have to choose the content very carefully to serve your educational objectives, so this content must be adjusted according to the existing traditions, historical scientific traditions and see how the nation is shaping.

Other teachers had positive attitudes towards CP and considered it a necessity since they were living in an era characterized by a “global spread of English and the growth in regional varieties of English” (Troudi, 2005, p. 127). Therefore, in the interviews, some teachers expressed the inevitability of addressing other varieties of English and not concentrating on teaching-centered varieties.

## Concerns About CP

When asked about their willingness to implement CP, some teachers expressed their concerns about it, for several reasons. First, some teachers were concerned about implementing CP because they believed students did not have sufficient foundations in language or critical thinking, which are two conditions for implementing CP. They claimed that implementing CP without these conditions would shock students and negatively affect them. This is in line with Pishghadam and Meidani’s study in Iran (2012), which found that introducing CP to students who were not used to critical thinking created negative feelings such as anxiety, confusion and depression. In this study Don, exemplifies this point in his interview stating

CP is something that would have to have a foundation, because without a foundation, students will lack exposure to sensitive issues and concerns, and then it would affect the real purpose—maybe because it would shock them.

Other teachers were cautious about implementing CP because the ELT system in the four colleges was heterogeneous in terms of teachers’ nationalities and backgrounds. Therefore, the introduction of CP by such a varied group of teachers might not be safe, since they did not know the students’ cultures and concerns. Sofia asserted that:

It [introducing CP] is very dangerous, especially in a multicultural setting like ELT here in the college, because imagine that all teachers with their different backgrounds start to question and think about alternatives to the topics discussed in the classroom!

Thus, Sofia and other teachers voiced their concern about the implementation of CP by teachers from various backgrounds because of their lack of understanding of the cultural and religious backgrounds of students. However, even Omani ELT teachers, who were supposed to be familiar with their students' background, clearly articulated the danger of implementing CP in the college. Azza stated that:

We need to be careful and make sure that we are not giving the students the wrong thing. Like what I understood from critical pedagogy that there is no absolute truth. I do encourage deep thinking, deep reasoning, but I need my students to reach a conclusion, a right conclusion.

From the above, it appears that being ill-informed about the students' cultures and beliefs was not the only reason that made the teachers concerned about CP. The teachers' technical backgrounds, which reflected a right/ wrong dichotomy, gave them reservations about implementing CP in which such absoluteness is rejected and continuous questioning is encouraged. It seems that teachers had internal hesitations about CP's aims, especially about taking a skeptical stance towards the issues under discussion. This is because CP requires students to challenge assumptions or try out new alternatives, which could be dangerous from the teachers' perspectives, since change is not easy. Jack said: "Change is precarious and a person needs to be somewhat cautious as an agent of change."

Other teachers justified their concerns by stressing the point that the students were not yet mature enough to decide for themselves, so introducing CP might lead them in the wrong direction. Fatma expressed this by saying:

We should ask questions but while we are mature enough to do that, our students are too young to do that—I mean, we do not want our students to misunderstand what we are doing, especially at this age, since the students can believe in anything very easily.

Another teacher (Sara) asserted that she was worried about implementing CP because it meant questioning, which could lead to dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Thus, it seems that teachers would avoid implementing

CP in order to be on the safe side emotionally (to avoid unpleasant feelings). Sara described this by saying:

You know, being a critical person means being a suffering person. If you want to be happy, just accept everything and do not question. For me it is a double-edged sword. We must be careful at all times.

On the other hand, some teachers, especially expatriates, were concerned about implementing CP because they felt that they were outsiders who did not have the right to question issues related to Omani students' lives. For instance, Joseph was not willing to implement CP because "I do not feel I have the right to implicitly question my students' beliefs in this context." In addition, such questioning could mean that their job in the college would be threatened. Therefore, questioning the givens, including rules and materials, was seen as impossible by the teachers because they were afraid of losing their jobs. This is to say that some teachers were hesitant to implement CP for practical reasons (to keep their jobs), especially in a managerial system where teachers were powerless and voiceless. This relates to Akbari (2008), who asserted that if the expatriate teachers started to question and be critical of things around them in the Arab world, where Oman belongs, this could cost them their career.

## Resistance to CP

From the data analysis, there were very few teachers who clearly showed resistance to CP because they regarded their role as solely to teach the language and not to create changes in students' lives. This is in line with Sadeghi and Ketabi (2009) and Baladi (2007), who found that some teachers who participated in their study felt that their main responsibility was to teach linguistic skills to their students rather than to question students' beliefs about various social issues. Two teachers in the current study clearly stated that they favored the communicative approach over using CP. For example, Azza stated in the interview:

I think, as teachers, it is not our job to question students' beliefs and assumptions. Our job is to teach language without interfering with students' beliefs [...] if I had a choice to do critical pedagogy or communicative approach, I would choose communicative approach because it is more beneficial for my students than critical pedagogy.

Although we did not ask participants to define what they meant by “communicative approach,” we had the sense that this approach was sometimes used by teachers, as it is self-evident. Additionally, in Oman, the communicative approach has been popularized among ELT teachers as the best way to assist students to gain competency in English language, especially after the educational reform that took place in 1998, which was heavily based on this approach (Al-Issa, 2015; McLean, 2011). Actually, the communicative approach has become a buzzword that one can repeatedly hear at the levels of policy making, institutions and research, which emphasizes the necessity of teaching communicatively as the best method for ELT. Therefore, teachers might assert that they use this approach more than any other teaching method because they want to be associated with a more contemporary methodological style (Al-Mekhlafi & Ramani, 2011).

This great emphasis on the communicative approach might partially result in some teachers abandoning L1, which is regarded from the CP perspective as a source that should be utilized in ELT classrooms. To illustrate, some ELT teachers in the four colleges perceived Arabic as an obstacle that inhibited students from learning English. For instance, Emran, who is Pakistani and thus does not speak Arabic clearly, maintained in the interview that:

English is a foreign language and when we learn English we should not use our mother tongue because when we translate from our first language, the whole structure in the target language will change, so we should learn English as it is through English and getting exposure to it.

Surprisingly, some Omani ELT teachers who shared the same linguistic background with their Omani students were also intolerant of the usage of Arabic inside the classroom. Amal explained that Arabic was

totally unacceptable in her class and students were not allowed to use it at all. For instance, she explained:

I do not use any Arabic word in the class. If I open the door for the students to use Arabic and explain things for them in Arabic, it will be an Arabic class. This is why I start my classes with an agreement between me and my students that we should not use any Arabic in the classroom because if I allow them to use Arabic, it will be like a habit, so I totally avoid using Arabic in the classroom.

Teachers presumably pointed out that allowing students to talk in Arabic meant less opportunity to learn English. However, many studies conducted nationally have reported that most students prefer to use some Arabic when they learn English as it helps them to understand the complexity of the content (Al-Bakri, 2014; Al-Jadidi, 2009; Ismail, 2011). It seems the majority of the interviewed teachers viewed the usage of L1 as a way to help in explaining vocabulary or grammar rules and giving instructions to save time, especially at lower levels. They did not see using Arabic as a way of respecting students' identities and backgrounds, taking into account that Arabic is part of students' identity, which may result in students feeling inferior from the CP perspective, as the workshop and article emphasized. For instance, Nasra said:

I am toward using Arabic with low-level students in level 1 and 2 ... So I can say we need to use Arabic with low-level students and then you try to minimize it when they reach higher levels like level 3 and 4.

Furthermore, one of the CP tenets challenges the appropriateness and relevance of ELT materials that are designed by the Center's authors (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Thus, it encourages developing ELT textbooks locally. However, during the interviews, some teachers, especially Omanis, resisted this tenet and asserted that they could not design ELT materials. For instance, Saif said:

They [British or American ELT expert designers] have been designing ELT materials for a long time, so they can be ideal designers; they have a lot of



experience. Frankly speaking, we Omanis do not have enough experience in designing curriculum and we are not expert in it.

Two issues arise from the excerpt above. First, it seems that Saif believed that Omanis have less knowledge than materials designers from the inner circle countries, who have a lot of experience which guarantees the design of good ELT materials despite their limited knowledge about the Omani context. Second, this excerpt exemplifies the dichotomy of others as superior or experienced (British and American designers) and the self as inferior or inexperienced (Omani designers) which perpetuates the center-periphery dichotomy that legitimizes knowledge from the center and neglects what is produced in the periphery. This can be attributed to the experience we have undergone in Oman of importing ready-made materials from big publishers to teach English and bringing consultants from the inner-circle countries to establish programs at HE institutions (Al-Issa, 2006; Karmani, 2010). In addition, based on my experience, professional development programs that aim to promote teachers' knowledge and skills about designing materials seem to be scarce. Therefore, teachers seem to be accustomed to believe that they are incapable of designing English textbooks. However, looking at reality and what was happening in the classrooms, many teachers said that students reacted to teachers' handouts better than to the activities designed by these experienced and "superior" ELT designers. For instance, Ahmed, an Omani ELT teacher, said "I can assure you that whenever we prepare a handout, students like it more than the activities in the textbook." Nonetheless, like Saif, Ahmed asserted that he was capable of designing separate handouts but incompetent to design a whole textbook.

### **In-Between: Inner Pull vs. Outer Pull**

A number of teachers seemed to experience a disjuncture between what they wanted to do as teachers who believed in CP and what they were required to do by the current system with its goals, syllabi and assessments. On one hand, they were impressed by CP and believed that it could make the students' learning experience better (inner pull). However,

if they did that, then they would find themselves straying away from what they were expected to do (outer pull). In the next excerpt, Joseph encapsulated this dilemma by maintaining that:

if I expose them to critical issues and that is what I really want to do and believe in, what if other groups are not given this kind of materials, they would make a comparison; they would have to question “why do you have these materials? Why are you teaching this?”

Fatma, an Omani teacher, in the following extract, expressed her willingness to try it out because CP could achieve, in her words, the “true meaning of education.” Nonetheless, she believed that the administration would not support her because of the critical age of the students, who were perceived by the administration to be powerful, since they were the ones to resist the regime in the country and protest to demand changes in 2011 (Arab Spring in Oman). Fatma explained that by saying:

I would like to try CP in my classes because it represents the true meaning of education, but thinking about the administration here, especially in our country, are in their comfort zone and getting such an approach would make them ask “Why is she doing it?” especially after the Arab Spring. They are afraid of any new approach which may affect the way students think because they strongly believe that students at university level have power and they might threaten the whole country if change leads their thinking to a way that they think is unsafe.

This echoes the findings of Kress, Degennaro, and Paugh (2013) who found that their pre-service teachers in Boston University believed that CP might not be aligned with the administration in an era characterized by neoliberalism and accountability discourses. Therefore, ELT teachers emphasized the need for the college itself to adopt this approach in order to enable teachers who support CP to implement it. Based on my experience as a teacher in these colleges, teachers within a level conduct meetings every two weeks, held by the level coordinator, to make sure that everyone is following the syllabus and they are covering all topics at the same time, because the tests are central and students need to get an idea

about all of the topics in the syllabi. Thus, a single teacher implementing CP might contradict the goal of the institution, which could put the teacher under a lot of pressure. The following extract from Jack's interview exemplifies how the current ELT system pushed him to stay inside the institutional box despite his positive attitude towards implementing CP:

I am into CP but first it must be part of the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the institution because as a teacher, as a lecturer, you cannot do so much and if you are doing like something that is not in line with the college's vision, you are not into this kind of general direction, then it becomes a struggle on your part.

## Theoretical Contributions

First, this study is based on four colleges in Oman, with student and teacher bodies typical of other Omani colleges, so it adds to a growing body of international literature exploring CP, which is deemed to be one of the most analytical contested approaches in teaching. McArthur (2010) states that CP “needs to gain strength from different perspectives, contexts, and ideas—shared and argued over in safe, creative public spaces” (p. 501). Therefore, this study exemplifies an attempt to strengthen CP in ELT via scrutinizing CP in the Omani ELT context, which may contribute to deepening the understanding of CP and how teachers perceive it, especially that “very few studies have intended to explore [CP] on the part of [in service] instructors and consider their attitudes toward this approach” (Sahragard, Razmjoo, & Baharloo, 2014, pp. 180–181).

Additionally, since this study tackles how teachers define CP, it contributes to the literature on teachers' conceptualization of CP, especially as there is a “paucity of empirical studies related to definitions and aims and purposes of [CP]” (Breuing, 2011, p. 5). The findings of this study reveal two issues with regards to the definition of CP. The first question relates to the heterogeneity of CP's meanings and its ability to be used for transformative education in various ways and from multiple perspectives (Smith, 2014). The second issue relates to the indefinite and partial

definitions of CP that were articulated by the teachers in this study might lead to teachers' unsuccessful implementation of it. Given this situation, this study highlights the necessity of consistent work at the level of making teachers more aware of this approach via providing them with more guidelines of what CP is about which could assist them to understand its meanings, central tenets and aims.

This study has also filled a lacuna in studies related to CP in the Arab world in general and Gulf countries in particular as few studies have been conducted to investigate CP (Abu-Shomar, 2013; Raddawi, 2011). These few publications on CP in the Arab world have dealt with theoretical aspects such as its tenets and the rationale behind the necessity of implementing it (Chandella & Troudi, 2013; Raddawi, 2011; Raddawi & Troudi, 2013). Also, others have concentrated on introducing CP to students and discussing its impact on their learning (Chandella, 2011; Ibrahim, 2013). Teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards CP were not considered.

## Pedagogical Contributions

In what follows, we draw some pedagogical implications based on the study's findings. However, these implications should not be seen as a step by step blueprint (Kincheloe, 2012) for how CP should be implemented; rather they should be seen as multiple discourses of how and when CP (s) could be implemented in the ELT realm in Oman. To this end, these implications are concerned with teachers and policy makers.

## Implications for Teachers

The findings of the study reveal that very few teachers showed resistance to CP for different reasons. Therefore, to introduce CP into ELT, teachers should have qualities of openness and flexibility (Chandella & Troudi, 2013; Sadeghi & Ketabi, 2009). With such qualities, teachers become willing to explore this approach and critically engage in debate in order to embrace changes in their practice and their students' learning

experience. Such openness itself is a kind of critical awareness. So, the principle message of this research for ELT teachers is that they should not close the doors against any opportunity to know about a new approach, and they should not be prisoners of conventional methods such as the communicative approach.

## Implications for Policy Makers

In order to instill criticality within HE institutions, all parties, including the authorities at ministry level, the deans in the institutions, teachers and students, should be involved in the criticality project. Such involvement of all stakeholders could minimize the fear and resistance to inject criticality with HE institutions as they feel that their voices are legitimized. This can be done through forming joint committees to establish a mutual rapport among all the stakeholders, which might result in agreement regarding the aspects that are needed to develop in order to approach teaching and learning as critical enterprises.

CP as an approach for teaching has been constantly developed and debated, it is important for the HE authorities to set up a particular agenda to organize an international conference concerning CP and related issues. Such conference would help in introducing CP to teachers who may not have heard of it. In addition, it will assist teachers who have knowledge of CP to exchange their knowledge and experiences about CP locally and internationally, which would result in widening their perceptions of CP and relevant issues.

The current limited PDPs that focus mainly on teaching methods and strategies are not adequate for enabling teachers to critically teach English. What is needed is a constructed system of in-service teacher education programs in HE institutions to raise ELT teachers' awareness of the socio-cultural and sociopolitical complexities surrounding learning and teaching English (Mohd-Asraf, 2005). Hence, teachers could be prepared to move beyond "how" to do things to question "why" certain things are the way they are. Put differently, "to put such issues on the agenda, to question the hegemony and supremacy of English and to engage teachers in discussions and projects about them" (Troudi, 2005, p. 121).

The results of the study reveal that teachers need more workshops on CP to be capable of implementing its tenets in their teaching. Therefore, serious workshops or a whole course on CP should be conducted. Nonetheless, “one cannot give a procedural guideline for implementing critical pedagogy into a program of teacher education” (Bercaw & Stooksberry, 2004, p. 3). Consequently, this study’s findings indicate that one way to introduce CP to ELT teachers is through presenting the teachers with their situations as problems where they can analyze, reflect and act.

It is naively assumed that EFL teachers will manage the implementation of CP by themselves, especially at the beginning of the implementation process. Thus, regular meetings should be organized between teachers, experts, and administrators in order to keep track of the kinds of challenges EFL teachers might encounter so that ongoing support can be provided for them.

## Further Reading

Crookes, G. (2013). *Critical ELT in action: Foundations, promises, praxis*. London: Routledge.

Crookes provides ELT practitioners background information about CP and its main tenets. He also provides detailed suggestions and examples of how to implement CP in ELT classrooms.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). *Language teacher education for a global society: A modular model for knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing, and seeing*. New York: Routledge.

The book aims to empower teachers by situating their pedagogy through executing five modular models for knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing and seeing.

Marzi Suzani, S. (2018). Implementing critical pedagogy in EFL contexts: Closing the gap between theory and practice. *Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers*, 91(1), 116–124.

This paper provides basic concepts and objectives of critical pedagogy and gives some practical applications for implementing CP in EFL classrooms.

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# Part IV

Issues of Voice and Voicelessness  
with English



# 12

## Teachers' Voices and Curricular Change: A Critical View

Federica Castro

### Nature of the Problem

Over the last decades, the issues of teachers' voice, participation and involvement, and teachers' marginalization in the processes related to educational changes have increasingly been recognized in the existing literature (Abudu & Mensah, 2016; Bao, 2016; Carl, 2005; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Gozali, Claassen Thrush, Soto-Peña, Whang, & Luschei, 2017). This lack of voice is clearly perceived in the lack of personal commitment and involvement arising from a common situation that teachers experience in their daily lives at their workplaces: that of having to follow dicta devised by others (Day, 2000). Teachers are instructed to carry out the curricula that they took no part in designing (Abudu & Mensah, 2016).

Curricular innovation, change and implementation are in teachers' hands since they are, in effect, the agents of change (Carl, 2005). Teachers

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are key players in the educational sector; therefore, it is critical that they play a central role in curriculum development (Abudu & Mensah, 2016). Quality participation and involvement by teachers is essential, not only in curriculum development but also for recognizing and nurturing teachers' personal and professional growth, their identity with the institution, and to strengthen their sense of agency. Teachers possess unique knowledge about the classroom that is key to successful policy formation and implementation (Gozali et al., 2017). Studies conducted in different settings reveal that changes in curriculum development are of little value if they do not take the teacher into account (Jessop & Penny, 1998; Modipane & Themane, 2014). As Jessop and Penny (1998, p. 393) argue: "one of the main reasons for the 'spectacular lack of success of change initiatives' may be traced to the neglect of teacher's voice."

At the time this investigation began, the institution was in the process of restructuring its English Language Curriculum. The existing curriculum at the time consisted of four courses (two courses at the introductory level and two at the intermediate level). The New English Curriculum (NEC) consisted of nine courses (two courses at the introductory level, two at the intermediate level, two courses at the advanced level, one Conversation course, one Academic Writing course, and one English for Specific Purposes course). Among the reasons for this change were the dissatisfaction with the results in students' language competency, the role of the institution in today's society, and the external needs for learning English because of its role in a constantly changing world. Obviously, if the role of English is now considered as entrenched worldwide (Phillipson, 1992) and as a powerful tool that can provide access to all types of professional opportunities (Troudi, 2005), two English courses did not fulfill this role.

The task of developing the NEC was the responsibility of the Head of the Applied Linguistics Department (ALD) and a team of four EFL teachers. The other 25 EFL teachers that comprised the ALD did not participate in the design process. The NEC represented a significant shift compared to the previous English curriculum, not only because more courses were added, but also and most importantly because it required a paradigm shift in teaching methodology; this shift, of course, had clear and profound implications for teachers. They necessarily had to make

changes and adjustments, especially to their own beliefs and practices. Initially, teachers complained about not understanding the reasons for a change, they did not understand clearly what was expected from them in this new curriculum. One possible reason for the mismatches between the new curriculum's principles and teachers' beliefs (Orafi & Borg, 2009) was the exclusion of teachers during the design stage. Consequently, when it came to the implementation stage, the team had to deal with teachers' feelings of fear, uncertainty, anxiety and insecurity about their capabilities to meet the challenges of a completely new way of teaching English as a foreign language.

## Critical Agenda

Since the study was conducted from a critical theory stance, which purpose as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005, p. 28) express: "is not merely to understand situations and phenomena but to change them," the theoretical framework was situated within the areas of what being critical means, critical applied linguistics (CALx), and the issues of teachers' voice, participation and involvement in curriculum development.

Being critical is the ability to look for hidden assumptions and fallacies in arguments (Benesch, 1999). Being able to do it implies constantly questioning and challenging the status quo to uncover, examine, and debate the taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions (Benesch, 1999) in order to be able to problematize the "givens" in a specific situation in order to transform it. In the words of Pennycook (1999, p. 343): "Thus, a crucial component of critical work is always turning a skeptical eye toward assumptions, ideas that have become naturalized, notions that are no longer questioned." Moreover, being critical implies a self-reflexive attitude, an engagement with political critiques and social relations; in other words, engaging with questions of power and inequality (Pennycook, 2001).

Central to being critical is the feature of awareness. Awareness arises from a reflexive process of how I and others think and act. We become critical thinkers when we learn to pay attention to the context in which our actions and ideas are generated, when we become skeptical of



quick-fix solutions, of single answers to problems, and of claims to universal truth (Benesch, 1999). Adopting a critical approach involves an attitude, a way of acting, thinking, and working. Therefore, this research project was aimed at investigating change and transformation.

## Critical Applied Linguistics (CALx)

In order to explicitly make connections of the present work with the critical element which guides it, it is important to understand that CALx is not merely the addition of a critical element to a specific domain of applied linguistics, in this case curriculum development; such argument is limiting. Critical applied linguistics goes beyond this; it tries in its practice to move toward change (Pennycook, 2001). It is a more dynamic and productive position, more than, as Pennycook (2004, p. 785) expresses: “just the sum of related critical approaches to language domains.”

CALx, critical teaching, and critical pedagogy all entail adopting a critical and self-reflexive stance toward questioning common assumptions—starting with our own. It has to do with revising teachers’ beliefs of what education is and what it should be for. It also has to do with working and teaching toward transformation and change for the well-being of others. It means engagement in and problematizing our work, our context; working outside our comfort zone, developing a sensitive attitude toward others, moving away from the certainties, the taken-for-granted in traditional approaches to education.

CALx, critical teaching, and critical pedagogy mean also being aware of the power structures within ourselves and in the context where we work, to be aware of where power and control are and where they should really be.

## Teachers' Voice, Participation, and Involvement

Teachers are, in effect, the principal role-players of curriculum change; therefore, they should be given the opportunity for their voices to be heard before the actual implementation takes place. In other words, they should be given the opportunity to have input during the initial curriculum development process (Carl, 2005). Unluckily, in many contexts, such as that in which this study took place, teachers' functions in the process of curriculum changes remain limited to the application of what has been developed by others. As other similar studies report (Carl, 2005; Jessop & Penny, 1998; Lasky, 2005; Orafi & Borg, 2009), teachers' exclusion from the planning and designing of curriculum innovation and change is detrimental to the process of taking ownership of the curriculum. By ignoring teachers' voices, the outcomes of new thinking on curriculum development may in fact be thwarted, prolonging the dangerous situation that teachers, as potential curriculum agents, simply remain "voices crying in the wilderness" (Carl, 2005). Moreover, teachers' lack of voice in decision-making processes has been identified as one of the causes of teacher burnout, understanding burnout as the physical and emotional exhaustion and anxiety caused by failure to derive a sense of existential significance from work (Pines, 2002).

Studies conducted in different settings reveal that changes in curriculum development are of little value if they do not take the teacher into account. Similarly, Jessop and Penny (1998, p. 393) in their study on teacher's voice, state that: "[O]ne of the main reasons for the 'spectacular' lack of success of change initiatives may be traced to the neglect of teachers' voice." Given such a reality, personal commitment and involvement are likely to be limited. Moreover, the uptake of an educational innovation can be inadequate if teachers' lived experiences and realities are not taken into consideration (Orafi & Borg, 2009). Undoubtedly, the omission of teachers' voice in policy-making processes resonates in the achievement of sustainable educational change and development (Jessop & Penny, 1998). Teachers' voice, as Jessop & Penny (1998, p. 401) argue: "is such a strategy that, for change to be implemented and sustained, teachers need to own the educational innovation and the process of

change.” In other words, teachers have to be informed about the reasons for curriculum change, understand and believe in it. For changes to occur, shared understandings, values and goals need to exist (Lasky, 2005). Obviously, this is more beneficial if done at the planning stage, not immediately before the implementation phase, as was done in the case of the NEC.

If teachers are the people who ultimately have to implement the curriculum, they have the right to be involved in the process right from its beginnings. If we want committed teachers, the diminishing sense of agency or control that many teachers report must be replaced by a sense of accountability with trust (Day, 2000), of participation and involvement through hearing their voices and bringing them into the educational processes that occur outside the classroom walls. This is also supported by Day (2002, p. 422) when he expresses that: “Externally imposed curricula, management innovations and monitoring and performance assessment systems have often been poorly implemented, and have resulted in periods of destabilization, increased workload, and intensification of teachers’ work and a crisis of professional identity.”

In spite of the recognition of teachers’ roles and their contributions in curriculum change, research has shown that teachers are neglected in the process (Abudu & Mensah, 2016). There seems to be a large gap between theory and what happens in real life. Furthermore, if teachers are only regarded as implementers of other people’s plans, the power of pedagogy is probably lost. They become merely technicians and, instead of feeling responsible for successfully implementing a new curriculum, they are simply its deliverers (Jessop & Penny, 1998). Unfortunately, in many contexts such as that in which this study took place, teachers’ role in the process of curriculum changes remains limited to the correct application of what has been developed by others. Previous studies (Carl, 2005; Jessop & Penny, 1998; Lasky, 2005; Orafi & Borg, 2009) report that teachers’ exclusion from the planning and designing of curriculum innovation and change is detrimental to the process of taking ownership of the curriculum.

If educational change is to be sustained (Jessop & Penny, 1998), prior consultation should form an important part of any curriculum reform, and the acknowledgement of teachers’ voices would ensure that teachers’

participation is incorporated at the appropriate time. This opportunity will serve as a means to ensure that teachers gain access to and take ownership of the new curriculum in a more significant way (Carl, 2005). They must know that their voices are heard and must be brought into the educational processes that occur outside the classrooms walls.

From the previous observations, it is clear that quality teachers' participation and involvement are essential, and change leaders must ensure that teachers are involved in all of the decisions, plans and activities related to curricular change implementation if it to be successful. Teachers more willingly can become more active agents able to influence their environment to change the context. Needless to say, allowing teachers' voices to be heard should bring positive results. Such is the case of the study conducted by Modipane and Themane (2014) in which they found that teachers' participation improved their commitment to curriculum development. They also found that when teachers are active participants in the implementation and when the new intervention is integrated in their everyday teaching, this improves its success. Done this way, teachers' satisfaction, professional self-esteem and status seem to be reinforced and put in the place where they should be, at the heart of the educational enterprise. In that respect, Carless (1998, p. 355) advises that: "Dissemination of innovation... is often insufficient... Instead, what is often needed is the negotiation of meaning between developers and teachers." In line with Carless' previous quote is the fact that imposed change will not be successful, as curriculum change is inexorably linked to personal change and we alone have the ultimate power to change ourselves (Lamie, 2005). Undeniably, successful implementation lies in the hands of teachers; at the end of the day, it is they who will determine whether innovations will eventually be carried out inside the classroom (Lamie, 2005). As Brown (1995, p. 206) puts it: "Involving teachers in systematic curriculum development may be the single best way to keep their professionalism vital and their interest in teaching alive."

## Research Framework

From a critical stance, the purpose of this small-scale research study was to investigate how a group of seven EFL teachers perceive their voices having been heard during the design process of the New English Curriculum (NEC) in an English Department of a higher education institution in the Dominican Republic. Based upon the results of the investigation, any necessary adjustments and changes should be made.

For this study, curriculum development was regarded as the encompassing and continual process during which any form of planning, designing, dissemination, implementation and assessment of curricula take place (Carl, 2005) and as a process where teachers take an active role in its design and implementation (Modipane & Themane, 2014). The constructs of voice, participation, and involvement are understood as being able to articulate one's interests and aspirations by negotiating a space through the competing discourses of domination and control; being able to develop and exercise a sense of agency (Canagarajah, 1999).

## Research Questions

1. Do teachers perceive that their voices are being heard during the design process of the New English Curriculum?
2. Can teachers' perceptions influence their involvement in the implementation phase of the New English Curriculum?
3. What actions can the leaders of this process take, at this stage, to allow teachers' voices to be heard?

## Methods

The methods used to collect the data were a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview—as a way to construct knowledge in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Methods such as open-ended interviews, must be included if richer and more accurate inferences are to be made (Pajares, 1992).

The questionnaire was designed as an initial stage to inform the interview design and to gather, from a critical stance, participants' ideas and opinions about their voices having been heard during the English curriculum design process, and how this situation would have an influence in the implementation phase. The questionnaire consisted of five questions: the first two were open-ended and the last three yes/no questions. In order to get more information from the last three questions, participants were asked for the reason they made their choices by answering the question "Why?" The first three questions were designed to discover the participants' general perceptions and opinions about the means and timeframe in which they were informed about the changes in the English curriculum; the fourth and fifth questions were designed to elicit their opinions about the importance of teachers' voice and participation in a curriculum design process and how this might affect the way in which they will approach the implementation phase. Due to the critical perspective guiding this study, the last two questions were designed to uncover possible hidden perceptions of power and control. The answers to these two questions were fundamentally important because the interview questions will originate principally from those answers.

The interview consisted of five questions addressed to uncover hidden issues of power and control, exclusion, voice and choice from the teachers' points of view. In accordance with a critical position, the questions were aimed at getting the information needed to make the adjustments and changes to include teachers as active participants in the process of the new curriculum's implementation.

The teachers' interviews provided an in-depth exploration into the ways teachers understood and experienced the opportunities they had to express their voices during the curriculum design phase.

## Participants

For time-limitation reasons, a purposive sample was selected. The participants were seven part-time EFL teachers who work in the Language Department of a higher education institution in the Dominican Republic. The teachers participating in the study had been working for the Language

Department for at least five years. Their work load ranged from 15 to 25 hours of class weekly. Two of them held BAs in TESOL, two of them held Master's Degrees in Education, one a Bachelor's Degree in Education, and two of them held TESOL certificates. Four of the participants were women and three were men.

## Piloting

Piloting the instruments was a key element in the present study. This process helped to uncover research bias toward the topic under study due to involvement throughout the curriculum planning and designing processes.

Two EFL teachers who were not participating in the study validated both the questionnaire and the interview. Originally, the questionnaire consisted of eight questions, but after piloting it some questions were rephrased and others were changed so that they reflected a neutral position in order to get the information that would guide in constructing the interview.

The interview was piloted by the same people who piloted the questionnaire. The piloting resulted in changing the wording of some questions to better focus their purpose. This process was extremely useful and helped to improve the research tools, clarifying the path to follow during each interview, to get the right information.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Since the purpose of this study was to understand the inner thoughts and feelings of the participants, words and not numbers were considered to be the primary sources of data. Data were collected through a questionnaire and a semi-structured individual interview. The teachers initially completed a questionnaire that elicited information on their perceptions of their role during the New English Curriculum (NEC) design process. The analysis of the data generated provided the framework for the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted individually over a one-week period.

## The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed personally to the participants at the research site a week before the interviews. All participants returned the completed questionnaire the same day it was given to them. This was highly valued and they were all thanked for doing so. In order to deepen the analysis of the why question within the last two questions and to better organize the data yielded, Radnor's (2002) six-step process of data analysis was followed.

## The Interviews

The interviews with the participants used semi-structured, open-ended questions. They were conducted individually over a one-week period, a week after completing and returning the questionnaires. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed for data analysis. Each of them lasted approximately 35 minutes. For the interviews, Radnor's (2002) six-step process for data analysis was also followed. This six-step process was extremely useful because it helped to organize and summarize the information and to visually focus on the most salient information.

The data yielded from both instruments were analyzed with reference to the research questions. The original questions in both instruments gave access to the themes. A code for each theme was created and then the data were organized into categories. Findings are presented according to the research questions and the themes, with samples from the transcripts as evidence.

## Findings and Discussion

Centrally, this study argued that teachers' voice through participation and involvement needed to inform policy-making if educational change is to be sustained (Jessop & Penny, 1998). A critical barrier to teachers' participation in curriculum development is their lack of information about the change and about the role they are to play (Abudu & Mensah,



2016). Prior consultation should form an important part of any curriculum reform, and the acknowledgement of teachers' input would ensure that teachers' participation is incorporated at the appropriate time. This opportunity will serve as a means to ensure that teachers gain access to and take ownership of the new curriculum in a more significant way (Carl, 2005). When the curriculum changes result from teachers' involvement in the curriculum development process, teachers will feel more assured in their classrooms, figuring out that their students will benefit from the changes (Bao, 2016).

In this section, I will present and comment on the most salient themes and categories that emerged from the questionnaires and the interviews that refer directly to each research question. As Schostak and Schostak (2008, p. 9) recommend: "a key demand of radical research is that any discussion of 'findings' is in the context of what is at stake in adopting particular perspective-shaping methodologies."

## **Teachers' Perceptions about the Design Process of the New English Curriculum**

Analyzing the data, it was obvious that teachers value being included, especially in the decision-making processes that affect them directly, such as the implementation of a new curriculum. This is also noted by Troudi (2009, p. 64): "What teachers value is recognition of their experience and professionalism." Participants were of the opinion that they could have made relevant contributions and that they should, therefore, have been involved accordingly. Not one of the seven teachers participating in the study considered that they were given any kind of participation at the design stage. They expressed the view that at that stage there was a lack of communication, and that they should have known about the coming changes in advance. As two of the participants expressed: "If I would have been given the chance to participate in the design of this project, it would have given me certain sense of identity with the project" and "Had I been informed, I could have started to experiment in my classes." Another participant said: "I did not participate, I was just informed."

One unexpected theme that emerged in this section was the issue of “change.” They complained about not knowing the reasons for this curriculum change. One of the participants expressed that: “We should have been asked about what changes were needed and should have been informed about the reasons for those changes.” The previous comment has also been noted by Orafi and Borg (2009, p. 251), who remarked: “if teachers are to implement an innovation, it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of the principles and practices of the proposed changes.” Another participant also expressed: “When we talk about changes, we should not only take into account what we are going to change, the new things we are going to adopt. We have to think of the good things we do and that we are going to keep.” This response goes in line with what Pennycook (1989, p. 608) expressed: “The construction of the Method concept in language teaching has been a typical example of the attempt to validate current forms of knowledge at the expense of past forms.” Pennycook (1989, p. 600) also argues, however, that: “while there certainly are trends and shifts in language teaching, these tend to be a reordering of the same basic options.” In this respect, it was explained to the English teachers of the ALD that following the basic principles of the Communicative Approach did not, by any means, mean that they would have to leave out what has proved to work for them and their students. It seemed that more work was needed to develop teachers’ trust and understanding.

### **Influence of Teachers’ Perceptions on Their Involvement in the Implementation Phase of this New Curriculum**

Even though in the questionnaire all participants answered affirmatively to the question asking if they thought that teachers’ participation in a curriculum design process influences the way in which changes would be implemented; in the interviews, only two of the seven participants provided straight answers. One of the two participants expressed that: “Knowing about the new curriculum structure and goals in advance, would have helped to avoid some insecurities they [the English teachers]

feel now.” The other honestly said: “If the program fails, everybody is responsible to make the appropriate changes.”

All of the participants expressed that their participation in a curriculum-design process is important for a number of reasons, namely: they feel part of the whole process, they can give their opinions and suggestions, they develop a higher sense of responsibility, and there is more commitment because, after all, they are who will ultimately be responsible for implementing it. Furthermore, as indicated in the research literature, teachers’ involvement in curriculum development increases their effectiveness as teachers, feeling that one’s contributions and suggestions are helpful and satisfaction from participating in decision-making that affects one’s work (Abudu & Mensah, 2016). Similar results are presented in studies conducted on teachers’ voice in curriculum development. As Carl (2005, p. 225) observes: “it is the teachers who ultimately have to implement the curriculum and therefore teachers, as professionals, ought to be involved in all these processes.” Moreover, to make education meaningful and relevant to the society it depends on how the curriculum is developed and implemented by teachers (Abudu & Mensah, 2016).

## **Leaders’ Actions to Allow Teachers’ Voices to Be Heard**

From the critical perspective guiding this study, this question became crucial; the answers obtained will fulfill the goals of any critical approach that aims to change a situation in which issues of power and voice are conflicting (e.g. teachers’ voice and participation in the process of curriculum design). In this particular case, participants’ recommendations were used to guide the curriculum implementation phase.

Among the participants’ recommendations were: that if more participation was desired, the leaders of the process should assign teachers more responsibilities to involve them in the process through specific tasks; this would, in turn, create more commitment, identity, and ownership of the project. One of them expressed: “If we would have been assigned certain responsibilities during that process, all of us would have been more committed. We would have started to know how the new curriculum was going to work.” A similar suggestion was presented in Abudu and

Mensah's (2016) study on teachers' perception about curriculum design; they concluded that one alternative to improve teachers' participation was to decentralize curriculum design and make teachers key stakeholders in curriculum construction.

Participants also expressed the view that they needed more information about the new program and about the communicative approach in terms of teaching methodology, classroom activities and materials; in this respect, they asked for workshops and training using this approach. One of the participants noted: "We need to have more training courses focused on communicative activities." They also recommended identifying teachers' interests. From a critical point of view, this can be translated as giving them choices rather than dictating what they have to do. These findings are also similar to those presented in previous studies related to teachers' voices, teachers' participation and involvement in curriculum reforms (Carl, 2005; Jessop & Penny, 1998; Lasky, 2005; Orafi & Borg, 2009).

Participants in the study clearly stated that they have an important role to play in the educational processes that originate at their work place, especially processes that have to do with curriculum reform; however, they stated that their voices were never heard. This is also supported by Day (2002, p. 422) when he notes that:

Externally imposed curricula, management innovations and monitoring and performance assessment systems have often been poorly implemented, and have resulted in periods of destabilisation, increased workload, and intensification of teachers' work and a crisis of professional identity.

This is also expressed by Carl (2005, p. 228): "By ignoring teachers' voices, the outcomes of new thinking on curriculum development may in fact be thwarted, prolonging the dangerous situation that teachers, as potential curriculum agents, simply remain 'voices crying in the wilderness'." Quality participation and involvement by teachers is essential, not only in curriculum development but also for recognizing and nurturing their personal and professional growth, their identification with the institutions where they work, and also to contribute to strengthen their sense of agency.

Critically analyzing these answers necessarily moved to serious reflection and required that immediate actions were taken to include teachers in the subsequent stages of this curriculum change. The findings presented in this section definitely helped to re-direct the way in which this curriculum change continued to develop, and teachers' recommendations were introduced. Most importantly, a change in the attitude of the people directing this process shifted toward inclusion and integration of teachers' voice to maximize their participation, involvement and commitment.

## **Pedagogical and Theoretical Contributions**

In any process of educational change, teachers are active agents, able to influence their environment to change a context. Moreover, it has become widely accepted that high-quality teachers are the most important asset of schools (Hanushek, 2011). For changes to occur, there needs to be shared understandings, values and goals. These are developed through individuals' participation in joint-productive or co-joint activities (Lasky, 2005). Certain paths of action need to operate as the mediational system to create the conditions that will allow and increase teachers' sense of agency. These mediational systems need to incorporate teachers' voice and participation if reform policies are to be adopted and not ignored. Furthermore, nowadays, there is a need to push for an understanding of curriculum as involving what teachers do with learners, rather than only what policy-makers instruct should be done (Modipane & Themane, 2014). The uptake of an educational innovation can be limited if teachers' lived experiences and realities are not taken into consideration (Orafi & Borg, 2009). Teachers have to be informed about the reasons for, in the case of this study, curriculum change, and they need to understand and believe in it through involvement and participation. If teachers are only regarded as implementers of other people's plans, the power of pedagogy is lost. They become merely technicians and, instead of feeling responsible for successfully implementing the new curriculum, they are simply its deliverers (Jessop & Penny, 1998).

The initial action to be taken by change leaders and policy-makers, with a view toward acting for change (Auerbach, 2001), is to acknowledge the situation by reflecting on the assumptions that guided previous practices and later on questioning those practices. Moreover, in the context where this study took place, it was an urgent matter to recognize and act with the firm determination that teachers are in effect the executors of change (Carl, 2005). In that sense, perhaps the most significant contribution that this study generated was the need to involve teachers in decision-making processes from the initial stage of the change process; that is, the planning of the curricular change, and throughout the change implementation. Teachers' voices need to be and should be recognized and heard by taking into account their suggestions for adjustments necessary at the design and implementation stages of the curricular change. Teachers' voices can also be given a place in educational processes by creating opportunities where teachers are integrated and participate with an active role from the very beginning of curricular change. One way to hear the voices of teachers is by supporting them through participation and involvement in all the work and academic activities that a curricular change requires. In this sense, if educational change is to be sustained (Jessop & Penny, 1998), prior consultation should form an important part of any curriculum reform, and the acknowledgement of teachers' input would ensure that teachers' voices are incorporated at the appropriate time. This will serve as a means to ensure that teachers gain access to and take ownership of the new curriculum in a more significant way (Carl, 2005). These opportunities operate as the mediation systems to create the conditions that would allow and increase teachers' sense of agency. These mediation systems need to be developed through processes of consultation with teachers in order to incorporate their voices and participation and ensure that reform policies are adopted not ignored. On the same token, Gozali et al. (2017, p. 45) assert that: "In addition to opportunity, the expression of teacher voice requires.... reactions from authority figures. Teachers will be more likely to voice their perspective when they feel listened to, supported and taken seriously by authority figures."

Allowing teachers' voices to be heard can bring positive results, and the teachers' professional self-esteem and status will be reinforced and put in

the place where they should be, at the heart of the educational enterprise. Among the possible ways that institutions could explicitly put teachers at the heart of the educational enterprise, from the planning stage, is by consulting them about change plans, assuring their participation in decision-making meetings, and assigning group work to develop drafts of the document containing the proposed changes. In this respect, teachers need to be assured that the curriculum change is not because they are not doing a good job. Education reforms must recognize teacher voice as part of the solution rather than marginalizing them as a problem (Gozali et al., 2017). Curricular changes should not be based on a deficit model, rather, as a different approach to achieving teachers' goal of effective EFL teaching (Iemjinda, 2007).

Another implication arising from this study is that institutions need to create learning spaces for teachers that are more conducive to learning and growth so that they can handle the challenges of time and workload more easily. Recognizing this fact implies a review of the policies and practices related to the professional development of teachers (Poulson & Avradamis, 2003). This revision should start from the everyday working conditions at educational institutions, where teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time coping with the immediate demands of their job, to the personal and institutional vision as part of the daily life of the teacher. The time teachers invest in class preparation, attendance at meetings and other activities in which teachers are involved outside the classroom should count as part of their workloads and should be included in their salaries, regardless of the type of contract they have. This way, teachers would not have to overload themselves by teaching more classes than they should in order to earn enough money to live on. The unavailability of adequate time at the disposal of the teachers and the painstaking efforts and energy required to develop new curricula serves as a barrier to teachers' participation in curriculum design (Abudu & Mensah, 2016). Tertiary education institutions should allocate specific times during the week just for teachers' preparation; that is, time within the working schedule of teachers and not during teachers' personal time.

Besides teachers' understandings and preparation, it is important to take into account that teaching is an emotional practice as well as a cognitive and technical endeavor (Lasky, 2005). This study also revealed that

change leaders in general should be sensitive and aware of the feelings and attitudes teachers develop before and throughout a curriculum change process. The importance of teachers' attitudes during a process of change has also been stressed by others (e.g. Hazratzad & Gheitanchian, 2009; Mowlaie & Rahimi, 2010), who argue that attitudes are such important factors that they can be considered the cause of teachers' success or failure in a classroom. Knowing teachers' attitudes is beneficial because any investment in a curricular change seems to be a waste of time and energy if teachers' full support is missing (Mowlaie & Rahimi, 2010). In this respect, change leaders need to develop an awareness of how much an educational change can have an impact on teachers' professional and, most importantly, personal lives. Teachers' days are filled with preparing lessons, teaching, and grading which limits teachers' willingness to get involved in all the activities a curriculum change requires Abudu & Mensah, 2016). With regard to this, collected data revealed that the demands an educational change poses on teachers, both at the professional and personal levels, need to be made step by step so that teachers' time and workloads are respected. Done this way, teachers are more likely to commit to the new situation and do their jobs with joy and satisfaction.

It has been obvious in this study that conflicts and challenges inevitably arise in a process of change; however, and as Fullan (2007, p. 123) points out: "... conflict and disagreement are not only inevitable but fundamental to successful change." A conflicting issue that most of the participants in this study highlighted was the fact that their personal lives have been greatly affected by the time demands the NEC has imposed on them and no remuneration for their effort was considered. Changes that are not accompanied by incentives will necessary produce psychological barriers, which can raise serious problems (Abudu & Mensah, 2016).

In sum, bringing about a curriculum change takes time; nevertheless, working on changing the infrastructure (policies, incentives) is necessary if valued gains are to be sustained and built upon (Fullan, 2007). In that respect, and probably the most important fact, is that as Fullan (2007, p. 124) emphasizes: "Assume that changing the culture of institutions is the real agenda, not implementing single innovations." Therefore, institutional initiatives that upgrade the professionalism of teachers, in



addition to being desirable in their own right, should help to provide a climate conducive to the development of curriculum changes (Carless, 1998).

Finally, it is important for teachers, administrators, and researchers to focus their attention on the following questions: “What conditions are necessary to create engaged teachers who are reflective of their practice?” “What conditions do institutions have to provide teachers to encourage their motivation in continuing their professional growth and development?” “What are the risks and responsibilities that teachers might face when given opportunities to voice their thoughts and ideas?” And, “What are the risks and responsibilities that teachers might face when given the opportunity to act against their own status quo?”

## Further Reading

Benesch, S. (2012). *Considering emotions in critical English language teaching: Theories and praxis*. New York: Routledge.

*Considering emotions in critical English language teaching: Theories and praxis* presents the author’s findings about ways of theorizing emotions and affect critically and applying those theories to English language teaching (ELT) and learning. The author proposes that emotions could be theorized as social constructs, rather than private feelings or cognitive structures, and integrated into research on critical teaching.

Carl, A. (2009). *Teacher empowerment through curriculum development: Theory into practice*. Cape Town, South Africa: Juta and Company Ltd..

Arend Carl acknowledges the importance of involving teachers in curriculum development processes. Teacher participation, teacher freedom, democracy in the classroom are at the heart of his work. This book is a synthesis of extensive research not only on teacher empowerment but also on the link between this notion and the process of successful curriculum development and implementation.

Thomas, S., Farrell, C., & Baecher, L. (2017). *Reflecting on critical incidents in language education: 40 Dilemmas for Novice TESOL professionals*. USA: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

The authors emphasize that most research on curriculum design and development is not carried out from the teacher’s perspective, and very little atten-

tion has been given to the particular challenges of curriculum in English as a Second Language/ English as a Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) teaching contexts. The chapter devoted to curriculum development details four problems of curriculum development and its place in the life of teachers. These problems refer to (1) working with mandated curricula, (2) integrating content and language, (3) aligning lessons to standards, and (4) facing a lack of resources. It stresses the ability of TESOL educators to adapt, modify, and create curricula as key to their success in the classroom.

Wedell, M. (2009). *Planning for educational change: Putting people and their contexts first*. London: Continuum.

Wedell highlights the place of human factors in influencing curriculum change. The book also offers recommendations on the teacher's role to determine the rate and route of a change process. It is of great value to practitioners responsible for planning and implementing educational change.

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# 13

## Performativity in Education and Its Impact on Saudi ELT Teachers' Performance

Kholoud Almanee

### Nature of the Problem

Educational reform in the majority of Gulf countries resulted in neoliberal education policies with all their dominant techno-rational discourses of teaching (Le Ha & Barnawi, 2015). These neoliberal policies require constant production of evidence that teachers are doing things “efficiently” and in the “correct” way (Bush, 2019). They are represented, for example, in discourses of professional teacher “standards” or “competencies” that reduce teaching to matters of technical efficiency (Clarke, 2013). Such policies require teachers “to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations [...] to set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation” (Ball, 2003, p. 215). This situation has given rise to what Lyotard, Bennington, and Massumi (1984) call “the terrors of performativity.” The new performative technologies, policies and strategies of neoliberal managerialism have a

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considerable impact not only on teachers' psyche, souls, identities and self-image as their performance encapsulates their value to the educational organization but also on their performance and teaching practice.

Performativity may prevent EL teachers from adding their informed agency or having meaningful influence on the issues that affect them and their ability to exercise judgment, make decisions, determine outcomes and shape change (Meng, 2009). Another problem for teachers working within a performative culture is that they find themselves continually inclined to create fabrications of the "evidence" (Clarke, 2013) to make their performance tangible, visible and more importantly measurable. By systems of recording and reporting on practice, teachers sometimes have to work to exclude what does not "fit" into what is supposed to be presented so as to render their organization into "a recognizable rationality" with all its systems of numeration and classification (Elliot, 2001). In more general terms, the performative culture is an attempt to align public sector organizations with the culture, systems and values of the private sector which eventually create the pre-conditions for core public services to be opened to commodification and profit-making (Apple, 2006). The proliferation of these performative and evaluative systems to measure and evaluate performance encourage teachers to think about themselves in their terms as "outstanding," "average" or "satisfactory" in their performance (Lim & Apple, 2016). The governmental control embedded in systems of measurement and performativity tend to be presented simply as a way of representing quality, but the way that these systems operate through observation of teachers, annual reviews and self-reviews shows how these systems come with a flow of changing demands that make teachers continually recorded and constantly accountable and responsible for monitoring and disciplining themselves (Lim & Apple, 2016). In this sense, teachers think about themselves as merely producers of performance and feel committed to improve it (Meng, 2009). These systems are powerful techniques "to produce bodies that are docile and capable" (Foucault, 1979, p. 294). In light of these issues, there is a dire need to take serious steps to explore what Pennycook (2001, p. 8) calls a "preferred future" for EL teachers to resist the profound consequences of performative systems and other market-driven policies on their performance and the nature of teaching and learning in the Saudi context.

## Critical Agenda

It is important to present a brief account of the basic tenets of critical theory that inform this study. Critical theory is concerned with social critique, social reformation and social justice (Bronner, 2017). That reality is shaped by social, cultural, political and ethical values is the essence of the critical ontology, and critical inquiry is committed to the ability to produce praxis or action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). People in society are central to critical theory (Crotty, 2003). Its ultimate aim is to reveal the system of power relations and to unmask ideology and hidden agendas that help in perpetuating different forms of inequality in society, so as to bring about social justice (Starr, 2019). Unlike the interpretive tradition, critical theory does not merely aim to describe and understand a particular social phenomenon; rather, it seeks to deconstruct prevailing concepts and to expose the underlying struggle between opposing forces by revealing the reasons that cause the status quo to exist in order to explore better alternatives. The area of this study is therefore best located within the critical rather than the interpretive worldview because, although participants' understanding of the socially constructed realities in the Saudi context about performativity and its technological systems is crucial for the current study, it is not the central endeavor. The ultimate goal underpinning this study is to suggest a preferred future for participants. As Habermas (1972) points out, critical theory goes beyond the understanding of the interpretive paradigm with an aim to improve or even to emancipate.

As this study is best seen as part of the current debate over the hegemony of neoliberal ideology on education, it is important to discuss how critical theory considers the structure of capitalism. Critical theory assumes a considerable tension between capitalism and democracy. Capitalism as seen by critical theorists as a way to limit the possibility for collective self-determination, and hence a main cause of injustice and domination (Browne, 2016). Capitalism is an economic system based on private appropriation and an unequal distribution of wealth and power whereas political orders try to present themselves as a manifestation of public opinion (Browne, 2016). Critical theory attempts to find out the

conditions that would help society to freely act upon itself, such as effective participation and social solidarity (Honneth, 2014). Moreover, critical theory considers that the existing collective self-determination has been distorted by regressive ideological expression, and thus needs to be critiqued (Browne, 2016).

Critical educational research has emerged as a response to the apparent deficiency of research in dealing with inequalities that have plagued not only the schools but the whole society (Allman, 2000). The interpretive approach to educational research has been criticized for offering incomplete accounts of social phenomenon by disregarding the political, ideological and economic contexts (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). While interpretive research strives to understand and interpret the social world in terms of its actors, critical educational research strives to offer a vision of what behavior in a democratic society should entail by interrogating common assumptions (Cohen et al., 2013). Critical researchers in this sense assume that knowledge is not neutral but is influenced by human interests.

The current study has a political agenda with the aim of empowering participants by helping them question the taken-for-granted issues related to performativity in English language education in the Saudi context. It also seeks to identify the distorted or fragmented consciousness (Eagleton, 1994) that brought the participants to relative powerlessness or even to power. It also aims at interrogating the legitimacy of the knowledge performative systems produce in an attempt to point out how power permeates the legitimation of knowledge.

In mainstream TESOL and applied linguistics research, performativity and its potential impact on teachers' performance are often depoliticized. Research as such is more concerned to offer answers to technical questions related to performativity and language teaching and learning. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. xxii) clearly explains how staying with technical micro-level questions has narrowed the field at the level of research:

In several ways, not asking why-questions is part of ESL tradition [...]. This is a dangerous narrowing of the field, staying within technical micro-level questions of the best methodologies and materials, in the best positive



tradition. One part of it is excluding the broader power issues from discussions about the language.

## Research Methodology

The study sought to answer the following question:

- How do performative practices affect Saudi primary, intermediate, and secondary English language female teachers' performance?

This question stresses aspects of research that lend itself to critical inquiry since I aim not only to understand and explore the impact of performativity on ELT teachers' performance but also to suggest what is changeable. Epistemologically, critical research sufficiently separates itself from the neutrality of positivism that seeks to describe a fixed objective "reality" of a particular group and the multiple realities of constructivism that do not offer an analysis to the social reproduction of inequalities. Critical epistemology is tightly linked to a social ontology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) that is, human interactions and relations occur within the economic, cultural, political context of the particular social site. Therefore, this question does not investigate EL teachers' perceptions of performativity, its impact on their performance and identities by seeking teachers' responses to self-report measures, and then subjecting them to correlational analysis for theory verification, nor does it seek to construct the multiple meanings of performativity that EL teachers hold in a particular context. This question aims at situating the meanings EL teachers generate about performativity within the broader societal structures to examine cultural forms of oppression and engage EL teachers to address them. To this end, Carpecken's comprehensive five-stage approach to critical research was adopted as explained below.

Carspecken's (1996) five-stage critical qualitative research (CQR) is an appropriate framework for the current study of performativity and its impact on ELT teachers because, based on the tenets of critical theory, it suggests a connection between social phenomena and broader sociopolitical events to expose prevailing ideologies, discourses and

taken-for-granted assumptions, so that social situations under investigation can be redefined. This approach offers the researcher a critical philosophical position to adopt an agenda to address patterns of power and domination (Palmer & Caldas, 2016) with the purpose of trying to transform political and social realities (Bronner, 2017) or suggesting a preferred future for the participants (Pennycook, 2001). Moreover, Carspecken's CQR utilizes simultaneous data collection and analysis to identify cultural structures by applying hermeneutic–reconstructive techniques of dialogue and reflexivity (Georgiou & Carspecken, 2002).

Another subtle point to consider is that Carspecken's model of critical research is not based on a fixed set of linear stages. It is often described as circular process whereby new data are continually being analyzed as they are collected. The current research design is one that enables researchers to adjust their research plans in accordance with their learning as their studies unfold and offers a powerful method of data analysis that can be applied to analyze cultural products of any type (Duke et al., 2016). In this type of design, data collection and analysis procedures can evolve over the course of a research project in response to what is learned in earlier stages of the study (Morse, 2015). If the research questions and goals, for example, change according to new information and insight, the research design may need to change accordingly. This flexible approach to data collection and analysis allows for ongoing changes and alteration in the original research design as a function of both what has been learned so far and the ultimate goal of the study (Carspecken, 2013). Within the broader framework of qualitative research, flexible use of research methods is closely associated with the broad goal of induction because success in generating hypotheses and theories is often based on a flexible use of research methods (Given, 2008). Finally, the goal of this approach is critical in nature.

Carspecken draws on a wide variety of theoretical orientations. In particular, philosophical pragmatism, critical social theory, phenomenology, and the expressivism of J. G. Herder, and charges his pragmatist attitude with the task of justification (Holmes & Smyth, 2011). To avoid problems raised by his eclecticism, and theoretical anomalies which may cause contradictions at certain points, I adhered to what is in line with the critical social theory that forms the overarching philosophy for his work.

## Methods

### The Sample

The research participants of this study comprised fifteen EL female teachers in their mid-career professional lives in the KSA. I selected the participants on two bases: purposiveness and accessibility. According to Patton (1990, p. 196) “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.” Purposive sampling entails careful selection of individuals for participation in a study (Silverman, 2016) to achieve variability in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and to inform an understanding of the social phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling technique places primary emphasis on saturation (i.e., obtaining a comprehensive understanding by continuing to sample until no new substantive information is acquired) (Silverman, 2016). I chose EL teachers in their mid-career professional life (approximately 5 to 15 years in their career) as some of them might have already developed a performative identity and aligned their teaching practice to performative imperatives.

### Data Analysis

To analyze my data, I used the six linear phases of thematic analysis as described by Clarke and Braun (2016): first, familiarization with the data; second, coding; third, searching for themes; fourth, reviewing themes; fifth, defining and naming themes, which requires the researcher to write a detailed analysis of each theme; finally, writing up to tell the reader a coherent and persuasive story. Thematic analysis is flexible enough to suit inductive as well as theory-based analysis and it allows for pre- and post-coding. An initial list of codes based on the study’s guiding questions was drafted using colored “Post-It” notes as I preferred to be in touch with the raw data. To verify the accuracy and internal consistency

of the coding, I listened to each interview while reviewing the codes. Then, I merged similar codes together. After that, I combined categories with similar codes in a higher-level “tree node” format. This allowed me to sort through large chunks of data to see general patterns both within and across the participants. Then, I organized the data into clustered mind maps using Microsoft Word.

## Findings and Discussion

The data revealed contradictory views among participants with regard to the impact of performativity and its technological systems on their performance as discussed in the following.

### “I Am No Longer Enjoying It”

Most teachers considered their school’s fear of missing targets, coupled with a restrictive model of teaching and evaluating students, have taken the heart out of education and forced many teachers to retire or leave the profession. Maha, who has fourteen years of experience, explained in a frustrated tone how excessive monitoring and paperwork have sucked all the enjoyment out:

I am no longer enjoying it [teaching]. Most of what we’re doing is filling out papers to provide evidences or trying to adapt to new teaching approaches that are imposed on us without any preparation... too much to do and so little time.

The Saudi MoE put forward student-centered approaches to teaching such as cooperative and active learning strategies that emphasize students’ involvement in classroom activities to help them construct their own meaning of the material as a rejection of traditional methods of teaching and learning. While almost all participants seemed to be convinced, to a certain extent, of the premise that learning occurs when students participate in shared endeavors and learning is more lasting and pervasive when

students take the initiative and are personally involved in the learning experience, 10 out of 15 participants expressed their discomfort caused by trying to achieve this within a framework that provides rigid and prescriptive instructions to achieve the desired change.

## Do Experts Really Know Better?

The findings reveal absence of coordination between policy-makers and classroom teachers. Participants expressed their lack of confidence in the performativity movement and the activities it mandates as they are externally imposed on them in a top-down model of educational reform introduced by policy makers and “experts” who are remote from the educational scene. Noura expressed this view by saying:

I wish I can meet those who put these standards. Have they taught in schools or just imagined how would it be like? Do they live in the same world that we live in?

It is clear from the above excerpts that the participants are speaking from a position of inferiority, exclusion and marginality and that they have an uncertain attitude toward the feasibility of current reform. This impression is based not only on the content of their remarks, but also on the way the teachers conveyed this idea—with facial expressions that strongly implied that they believed themselves inferior to others involved in tailoring these new policies and the procedures to implement them. Troudi and Alwan (2010) reported similar findings of a qualitative interpretive study of 16 female secondary school English language teachers’ perceptions of their role during curriculum change in the United Arab Emirates. Most participants in their study expressed an image of themselves as being “at the bottom of the pyramid,” “obedient slave[s]” and “prisoners of the exam.”

## **“I am Leaving the Profession for Good”**

Participants cited a number of what they considered the most influential factors as to why teachers quit the profession. Some of these factors are commonly cited in the literature, such as being underpaid, overworked and underappreciated. However, I will direct my discussion to the factors the participants see as a direct resultant of the current neo-liberal policies of educational reform.

Several of the selected participants cited incompetent school managers and supervisors to be one of the biggest influential factors in thinking seriously about leaving the profession. Some teachers speculated about some rumors that the rise in their annual basic salary will be performance-related:

I don't mind my annual rise to be performance-related if I am going to be evaluated by a qualified team but if I am going to be at the mercy of the stupid school manager or a stupid supervisor to get this rise then it is a big NO and I will definitely leave for good.

Of all of the participants interviewed, six of them shared their intention to quit teaching by choosing to go for early retirement. Consider the following quote by Sara:

I do love teaching but now I feel out of the place. What brought me to the profession does no longer exist. I lost any feeling of satisfaction or accomplishment. I am exhausted trying to cope with the constant changes. Every year they have a new version of their audit system with new demands and new requirements. I find it very hard to manage the stress and that's why I am saying goodbye.

Another interviewee affirmed that the feeling of being under extreme scrutiny is what made her think seriously to leave teaching:

You are expected to teach according to a new scheme without any preparation or training whatsoever and all what they do is just to tell you that the manual is available online and the attitude is like get on with it! But what

I even hate more is being constantly watched simply because they want to make sure that I am working in line with their new scheme I am neither prepared nor trained for. Your books, lesson plans and exam papers are all continuously checked... I can't handle this anymore and I'm happy to retire early and I wouldn't give it a second thought. (Nadiyah)

Likewise, Leena is another participant who expressed her regret of becoming a teacher by saying:

After five years, I have realized that I made a wrong decision to be a teacher. I have now started a small business on Instagram [online application and a social network platform] and I will resign soon... what is happening now is really sickening... I can spend the whole day describing how we are being constantly watched and monitored.

It is neither revelatory nor controversial that the demands on teachers are greater than ever before. Teachers today are under more scrutiny, which places them under great amount of pressure as their job now is becoming more and more aligned with test scores and evaluating performance. One consequence of this is high attrition rates. According to the Saudi Public Pension Agency official website, teachers make up the largest group of public sector employees taking early retirement for the year 2016 at a rate of 87% (Public Pension Agency, 2016).

Clarke and Phelan (2017) state that the micro-level surveillance of classroom and school inspection coupled with the macro-level of performance data collection form what Webb (2007) describes as a twofold "axis of terror" for imposing accountability on teachers. The performative technologies used are based on "strictly hierarchical asymmetries that reduce social existence to a competitive, zero-sum game in which everything is mine or yours" (Clarke & Phelan, 2017, p. 31) so teachers can strive to achieve more and do better. This is also in line with Foucault's assertion that constant surveillance is an efficient way of social discipline as the feeling of being constantly watched leads the inmates of any social institution to enforce discipline on themselves. This mechanism of constant observation, according to Foucault, has an ideological function that alters individuals' understanding of themselves and offers a structure

whereby inmates' behavior can be modified. This form of discipline exercised in modern social institutions forms the heart of the social system of power relations.

In Foucault's perspective, schools, as other social institutions, function to maintain and perpetuate the values and code of behavior that protect and serve the status of people who possess authority, be it economic, political, religious or any form of position or authority. Page (2017) pointed out the fact that surveillance might not be effective in preventing bad teaching or even reflecting the reality of teaching simply because when teachers are aware of the likelihood of being observed they put on a performance and therefore inspection may not be able to distinguish the appearance of the observed from the truth of the observed. That is to say, the intensification of surveillance as a result of performativity produces teaching fabrication that I will discuss in detail in section "Fabricating Ourselves". It also reflects lack of trust in teachers, and a lack of respect for their sense of professionalism and ethical integrity and their ability to implement a policy with classroom-level modifications. They are sometimes made to feel as potential thieves who, if left with no supervision, are likely to steal from the system.

### **"Much Ado About Nothing"**

In response to the interview question: "Do you think performativity and its technological systems meet expectations from the field (teachers, students, administrators and policy makers)? How?" Respondents explained their frustration with the way that the increased performative orientation of teaching and learning fell short of meeting expectations from the field. As Nouf remarked: "All of what happens now is just much ado about nothing." She quickly continued:

They should pay more attention to core educational issues. Take for example elementary schools. Many teachers teach subjects they are not qualified for. Last year I taught Art for the 5th grade besides teaching English and all that they did was giving me the manual and the phone number of the previous art teacher who was in a maternity leave.



Other participants made frequent reference to the fact that much of the effort exerted to reform education is not paying off. Leena, a primary school teacher, explained effort is often directed in the wrong direction, which is why, in her opinion, there is too much effort with little or no result. In her words:

If probably half of the money and effort was directed to the right direction, such as providing school buildings and equipment or at least improving the miserable conditions of rented school buildings only then we can talk about real reform but what happens now is either reducing teaching and learning to a number of statistics and formulas or buying a new curriculum series that looks quite similar to previous ones just repackaged under different name.

Another teacher confirmed this by saying:

we are so focused now on making sure everything looks as it should be from the outside to the extent that we forgot what we're really here for... Are we here to help students learn or just to please the school principal? ... They are absolutely taking education to the wrong direction (Nadiyah).

In another instance, Hala, an intermediate teacher, explained that most of the practices in schools have nothing to do with supporting struggling students but rather most of those students are being awarded marks they did not deserve to produce positive measurable outcomes for the school, creating what she describes as “failure in disguise.”

In fact, it is worth noting how merit and reward is interpreted in performative schools. It seems from the participants' remarks that drawing correlations between hard work and reward has lost its meaning as it has nothing to do with building resilience in students. This is in line with the finding of a recent qualitative study by MacDonald-Vemic and Portelli (2018) that reports data derived from interviews with 28 educators committed to social justice education from across Ontario, Canada. Participants were asked how they perceived the impact of neoliberalism on education and on their teaching practice. One of the main themes reported how the meaning of academic success has shifted from

demonstration of knowledge and skills to simply doing as little as required to get a course credit to contribute to positive school outcomes creating an “illusion of success” or what Ball (2003) termed “Fabrication.”

## **Fabricating Ourselves**

Whether referring to reporting their students’ learning outcomes or their own professional practices, several participants reinforced the view that due to the increases in performativity mechanisms designed to make official judgments of them and their schools, they fabricate in order to present “a favorable gaze of quality and accountability” (Webb, 2006). In answer to interview questions related to how performativity impacted teachers’ performance, comments like “give them what they want” and “you have no choice but to do what they want you to do” were repeatedly used by some participants to describe how they found themselves obliged to engage in acts of fabrication. Amal, for example, said: “I haven’t changed anything but when someone steps into my class I just follow the lesson plan I submitted in advance.” Leena, similarly stated that understanding what is requested by higher management and adhering to it is the key to success:

Just learn how to make the school principal happy that’s all what it takes now to be a good teacher and, most important, never try to question any command or try to understand the logic behind it as this might be understood as an attempt to critically examine it and resist it... just show absolute submissiveness and you will be safe.

Within the context of performance management of teachers’ work, many teachers tend to present superficial versions of themselves. Additionally, fabrications are privileged by some individuals in the school setting and “are informed by the priorities, constraints and climate set by the policy environment” (Ball, 2000, p. 216). The previous comment by Leena is understandable if one has to consider the hierarchical structures of schools. It could be argued that the school principal and her assistants and other members of the management team are privileged because of

their position in this structure and some may use their position to fabricate versions of themselves and their schools according to what is needed by the rhetoric of policy, expecting little or no resistance from their subordinates in the structure, that is teachers under their charge. However, these acts of fabrication are resultant of transforming schools into becoming part of the “audit society”.

An unanticipated finding, however, was how these acts of fabrication were valued as a sign of understanding and adhering to the new guidelines of practice not only by the school principal and other management team but also by some external inspection team members.

We had a whole week of inspection by an external team. We had several months’ notice and both teachers and management team spent considerable time to prepare and make everything look at its best. I refined my lesson plan and crammed every teaching strategy that I could muster into that specified lesson. I was confident and excited to perform a lesson I’ve been preparing for weeks... During the discussion with the inspector after the lesson I explained my reasons for not using the objective poster and her reaction was you should have done it at least for this lesson, you know it’s the inspection day!

The instances of fabrication presented here are not necessarily indicative of dishonest teaching practices. These acts should be seen as Ball (2000, p. 216) puts it: “selections among various possible representations or versions of the organisation or person.” It is expected in a diverse and complex school environment that some teachers will purposely be less than authentic in order to be accountable. In this situation, “truthfulness is not the point—the point is their effectiveness, in the market or for the inspection” (Ball, 2003, p. 224).

### **“That doesn’t count”**

In answer to the interview question: Can you talk to me about the recent changes in your practice to meet the performative requirements? Rana explained the changes as follows:

I used to do spelling competitions and “show and tell” presentations to help students practice speaking as well as other extracurricular activities with my students that we both enjoyed greatly. Now the school principal told me I can only do one activity and I won’t get any credit for doing more than one extra activity so it is a waste of time to do something that doesn’t count in my evaluation.

Schools are ranked in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) by the Saudi National Center for Assessment according to two centralized tests: General Aptitude Test (GAT) and student’s educational achievement test. The public has access to the yearly evaluation of schools available at the Saudi National Center for Assessment website, enabling parents to make choices of schools for their children. Schools, educational supervisors, school managers and teachers are also ranked according to their performance in the specified criteria illustrated in the audit system manual via a technological system called Makken. School managers need to enter teachers’ data into the system in a manner by which the algorithms can consume the data to elucidate a ranking structure, and the system will not accept two identical grades. For example, if two teachers get a total of 95.5 points, the school manager has to minus or add part of a decimal in order for the system to accept it. One of these teachers has to be, for instance, 95.4 or 95.6.

Ball (2012) distinguishes two “orders of effective performativity” in education. The first is to redirect pedagogical activities toward those that are likely to have a positive impact on measurable performance outcomes for a group, institution or nation. Consequently, aspects of social or moral development that have no immediate measurable performative value are disregarded. The second order is that such reorientation towards measurable outcomes changes the way in which many teachers experience their work and the satisfactions they get from it and, therefore, their sense of moral purpose and responsibility for their students is distorted. This reduction of teaching and learning into calculable procedures, Biesta (2009) argues, makes educators value what they can measure rather than measure what they value, to generate market information for choosers and to enable the state to pick off poor performers. Nonetheless, although the KSA launched a privatization plan for education as well as other

sectors in April 2018 (one year and six months after starting this research), the repercussions of poor performance for both schools and teachers in the KSA remain vague and indefinite, and many questions remained unanswered: “Are teachers’ wages going to be performance-related?” “What will happen to poorly performing schools?” “Are there intervention plans for schools with poor performance?” “Is the Saudi MoE going to hire teachers or that would be left to schools?” “Are teachers going to be hired by annual/term contracts?” “What will happen to teachers who are already employed by the government?” “Do underperforming teachers get special help or extensive training programs or they just get sacked for poor performance or poor students’ results?” This list of questions is not exhaustive and only includes some of the most repeated questions on the Saudi Minister of Education’s Twitter account under a hashtag that can be translated as #launch-of-privatization-program.

## Job Description

When answering the following question: “How do you feel about having to match the requirements of performative systems?” Some participants expressed their satisfaction with the new performative systems in terms of helping them to know exactly what they are supposed to do, how they are going to do it and how they will be evaluated, giving them a clear and definite structure for their teaching practice, as explained by Hala:

Actually now we know what we are required to do and what elements are going to be included in our evaluation, this keeps me focused and helps me direct my effort on what should be done first.

Rana is another participant who supported this view by saying:

Actually now we have a framework to work within and we are offered definite guidelines... There is nothing I hate more than working in a chaotic school environment.

Likewise, Rawan said:

Regardless of being meaningless or not, these requirements work as guideline and describe my tasks and responsibilities. In this way I know my duties and my rights. In a previous school, the principal used to assign me a different task that has nothing to do with teaching English. I worked as a reprographer and a students' advisor besides teaching English but now they can't do it.

Sarah sees positive benefits from trying to match these criteria, as teachers now are obliged to join professional development annually:

When there is a workshop or a training program, the school principals usually either send teachers they favor or those with little teaching loads but now all teachers have equal opportunities to attend professional development programs as this will affect the overall evaluation of the school.

Elyas and Al Grigri (2014) conducted a study using a mixed-methods approach to identify the problems of teaching English in public schools in Saudi Arabia from the perception of teachers and supervisors. Two instruments were used for data collection, a close-ended questionnaire and an open-ended interview. The scarcity and weakness of the in-service teacher training programs were among the prominent findings of the study. This may explain the participants' support for incorporating in-service teacher training programs in the overall assessment of school performance.

School principals' lack of professional leadership and management skills, knowledge and expertise in Saudi schools has been well documented by educational researchers (e.g. Thumali, 2016; Alhumaidhi, 2013). Until 2007, there were minimal criteria for the selection of Saudi school principals (Khalil & Karim, 2016). Teacher with as little as two years' experience could apply for a position and they often struggled due to the lack of formal training that usually resulted in ineffective management (Thumali, 2016). After 2007, however, the MoE started requiring potential new principals and set a new set of criteria to be met: teachers needed to have a bachelor's degree as well as eight years' experience in a teaching or administrative role. Furthermore, not all Saudi universities include educational leadership or professional administration in

bachelor's programs. Therefore, the MoE has been incapable of filling principal positions with suitably qualified candidates (Mathis, 2010). This perhaps can offer a reasonable justification to some participants' preference for detailed regulations and practices that are imposed externally over leaving this task to incompetent school managers.

## Theoretical and Practical Contribution

This study's main contribution relates to the notion that has been widely debated in the literature of policies in education and critical education: the importation of market philosophies into education through performativity and its technological systems, and the impact of this on ELT teachers' performance in the Saudi context. The study has both theoretical and practical contributions. First, informed by a critical theory, the current study makes a major theoretical contribution in the sense that it presents a new perspective from which to approach the phenomenon of performativity and its consequences on educational policies and practices in the Saudi context. Prior efforts devoted to studying performativity in the KSA have been unsuccessful in linking the prevailing culture of performativity and performance technologies as a manifestation of market-driven principles to its sociopolitical and sociocultural context. There are evident indications that Saudi ELT teachers throughout this study have claimed a pattern of detachment between government language education policies and individual needs. The findings have also revealed the complexities and uncertainties of issues surrounding the phenomenon of performative educational technologies and the information generated by them and the fabricated reality such systems represent by rendering educational practice and assessment into a generic form. All these issues influence language education policy and practice in the Saudi context. These, as was discussed, were an outcome of sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors.

Furthermore, most ELT research conducted in the Arab world has been limited to objective scientific modes of inquiry where central issues embedded in ELT educational practices, such as voice, marginalization and power relations are not addressed, which the findings of the current

research clearly point out. The current research also can be said to function with a vision in which, in Pennycook's words, "what it means to be critical is limited to relating the language to broad social contexts" (2004, p. 797).

Relevance is considered as an important criterion that educational research needs to meet to influence educational policy making (Stacey, 2018). Relevance refers to the connection between research questions addressed and the topics of interest in educational policy making (Stacey, 2018). The KSA is now undergoing an educational transformation through privatization programs, as part of the Saudi 2030 vision and the National Transformation Program, which led to heavy reliance on performative educational technologies. This constitutes the central scope of the current inquiry. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the complex connection between research and policy, and no single study can provide conclusive evidence for a relationship or effect. It is only through replication of the research and magnitude of an effect across studies and applying different methodology that we can determine whether a relationship or effect has been proved. However, I believe the findings hold relevance to key audiences and underscore the importance of considering the corporate logic in educational settings in the KSA from a different perspective.

## Conclusion

The findings reveal that participants hold different views regarding the impact of performativity on their performance. For some, performative imperatives offer them a definite guideline and help them to know where to direct their efforts and how they are going to be evaluated. For others, performativity and the audit culture has negatively changed their performance and practices. They believe that this surveillance culture has led to a damaging attitude, preoccupied with reaching targets and satisfying imposed criteria. Conventional concepts of context-specific practice reached through professional dialogue are restrained as the requirements of performativity imposed on them resulted in fabricated and inauthentic practice, and relationships where they are no longer encouraged to have a



rationale or reasoning for their own practice because what is important is to achieve the desired outcomes and to reach target grades.

Policy-makers could encourage and even reward teachers who resist performative goals to show that they are open to different perspectives and ends, and there could be a welcome exposure to alternative ways of thinking about issues in the education profession. This may help some teachers recover the values displaced by corporate and performative values. Teachers and other educators must be included in the process of generating and implementing educational policies as excluding them can result in a loss of connectedness as they cease to find meaning and agency in their everyday practice. Teacher education could promote the responsible exercise of autonomy and place considerable emphasis on direct and explicit discussions of teachers' discretion, responsibilities and rights, as this might have a positive impact on the unavoidable exercise of power in schools.

## Further Reading

Ball, S. J. (2017). *Governing by numbers*. New York: Routledge.

This book critically addresses some of the ways in which numbers are deployed in educational governance and practice, and some of the consequences of this deployment for being educated, teaching and learning. Recognizing that numbers do not simply represent, but that they change things and have real effects, allows us to move beyond a system where difficult and important issues about what we want from education and from teachers are sidestepped in the push to "improve our numbers."

Biesta, G. (2015). What is education for? On good education, teacher judgement, and educational professionalism. *European Journal of Education*, 50(1), 75–87.

In this article Biesta engages with this question in the context of a wider discussion about the role, status and significance of the question of purpose in education. He suggests that this is the most fundamental question in all educational endeavors. He analyzes the specific nature of teacher judgment in education and shows how the space for teacher judgment is being threatened by recent developments in educational policy and practice that concern the status of the student, the impact of accountability and the role of evidence.

Kalfa, S., & Taksa, L. (2017). Employability, managerialism, and performativity in higher education: A relational perspective. *Higher Education*, 74(4), 687–699.

This article combines Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and cultural capital with Lyotard's account of performativity to construct a three-tiered framework in order to explore how managerialism has affected the academic habitus.

Roberts, P. (2019). Performativity, big data and higher education: The death of the professor? *Beijing International Review of Education*, 1(1), 73–91.

This paper argues that the dominance of economic goals in shaping educational agendas, the triumph of the performativity principle, and the obsession with measuring and marketing almost everything, has led to support for scholars in the humanities in particular being progressively eroded. This process of dying is, however, by no means complete, and a rebirth of the age of the professor, perhaps in a slightly different form, remains a possibility that should not be ruled out.

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# 14

## Non-native: Problematizing the Discourse and Conscientizing the Teachers

Amal Treki

### Introduction

The topic of non-native English speaker teachers (NNEST) has received considerable attention in the past few decades. Problematic issues include the perpetuated discourse of inequality and labeling, the “native speaker fallacy” (Phillipson, 2009), employability, self-perception and professional identity. Foley (cited in Coşkun & Izzet, 2013, p. 2) argues that despite English changing and being used in a variety of new contexts, there is still a “strong tendency to view native-speakers as the sole authority” in the appropriate use of the English language. NNEST’s perceptions also feature disproportionately in professional discourse “despite their overwhelming numerical majority” (Hayes, 2009, p. 1) as a consequence of “expertise” being “defined and dominated by native speakers (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 85).

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Fairclough (2010) has argued that while discourse is shaped by established structures and assumptions, it also contributes to shaping, reproducing and transforming them. It seems that regardless of how much it has been problematized, native-speakerism gives teachers who are perceived as native speakers a higher status than those who are not (Selvi, 2010). The assumption that the native-speaker is the ideal teacher is perpetuated in recruitment discourses, despite decades since the NNEST movement. Yet, Phillipson (2009) has argued that there is “no scientific validity” to support the proposition that native speaker teachers are better English-language teachers, and has attributed its perpetuation to socio-political motives.

Forms of racism, and native-speakerism in TESOL persist perhaps because they are infinitely reinforced through “discourses that make them seem natural, increasing their power through making them invisible and less likely to be challenged” (Ruecker & Ives, 2015, p. 407). Such “loaded discourse” and the “superior identity of the ‘native speaker’ teachers” is continually perpetrated also because teachers are rarely engaged in examining such discourse and belief systems at any point in their careers (Holiday & Aboshiha, 2009, p. 670).

## Researcher’s Positionality

The choice of topic stemmed from acknowledging the prejudice that exists, feeling the need to critically examine the discourse, and from being personally affected by a racist ideology. My own experiences have inspired the study. I am one of “them,” and have dealt with many of the same issues personally and professionally. As did Park (2012, p. 131) in “Afraid of being NNS,” I see my “positionality as juxtaposed” to that of the participants and “their experiences were intricately interwoven” with mine.

A modernist approach calls for objectivity through maintaining detachment from the subjects, and utilizing empirically verifiable methods. Moussu and Llorca (2008), for example, critiqued studies concerning “nonnative speaker” teachers for their “excessive reliance” on “personal experiences and narratives,” arguing that such approaches pose a clear “danger to the field with an ‘inflationist repetition’” (as cited in Holiday

& Aboshiha, 2009, pp. 671–672). This project takes such critique into account and incorporates a critical discourse analysis component to establish “evidence” of racism and marginalization in the TESOL/ELT arena. Still, the subjectivity of experiences with marginalization is precisely what the researcher sought and her positionality could not go unheeded.

## Research Purpose and Significance

Firstly, while several studies have problematized the NNES teacher situation in the field and many have established the existence of discrimination, many of those were carried out in the center—the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada (e.g. Clark & Paran, 2007; Cook, 1999; Liu, 1999; Park, 2012). There remains the need to bring to the “forefront of the ELT professional discourse” (Hayes, 2009, p. 2) the experiences and perceptions of non-native teachers, particularly from the periphery (*ibid.*). The available studies on NNES teachers in the region (Arab Gulf) have mostly looked at NNES teachers’ perceptions of their native counterparts (Alwadi, 2013), learner preferences (AbdulMajeed, 2005; Coombe & Al-Hamly, 2007), and effect on learners’ proficiency (Albakrawi, 2014). None have focused on discrimination against non-native teachers in employment and questioned the dichotomy, both of which are “absolutely necessary to engage in activism for seeking social justice in the globalized era” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 8).

Secondly, the researcher’s intention is not to merely corroborate that prejudice still thrives and that there is a “deep racist ideology within the fabric” of TESOL (Holiday & Aboshiha, 2009, p. 685), but to also critically examine common recruitment discourse, seek teachers’ perceptions of the labeling, their experiences with marginalization, and most importantly identify ideas and tools for empowerment.



## Critical Agenda

By its nature, this study falls within the critical paradigm and critical theory: questioning existing assumptions and existing ideologies, seeking emancipation through awareness and reflection, and pursuing change. It is also based on critical applied linguistics (CALx) which relates aspects of language learning to broader sociopolitical contexts through problematizing the givens of applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001), one of which is the native-speaker ideology. It has been suggested that research within a critical stance cannot escape the influence of Freire (Crotty, 2003). Within the Freirean philosophy the concept most relevant to this inquiry is “conscientization”—awareness, continuous reflection and active intervention. He sees freedom in the ability to do something about the situation within which humans are submerged, the need to engage with, reflect upon, and intervene in it, not merely realize ideals. Hence, the status quo is not unchangeable fate, but only a limiting challenge (*ibid.*). It is from these perspectives that NNEST topic is approached seeking empowerment through sharing ideas for resistance and embarking on emancipatory change.

## Native Speakerism: Definitions and Discourse

According to Cook (1999, p. 185) the first documented use of the term native speaker was by Bloomfield in 1933, in the following statement: “The first language a human being learns to speak is his native language; he is a native speaker of that language.” The incontestable characteristic of native speakers is that it is the language they learned first. Consequently, and by definition, later learned languages cannot be a native language (*ibid.*). Those classifications are echoed in four major online dictionaries:

1. Cambridge Dictionaries online (2016): Someone who has spoken a particular language since they were a baby, rather than having learned it as a child or adult.

“All our teachers are native speakers of English.”

2. Collins English Dictionary (2016): A native speaker is someone who speaks that language as their first language rather than having learned it as a foreign language.

Our programme ensures daily opportunities to practice your study language with native speakers.

3. Oxford Dictionaries (2016): A person who has spoken the language from earliest childhood.

Native speaker of English.

Grammar books are not needed for the native speaker because the native speaker has the grammar already in his or her head.

4. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2016): someone who has learned a particular language as their first language, rather than as a foreign language.

For the spoken language, students are taught by native speakers. A native speaker of English.

Whilst at first glance the above definitions and accompanying examples may seem neutral and unproblematic, a critical analysis reveals a perpetuated superior native-speaker ideology in ELT, and the strong association of “native speaker” (NS) with teaching English in particular. The subtle assumption in them is outlined by Stern: “The native speaker’s ‘proficiency’ or ‘knowledge of the language’ is a necessary point of reference for the second language proficiency concept used in language teaching” (as cited in Cook, 1999, pp. 188–189). Another assumption is that learners seek native speaker competence, and that, consequently, a native speaker is the ideal teacher (Clark & Paran, 2007, p. 410). Theoretically this notion was, perhaps, “reinforced by the Chomskyan conceptualization of the (idealized) NS as the source of knowledge about language” (Canagarajah, as cited in Clark & Paran, 2007, p. 410).

## ELT Discourse Built on SLA Research

Principally, SLA research is aimed at detaching L2 learning from the native speaker; however, in practice it has frequently “fallen into the comparative fallacy” (Cook, 1999, p. 189). James (1998) links this tendency to assess an L2 learner’s language in relation to the native speaker to Chomsky’s idealization of the NS (as cited *ibid.*). An example of this is clear in Ellis’s statement that “learners often failed initially to produce correct sentences and instead displayed language that was markedly deviant from target language norms” (1994, p. 15). Such an idealization places the NS as an “indisputable authority” (Aneja, 2014, p. 26), and has been reinforced in SLA, and eventually ELT and TESOL, by Selinker’s theories of fossilization and interlanguage, the discourse of the target language norms (Ellis, 1994), Long’s (1991) ideal language norms (as cited in Aneja, 2014, p. 26), and Harmer’s (1991) description of language competence as the “need to get an idea of how language is used by native speakers” (as cited in Cook, 1999, pp. 188–189). Medgyes’ conviction that NNES teachers cannot achieve NS competencies and will always “struggle with their own language deficiencies” can certainly be traced to and understood by Selinker’s interlanguage continuum (as cited in Merino, 1997, p. 70).

Those may have originated as linguistically neutral constructs, theories and categorizations. However, they have not remained apolitical, and have contributed to the perpetuation of discriminatory discourse. Kramsch succinctly summarizes the matter: “Traditional methodologies based on the native speaker usually define language learners in terms of what they are not, or at least ‘not yet’ or ‘not ever’” (as cited in Cook, 1999, pp. 188–189). Drawing on Pennycook’s analysis of English and the discourse of colonialism, Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999) concluded that the construct of nativeness in ELT is a lived reality in postcolonialism.

## Native & Non-native Teachers: The Dichotomy, Labeling, and Homogeneity

The linguistic competence, cultural knowledge, and teaching style differences have been highlighted and written about extensively in the literature (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Medgyes, 1994; Merino, 1997; Reves & Medgyes, 1994), and need not be reiterated here. The issues of relevance to this study are not the seemingly neutral descriptions of NNES teachers, but the “ideologically motivated Othering,” labeling (Holiday & Aboshiha, 2009, p. 684), and homogeneity.

NNES teachers are no longer “confined to a home country status and compete with so-called ‘native speaker’ teachers in every aspect” (Holiday as cited in Holiday & Aboshiha, 2009, p. 670, *ibid.*). Davies (cited in Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999) rejects the notion that non-native and native speakers are permanently and uniquely different and stresses that L2 learners can acquire native linguistic competence. Consequently, the distinction based on the assumption that NNES teachers are inherently culturally and linguistically deficient is losing its relevance (Moussu & Llurda, 2008, p. 316). Like Medgyes (a Hungarian native whose English is an L2), many NNES professionals have reached near-native proficiency and have acquired the pragmatic cultural dimension having lived in inner-circle countries. Yet Medgyes, although recognizing that the labels are problematic (1994), maintains that NNES teachers are either “apathetic or aggressive because the goal of native-speaker command is unattainable” (Merino, 1997, p. 70). The support in the literature for the value of NNES professionals has mostly highlighted their advantage in sharing students’ experiences of going through “the laborious process of acquiring English” as an L2 (Phillipson, 1992 as cited in Liu, 1999, p. 99), being bilingual or multilingual themselves and, hence, “providing a good model” (Medgyes, 1994, p. 51).

Two lines of objection arise to this superficially empowering discourse. Firstly, the problematic and unfounded assumption that most, if not all, NNES teachers learned English as an L2 and as adults—not acknowledging the growing diversity amongst them. The NES/ NNES dichotomy, largely an “othering” process, reduced and “overlooked the multiple

identities of NNESTs, who could potentially identify themselves as multi-competent bilinguals” (Park, 2012, p. 129). Referencing the post-colonial critic Edward Said, Kumaravadivelu (2003, p. 716) argues that the stereotypes, such as those persistent in TESOL, are a “binary opposition” between “us and them,” “East and West” where the colonized are not treated “as communities of individuals but as an indistinguishable mass about whom one could amass knowledge.” Liu’s (1999) study, in which participants “spoke English without any trace of nonnative accent” (p. 94) having learned English simultaneously with their native language, demonstrated that a child can grow up bilingually or trilingually and acquire multiple native languages concluding that the dichotomy is very limited in scope and “perhaps politically incorrect” (p. 97). Secondly, there is a propagated assumption that the NS is monolingual. Illich and Sanders (as cited in Cook, 1999, p. 187) argue that, “From Saussure to Chomsky ‘homo monolinguis’ is posited as the man who uses language—the man who speaks” (p. 52). Others in the 1980s have included monolingualism in their definitions of a native speaker (*ibid.*).

Researchers who have engaged with the issue maintain that the dichotomy has not been satisfactorily explained in meaning or significance and can no longer represent a linguistic construct, but rather a sociocultural preconceived notion of a native speaker which often invokes nationality, accent and sometimes ethnicity (Aneja, 2014, p. 25; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999, p. 416). Davies suggests that the dichotomy is “power driven, identity laden, and confidence affecting” like most majority–minority relations (as cited in Liu, 1999, p. 86). Similarly, Phillipson (2009, p. 40) argues that the terms are “offensive hierarchies internalized subconsciously and serve hegemonic purposes.”

## Addressing Discrimination

In 1991, the TESOL organization in the United States “issued a statement condemning as discriminatory the employment of English language teachers on the sole basis of their being or not being native speakers of English” (TESOL, 1991, as cited Clark & Paran, 2007, p. 407). However, the NNEST movement only gained momentum in the late

1990s with work by scholars such as Braine (1999), Cook (1999), and Kramersch (1998) (as cited in Ruecker & Ives, 2015, p. 735). More recently TESOL (2006) has released another position statement declaring: “TESOL strongly opposes discrimination against nonnative English speakers in the field of English language teaching. Rather, English language proficiency, teaching experience, and professionalism should be assessed along on a continuum of professional preparation” (ibid., p. 736). In today’s EIL (English as an International Language) environment, propositions have been made to move past the native speaker as the standard to which others are compared (Llurda, 2004, p. 317). Accordingly, Modiano argues that proficiency can no longer be determined by birth, but by the ability to use the language competently and appropriately (as cited ibid.).

Yet, despite such efforts to rectify injustices, numerous studies, and relentless voices calling for an end to discrimination and NNES teacher emancipation, in this seemingly postmodern domain the reality is unchanged for many NNES teachers in different parts of the world. Nayar’s statement (as cited in Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999, p. 416) remains true: “Generations of applied linguistic mythmaking in the indubitable superiority and the impregnable infallibility of the “native speaker” has created stereotypes that die hard.” It is believed that the racist NS ideology “is hidden within the discursive structures of the profession” and difficult to address (Holiday & Aboshiha, 2009, p. 670).

## ELT Recruitment Discourse

The fact that NNES teachers have been discriminated against has been “fairly well established” due to a traditionally and historically prevalent view of the superiority of the NS in language teaching (Holiday & Aboshiha, 2009, p. 670). However, the distinction influencing and the discrimination in recruitment can also be racist—where there is a tendency to equate the native teacher with Whiteness and affording them “a privileged status in employment” (Kubota & Lin, 2006, p. 6). In the field of ELT, this type of racism is evident in the hiring practices of English

language teachers worldwide (*ibid.*) and is neither confined to the center nor the periphery.

Clark and Paran (2007, p. 408) referencing Mahboob et al., concluded that in the American tertiary sector employers considered the “native speaker” an essential criterion for employment. Similarly, Liu (1999) conducted a study in a US context and found that many TESOL job advertisements requested that native speakers only need apply. In a critical discourse analysis inquiry of online teacher recruitment sites in Southeast Asian countries Ruecker and Ives (2015) found that 88% of analyzed job advertisements were discriminatory, with the main form of discrimination being native speaker status and/or nationality. They concluded that the message was clear: “Nonnative-English-speaking teachers from countries outside of the approved list, regardless of qualifications, need not apply” (*ibid.*, p. 734). Selvi (2010, p. 172) examined 38 TESOL jobs advertised online and concluded that the ELT employment landscape is “undemocratic” and “unethical.”

## Methods

This small-scale critical inquiry utilizes a qualitative method (interviews) wherein the teachers share their experiences, and includes a critical discourse analysis component. To examine and understand the impact that the ELT recruitment discourse and marginalization has had on the teachers’ self-image, professional identity, and passion about the profession, the study poses the following questions:

1. How are teachers whose L1 is not English represented in the TESOL recruitment discourse?
2. How have the teachers dealt with such discourse and how they feel about the label non-native?
3. How has marginalization, when/if it is the situation, impacted the teachers’ personal and professional lives?
4. How can they empower themselves through reflection and action?

## The Participants

The six participants are teachers working in higher education institutes in the UAE, Oman, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Their residency in the region ranges from three to twenty years. They all hold a Master's degree in either TESOL, TEFL, or English literature and are all considered experienced. The teachers come from different parts of the world: Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Three are adjunct teachers, two have full-time contracts, and one is unemployed. All ethical concerns were attended to and pseudonyms are used throughout. The sampling for this project was purposive and the criteria for selecting the participants were expatriate ELT professionals whose L1 is not English working at tertiary level.

## Data-Collection Methods

The first stage represented a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of online recruitment sites (advertising ELT jobs in the region), as well as the employment section of regional university websites. This part of the study builds on a recent CDA project by Ruecker and Ives (2015). The rationale for conducting CDA of online recruitment discourse before the interviews was to examine the extent to which discrimination in employment exists, and accordingly gauge the participants' reactions to the findings.

The second data-collection instrument was in-depth interviews. The interview questions were derived from concepts and issues in the literature review, and sought the teachers' experiences with employment opportunities, feelings about the non-native label in the discourse, their perceptions of native-speakerism, and their views on tools for empowerment and resistance of the perpetuated ideology. The interviews were "descriptions of the lived world" of the teachers through which they were given "voice... allowing them to freely present their life situations in their own words" (Kvale, 1996, p. 481).

The third source of data involved summarizing the participants' proposed collective emancipatory actions and sharing the list with all the



participants via email. They were asked to respond by commenting on the suggestion they perceived to be more attainable and likely to bring about some change.

## CDA Data

CDA is a process that involves examining the choices of words and grammatical structures used in a text for the purpose of identifying the underlying ideologies—“where some are highlighted and others are downplayed or disguised” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 20). They ways we “talk about the world influences the society we create, the knowledge we celebrate and despise, and the institutions we build” (ibid., p. 21).

A total of 21 university websites and 36 English language teachers job advertisements posted online were analyzed for possible forms of discrimination in hiring practices. The study adopts two of the four broad categories used by Ruecker and Ives (2015) in their CDA study: “qualifications”/ “requirements” and “benefits,” as those were viewed to be more applicable to this particular CD analysis.

## Interviews

The semi-structured interviews began with general questions about qualifications and professional experiences. The interviews were more “conversations” between peers than between “researcher and participant” (Schutt, 1999, p. 304). The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the analysis process began simultaneously with the transcription making tentative interpretations and developing familiarity with the data content (Hayes, 2009, p. 4). The software Nvivo facilitated the organization and coding processes. Data were initially displayed in tables (Punch, 2009) through grouping responses to the same interview questions. Initial categories were derived from concepts in the interview questions before other categories and sub-categories emerged from the data (e.g. impact on professional identity, career options, and professional development, impact on personal lives, impact on teaching practices and passion about the

profession). Those were later grouped to form a general category in a process of axial coding—making connections between categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

## Findings and Discussion

### Online Job Advertisements Analyzed

Of the 21 universities only four had the “native speaker” requirement or a “native speakers preferable” overtly stated. The remaining universities (private and government institutes), required that applicants indicate their nationality/ citizenship, and “country of birth/ origin.” Consequently, even when/if an applicant holds an inner-circle passport, their country of origin is perhaps a determining factor as to whether or not they meet the “native speaker” criterion. This is, possibly, a more covert and responsible way of identifying features on which an elimination process of future applicants is based.

Running a word-frequency search revealed that the word “native” is the tenth-most frequent word in the adverts. The term “native speaker” appeared 40 times in the document, of which only five were part of stemmed words including ‘non-’, and (one) “near-.” The document on which the concordance function was run is a list of 36 ELT job advertisements (considered representative of the overall ELT job market in the region) copied, pasted and edited to exclude any non-relevant elements (e.g. recruiting company, e-mail addresses, links, etc.). Although five of the listings did not have the native-speaker requirement, the reason that the criterion “native speaker” is stated 40 times in 36 advertisements is that in many of them it is repeated so as to stress importance. A few adverts communicated the “native-speaker” requirement differently, indicating that “only American or British can apply” or the word “citizenships” followed by “US, UK Visas available currently” suggesting that it is an employer/government requirement. This “shift of blame for the prejudice,” symptomatic of “racism denial strategies,” was also reported by Ruecker and Ives (2015, p. 742).

Of the four times non-native was included, two were in the same advert, stating that for “non-native: At least 2-years full-time... after obtaining a Phd [sic] degree in English literature/linguistics/TOEFL/TEFL.” Whereas, for the native speaker counterpart the experience requirement was “At least 2 years of full time, formal teaching experience at upper secondary level or tertiary level.” This was clearly echoed by four of the participants acknowledging that they needed to have a “doctorate” a “terminal degree” to prove they can teach “as well.” When a country or recruitment agency has not established visa requirements “legitimizing teachers from inner-circle countries and have moved beyond the narrow native speaker condition, they still demand more qualifications and years of experience from teachers whose L1 is not English” (Ruecker & Ives, 2015, p. 734).

The third non-native featured in requiring a “fluency in English to IELTS 7 level for non-native.” The final “non-native” appeared as an egregiously discriminatory difference in “salary range: Native speakers: [currency] 12,000–22,000, non-native speakers: [currency] 10,000–20,000.” This was confirmed, yet to a worse extent, by one of the participants who reported being “shocked” when she accidentally found out that her newly hired native-speaker colleague’s salary was more than double hers despite both being full-time teachers in the same department.

In terms of qualifications, one university website has the “native English speaker” criterion listed under qualifications and came second after “a degree in TESOL, clearly from a Western accredited institution.” In most of the adverts, when “native speaker” was not capitalized or representing the first word in the introductory statement, it was commonly under qualifications/requirements often preceding degree and experience. One advert sought applications for “the position of Native English Language Lecturer” [emphasis added]. As for the words/phrases that frequently collocated with “native,” they were “must be,” “needed,” “required,” “seeking,” and “only” clearly discouraging NNES teachers from applying.

Other common criteria included a degree (often an MA) in English literature, applied linguistics, or TESOL/TEFL. However, contrary to the findings reported by Ruecker and Ives (2015), all the adverts in this study had the requirement of some teaching experience—2 to 5 years.

The word “Western” appeared as a requirement 11 times in the 36 adverts as “must be western-trained,” “Western-accredited institution,” “a Western degree,” “western recognized,” and “born in or educated in a western country.” While conceivably, and perhaps justifiably, seeking to advance their educational standards by requiring only “Western” educated professionals, some may have unintentionally questioned and undermined those very standards. Liu (1999) reported a comparable view by a teacher participant who could not understand how “educational officials in nations where English is an L2 could maintain a policy that effectively rejected English language professionals originating from similar nations” (p. 98).

As for benefits, the ones highlighted the most by the adverts was the “tax-free” salary, free accommodation, and medical insurance. One advertised a “generous travel allowance,” and “swimming pools” in the residence. While most adverts used relatively formal register with very limited use of personal pronouns, a few took a promotional stance in advertising the position, benefits, and location. The latter represented common consumer-oriented advertisement discourse in appealing to the “native” and “lucky” travelers seeking an “adventure” using adjectives such as “exciting,” “amazing” and “fantastic” opportunities and benefits—which included “the most delicious shawarma.” Similar findings, but of a wider scope, were described by Ruecker and Ives (2015).

## Experiences with Hidden Racism and Marginalization

Most of the participants’ distressing experiences being “non-native” centered on employment opportunities and the ability to get full-time work. Tamara, who has been unemployed for over a year, attributed the situation to a perpetuated ideology inconsolably reaching the conclusion that “If you’re not a native speaker, you’re not getting the job.” The other teachers’ experiences were not dissimilar and can be succinctly summarized in Nasima’s following words:

I’m sure if my name sounded English or if I had another passport, I would have been given more chances with the employers. I applied to many

universities in the region and they replied by saying they need native speakers. I also read lots of job advertisements and most had the term “only native speakers” explicitly stated.

Yet, she is pleased that she is treated as an equal in her current workplace, and is paid higher than some of her native-speaker counterparts because her new institute recognizes her qualifications and experience and hence compensates her accordingly. For Ibtisam, who is the only other participant to have a full-time position, however, the situation is different. She reports that while she “never felt any problem” having worked for the same institute for 7 years, she was recently “shocked” to find out that her “newly hired” NES colleague’s salary are “more than double” hers. Ibtisam also noticed that the situation is becoming worse: “for the last 2 years, they are just hiring natives. There are hardly any others anymore, just four of us out of 30 teachers.”

Amani, Samira, and Sahar, who have been adjunct teachers for 9, 8, and 3 years respectively, have all contended that while the racism is hidden and the reason why they repeatedly do not succeed in their applications for full-time positions at their own institutes, is never explicitly stated, the ideology is there and ever-present. Sahar has never experienced any direct incidents of discrimination, as it is “never said, never in the open,” and “no one says you’re not hired full time because you’re a non-native”; yet, she acknowledges that “you’re always hired as adjunct.” The problem with the latter, she adds, is that there is always the possibility of “not getting courses.” Despite the discrimination being “never in the open,” “never blunt,” and “no one would confess to it,” the teachers speak of ample evidence of its existence, and that “it’s understood.” Shaima states that “those who are hired full-time may not be native speakers,” yet they have the “right nationality/ passport.” Similarly, Amani applied for a full-time position several times at her institute and was repeatedly rejected “as if they’re telling you this job cannot be yours.” Samira observed that “you have to be white to be considered an expat” and accordingly “you don’t get the benefits that they do,” even if/when “you’re accepted for a full-time position.” Ibtisam reported on an “interesting” incident with an Egyptian colleague who applied and was turned down before getting “a Canadian passport,” successfully applying again, and “getting the job”

despite being the “same person with the same qualification.” “You see,” she adds, “that says it all.”

## Periphery and Outer-circle Racism

Two of the participants inculcate their “own kind” in prejudiced practices confirming Canagarajah’s (1999) observation that discrimination against NNES teachers is worse in outer-circle contexts by those who are non-native and non-white. Samira argued that “it’s the worst kind of racism” as it comes “from our own kind”: “the non-native managers and supervisors are the worst,” and the parents who seem to be convinced that the “American or British teacher is better than the Arab or Asian.” However, she adds that racism is not exclusive to education, it is in all jobs and across fields and that “we are crucifying ourselves by preferring natives. We are contributing to our own marginalization.” Amani holds a matching belief asserting that, though it may have begun otherwise, “the problem is from inside,” often representing an “undeclared policy.” Neither one has ever had a negative experience with their NS counterparts, professing that it is “usually not the native speaker who judges us.” This situation is reminiscent of the idea of self-marginalization, which refers to the ways in “which the periphery surrenders its voice and vision to the centre” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 22).

## Views of the Label

The six participants were unanimous in their evaluation and antipathy for the “non-native” teacher label. Tamara described it as a “stigmatizing thing” a “bad name” similar to the consequent adjunct label: “You’re added to something that you don’t belong to. You’re lacking in certain qualities.” The others’ feelings about the label were parallel: “it’s discriminatory” (Shaima); “it’s racist, it means you lack something”; “the term is degrading,” “it’s like you are labeling someone as a second class something (Samira)”; “it shows segregation and racism as if you’re not as qualified. They label us,” “it’s offensive” (Amani); “it’s not neutral at all,” “it

feels like it's setting you aside from something better"; and "the non itself is racist," "you're like second class citizens, lacking something" (Nasima). In sharing their feelings about the label, the teachers all emphasized their qualifications and experience as educators, arguing those are the only criteria on which they ought to be judged, not their appearance, nationality, or skin color. Two of the participants wondered why and when the labeling and the dichotomy started in education and why there needs to be a distinction at all, unless the "the assumption is that the native speaker teacher is better." Shaima questioned the rationale behind having a distinction since "in terms of job description, there is no difference" and it matters not, once you have the required qualifications and experience, "whether you're native or non-native you're an English instructor, or a writing instructor, you're that." All six participants wanted to be referred to as "English language teachers/ instructors," "without any prefixes." One welcomed the "bilingual and multilingual teacher" label, and said that the acronym TESOL itself is problematic because "the Other in it is kind of negative."

## Impact of Discrimination

Undeniably, all of the teachers in this study have been affected by discrimination to different extents. Professionally, it has driven four of the participants to pursue a "doctorate," a "terminal degree" and "add to the CV." Nasima contended that "we have to do more," "more degrees and more certificates." Most of them have to "work hard" to "prove" that they are "as good" as their native-speaker counterparts.

Whilst three of the participants declared being generally "demotivated," all but one said that it has not impacted on their teaching and behavior in their classrooms. Showing a commendable level of responsibility and a sustained passion about teaching: "in the classroom everything disappears, it's just me and my students and I love teaching" (Amani); my students are the source of my positive energy (Tamara); "whatever happens outside the classroom should not be reflected in it. My students deserve the best that I can give" (Sahar).

The marginalization has been demoralizing, leading the teachers to feel frustrated, and uninterested in the profession as a whole. One of the participants said that she had thought about a career change after struggling to find work. Another teacher spoke about regretting having studied English literature wishing she “had done something else.” Medgyes had predicted that NNES teachers would reach a point where they would “regret having chosen this career” (as cited in Merino, 1997, p. 70). The reason, however, for their “regret” and “schizophrenic” (sic, *ibid.*) states is not “linguistic deficiencies,” but the despondency resulting from discrimination in the industry.

Others reported on a “professional identity” that “is shaken” (Amani) because “they look at me as a second class citizen in this institution,” and “it affects your self-esteem and the perception of the job itself” because you start “doubting myself” (Tamara). Similar findings were reported by Sung (2014) suggesting that “discrimination impacts negatively on the confidence” of NNES teachers, and their “identities as ELT professionals” (p. 2). A distressing state of having to hide one’s own identity was reported by Tamara whose colleague “is now wearing the cross around her neck to be perceived as a native-speaker, despite being Muslim. She feels that she has to do that to maintain her job... it has reached a bad level.” Similarly, Nasima noticed that some of her colleagues conceal their origins and “introduce themselves as American, Canadian, or British” because they “have the passports,” adding that other teachers are “thinking of getting a new passport.” Corresponding reports of “minimizing” and/or concealing the NNS identity were shared by Liu (1999). For Tamara, family were also influenced by her situation. She bitterly described a desolate circumstance where her eight-year-old son said, “if you were good, they would have hired you... what did you do wrong,” because she had instilled in him that hard-work translates into good results. Yet despite their frustrations, the teachers continue “applying for jobs,” and “keep trying.”



## Perceptions of Native-Speakerism

Despite some convergence amongst the participants, the “native-speaker” was overwhelmingly associated with whiteness. Samira is categorical in that “in this part of the world” the native speaker is “white,” otherwise “you’ll never be considered a native speaker” even if “English is the only language you speak.” However, the associations and characteristics were not always simple. Tamara’s perception, which developed from experience, was that there is more to the native speaker status than nationality, it is also physical characteristics: “You can’t be a hijaby” [wearing a head scarf]. She spoke of a Turkish colleague who did not sound “native,” but “looked” it, and that was enough for her to be differentiated from other “non-native” teachers. Samira thought the categorization is problematic prompting many questions: “Is it someone who doesn’t have an accent? Is it your first language? Is it the nationality? What if you were born there but left as a child, would you be a native-speaker?” Shaima, said that teachers are judged on their physical appearance and that being “Arab and veiled people just get shocked a little bit because I have a native accent. So they can’t somehow tie both together.” Others have contended, (e.g. Ibtisam), that “having a passport” does often qualify the person to “native speaker” status, at least in the face of “visa requirements and ministry restrictions.”

## Collective Ideas for Change and Individual Resistance Strategies

When initially asked about change and resisting the ideology, most of the teachers said there was “nothing we can do,” “we can’t do anything” and that it is something that they recognize, and have “got used to.” However, given more time to think about certain strategies that can be instigated, individually and collectively, some ideas began to emerge. Most of them viewed this project as one possible tool for raising awareness and having an ongoing conversation in the literature saying that their “voices should be heard and it can be done through research” (Shaima); “if there’s more research, it’s proof that the situation exists. More people need to know

about this” (Amani); “Maybe you can get us some rights by talking about this” (Tamara); “You should present this research. This topic should be highlighted; it might make a difference” (Ibtisam).

One teacher suggested “promoting it in conferences.” Most, however, agreed that it has to be “top-down” and that it is those who are in “decision-making positions”: “managers,” “department heads,” and those in the “ministries of education” that should be targeted by any awareness-raising endeavors. Two teachers proposed “having an organization,” “or some sort of body” that can, at least, provide “some kind of support” amongst people who “go through the same thing.” However, Nasima disagreed because such an approach could in turn “marginalize the native speaker” teachers and further reinforce the dichotomy.

On an individual level, most teachers’ tools of resistance are hard work and professional development, since discussing the issue with their superiors/employers is not a feasible option. However, the problem with constantly trying to “prove yourself through hard-work” and “putting in more effort,” argues Shaima, is that it is done for the “wrong reasons”: not for the students, but for the managers. It is “unfair, I shouldn’t need to prove it [being qualified and experienced] to anyone,” she adds.

Two of the participants believed that “this way of thinking” is difficult to change because it is deeply rooted in many societies, and that we should start with our own children—educating them and implanting anti-racist views, so that they do not grow up as parents who “demand and expect native-speaker teachers” for their own children and ultimately contribute to the perpetuation of the ideology in future generations. Samira suggested raising awareness through discussing the issue in the “media,” “because that is the only influence,” and “just sitting with someone and sharing your ideas will not get you anywhere.” She also advocated raising the issue with “our own students.”

## Conclusion and Contribution

As have numerous previous inquiries, this study emphasizes the extent to which marginalization exists in the TESOL profession, and the adverse impact employment discrimination and recruitment discourse have had

on some teachers' professional identity, perception of the profession and personal lives. As previously concluded by Ruecker and Ives (2015), the study further confirms Canagarajah's (1999) observation that teaching requirements are based on linguistic not professional qualifications and that the native-speaker "fallacy prevents the critical development of the TESOL professional community and its discourses as it denies the participation of Periphery teachers on equal terms" (p. 87).

However, it also sought empowerment for the teachers through generating their own ideas for resistance and change. If one accepts that empowerment, is "analyzing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognizing systemic oppressive forces, and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives" (Lather as cited in Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999, p. 413), this project has initiated such an engagement in critical praxis and provides a step forward for the teachers. Still, as identified by the participants, the "longstanding myth" of the native-speakerism construct which has been "modeled any which way in the intuitive appeal to correctness of language use" (Nao, 2011, p. 3770) represents an ideology that dies hard. Change, thus, will neither be easy nor timely. Yet, it is most certainly time for TESOL to "move beyond the colorblind vision of imagining that it is inherently filled with understanding and sensitivity of diverse cultures and people" (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 16).

In addition to the strategies for change suggested by the teachers themselves in the previous section, we (non-native) professionals must not shy away from continuing to raise awareness about forms of racism and injustices in TESOL. The researcher adds her voice to Ruecker and Ives (2015, p. 752) in their recommendation that it is essential that we begin in "our own programs because that is where we can have the most immediate influence." We need to engage in critical discussions with our own students and colleagues. The issue, though problematized for decades, still demands scholarly attention and more research dissemination highlighting the issue through all possible vehicles.

## Further Reading

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- This paper provides a useful and a critical review of literature on the issue of non-native speaker teachers' intercultural identities and their potential role in the promotion of intercultural competence.
- Kiczkowiak, M. (2019). Students', teachers' and recruiters' perception of teaching effectiveness and the importance of nativeness in ELT. *Journal of Second Language Teaching and Research*, 7, 1–25.
- This study conducted in Poland demonstrates that students, teachers and recruiters consider proficiency and rapport with students to be more important than nativeness.

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# 15

## Problematizing Student Evaluation of Teaching in Saudi Arabia: Merits, Demerits and Impacts on Performance

Randa Alsabahi

### Nature of the Problem

Quality assurance in the higher education (HE) institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has gained much attention in the past decade. The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA), an official government agency, was established in 2005 to ensure that the quality of learning and management of institutions are equivalent to international standards. Given that students' satisfaction is one of the important aspects of quality management in higher education, NCAAA has requested that students carry out several evaluations to certify quality assurance in post-secondary education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, all Saudi higher education institutions have designed internal quality-assurance systems to assess and evaluate the performance of their faculty, in order to meet the NCAAA requirements and to improve the quality of their work (Al-Ghamdi, Al-Gaid, & Abu-Rasain, 2010).

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Student evaluations of teaching (SET) processes in Saudi universities are often considered of utmost importance due to the fact that high-stakes decisions rely heavily on them (Al-Rubaish et al., 2010; Arun Vijay, 2013). Nonetheless, the desire to use SET assessment data in making personnel decisions has put teachers at a greater risk of unfair evaluation, removal of tenure and, sometimes, wrongful dismissal. Moreover, when students are empowered to exert this much influence over the careers of their lecturers, combined with the demands on the lecturers for increasing course loads, student enrolments and student satisfaction, the long-term results may very well be an overall reduction in program quality.

There is an enormous literature on the subject of student evaluations of faculty (SET). Research in Saudi Arabia (Al-Kuwaiti, 2014) has shown that teachers prefer an alternative model of supervision with emphasis on shared responsibility and trust rather than imposition and fear. According to Stark (2014), SETs should be avoided entirely because they are strongly influenced by factors unrelated to learning, such as gender, ethnicity and attractiveness of the instructor. Chen and Hoshower (2003) and Penny and Coe (2004) further argue that using SET ratings for quality monitoring and administrative policy-making is equating students' opinion with teaching quality. Counter to these are the arguments put forward by scholars including Richardson (2005), Davis (2009) and Seldin (1999) who claim that SET is a valid tool, and Benton and Cashin (2014), who encourage combining students' ratings with complementary evidence to enhance validity and reliability criteria.

Many scholars have investigated students' perceptions of the teaching effectiveness of lecturers in higher education (Al-Kuwaiti, 2014). Others have drawn attention to the prevalent misconceptions concerning student ratings in terms of reliability and validity (Al-Rubaish et al., 2010; Al-Kuwaiti, 2014; Burney, 2006; Curby, McKnight, Alexander, & Erchov, 2019; Hornstein & Law, 2017). However, studies on how teachers and administrators perceive the SET process and its effects on career opportunities are scarce. This study, which is conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is an attempt to fill this gap. It is based on critical applied linguistics, and aims at problematizing the usage of SET results to determine career paths in higher education.

## Critical Agenda

This study aims at questioning the use of SET results to determine career advancement in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Saudi Arabia. It is based on critical applied linguistics (CALx) whose goal is not simply to describe the current situation, but to question the established views around practice and theory in language education. Critical language policy research aims at producing social change through examining “the processes by which systems of inequality are created and sustained” (Tollefson, 2006, p. 43). Hence, policies such as SET should be viewed with a critical lens since most college administrators tend to use SET assessment data in making promotion/demotion decisions, rather than applying the tool as a method to improve the quality of teaching.

## Purpose of SET

Student evaluation of teaching is currently used as a measure of teaching performance in almost every institution of higher education throughout the world (Zabaleta, 2007). SET is normally run by means of a brief standardized rating form on which students rate characteristics of teachers and courses, including clarity of explanation, enthusiasm, availability and fairness of exams. Additionally, the SET data are primarily used to provide information about teaching from the consumer’s, i.e., student, perspective and as performance measures for personnel decisions such as hiring, tenure and promotion (Marsh & Dunkin, 1992). Nonetheless, the use of SET data for these purposes is controversial, and both scholars and instructors alike have questioned the reliability and validity of the SET process (e.g., Clayson, 2009; Pounder, 2008; Sproule, 2000).

Arguably, one reason for the increasing popularity of SET is the belief that the university is a business and that the responsibility of any business is to satisfy the customer, i.e., student. Customer satisfaction, a well-established marketing principle, has become the target of education. To this end, Emery et al. (2001, p. 2) argue, “Student-customer satisfaction directly correlates to larger enrolments” and Vaill (2008, p. 1) states,

“Education is clearly a service, not a product in higher education whereby teachers have to be mindful of, responsive to the characteristics, needs, and expectations of the students.” However, according to Demetriou (2008, p. 4), “satisfaction is not an appropriate gauge of quality in higher education. In business, the customer is always right; however, in education the student is not always right.” Hence, even if part of a university’s responsibility is to satisfy its students, it is also the university’s responsibility to educate those individuals whom it is certifying as educated.

No one seems to doubt that student evaluations provide some measure of student satisfaction. Nonetheless, controversy arises when administrators seek to use student evaluations for summative purposes. Hence, in the following section, I tend to explore the different views regarding the implementation of SET.

## Different Views on SET

Much has been written about the problems with course evaluations. Educational scholars have examined issues of bias (Eiszler, 2002), have questioned students’ ability to accurately assess the teaching effectiveness of faculty (Nasser & Fresko, 2002; Ryan, Anderson, & Birchler, 1980) and have argued that ratings are impacted by student grade expectations (Baldwin & Blattner, 2003). According to Remmers, the first to initiate a systematic research into the field of SET, students are the only ones who observe what really goes on in their classrooms, thus, they are in a position to judge teachers’ effectiveness (1927, in Sauer, 2012). Nonetheless, many studies have contradicted this view, claiming that students base their evaluations on their enjoyment of the course or on their realized utility (Braga, Paccagnella, & Pellizzari, 2011; Uttl, White, & Gonzalez, 2016).

In an effort to shed light on the concerns surrounding SET, Peterson, Berenson, Misra, and Radosevich (2008) investigated factors that impact students’ ratings by compiling 5200 studies from JSTOR. Findings revealed that non-teaching factors including faculty type, course level, course focus and course type undeniably affect the assessment of teaching-related factors. Trout (2000) further claims that what numerical forms

measure is the degree to which students are satisfied with the instructor's personality, the course requirements and their grades, and Feeley (2002, p. 226) states that SETs are influenced by a halo effect, which is attributed to students' perceptions of instructors "likeability" and sense of humor.

Opponents also consider the use of ad hoc instruments that are not tested at all as one of the most problematic aspects of the method (Richardson, 2005). Others have questioned the number of items present in SET forms. While Spooen and Van Loon (2012) argue that the high number of items may overburden students and result in a non-response and/or biased remarks, Wagenaar (1995) maintains that an assessment form consisting of a few items that students' rate on a five-point scale at the end of a semester barely measures the complexity and multidimensionality of effective teaching. Ching (2018) further argues that different SETs may be needed for different courses and subjects, and that faculty self-evaluation and peer-evaluation might enhance current SETs.

Nonetheless, many researchers consider student evaluations to be a useful measure of the instructional behaviors that contribute to teaching effectiveness. Abrami (2001), for example, argues that student evaluations are valid, effective and sufficient means of measuring teaching effectiveness and Beran, Violato, and Kline (2007) note that student ratings have become an important and efficient accountability measure in institutions for accreditation purposes. Likewise, Marsh (2007) and Biggs and Tang (2009) contend that the continued broad use of course evaluations offers the best hope of improving teaching effectiveness in postsecondary instructors and Chen and Hoshower (2003) and Diseth (2007) assert that student feedback aligns with preferred student learning and teaching approaches.

Despite the inconsistencies in opinions towards the use of SET surveys, many universities in Saudi Arabia have been found to be overly reliant on SET results to provide benchmarking for promotion and tenure decision-making (Al-Rubaish et al., 2010). Studies have shown that a higher percentage of faculty possess negative than positive or neutral attitudes toward students' evaluation of teaching (Abrami, 2001; Nasser & Fresko, 2002; Theall & Franklin, 2001; Wachtel, 1998). Hence, policies such as SET, which are implemented in an unquestioned manner in

higher education, should be viewed from a critical perspective as they affect the lives of teachers. By exploring how teachers and administrators perceive the effectiveness and use of SET surveys in the Saudi context, and by questioning the practice of deciding issues of promotion, salary and tenure based, at least in part, on anonymous student evaluations, I hope to raise awareness to the effects SET policy can have on the career paths of teachers. Such knowledge would be valuable for helping faculty members and policy makers evaluate, construct and refine their current practices of SET surveys and other evaluation mechanisms for teaching and learning.

## The Study

Lured by the prospect of increased teacher accountability and thereby increased student achievement, The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) has requested that students carry out several evaluations to ensure quality assurance in the higher education institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is attributed to the belief that SET has the ability to greatly increase student achievement through professional development and growth recommendations (Papanastasiou, 1999; Toch, 2008). However, current literature does not reflect that this evaluation tool is generally deemed to be suitable for this purpose; instead, it is primarily, usually exclusively, used for the purpose of either retaining quality teachers or dismissing those who perform below the standard (Sutton, 2008). SET can be a strong tool for increasing teacher effectiveness and teacher accountability if it is used appropriately. The results from such a study will hopefully raise awareness of the importance of using SET data to aid professional growth and enhance teacher performance rather than using the input exclusively in making decisions regarding salary and promotion.

## Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers and administrators' perceptions of and engagement with student evaluations and the threat this process can have on teachers' academic performance. The research aims to provide a response to three research questions:

1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of the overall quality of the SET process in the foundation year in Saudi universities?
2. What are the perceptions of Saudi college administrators regarding the overall quality of the SET process?
3. How do teachers who receive low SET ratings perceive the support provided by the institution?

## Research Methods

A critical exploratory method was employed as it best serves to answer the research questions and matches my theoretical positions. This method is compatible with the critical research paradigm as it aims at questioning the existing situation and raising awareness of the importance of using SET data as a means of enhancing teacher performance besides using the input to make high-stakes decisions. According to Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010), critical theorists "view society as a human construction in need of reconstruction." In fact, critical theory researchers are "concerned with action rather than discovery" (Edge & Richards, 1998, p. 341). Their agenda is to change, improve the lives and situations of the oppressed and raise awareness to the inequalities in society in the purpose of "emancipating individuals and groups towards collective empowerment" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 186). Once the study is done, dissemination of the results will take place by sending a report of the findings to all participants in the research, publishing the research paper in national or international journals and presenting the study at both national and international conferences. Raising awareness to the effects of SET will hopefully stimulate further discussion, inspire other

researchers to question previously accepted practices and bring about positive, equitable and sustainable change.

Given that the dialectic dialogue between the researcher and the participants is important to accurately present all viewpoints fairly, the employment of qualitative data collection tools is justified. Additionally, since the purpose of the study is not to generalize the findings to a larger population but to understand teachers and administrators' views regarding SET, the employment of semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool suits my objective.

The study enhanced its trustworthiness through a number of mechanisms: member checks, peer examination and the provision of thick, rich descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). Member checking and peer examination were used during the data analysis and conclusion drawing stages to check the credibility of emerging findings. Additionally, thick, rich descriptions confirmed that the research findings are consistent with the data collected.

## Participants

This study used purposive sampling technique, which selects participants "based on a specific purpose rather than randomly" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) and is believed to be a rich source of the data of interest (Du Gay, 1996). Invitations to participate in the study were issued individually to teachers and administrators in one university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; only four teachers (two males and two females) and three administrators agreed to participate. The rest refrained from participating due to their busy schedule, since the study was conducted near the end of the academic year. Nonetheless, I feel that this number of participants is sufficient to explore experiences from a variety of perspectives. The participants were selected based on two criteria: that they were university employees and had years of experience in Saudi universities. Thus, they suited the purpose of the study and would most likely contribute appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth. Both individual and institutional identities are hidden, as this formed part of the agreement with the respondents.

After identifying the main participants, consent letters were sent detailing the purpose of the study, expectations of participants and issues of confidentiality. Participants were told that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. They were also assured that their names would remain confidential and that all information provided would be treated with utmost secrecy. Accordingly, pseudonyms were used in order to preserve the participants' anonymity.

Additionally, an ethical research form was completed and sent to the ethics committee to ensure that the research project was conducted according to the University of Exeter ethical regulations. Lastly, all participants in the research were given a report of the findings, and were encouraged to comment on them.

## Interview Design and Data-Collection Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were used as a data-collection method since they serve my critical enquiry and enable me to critically study situations from different perspectives. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to listen to the voices of the marginalized and provide rich data on how these individuals make meaning, draw conclusions and make suggestions regarding the implementation of SET (Perry, 2005; Ritchie, 2003). Interviews also permit probing for particular responses, clarifications and confirmations of information from the respondents. Interview questions were developed in relevance to the critical literature on teacher evaluation; the interview was then piloted to see if it worked as planned and prompts were used to elicit more detailed responses from the participants.

The interviews were conducted with four college EFL teachers and three administrators chosen purposefully from one Saudi university in the city of Riyadh. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was held either in the workplace of the participants or through detailed email conversations. Hence, Face-to-Face interviews were conducted with three administrators and three teachers in which a digital recorder was used, and permission to record each session was requested. Notes were also taken to formulate additional questions whilst reflecting on the



ongoing conversation. The interview with the fourth teacher (Susan) was conducted via email due to the respondent's busy schedule.

In all instances, the interviews opened with an introduction and explanation of the purpose behind the study. Rubin and Rubin (1995, cited in Du Gay, 1996) recommend that the researcher begin the interview with an informal chat about something related to the topic of the study to put the participants at ease and establish positive rapport. Participants were then asked to give some background information about themselves such as their qualifications and work experiences. The second part of the interview focused on problematizing SET and examining its effect on teachers' performance. Accordingly, teachers were asked about their views regarding the SET process and the effect it may have on their performance and on their relationship with students. Administrators, on the other hand, were asked to discuss how SETs are used in their institutions, outline the benefits and weaknesses from their viewpoint and mention the kind of support they provide to teachers who fail to meet evaluation standards.

At the end of each interview, the participants were thanked for their time and shared experiences and were assured that all data provided would remain confidential.

## Data Analysis

The final component in the interview process is the interpretation of the collected data. During this phase, the researcher must make sense out of what was just uncovered and organize the data into sections or categories of information, also known as themes or codes (Creswell, 2009). Hence, to analyze the qualitative data, audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed and the answers were codified and categorized based on the literature available on SET. To ensure the credibility of the subsequent transcription of data, the participants were asked to review and verify the transcripts of the interviews. Bracketing and coding were then performed in order to identify themes, which were selected based on the recurring of the ideas in the participants' answers. Then the commonalities and differences in the themes were identified with the purpose of probing

respondents' attitudes, beliefs and challenges regarding SET implementation. Lastly, to help alleviate researcher bias or eliminate over-analysis of data, a colleague was asked to code three interview transcripts. She was then asked to review the coding process conducted in this research for comparison. The coding conducted by my colleague corresponded to mine in that the same main issues for discussion arose. This enhanced the credibility of the study findings.

## Findings and Discussion

### Perceptions Regarding Teacher Evaluation Procedures

Teachers were asked to rate the sources of information that are generally used in the evaluation process. These sources were: coaching, peer observations, reflective conversations, traditional 45-minute observation and students' evaluations. The majority of teachers gave reflective conversations the highest rating while giving the lowest rating to traditional 45-minute observations and student evaluations. Nonetheless, they all stated that in the institution where they work, reflective conversations, coaching and peer evaluations were non-existent whereas traditional observations and student evaluations were used extensively to judge their teaching effectiveness. Administrators also reported that student evaluations are important criteria in their assessment process and are often used in evaluating the overall effectiveness of an instructor, particularly for tenure, hiring and promotion decisions.

Teachers, on the other hand, were particularly critical about how their institution assesses their teaching effectiveness, with some reporting that they have more confidence in their own assessment practices than they do in the assessment practices of their institution. To this end, one teacher said,

The informal evaluation that I do in the classroom helps me to establish positive rapport with my students from the beginning of the year

and another stated,

It's my job to figure out how my students can best learn.

Furthermore, all four teachers concurred that the current SET process in their system is ineffective as it is voluntary and administered solely via online methods. According to Jill, the two online SETs that were administered in the current year

had a very low response rate given that students didn't have to do them.

Susan further argued,

SET should not be done online, as students do not take the process seriously.

These statements contradict arguments put forward by Hardy (2003) who claims that response rates to questions posted online tend to be higher. Nonetheless, participants argued that since the response rate is low, the data should not be considered representative of the class as a whole as Matt indicated,

though students' comments sometimes contain valuable information, having a low response rate makes it impossible to generalize to the whole class.

Despite the fact that all administrators stated that online evaluation methods might produce lower quantitative results, they all indicated their preference for the above-mentioned methods. Peter, for one, stated

they are easy to use, pain-free, not time consuming and very easy for students to access.

Gina further argued,

students prefer the online survey since they are so technology savvy.

This statement concurs with Cain and Bird's (2005) arguments on the usefulness of online evaluation methods in saving time, money, speed in

reporting students' results and reliability factors due to the fact that students complete the evaluation survey whenever they wished without any outside influence. Nonetheless, Yazan, confirmed the fact that students' comments sometimes are "misrepresentation of the actual" and Peter stated,

the results that we received this year were statistically irrelevant. We got such a low response rate that there was really no profitable information because they were online and there was no incentive for the students to do them.

On the forms used in the SET process, both administrators and teachers stated that an internal standardized form designed by the evaluation entity in the university is administered electronically immediately after students complete a half-period of their academic program; however, one administrator argued that the form is often "exhaustive, considering all aspects that need to be evaluated" just as previous research has shown (Amendt, 2004; Barton, 2010). Interestingly, one teacher raised a very important point regarding the split classes that are common in Saudi universities. To him,

It is note mentioning that some Saudi universities teach both male and female undergraduates in the same (split-level) classrooms, with men sitting on the ground floor and women in the balcony.

He further stated that the questions in the form "need to be different depending on the course because a science course may not be the same as a math course or as an English course."

## Perceptions Regarding the SET Quality

Of the two groups that were interviewed, the smaller one, the administrators, was strongly in favor of SET. The reasons they gave were generally to provide a diagnostic feedback to faculty about the effectiveness of their

teaching and to categorize and rank teachers for personnel decisions. Nonetheless, one administrator admitted that

experienced teachers aren't evaluated every year... these teachers might go years without receiving any meaningful feedback on their performance.

This clearly shows that inequalities in the process do indeed exist. Evaluations should provide all teachers with regular feedback that helps them grow as professionals, no matter how long they have been in the classroom.

The four teachers in the study believe that it is a mistake to assume that SET provides a complete assessment of all-important aspects of college or university teaching. According to Matt, SET can only assess

characteristics that are observable by students, and not factors related to course design, instructor knowledge, academic standards and quality of assignments.

This determination is supported by numerous studies (Peterson et al., 2008). Gill further claims,

SET has value and is worth keeping only if the results are used to strengthen the knowledge, skills, dispositions and classroom practices of professional educators.

This point was also echoed by Susan who explicitly stated,

the process should be constructive, allows for growth and professional development and not criticism.

This brings to mind Mercer and Mercer's (2005) argument regarding the substantial support a quality-assurance system enjoys when the focus is on the professional development aspect. Additionally, Adam, a senior lecturer in biochemistry and physiology, drew attention to the importance of using an evaluative portfolio. He contended,

the portfolio is more authentic when compared to surveys and observations.

The point he raised is supported by Palazuelos and Conley's (2008) arguments, which attest that using portfolios to evaluate teachers indeed has an impact on the effectiveness of the professional development of teachers and on students' achievement.

Instructors seem to be particularly critical of the use of SET ratings for summative purposes. The majority of instructors surveyed were concerned about the use of their ratings by university administration, and many reported feelings of anxiety and a lack of clarity about expected teaching behaviors and evaluative standards. Susan, for one, stated,

even though I get excellent reviews, I am still always paranoid about contract renewal ... SET should not affect contract renewal or salary increments and management should use it as a tool to identify any potential problems.

In a similar vein, Jill, argued,

it doesn't have to factor into contract renewal, or retention

and Adam drew attention to the fact that

the statements tend to be broad and they are not linked to either a key learning outcome or a process you are trying to achieve, therefore, they definitely should not be used for a summative evaluation on the quality of an instructor.

Finally, teachers and administrators alike felt that SET strengthens the relation between teachers and students, with only one teacher indicating that the evaluation process does not affect her relations with her students at all. Nonetheless, by allowing students to participate in the evaluation of their teachers through informal and formal feedback processes, we can elevate the value of student opinion, increase communication and strengthen classroom relationships.

## Perceptions Regarding the SET Feedback

Despite the fact that all four instructors acknowledge the potential usefulness of SET data to improve their professional performance as well as identify their strengths and weaknesses, only one reported that he has changed his courses based on SET feedback. The other three instructors stated that the feedback is very limited and provides information about the curriculum rather than instructors' teaching efficiency. Reasons cited for the reluctance to make use of SET feedback mainly included lack of trust in students' judgment. Adam, for one, stated,

students usually base their opinion on how they feel emotionally about the instructor; they might not be mature; they might not be savvy enough to look at what the instructor is trying to do in the classroom

and Susan maintained,

our students are so used to the entrenched rote memorization, grade-focused systems that they cannot fairly assess this type of student-centered curriculum, so often students' comments are directed at that and not at me personally... I hope that it's understood that sometimes students give bad ratings because they're disgruntled or too immature to take the process seriously.

Additionally, Matt argued that some of the questions in the SET form are vague and generic and that more specific information is needed as to what changes could be made to make a teacher more effective. To him,

students should be given more questions like "Does he attend all the lectures?" "Does he answer my questions?" "Does he respond to my emails?" and "Does he give me feedback?"—things students observe and understand, for they can't understand a question like "Does he know his subject?" or "Is his teaching effective?"

Jill, likewise, was disappointed with the current SET process. She went on to suggest

in order to benefit from students' feedback on their learning process, we need to teach them how to reflect and answer questions through a critical constructive lens.

She further stated that the tools the administration asks students to complete are redundant, given that they,

do not do anything but give the students an opportunity to vent about things they are not happy with. I don't think it gives us good information to help us improve as teachers.

Research has shown that many of the concerns voiced by faculty are justified. In fact, many scholars have argued that students often do not have the meta-cognitive skills to assess their learning, and that they make consistent errors when estimating their performance (e.g., Clayson, 2009; Sproule, 2000). Researchers have also concluded that the emotional state a student is in when he or she completes a teacher rating form affects the validity of the results. Small, Hollenbeck, and Haley (1982) found that the more anxious, depressed, frustrated and hostile students were at the end of a semester, the more likely they were to give poor scores when evaluating teachers. Thus, the use of these invalidated and mainly irrelevant results to determine career paths in higher education needs to be questioned as it puts faculty at risk of being wrongfully dismissed.

In an effort to elicit a fair and thoughtful response from students, one teacher suggested explaining the importance of the evaluation process to students early on, and another recommended administering training sessions whereby the benefits and purpose of SETs are outlined. In this regard, Adam stated,

I think students need to go through an education process of what SET process should be ... once this is achieved, they will give better feedback.

Teachers generally acknowledge students' democratic right to have a say in their education and to voice their opinions about the classes they take. To this end, Jill noted,



I think if we assess our students then they should have the opportunity to give us feedback. We are providing a service and they are paying money for this, and so they have the right to give us feedback on how that service was.

and Matt argued,

the people who are there every day in the classroom are the students and they have the right to voice their concerns and tell us if there is, for example, something unethical going on in the classroom.

These arguments concur with Vaill's (2008) interpretations of customer satisfaction principle, which states that education in higher institutions is a service, whereby teachers have to be mindful of and responsive to the characteristics, needs and expectations of their students.

Lastly, the argument that SET might induce leniency in grades (Greenwald & Gillmore, 1999; Marsh & Roche, 1999) have not been supported in this study as all teachers asserted that they have never altered their teaching, that is given high grades or lower content difficulty, to obtain favorable ratings, nonetheless, it is unlikely they admit this (even to themselves) as one teacher stated,

I will definitely do things to satisfy the students and make them happy.

## **Perceptions Regarding the Support Provided by Administrators to Faculty**

There is a general agreement among all three administrators that institutional support is not provided to those who get low ratings on the SET scale. To this end, Yazan admitted,

unfortunately, we don't have any professional development opportunities in this particular area

and Peter noted,

the department chair is expected to do some kind of professional development and coaching of a faculty member who does not achieve good scores, however, this has not been done.

Gina further added,

I think we are just doing it for formality, just to get it done. It has become nothing more than a vehicle for removing ineffective teachers instead of professional development purposes. What we should do is mentoring, helping, guiding and assisting, especially to new faculty members.

The four teachers in the study also concurred that the institution where they work does not provide any kind of mentoring to teachers who fail to meet evaluation standards, nor does it give any of them the opportunity to justify the SET results. According to Adam,

nobody asks for that, nobody says look at them, nobody wants to know why you did what you did this year or why are the students saying this, nothing ... It would be beneficial to sit down and talk to an administrator about the type of questions asked in the evaluation process.

Jill also asserted,

we do not participate in that process and I have no idea who writes it or who administers it.

Most importantly, Susan noted,

teachers should know what they are being evaluated on

and Matt contended,

teachers should be part of the process and should design the questions for those currently in use do not address the specifics of the subjects.

When administrators were asked whether they believed faculty members should be part of setting the guidelines for effective SET, they all

agreed, with one administrator stating, “We have shared our SETs with our faculty.” Nonetheless, another administrator admitted, “Yes, they should be, but they are not in this college.”

It is clear from the above excerpts that the absence of collaboration between teachers and administrators and the misinterpretation that could appear when dealing with students’ evaluation of courses and instructors has impeded to a great extent the implementation of successful SETs in this college in Saudi Arabia. Hence, awareness to its importance needs to be developed, for, as one administrator noted

SET results improve performance, develop teachers’ classroom effectiveness and build up rapport between teachers and students.

## Pedagogical and Theoretical Contributions

Taken as a whole, SETs provide perspective from students, who have the most experience with teachers, as well as formative information to help teachers improve performance. Research indicates that SET can be an extremely useful tool for improving teacher effectiveness and student achievement when used properly (Papanastasiou, 1999; Toch, 2008). However, the present study revealed that these evaluations are perceived as a formality with little meaningful information obtained and are primarily used for the purpose of either retaining quality teachers or dismissing those who perform below par.

As with previous research (Hodges & Stanton, 2007; Ryan et al., 1980), the findings in the study revealed that teachers have an overwhelming negative perception of the SET process with many reporting feelings of anxiety and a lack of clarity about expected teaching behaviors and evaluative standards. These feelings were attributable to the fact that administrators give significant attention to SETs and use the input to make high-stakes personnel decisions. Additionally, the majority of teachers reported students’ views to be invalid because they reflect factors other than teaching performance and because students do not take SETs seriously as one teacher noted,

students dislike exerting effort, especially the least able ones, and when asked to evaluate the teacher, they do so on the basis of how much they enjoyed the course.

Nonetheless, despite being troubled by many aspects of student evaluations, participants agreed that SET is an essential component of any faculty evaluation system. It is worth noting that some teachers suggested making the wording on SET instruments more “achievement” oriented rather than “satisfaction” oriented, which could be achieved by adding questions that concern how much the students learned from the course and removing questions such as how well the instructors know the subject matter.

Furthermore, this study findings support the argument of Koster, Brekelmans, Korthagen, and Wobbles (2005) that teachers’ attitudes and perceptions about SET tend to be positive when they are allowed to be a part of planning, designing, implementing and creating this evaluation tool. It is, therefore likely, that collaboration between administrators and teachers increases the prospect of creating a valid and reliable assessment tool should be a collaborative effort between administrators and teachers. Academic departments must also assist faculty by providing support to teachers who receive low ratings, and training sessions to students to enhance teacher effectiveness and student learning. If students are to be an integral part of the unit’s evaluation system, they need to be trained to evaluate during a freshman seminar. For example, instructors could discuss the meaning of student rating items with the students and practice rating various case studies. Administrators likewise need to be trained in giving constructive feedback to prevent a reduction in motivation and ensure the fairness of the process. Lastly, the use of multiple sources of data is also recommended: the instructor’s teaching portfolio, students’ achievements and peer evaluations.

As a small-scale exploratory study relying on interviews as the primary source of data, the research reported in this paper has obvious limitations. In regards to the selection of the participants, it is possible that those who volunteered had strong opinions regarding SET. Hence, to avoid possible biases, I followed interview protocols, avoided leading questions, remained objective and checked the key pieces of information provided by respondents with a variety of sources. Additionally, the use of one

data-collection tool could also be considered as another limitation: an additional tool such as document analysis of students' ratings would have enhanced the validity of the study. However, the fact that I had only limited contact with the respondents prevented me from compiling additional data. The timing of the interviews can be considered another limitation since they were conducted during the last weeks of the academic year, with many colleagues choosing not to participate due to their busy schedule. Most importantly, valuable information could have resulted had I investigated students' perceptions and attitudes when completing SET questionnaires. Nonetheless, the timing was not appropriate given that the study was conducted towards the end of the academic year. Lastly, since the participants in this study were not randomly selected, it is wrong to generalize the findings of the study to a larger population.

The study has definitely provided additional insight, as most views presented were consistent and validated the complexities SET imposes and its negative effects on teaching performance. Nonetheless, more research needs to be conducted with larger sample sizes so that the results can be compared with the present study and the accuracy of the findings checked.

Although this research was limited in scale, length and number of participants, I believe that it contributes to the critical language policy literature that examines the unquestioned practices of SET and its negative effects on teachers' career paths. I trust it has raised some awareness and feel that those who showed dissatisfaction with the current SET process and others who admitted that improvements are needed to make teacher evaluations more effective will more likely question the status quo. As Pennycook (2007, p. 23) states, "consciousness is the first step towards emancipation." Ideally, more research studies are needed, preferably including students' views since they are also affected by the SET policy.

## Further Reading

Danielson, C., & McGreal, T. (2000). *Teacher evaluation to enhance professional practice*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

The book shows how a school district's local teacher evaluation committee can design evaluation systems in which educators can achieve the dual purposes

of accountability and professional development and even merge these purposes. A structural framework for designing the evaluation is proposed that locates teachers in one of three tracks: the beginning teacher program, the professional development track and the teacher assistance track.

Pamela, D., Tucker, P., & Stonge, J. (2005). *Linking teacher evaluation and student learning*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

This book shows that including measures of student achievement in teacher evaluations can help schools focus their efforts to meet higher standards. The authors explore the strengths and weaknesses of four approaches, offer insights from teachers and administrators, and describe practical ways to incorporate similar measures of student learning into the evaluation program.

Myron Dueck, M. (2014). *Grading smarter, not harder: Assessment strategies that motivate kids and help them learn*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

The book shows how to design an effective assessment system that accurately reflects students' learning and motivates them to meet learning objectives.

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