

## **Assessing the Roles of Teachers and Supervisors of English as a Foreign Language in the Reform of English Language Curriculum in Saudi Arabia**

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### **Abstract :**

In its quest for quality education in the new millennium, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia has expended tremendous efforts to improve the status of English language instruction in pre-university education in the kingdom.

Several measures have been undertaken to achieve this goal, chief among them the recent project of revising and modernizing the curriculum for English language taught in all stages (elementary, intermediate and secondary) in the Kingdom's public and private schools.

This paper has investigated the amount and scope of involvement of English language teachers and supervisors in this important educational reform and their perceptions of such reform vis-a-vis their awareness of the place that the English language occupies in Saudi Arabia's ambitious plans for national development.

The paper sought the opinions of such teachers and supervisors on the feasibility of this latest development in light of the Ministry's plans to introduce English language instruction in the country's public schools at an earlier stage, namely, the elementary school, and the effects that this measure would entail on the structure, sequence and content of English language curriculum, on teacher training and related matters.

The investigation indicated that the English teachers and supervisors questioned had a high level of interest and a great degree of willingness to participate in all aspects involved in the reform of the English language curriculum in Saudi Arabia.

**Introduction:**

In a school setting there is always a curriculum plan for carrying on the education of students. Planning a curriculum for a student, a class of students, a student body of a school, or the children and youth of a community is a complex, widespread, and painstaking process. It comprehends a philosophical insight into the purposes of schooling, a psychological understanding of the nature and characteristics of the students being schooled, a sociological perception of the society which established and controls the schools, and an awareness of the cultural traditions, mores, beliefs, values, perceptions, and aspirations of the people comprising the nation. (Saylor, 1982).

According to Saylor (1982), the term “curriculum plan” accounts for philosophical statements with a wide range of functions. First of all they are intended to give direction and substance to schooling and general statements of aims, goals, functions, or objectives that are not particularly part of a substantive plan for instruction. They also present a huge body of theory, statements of problems, issues, trends, and the like, descriptions of practices that may influence greatly the participants in the planning process, but do not in themselves constitute a definite plan for instruction.

Most importantly, however, a curriculum plan is specifically and overtly designed to direct, guide, and control instructional activities and processes being carried on in an organized and systematic manner in a school setting (Saylor, 1982).

During the 1960’s, a number of publications appeared that in varying degrees affected all aspects of education. Two of these were Mager’s 1962 book on behavioral objectives. and the U.S. Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Although not proposing any new ideas about teaching, these publications, nevertheless, came at a time when the word “accountability” was starting to be heard. They seemed to offer at least a partial answer to those calling for teachers to be able to specify exactly what they were teaching (Benson, 1987).

The result of the movement towards accountability was that the earlier-somewhat nebulous – approach to curriculum planning became the focus of attention in almost all areas of education including foreign language education. A host of new terms became current: terms like behavioral or instructional objectives, criterion-referenced tests mastery learning, needs analysis, formative and summative evaluation, plus a host of other terms. Models of instructional design began to appear in the literature, and, in due course, English as a Second Language/ English as a Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) models were also seen, starting mainly in the 1970s. (Benson,1987).

The curriculum of a given language program can be looked at from different perspectives. On the one hand, it can be seen as a statement of intent, the “ what should be” of a language program as set out in syllabus outlines, sets of objectives, and various other planning documents. Another perspective is that of the curriculum as “ reality,” that is, in terms of what actually goes on from moment to moment in the language classroom (Nunan, 1988).

In recent years, recognition of the fact that there is no simple one-to-one relationship between intention and reality has promoted interest in classroom research. Such research, which came from quite different perspectives, has highlighted the complexity of language learning and teaching and has provided insights into why there are mismatches between what is planned, what actually gets taught, and what learners learn. Further insights have been provided from second language acquisition research which showed that mismatches between the various curriculum perspectives can be accounted for, among other things, by speech-processing constraints, (Nunan,1989).

In addition to a range of diverse and sometimes contradictory views on the nature of language and language learning, curriculum designers need to take account of and respond to data coming from classroom researchers, second language acquisition researchers, test and evaluation specialists, funding authorities, learners, teachers and so on. They need to incorporate these into a design that accords with the political, social, cultural, and historical contexts in which the language programs will be implemented. (Davies, 1999 and Nunan,1989)

Most curriculum proposals can be ranged on a “control continuum,” with fully centralized, or top-down, curricula at one extreme and decentralized or bottom-up, curricula at the other. The history of education systems can be seen as an interplay between forces representing centralization and decentralization (Nunan 1989).

The interplay between centralized and decentralized forms of curriculum development is reflected in language curriculum development. During the 1970s, a number of developments prompted experiments with various forms of school-based curricula. Changing views on the nature of language, particularly the development of communicative language teaching in its various guises with its implication of differentiated curricula for different learner types, the work of the Council of Europe with its behavioral approach to syllabus design, Munby’s (1978) needs-based approach, the application of competency-based education to second language learning, and, in Britain, the Graded Levels of Achievement in Foreign Language Learning, all promoted the cause of decentralized language curriculum development (Clark, 1987).

School-based models offer greater power and control to the classroom practitioner in the curriculum development process than do more centralized models.

As Clark (1987) explains

The two most important factors in school-focused curriculum renewal are the quality of relationships between participants and the sharing of responsibility. Education is about people, whether it be teacher education or pupil education, and the most valuable contribution that a project leader can make is to ensure that the diverse strengths, energies, and personalities of those involved are harnessed and forged together harmoniously. For this to occur, a democratic framework of shared responsibilities is essential, rather than a simple hierarchical structure. The sort of accountability that seems to work best in curriculum renewal is not managerial ... but rather one of mutual responsibility.

A localized, school-based approach to language curriculum development, thus, requires a collaborative approach between all concerned groups in the educational enterprise, including teachers, researchers, curriculum specialists, and program managers and administrators.

It is the basic premise of the present researchers that the teacher who is guiding and directing the organized learning activities of students in a school setting is the ultimate curriculum planner and thus must be accorded a central role in the curriculum development process in which the renewal of the curriculum reflects a collaborative effort between teachers and curriculum developers.

The teacher has a key role to play in curriculum development, particularly in systems in which courses are meant to be responsive to learner needs.

### **This study:**

The first explicitly stated English curriculum for public schools in Saudi Arabia appeared in 1970 (Ministry of Education, 1970). It outlined a rationale for the teaching of English in the Kingdom and stated general and specific aims for teaching it. It described the theoretical framework and pedagogical practices by which these aims could be achieved and suggested ways for the evaluation of their achievement.

Since 1970, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education has striven to reassess its policy of teaching English in the Kingdom in terms of the country's successive developmental plans and the expected role of Saudi youth in their fulfillment.

In 1988, a new revision of the curriculum of English was adopted and new teaching materials were prepared to implement it. This currently-used curriculum has introduced various changes and delineated general and specific objectives of English language teaching in Saudi Arabia in more realistic and functional terms.

The continuous drive for quality education has led the Ministry of Education to launch in 2000 a project of comprehensive revision of its

educational curricula and teaching materials at all levels: elementary, intermediate and secondary. As part of this major educational overhaul, a new English curriculum has been introduced. Based on recent findings of psycholinguistic research, this new English curriculum adopts a more learner-centered approach in teaching English to Saudi learners. It aspires to emphasize the explicit (general and specific) goals and the educational and sociolinguistic value of English in the Kingdom. It pays special attention to course content, recommends appropriate teaching techniques and suggests proper methods of assessment.

This paper investigates the amount and scope of involvement of English language teachers and supervisors in this important educational reform and their perceptions of such reform vis-à-vis their awareness of the place that the English language occupies in their country's ambitious plans for national development.

The paper will also seek the opinions of such teachers and supervisors on the feasibility of this latest development in light of the Ministry's plans to introduce English language instruction in the country's public schools at an earlier stage, namely, the elementary school, and the effects that this measure would entail on the structure, sequence and content of the English language curriculum, on teacher training and related matters.

### **Research Questions:**

Specifically, this paper will answer the following questions:

1. How do EFL teachers and supervisors evaluate the English language curriculum currently employed in the Saudi Arabian school system?
2. How much involvement do EFL teachers and supervisors have in the announced reform of the English language teaching curriculum in the Saudi Arabian school system?
3. How do EFL teachers and supervisors evaluate the adopted reform of the English language curriculum in the Saudi Arabian school system?
4. How do EFL teachers and supervisors evaluate the introduction of English language teaching at the elementary level in the Saudi Arabian school system?

### **Methodology:**

A twenty-two item questionnaire was developed to solicit responses of EFL teachers and supervisors to the research problem. The questionnaire was divided into four major areas covering the four research questions mentioned above.

The questionnaire concludes with an open-ended question calling for additional comments about the current changes in English language teaching in Saudi Arabia.

A total of 84 EFL teachers and supervisors responded to the questionnaire (Table 1). All respondents came from the school districts of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

**Table ( 1 )**  
Distribution of Respondents to the Questionnaire

Type of Respondents	#	%
EFL teachers	74	88.1
EFL supervisors	10	11.9
Total	84	100

Frequency ranking method was used to evaluate responses to the questionnaire.

Each research question was evaluated separately since some respondents failed to respond to all 4 research questions. As a consequence, the total number of respondents for each research question varies.

### **Analysis and Discussion:**

Research Question No. 1: How do EFL teachers and supervisors evaluate the English language curriculum currently employed in the Saudi Arabian school system?

**Table ( 2 )**  
**Respondents' Rating of the English Language Curriculum Employed in  
 the Saudi Arabian School System**

Type of Respondents	Excellent		Very Good		Good		Satisfactory		Weak		Don't know		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Teachers	2	2.7	12	16.2	23	31.1	26	35.1	11	14.9	-	-	74	100
Supervisors	-	-	1	10	2	20	3	30	4	40	-	-	10	100
Total	2	2.38	13	15.48	25	29.76	29	34.52	15	17.86	-	-	84	100

As shown in Table # 2, 26 teachers and 3 supervisors, or 34.52% of the population of the study, found the currently-employed English language curriculum to be merely "satisfactory." On the other hand, 23 teachers and 2 supervisors, or 29.76%, found this curriculum to be "good" and 11 teachers and 4 supervisors, or 17.86%, rated it as "weak". Only 2 teachers considered it "excellent".

The above data show that the majority of the respondents (49 teachers and 5 supervisors, or 64.3%) rated the current curriculum for English language between "satisfactory" and "good." When asked whether or not this curriculum was in need of change, the majority of respondents (58, or 60%) thought this was either essential or important. This opinion was supported by the majority of teachers (53 or 71.6%) and 5 (50%) of the supervisors. This conclusion would reflect the strong belief among the population of the study, teachers in particular, in the importance of change to the present English language curriculum, and hence supports the plans of the Ministry of Education for effective change.

Data derived from the study also show that most of the teachers (67, or 90.5%) found curriculum design and textbooks as the most problematic areas needing change. Their opinion regarding areas such as goals, methods of teaching and audiovisual aids was not as strong. This opinion was supported by all of the supervisors (100%). The general and strong agreement among respondents would indicate the urgent need for change of the present curriculum and supports such change.



Research Question No. 2: How much involvement do EFL teachers and supervisors have in the announced reform of the English language teaching curriculum in the Saudi Arabian school system?

**Table ( 3 )**  
 Respondents' Awareness of the Announced Reform of the English Language Teaching Curriculum in Saudi Arabia

Type of Respondents	Yes		No		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
EFL Teachers	31	49.2	32	50.8	63	100
EFL Supervisors	3	37.5	5	62.5	8	100
Total	34	47.9	37	52.1	71	100

Table # 3 displays respondents' awareness of the Ministry of Education's announced reform of the English curriculum. As the table shows, 31 of the teachers, or 49.2%, expressed their awareness of the intended change in the curriculum, while 32, or 50.8% indicated their lack of awareness of the proposed change. On the other hand, only 3 supervisors, or 37.5%, indicated their awareness of the reform, while the majority, i.e., 62.5%, expressed that they were unaware of it.

The above figures show beyond any doubt that the majority of respondents (37, or 52.1%) were not involved in bringing about the required changes to the current English curriculum and were not sought out for help of any kind in this endeavor.

This result, however, does not reflect the belief of the respondents regarding who should be involved in carrying out the intended reform. The majority of the teachers, 58, or 78.4%, thought that EFL teachers and supervisors should be given priority in helping to carry out the required reform, with teachers given more importance in this task: 36, or 48.6%, for teachers and 22, or 29.7% for supervisors. Six supervisors, or 60%, supported this opinion and believed that teachers should play the most important role in this change. When asked whether this role should be

assigned to university English language staff, only 17 teachers (23%) and 2 supervisors (20%) supported their involvement in this task. Educational administrators' involvement was supported by 12 teachers (19%) and 2 supervisors (25%), while students were not seen to be important players in this respect and received the support of only 7 teachers (9.5%) and 3 supervisors (30%).

Research Question No. 3: How do EFL teachers and supervisors evaluate the adopted reform of the English language curriculum in the Saudi Arabian school system?

**Table ( 4 )**  
Respondents Who Had Read in Detail about the Reform

Type of Respondents	Yes		No		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Teachers	30	44.1	38	55.9	68	100
Supervisors	3	33.3	6	66.7	9	100
Total	33	42.9	44	57.1	77	100

Table # 4 shows that only 30 teachers, or 44.1%, had read in detail about this reform, while 38 teachers, or 55.9%, had not done so. On the other hand, even less supervisors, 3, or 33.3%, had read in detail about this prepared reform, while 6, or 66.7% had not.

**Table ( 5 )**  
Evaluation of the Proposed Reform by Respondents  
Who Had Read about It in Detail

Type of Respondents	Excellent		Very Good		Good		Satisfactory		Weak		Don't Know		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
EFL Teachers	7	21.88	5	15.6	8	25	8	25	1	3.12	3	9.4	32	100
EFL Supervisors	1	16.7	5	83.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	100
Total	8	21.1	10	26.3	8	21.1	8	21.1	1	2.6	3	7.8	38	100

As the table indicates, only 32 of the teachers were able to evaluate the reform since they had read about it in detail. However a high number of these gave a positive response: 7, or 21.9% rated it as “excellent”, 5 or 15.6%, as “very good” and 8, or 25%, as “good”. Therefore, 20, or 62.5%, rated it between “good” to “excellent”. For supervisors, on the other hand, all of them rated it at the very top of the scale: “very good”, 5, or 83.3% or “excellent”, 1, or 16.7%.

Eight teachers, or 25%, rated the reform as “satisfactory” whereas only 1, or 3.12%, rated it as “weak” and 3, or 9.4% had no opinion.

These data indicate a very positive response to the reform by those who had read about it in detail.

Respondents identified particular strong or weak points of the reform. Coinciding with the positive response in general, the following points were given a high rating: the reform fulfils goals, it meets modern standards, it is easy to implement, and it improves on the previous curriculum.

Respondents also indicated which groups would best implement the proposed reform. The greatest number indicated that bodies within Saudi Arabia were preferable, especially the Ministry of Education and specialist organizations within Saudi Arabia. For the Ministry of Education, 22 teachers, or 29.7% and 2 supervisors, or 28.6%, expressed their preference, while for specialist organizations within Saudi Arabia, 20 teachers, or 27%, and 2 supervisors or 28.6% expressed this preference. Next in preference were specialist organizations from abroad with 16 teachers, or 21.6%, in favor and only 1 supervisor, or 14.3%, of this opinion. Of a similar level were the responses for individual specialists to be assigned for this task, with 15 teachers , or 20.3% and again 1 supervisor, or 14.3% of this opinion. Much lower was the preference for Saudi universities and colleges, with 11 teachers, or 14.9%, and again only one supervisor, 14.3%, favoring this choice.

Research Question No. 4: How do EFL teachers and supervisors evaluate the introduction of English language teaching at the elementary level in the Saudi Arabian school system?

**Table ( 6 )**

Respondents' Awareness of the Intention of the Ministry of Education to Begin English Language Instruction at the Elementary School Level

Type of Respondents	Yes		No		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Teacher	50	76.9	15	23.1	65	100
Supervisors	6	100	-	-	6	100
Total	56	78.9	15	21.1	71	100

A high percentage of respondents showed an awareness of the intent of the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education to introduce the teaching of English from the elementary level: teachers, 50, or 76.9% and supervisors; 6, or 100%.

Of those who were aware of this reform 28 of the teachers, or 63.3%, and 5 of the supervisors, or 83.3%, indicated that their opinion about this reform had been solicited. On the other hand, 37 of the teachers, or 71.2%, indicated their interest in helping to implement this reform. However, all 7 supervisors, or 100%, were interested in assisting in this task.

Respondents indicated a high preference for participating in the area of drawing up curriculum plans, developing teaching materials and training teaching staff. Much less interest was indicated for ascertaining goals and developing methodology.

When asked to indicate which groups would best carry out this change, the favored group both by teachers and supervisors was that of "teachers". Also, very highly recommended was the group of "supervisors", again supported by both teachers and supervisors. The choice of "university language staff" was indicated by a substantial number of respondents, but "students" and "educational administrators" received a very low level of support.

Regarding their agreement to the introduction of English instruction at the elementary level, a high proportion of teachers, 35, or 58.3%, "strongly

agreed”; whereas only 2 supervisors, or 28.6% were of this opinion. However, 22 teachers, or 36.7% “agreed” and the remaining supervisors, 5, or 71.4% “agreed.” So 95% of teachers either “agree” or “strongly agree” to this change and 100% of the supervisors shared this opinion. Consequently, only very few were not in agreement.

When asked about the effect of this introduction of English language instruction at the elementary level, 98% of teachers responded affirmatively and 85.7% of supervisors saw this as having a positive effect.

The area of “curriculum” was identified as the most strongly-affected area, followed closely by “textbooks.” “Goals and methods of teaching” were also considered important as areas affected by this change. “Audio-visual aids” were not seen to be so seriously affected.

**Additional Open-Ended Question: What Additional Comments Would You Make about English Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia?**

Thirty teachers, or 40.5% and 8 supervisors, or 80%, have responded to this question by giving some general views on what they thought to be important considerations for the design of an effective curriculum of English language in the concerned school stages: elementary, intermediate and secondary.

Not surprisingly, in this question teachers have shown more interest and willingness to offer varied and relevant comments and suggestions than supervisors. The following are ideas that received the highest attention by the respondents.

1. The English curriculum must follow modern standards of curriculum design.
2. The English curriculum must adopt communicative approaches to language teaching and learning.
3. The English curriculum must pay special attention to the needs and interests of the learners.
4. The English curriculum must provide interesting, enjoyable and more realistic materials to motivate student learning.
5. The English curriculum must be graded in difficulty to suit learners’ abilities.

6. The English curriculum should give more attention to quality rather than quantity of instructional material.
7. The English curriculum should reflect the culture and social values of the learners.
8. Provision for ample time and amount of language practice must be provided in the curriculum.
9. Speaking and writing skills must receive more attention in the new curriculum.
10. More audio-visual aids, especially video-taped materials and language laboratories, are needed.
11. Teachers must be made acquainted with the new curriculum before its implementation.
12. Teaching English in the elementary stage must be clearly planned.
13. Specialists in child psychology should be involved in planning the English curriculum at the elementary school level.
14. Special training and/or orientation must be provided for the elementary English teachers.

**Conclusion:**

The importance of the English curriculum is derived from the position English has in Saudi Arabia, for, as is well known, it is the Kingdom's most important foreign language. It is also the medium through which Saudi Arabia communicates with the non-Arabic speaking countries of the world and it helps the country promote relations, understanding and cooperation with such countries, and it is used by Saudi Arabia to explain and present itself to other nations (Al-Saadat, 1990).

Knowledge of English by a sizeable sector of the Saudi community is vital to educational, economic and technological needs of the country. The development of an effective English curriculum is, therefore, in harmony with general and overall educational and developmental plans of Saudi Arabia, and every effort needs to be made to guarantee such effectiveness.

The actual content of the English course will be embodied in the textbooks and materials to be written and developed with this curriculum. And since all material writing involves an element of creativity, it may not be possible, or even desirable, to specify in advance the exact content of the

textbooks to be produced. However, a well-prepared curriculum will provide materials designers and textbook writers with a set of important parameters to be observed and general guidelines of the course content which would include lists of functions, notions and structures that are recommended.

This paper has considered many aspects of the proposed changes to the English curriculum in Saudi Arabia. In this study, two major questions were addressed: who should be involved in bringing about the required change in the English curriculum in the Saudi Arabian school system, and who can give the best answers to satisfy the needs of an effective change?

The paper has proven that the classroom teacher is the most qualified person for such task. Saudi EFL teachers have shown awareness and appreciation of the special needs of EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia and stressed their ability to effect the required change. This demonstrates those teachers' confidence in their previous training programs, current development schemes and overall experience in the field of language teaching and learning. Yet, investigation carried out in the study showed that classroom teachers did not play a major role in effecting the reform and were not sought out for help as might have been expected.

However, achievement of the objectives of the English curriculum still depends upon the classroom teacher, as such achievement requires a qualified and competent teacher to realize it. This entails that the teacher training schemes should be integrated with the curricular requirements. The ultimate goal of such training programs is to equip the teacher with the necessary skills to implement the curricular activities effectively and economically through facilitating and enhancing student learning.

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## تقويم مهام مدرسي ومشرفي الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في إطار تطوير منهاج اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية

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جامعة الملك فيصل - الهفوف - المملكة العربية السعودية

الملخص:

تبذل وزارة المعارف في المملكة العربية السعودية جهوداً هائلة سعياً منها للوصول إلى تعليم متميز في القرن الحادي والعشرين، وذلك في مجال تطوير تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية ورفع إمكانياته في المراحل ما قبل الجامعية. ولتحقيق هذا الغرض، قامت الوزارة بعدد من الإجراءات من أهمها المشروع الحالي لمراجعة وتحديث منهاج اللغة الإنجليزية الذي يستخدم حالياً في جميع مدارس المملكة الحكومية والخاصة في جميع مراحل التعليم الابتدائي والمتوسط والثانوي.

يقوم البحث الحالي بدراسة مدى مساهمة مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية ومشرفيها في هذا المشروع التربوي الهام. كذلك يهدف البحث إلى اكتشاف فهم المدرسين والمشرفين الخاص لهذا التطوير للمنهاج عن طريق دراسة وعيهم للمكانة التي تحتلها اللغة الإنجليزية في الخطط الطموحة للتنمية الشاملة في المملكة العربية السعودية.

وقد استطلع البحث آراء عينة من المدرسين والمشرفين على اللغة الإنجليزية حول إمكانية التطوير المقترح وذلك على ضوء خطط الوزارة القاضية بإدخال تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الحكومية في مرحلة أبكر مما عليه الحال الآن، في المرحلة الابتدائية. ويدرس البحث كذلك الأثر الذي سيجدته هذا التغيير على هيكلتها منهاج اللغة الإنجليزية وعلى ترتيب المنهاج ومحتواه، وعلى تدريب المدرسين وقضايا أخرى متعلقة بهذا التغيير.

وأوضحت نتائج البحث بأن مدرسي ومشرفي اللغة الإنجليزية كان لديهم اهتمام كبير ورغبة شديدة في المشاركة في جميع نواحي تطوير منهاج اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية.