EFL Teaching in University Classrooms in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study of Instructors and Curriculum and Implementation for Language Learning

by

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Abstract

Literature has extensively documented the traditional conceptions of viewing teaching, learning, curriculum and implementation and recommends changing these traditional views for better teaching and learning outcomes. However; still some teachers view curriculum as a rigid document, learning as static, unalterable, and measurable by tests and teaching as transmitting knowledge and teachers as transmitter of prescribed knowledge. This thesis presents a case study of nine EFL instructors explaining the ways participating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors understand and implement the foundation year EFL university curriculum in Saudi Arabia and how their understanding impacts their implementation and language learning. This case study explains the factors affecting students’ learning through the eyes of the participating EFL instructors, the ways these EFL instructors re-imagine teaching and learning in the EFL curriculum at university, and the support needed for EFL instructors that would facilitate improved English teaching and learning. The rigid, hierarchical educational system and its effects on EFL in the foundation year as a result of its top-down organization, fixed curriculum, limited time, and poor outcomes were highlighted as factors that contribute to EFL teaching, learning, curriculum and implementation at university. The findings reveal that policy and power, voice and choice, culture, motivation, teacher learning, and resources are major factors that need reconsideration for improved EFL teaching and learning. One of the emerging considerations from this research is that participating EFL instructors need to rethink traditional,
conventional conceptions of EFL curriculum, teaching, and learning at the university level in Saudi Arabia for improved teaching and learning outcomes.
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Chapter One: Introduction

This study investigated the ways university English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) instructors teaching in Saudi Arabia negotiate and understand the place of curriculum, teaching, and learning. This study explores how EFL instructors deal with a prescribed curriculum imposed from the top down to which they cannot contribute.

I draw from my experiences as a teacher (practice) and as a graduate student (theory) to explore the critical issues of teaching, learning, and curriculum. I taught EFL in Saudi Arabia in an undergraduate, private, medical institution for one and one-half years. I became a teacher because I was passionate about EFL teaching. However, a lot of my expectations about what teaching in the institution would be like were not met. Before I began working as a teacher, I expected that I would have a say in the curriculum, the methods of teaching, and assessment. But this was not the case.

While teaching in Saudi Arabia, I was working in a strongly hierarchical system of education. The Ministry of Education determined the curriculum and required instructors to follow the curriculum, guidelines, strategies, and instructions step by step. The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia viewed curriculum as a product rather than a process and the role of the teacher as fixed. Moreover, the Ministry of Education placed considerable pressure on EFL instructors to produce competent, fluent, and able English speakers. Teachers were blamed when students failed to achieve a high standard. From my experience as an EFL instructor, I believe that EFL instructors need support to help them overcome the obstacles they face teaching EFL. I embarked on this research because I wanted to know how EFL instructors deal with this very controlled and tight situation where a lack of trust on the Ministry of Education’s side is obvious and where choices and options are few and far between. In what ways does this situation affect
EFL teaching/learning progress in Saudi Arabia? What is the notion of curriculum? All these questions and concerns are a result of my experiences as an EFL student teacher and as an EFL teacher.

**The Researcher**

As a student teacher. In the teacher education program I completed in my third and fourth undergraduate years, I participated in a school-based practicum. The first class – the first time teaching EFL in a classroom – proved extremely challenging. Like other EFL teachers, I faced many challenges because we were required to teach using the English language. Other subject teachers used Arabic, their mother tongue.

In the practicum period, I began questioning my role and practices: “How am I going to teach? I have never done this before.” I worried about failing. A few days later, I was walking in the corridor of the university and found a notice for a three-day workshop on learning how to teach. Shocked, I thought it would take a miracle to learn how to teach in only three days. I had been taking three years’ worth of classes and I still did not know how to teach. I decided not to attend the workshop because this did not make sense to me. However, I was forced to attend the whole three days and sign in each day. My classmates and I were threatened that if we did not attend, marks would be deducted from all our courses. It was mandatory that we take the workshop before proceeding with the practicum.

Consequently, I attended that workshop. The main activity of the workshop was that teachers from different intermediate schools gave English lessons from different units to the attendees as if we were intermediate students. So we had to act like intermediate students and engage in the lessons. The teachers used charts, pictures, and cassettes to convey the subject matter to us. The problem was that there was no opportunity for the student teachers to try
teaching and get feedback. We did not practice teaching, so what this workshop added to my education was, in my opinion, nothing except frustration.

I will not forget that hard experience. At the time I tried everything to learn how to teach and I did not know or understand the choices. Unfortunately, I had a hard time finding someone to talk to. I wanted to reflect on my classes with someone who had experience and had advice to offer me, but there was no one to whom I could say my class did not go well or I do not know how to teach this part and so on. There was competition between the student teachers that prevented everyone from speaking frankly about what they experienced in the classroom. Moreover, when a mentor came to evaluate a student teacher, she expected that the student would know everything about how to teach. I did not dare ask about anything because I was afraid that this would be a point against me.

I worried during the practicum for several reasons: First, I constantly thought about how I could best determine the objectives of each lesson; Second, I was concerned with how I could best explain certain aspects of the English language, such as rules of grammar, to the students; and Third, I was worried about whether I could get the students involved in class participation using group work presentations and peer-reviewed activities for certain assignments. My main concern was to teach the students English in a fun manner using different strategies. Although I put forth a great effort, I always felt the lack of a professional preparation program for teachers. I passed the practicum with an A+; but what did this mean? Did this grade indicate that I was a good teacher?

**As a teacher.** From September 2007 to February 2009, I taught EFL at an undergraduate, private, medical institution. Simultaneously, the institution was implementing a new curriculum to develop the language center. Their approach to implementing a new curriculum was to change
books and materials. The English department head was an experienced teacher. I was a new graduate in English language and literature who understood curriculum as subject matter contained in prescribed textbooks and materials that include clear outlines to follow.

In my first semester, I taught students using the same methods instructors had used when I was a student. I did not think critically about what I was doing. I was teaching by following the guidelines exactly and using the traditional teacher-centered approach to teaching. I was focusing on rote learning and memorization for the set exams the students needed to pass.

During my teaching, I noticed that sometimes lessons I planned did not go well so I decided I needed to make some changes. I began by asking my students how they wanted to learn. They described being bored with traditional lessons. At that point, I decided to take responsibility as a teacher and make pedagogical decisions based on what I knew my students needed. To that end I started to reflect deeply on my classes and ask myself questions about pedagogy, learning, and teaching as well as the effects of my teaching on my students. As I gained experience, I came to see curriculum differently. I started to see curriculum as a process that takes place in the classroom in the interactions between teachers and students.

The English department head was committed to abiding by the institution’s curriculum, and consequently refused to condone other approaches to teaching. For example, I once planned to show videos from the television series *ER* to introduce the students to new English medical vocabulary. The idea came to me when I was watching one of the episodes to address the dissatisfaction I had with my students’ knowledge acquisition. I noticed that the *ER* episode used a lot of the vocabulary that was in the curriculum. I had a sense that teaching could be more effective if I introduced alternative materials such as this.
I asked for permission from the head of the department because the policy of the institution required that teachers obtain permission before using materials that were not provided by the institution. However, my department head refused to allow me, stating, “There is no need, all you need to do is write the new vocabulary on the board and let them practice it.” When I asked why he insisted that this was the only approach possible, he replied that my idea was “a waste of time and you can do it using the way we have always used.”

In spite of this exchange, I used the ER video. My students enjoyed it and said, “This was a very interesting and engaging lesson.” Also, they said, “We did not feel the long time of the class.” While I recognized the consequences of contradicting the dictates of the program/curriculum and teaching expectations, I did this because I realized that I, better than any external entity, knew and understood the needs of my class. Moreover, from my one semester of teaching, I learned that it is impossible to plan step by step because I frequently had to react to what was actually going on in the classroom during the lesson and change my plans accordingly.

As a teacher, I did not feel that I had a voice or choice. In the institution, our voices as teachers were never considered when changes regarding curriculum, hours, and other issues related to teaching were being considered. Teachers’ voices were basically ignored. As a result, I felt disappointed because I believed that teachers need to be a part of everything related to teaching as they represent a very essential part in the learning process. That is why this research is important. As a researcher and a teacher, I want to create a space where EFL teachers can have a voice to speak up about all the issues and concerns they have with respect to teaching. I would like to present their voices to the authorities who make pedagogical decisions. I would like them to know that teachers know better about their classes and students than any outside entity does.
In several situations during my teaching, I was asked to share my opinions about the semester or the curriculum and I did share my opinions and recommendations and other teachers did as well. However, no action took place to improve the curriculum or the system and we did not see any changes. As a result, the other teachers and I reached a point where we decided not to share our thoughts with administrators or superiors because it was such a waste of our time. For this reason, there is an urgent call for this research. It is time that we stand up for ourselves as teachers and make our voices heard to improve student learning.

**As a graduate student.** What I went through as a student teacher and a teacher forced me to think deeply about what teachers teach and how they teach, and about how they might overcome the frustration inherent in EFL teaching. During my graduate studies at OISE/University of Toronto, I was introduced to reflective practice as a model of professional development. I began to connect this to the conditions of teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. I think for reflective practice to be more authentic and effective, it needs to be done in groups of peers because teachers need others’ views and perspectives. I believe it is not enough for teachers to do self-reflection in isolation because the effect of this kind of reflection is limited. If teachers share their reflections with other teachers, it might lead to a better understanding of their practices and open new horizons for them.

Teachers need a safe space where they can share their problems, opinions, and ideas without restriction or judgment. This is what I could not do when I was a student teacher and a teacher. The lack of a comfortable, safe environment may put additional stress on teachers. How can teachers know that they are experiencing the same problems if they do not talk about them with each other? This study created a space where a number of EFL teachers were able to gather and share their thoughts on EFL teaching, learning, and curriculum at the university level.
Also, another inspiration for this study is my master’s thesis. I obtained my master’s degree from OISE/University of Toronto in Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development. My master’s thesis was based on a study conducted with four underperforming students in literacy. The Ontario students had been sent to summer school because of their unsatisfactory literacy levels. The students had difficulty learning in the regular school setting, however, when the conditions around them were changed, they learned and made progress. In their schools, they had no say in how they were taught. Everything was chosen for them including the reading text, the reading strategy, and the style of assessment. Contrary to this, when they joined the study, where they participated in a book club with their teacher and myself as a researcher, their literacy improved. Their progress resulted from the conditions of learning that had been completely changed. The dialogue between the students and the teacher gave them a chance to determine the nature of the experience and, they picked the book they wanted to read. The conditions were negotiable. Nothing was imposed on them as the teacher agreed to share authority with them, so the students felt that they were in a safe environment where they could share their opinions and be heard. Reading is a social act, so in order for students to improve their skills, we should create spaces where they can share their ideas about what they are reading (Maurer, 2010; Polleck, 2010; Ruzich & Canan, 2010). This is important as, “sharing ideas in the classroom is…educationally valuable...[because] meanings are created cumulatively over time through sustained, responsive dialogue” (Mercer, Hennessy, & Warwick, 2010, pp. 206–207). When students talk and express their ideas, share with, and listen to others they formulate new ideas and new understandings. What happens when students have time to talk in classrooms is amazing.
Creating conditions that encourage students to use language, that give them choice in how they are taught, and that allow them to understand what is taking place in the classroom is more important and helpful for the students than merely transmitting information about a certain topic (Dudley-Marling & Searle, 1991). When students read and then talk about what they have read with other students and the teacher in the classroom, they start to construct authentic knowledge and build self-confidence “since language develops through the active engagement of the learners...[and] language learning takes place through interactions in meaningful events...[it] develops through…the joint construction of meaning” (Raison, Rivalland, Cowan, & Australia, 1994, pp. 5–6).

This resonates with the issue of EFL teaching/learning at the university level in Saudi Arabia. What if all the conditions that EFL teachers work under changed? What if we created new conditions to support teachers’ learning? What if teachers were provided with a space to share their concerns and talk about their practices? How can we open this dialogue between teachers and keep it going? In my master’s research, I showed that the performance of underachieving students can be improved if the conditions under which they are taught are changed. The problem was not in the students but in the way they were being taught. When the conditions were changed, the problem was solved. This research hopes to disrupt the assumption that teachers can be effective without having input into the decisions made about curriculum and learning. Teachers should be given the chance to participate in and contribute to all the important decisions affecting teaching and learning including the curriculum. If this were to happen, it would ultimately affect the students’ learning positively.
EFL Teaching/Learning at the University Level in Saudi Arabia

This study investigates how EFL instructors negotiate and understand the place of curriculum, teaching, and learning in the context of the English language program in the undergraduate foundation year at a major university in Saudi Arabia. The intensive English language program was established a few years ago at the university, but no studies have been conducted to investigate the program’s effectiveness or the teachers’ views about what they are teaching and how they are implementing the curriculum. This study was designed to explore and describe the obstacles EFL instructors face and to discover the support they need to facilitate improved EFL teaching and learning. It also aimed to determine what improvements in the EFL curriculum would lead to better instruction and learning. The research findings may ultimately contribute to improvements in teacher development in the future.

The importance of this research lies mainly in its attempt to provide EFL teachers with a space to share their teaching practices and concerns with each other. Teachers were interviewed about what they are experiencing in teaching EFL to students whose English is weak (Liton, 2012). Through the interviews the support they need and the need to make their voices heard in decision making about learning process are revealed. This research aimed to know what happens behind the classroom doors and what teachers go through that administrators do not know about.

This research was conducted at a major Saudi university in Saudi Arabia. The university was established in 1967, English language instruction was added in 1975, and ultimately, in 2006, a required English program was established. In 2008, the English Language Institute (ELI) became a recognized independent entity in the university (ELI, KAU, 2012).

The participants of this study were nine female language instructors who were teaching English language to undergraduate students in the foundation year. In the Saudi context men and
women are separated in educational settings, hence, because I am female, this research was conducted at one of the female campuses of the university.

After graduation from high school, students who decide to take any undergraduate degree start the program with a foundation year during which they have to go through a very intensive English language program. Although the students take four subjects besides English in this year, the focus of the first year is on the acquisition and/or improvement of English language skills (ELI, KAU, 2012).

**Overview of the Research Context**

**Academic program.** The intensive English language course is an essential part of the first year experience for all university students working to obtain an undergraduate degree. The foundation year is a bridging year that students are required to successfully complete in order to start the first year in the major of their choice at the university. The English language program is designed to help students achieve an intermediate level of proficiency in the use of the English language (B1 CEFR) as this is necessary in order to start most first year majors.

The number of newly admitted full-time students varies depending on the availability of places at the university, but it generally ranges between 12,000 and 15,000 students each year. Unless exempted because they have achieved the required IELTS or TOEFL score ahead of time, all students must successfully complete the English course requirement before they will be admitted into a university. The ELI features small class sizes, averaging 18 students per class.

The foundation year English language program curriculum has four levels of instruction, which correlates with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). At the beginning of each module, instructors are provided with a detailed curriculum and syllabi
for each of courses they are assigned to teach at the ELI, which describe expected learning outcomes, as well as a pacing guide for each module containing day-to-day lesson planning guides. These guides detail precisely how many textbook units and language items are to be presented and practiced during a specified time frame. The total number of credits designated to the English program is six: they are assigned to four English language modules in the foundation year as follows:

1. ELI 101 (Level 1 – CEFR A0) Beginner: 0 credit  
2. ELI 102 (Level 2 – CEFR A1) Elementary: 2 credits  
3. ELI 103 (Level 3 – CEFR A2) Pre-Intermediate: 2 credits  
4. ELI 104 (Level 4 – CEFR B1) Intermediate: 2 credits

**Program design.** The four levels of English offered in the foundation year cater to the general language learning needs of each student determined by their proficiency level, which is assessed using a placement test. The test in use is the Oxford Online Placement Test (OOPT). This test was developed by Oxford University Press (OUP) to place students at the appropriate level in courses using the *New Headway Plus Special Edition* textbook series. The OOPT’s reliability has been validated by recent research in March 2011 in which it was compared to CEFR, IELTS, TOEFL and TOIEC levels.

This mandatory test is only offered once a year, immediately after admission into the university. Students are placed in the appropriate level according to placement test scores. Upon completion of the admission procedures, students are given a date and time to take the placement test. Students are then officially registered and placed in their appropriate level by the Registrar’s Office. In case of failure to attend the test, students are automatically enrolled in ELI 101, which is the first and most basic level.
The four-level intensive English language course is a content-based, integrated-skills program that ranges from beginner to intermediate on the CEFR scale. The course is delivered using a system of modules. There are four modules in the foundation year, two in each academic semester. Each module consists of 18 hours per week over seven academic weeks. The final exam is scheduled during the seventh week of each module. Each module covers one level of the program and is considered a full and independent course. Students must be assessed as having successfully completed one level in order to proceed to the next, and so on through the four levels.

**Problem Statement**

Arabic is the mother tongue of Saudi Arabia. English is considered a foreign language and is not used in daily life, but students encounter its use in schools, universities, and colleges. “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undergone great political, social, and economic development. To meet new challenges, the Ministry of Education introduced English as a foreign language (EFL) in schools, since 1925” (Al-Ahaydib, 1986, p. 26). Learning English starts in Grade 6 in Saudi Arabian schools. English is taught in four classes a week, 45 minutes a class. The students continue learning English until they graduate from high school. Although they have studied English for seven years by the time they finish high school, the English language they have acquired is meager (Liton, 2012).

The Ministry of Education is working hard to establish English as an important language for Saudis to acquire because it is a global language. In EFL learning, the bulk of the responsibility for achieving the desired outcomes rests with EFL instructors (Al-Hajailan, 2003). For example, EFL instructors are required to help students appreciate English as a foreign language (Crystal, 2003), to help students understand other cultures, and to learn to share Saudi
culture with members of other cultures (Cook, 1991). The Saudi government also expects EFL instructors to teach students to share Saudi scientific and technical knowledge as a way to advance Islamic history, culture, and tradition (Litton, 2012).

However, many issues hinder the achievement of these objectives. The poor implementation of the EFL curriculum and the lack of sufficient support for EFL instructors are central to the failure to achieve the described objectives. A study conducted by Moskovsky and Alrabai (2009) evaluated the current and future prospects of EFL learning in Saudi Arabia and established that there was a significant lack of enthusiasm for their work among EFL instructors. The researchers traced the lack to the poor perception of EFL learning and a failure to appreciate the objectives of EFL learning in Saudi Arabia among students. These challenges inhibit the improvement of EFL learning (Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009). As a result, more investigation is needed to understand why students have difficulty learning the language at the university level (Litton, 2012) from EFL instructors’ perspectives and what can be done to support EFL teaching and learning at the university level.

EFL instructors do not get the professional development workshops they need. As a result, they have no idea what to do with a rigid curriculum, students whose English language skills are at a low level, and limited resources. If teachers are frustrated because the students are not learning in these conditions, then we need to find out what conditions would produce better results. One of the biggest problems is that there is no research in Saudi Arabia about learning conditions so I am left with very little on which to ground my study. Research has been done around the world because it is increasingly important that students become competent English speakers. This study was designed to increase our understanding of the situation in Saudi Arabia, which will ultimately lead to increased language competence in the students. This study
explores, with the help of EFL university instructors, what the issues affecting students’ learning are and what the instructors do to cope with them. In order to explore this, the study was conducted over the course of four months through interviews and focus groups with the teachers and observations of classes.

**EFL learning and curriculum implementation.** EFL learning depends on the efficacy of the curriculum implementation process. Thus, there is a need for a strong conceptual understanding of that process (Hussain, Dogar, Azeem, & Shakoor, 2011).

However, this realization is relatively recent. During the 1960s and 1970s, government-level educators assumed that introducing a new curriculum and distributing it to institutions of learning would guarantee its effective implementation (Hussain et al., 2011). This turned out to be untrue. Literature have shown that there was a significant gap between the implementation of new curricula and the achievement of desired learning outcomes because of the failure of educators to appreciate the role of reflection in curriculum implementation (Yeo, 2013). This is in spite of the fact that most instructors have an understanding of curriculum based on their own reflections, and many of them enact this understanding in the classroom (McDonald & Adam, 2003).

**Statement of Purpose**

This study presents the challenges college instructors face teaching EFL and the support they need to improve English language teaching and learning. Furthermore, this study investigates the ways EFL instructors’ understand and implement the university-level curriculum and highlights the changes and improvements in EFL curriculum that may improve instruction and learning of English for students in the foundation year.
In Saudi Arabia, the majority of students study English for seven years; yet in that time they do not acquire the language (Liton, 2012). Additionally, when they start their undergraduate degree, they take a year-long intensive English course. Despite the instructors’ efforts to support students, there are apparently still some obstacles that need to be investigated so that educators will understand why students fail to learn the language (Liton, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to understand the reasons behind the students’ difficulty in learning the English language in the foundation year from EFL instructors’ perspectives (Liton, 2012). The research aims to highlight the important factors that affect students’ learning process. Moreover, the research gives rise to some recommendations that will help students be successful in learning the language in the foundation year. The findings of this research add to the literature on EFL education and on curriculum development and teacher education.

**Overall Research Question**

How do EFL instructors negotiate and understand the place of curriculum, teaching, and learning at the university level in Saudi Arabia?

**Overview of Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative methodology applying the descriptive case study approach because it is most appropriate for the study’s purpose, aim, and objectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). This approach focuses on in-depth description of a specific context, which is in this case, the EFL program in the foundation year at a major university in Saudi Arabia. The findings of this research include a detailed description of EFL curriculum, teaching and learning from EFL instructors’ perspectives in this specific context. The data were collected through individual
interviews, class observations and focus group discussions with EFL teachers over the course of four months. All the data were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Rationale and significance.** The importance of this research centers on its contribution to an understanding of how EFL curriculum development can enhance the quality of English teaching/learning (Bacon & Finneman, 1990). Since this research focuses on improving EFL teaching/learning at the university level in Saudi Arabia, the findings of this research may add to the existing body of knowledge about improvement of EFL instructors’ learning through increasing teacher input into curriculum. Through identification of the obstacles EFL instructors face, guided by the research questions, it should be possible to overcome them and improve the quality of EFL teaching. Eliminating these obstacles may make it easier for EFL instructors to be more in tune with their curricula and practices, which should lead to the improvement of EFL learning. Overall, the findings of this study add to the existing literature by increasing the understanding of the importance of EFL instructors’ input into the development and implementation of curriculum for the improvement of EFL teaching/learning. It will also add to the curriculum development and teacher learning and development.

Since EFL education is a growing area in Saudi Arabian education, there is a strong need to establish an effective learning environment that maximizes teachers’ input into the learning process (Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009). The gap in the literature with respect to the improvement of EFL learning, especially the role of the input of instructors, allows the research findings and recommendations to bridge the gap between desired learning outcomes and the contribution of instructors to EFL curriculum. Since curriculum development in EFL teaching normally needs to take account of multiple, unexpected, and context-specific problems that hinder the realization of desired learning outcomes, curriculum development should anticipate these problems by
including the capacity to manage them (Ellis, 1997). As proposed in this study, understanding the importance of EFL instructors’ input into the management of curriculum implementation issues is the first step to managing these problems.

**Role of the researcher in the study.** As a researcher, I interviewed the teachers individually and asked questions I prepared ahead. If I, as, the researcher, found during the interviews that clarification was needed or a follow-up question was required, I went beyond the prepared questions. I also observed some classes of some of the participants to have an idea how they were run and how the students interacted with the teacher during the lesson. During the focus group discussions, my role as the researcher was facilitator; I raised the themes that were generated from the individual interviews for in-depth discussion by the EFL instructors. The purpose of the focus group discussions was to allow teachers to share their experiences, opinions and issues in order to support each other in a friendly environment created by the researcher through the provision of food and drinks; a place where they were not being judged but are sharing and listening to each other.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In this chapter I describe the context of the study and its importance. The second chapter presents a literature review detailing current research in EFL teaching/learning at the university level and curriculum implementation. It also presents related and current literature regarding the relationship between EFL teaching/learning and curriculum development. Chapter Three details the study design and rationale. The fourth chapter explains what took place during the study and the study findings in details, and the fifth chapter presents some of the implications for EFL teaching and learning.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This research aims to investigate the effects of EFL instructors’ understandings of curriculum on curriculum implementation and course outcomes at the transition level from secondary school to university in the foundation year. The study looks at the relationship between curriculum and the teaching and learning experience, the factors that affect instructors’ implementation of curriculum, and the support EFL instructors need to improve curriculum, teaching, and learning outcomes.

The literature review is broken into three main sections:

1. Teachers, Teaching, and EFL Teaching,
2. Curriculum, and
3. Learning.

The first section consists of a discussion of teachers, teaching, and EFL teaching under the traditional conceptions of teacher and teaching, and of the role that questioning traditional conceptions plays in efforts to improve/change the profession. The second section consists of a discussion of curriculum conceived as a document and the effect of this conception on teaching and learning, the viewing of curriculum as a “currere,” and curriculum implementation. The last section consists of an exploration of learning in schools, teacher learning, and student learning. The discussion of these concepts and the insights into them provided by research is particularly critical to the case of Saudi Arabia because there top-down hierarchies and power is so well established that it prevents any teacher-initiated change to education.

In Saudi Arabia, there is a gap between the way implementation of curriculum has been conceived in the research and the actual practices in the schools. In this literature review I argue...
that curriculum is more than a document. It is a currere that is the journey both teachers and students take with knowledge. Moreover, I argue that implementation is more than following orders and teachers’ input and personal knowledge is essential in the curriculum implementation process. My working assumption is that learning is an active process that takes place in the interactions in the classroom.

**Teachers, Teaching, and EFL Teaching**

**Teachers.** Changing conceptions of teachers and teaching is central to any efforts to improve or change the profession (Kooy & Colarusso, 2012; Loughran & Russell, 2007). The conventional conception of teachers as “do-ers” who follow orders by doing what is prescribed in the curriculum that has been provided to them. Teachers are expected to adhere so strictly the curriculum that they do not have the freedom to respond to the needs of students (Sibahi, 2015; Ying, 2012).

But it has been argued that teachers, not administrators, are the only ones who know about the reality of day-to-day teaching (Sibahi, 2015). They are the only ones who are continuously gaining tacit knowledge from their practice as they teach (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1999; Kooy, 2006). They should be seen as “knowers,” “thinkers,” and “decision-makers” because they make hundreds of decisions daily, from trivial to the most complex (Manley-Casimir & Wassermann, 1989).

Teachers make decisions about curriculum; what to teach, how to teach, how to organize the content, what instructional approaches to use, what to give major emphasis and what to exclude; how and what to evaluate. Teachers decide how to present material, how explicit to make explanations, how much to leave to inference. They decide how to supplement the prescribed curriculum, what
materials to use, what risks they may expose themselves to and whether the educational benefit warrants the risk. They decide how to evaluate student progress and what to report to parents. They decide, perhaps implicitly through their personal style, about classrooms climate, about group work and interpersonal relationships, about housekeeping and discipline. (Manley-Casimir & Wassermann, 1989, p. 288)

Teachers are producers of knowledge and decision makers. For them to be effective they need help to articulate their professional knowledge of learning (Loughran, 2009). Teachers can bring in knowledge, create new understandings, and add value to the classes, curriculum, and learning process. “Without appreciation of all that teachers do, it is impossible to see and to understand the range of expertise required, and the day-to-day applications of the expertise in promoting student learning” (Wassermann, 2015, p. 89).

Because of the critical role teachers play in educational change their input in implementation and planning is vital for their own learning and for students’ learning (Guskey, 2000). However, applying this is difficult in the context of the top-down education systems seen in most of the countries around the world including Saudi Arabia. This is clear from the professional development offered to teachers in such contexts (Sibahi, 2015). The teacher is seen as “technician, consumer, receiver, transmitter, and implementer of other people’s knowledge” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1999, p. 16). In other words the people in authority believe that teachers’ main task is to deliver curriculum to students (Loughran 2009; Loughran & Russell, 2007).

In this view teachers are not seen as active agents in curriculum implementation and their role is severely underestimated. In fact, teachers are active agents and they must participate in
decisions regarding curriculum planning as they must be viewed as curriculum makers and
decide the content they want to teach and the ways they want to deliver the content (Bozik, 1990;
Little 2002; Schwab, 1983). It is the teachers who know best what the curriculum should look
like. After all, they work directly with the students meant to benefit from the curriculum. In order
to create a strong curriculum, teachers must play an integral role in every step of the process
(Bozik, 1990; Little, 2002; Schwab, 1983).

Wassermann (2015) states that teachers organize the curriculum experiences that help the
students to be engaged and motivated in “minds-on activities not only asking the students to
absorb information” (p. 88). Teachers who do this realize that “teaching for thinking requires
active, mental engagement with curriculum content” (Wassermann, 2015, p. 88). Teachers are
active agents who make a lot of decisions in the classrooms that go beyond what is contained in
the curriculum (Tanner & Tanner, 2007). This point is significant because curriculum is more
than a document (Goodson, 1997; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Posner & Rudnisty, 1982; Ornstein &
Hunkins, 2013; Roh, 2006). As a result, there is a need to change our traditional conception of
the teacher as one who follows orders in implementing curriculum to seeing teachers as decision
makers in order to improve teaching and learning (Loughran 2009; Loughran & Russell, 2007).
To achieve this we have to change our traditional conception of teaching as well. Teachers
should not be seen as merely deliverers of information (Wassermann, 2015). Because teachers
are the ones who implement the curriculum, their involvement, agreement, and understanding of
the theoretical base of any new curriculum is essential to successful implementation (Bozik,
1990).

Teachers know what the students need in order to learn by virtue of their presence and
experience (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013; Wassermann, 2015). Since the teacher operationalizes
the curriculum, it is logical to conclude that teachers understand learners’ needs and the methodologies of delivery better than administrators without classroom experience (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Moreover, they are the only ones who can understand how to assess a particular learner (Bozik, 1990). It is the role of teacher educators to foster the view of teachers as creative thinkers and decision makers (Bozik, 1990). Perhaps, it is time for a “closer examination of what it is that teachers do, daily, intensively, and exhaustively, when they are teaching” (Wasserman, 2015, p. 85).

Teaching. The conventional view is that teaching is the delivery of information. Freire (2000) called this the “banking model.” Teachers store information in students and withdraw it later in tests. This view of teaching as transmitting the information to others is the view that teaching is telling. Teaching using this model is one of the reasons why the quality of education in universities and schools is sometimes criticized (Loughran 2009; Loughran & Russell, 2007; Wassermann, 2015). “While teaching is not easy, many (including some teachers) inadvertently and unintentionally assume that it is easy because the very act of teaching is still mistakenly perceived as only being about the simple delivery of information” (Loughran & Russell, 2007, p. 219). Although there is a call for developing critical and independent thinkers, teaching at universities and colleges follows the conventional model of teaching as conveying the maximum amount knowledge to a large number of student in the minimum possible time whether the students are engaged and understanding or not (Loughran & Russell, 2007; Sibahi, 2015).

Teaching is viewed as an individual activity or performance, something that teachers do. This view fails to appreciate the interaction between theory and practice because it does not take into account interactions that take place in the classrooms. As a result, viewing teaching as a discipline in its own right has been suggested (Loughran & Russell, 2007; Richards, 1994).
Although there are many discussions in the literature about teaching, there is a lack of discussion of teaching beyond the narrow view. Teaching in most cases is considered “instructing,” that is, providing students with information, help, advice, and so on (Wassermann, 2015). But this view considers only one aspect of teaching, but teaching involves many aspects including teacher-student relationships, curriculum, and teachers’ personal and professional knowledge and experience. Teaching is much more than telling (Wassermann, 2015). Research should become an integral part of teaching because teaching and how knowledge develops is so complex (Banegas, 2011). “As teaching is problematic, it is commonly the case that the subtleties and idiosyncrasies of the practice setting call for pedagogic responses that are embedded in teachers’ experiences of practice rather than on generalized rules, propositions or procedures” (Loughran, 2012, p. 47). Thus, according to many researchers teaching is complex and requires teachers’ knowledge and experience; how to teach cannot be captured in a prescribed document (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Rather, teaching is dynamic and approaches change according to teachers’ perceptions of the needs of their students and the classroom environment (Loughran, 2009; Wassermann, 2015). Nevertheless, the “general population interprets teaching in ways that are at odds with notions of teaching as complex and problematic and far removed from seeing teaching as being built on specialist knowledge, skills and abilities” (Loughran, 2009, p. 191).

Adopting a fuller understanding of what teachers do and how they do it is a prerequisite for enhancing teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1999; Loughran, 2009; Loughran & Russell, 2007). According to Loughran (2009),

If teaching is to be better valued and understood, some provocation is necessary to disturb the status quo. In fact, some might say that a paradigm shift is needed in order to break free from existing views and positions as the comfort and stability
associated with an existing position encourages resistance to change in an established community. (p. 200)

Teaching is about knowing how and what and choosing the pedagogy according to the situation (Wassermann, 2015). Prescribed documents or texts fail to acknowledge the creative role of teachers. The teacher, in everyday interactions with students, becomes the knower, the decision maker, and the thinker (Bozik, 1990). Being a teacher is not easy because teaching is not a straightforward activity or task. It is a very demanding and complex profession.

This research focuses on changing conceptions of teachers and teaching. The study is based on the premise that teaching is more than transmitting knowledge and a teacher is more than a person who follows the curriculum and obeys the instructions. It is more complex to be a teacher (Liton, 2012). It is from this premise that the study explores the experiences of EFL teachers in universities in Saudi Arabia with implementing curriculum.

**EFL teaching.** Language teachers differ in their views of language teaching. Some do not view language teaching as a profession while others believe that language teaching is a profession and that they have to take charge of their teaching in order to improve the learning outcomes of their students (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Teachers’ conceptions of teaching in general and language teaching in particular play a role in teaching, curriculum, and learning outcomes.

Richards and Lockhart (1994) found:

Language teaching is not universally regarded as a profession – that is, as having unique characteristics, as requiring specialized skills and training, as being a lifelong and valued career choice, and as offering a high level of job satisfaction.
The degree to which individual teachers have a sense of professionalism about their work depends upon their own working conditions, their personal goals and attitudes, and the career prospects available to language teachers in their community (p. 40)

EFL teaching is challenging and in order to overcome the obstacles EFL teachers encounter in the classrooms, “teachers can promote and motivate university learners towards EFL learning through changing their views towards classroom learning/teaching quality” (Abu Ayyash, 2015, p. 167). I have argued elsewhere (Alghamdi, 2014) that it is important to examine deeply our understanding of EFL teaching and learning and what students need in the classrooms.

English is a global language, but it is not an official language of every country. In Middle East countries such as Saudi Arabia, English is considered a foreign language and is not used in daily communication; however, students start to encounter it or learn it in schools, colleges, and universities (Litton, 2012). There are several challenges that teachers teaching EFL in the Arabian Gulf region encounter: students’ lack of motivation, underachievement, and literacy, assessment that depends on high-stakes testing systems, and students reliance on memorization and rote learning. These challenges represent obstacles to EFL teaching/learning improvement (Syed, 2003). There is a huge demand for better English teaching/learning in Saudi Arabia; however, to achieve this goal, several major changes need to take place (Liton, 2012; Syed, 2003).

According to Syed (2003), although some efforts from the Ministry of Education took place to develop EFL teaching/learning along with money invested to do so, very little research has been conducted in the Arabian Gulf and this is basically because of a lack of research culture in the region.
Research is not actively sought to provide insights into problems or issues, nor are its findings incorporated in meaningful ways. Research, or systematic inquiry, and critical reflection on experience are the principal sources for constructing a knowledge base. The lack of an established knowledge base from which to draw and the underutilizing of research as a tool often leads to ahistorical initiatives that reinvent the wheel and to uninformed decisions about program development, curriculum design, assessment and pedagogy. The region needs to make a concentrated effort to establish a research agenda and build a sound knowledge base. (Syed, 2003, p. 340)

The lack of research makes it impossible to make evidence-based recommendations for EFL teaching/learning. Thus there is a need for getting all stakeholders involved in the process of structural change and real growth to encourage research that initiate recommendations for improving EFL teaching and learning in the gulf countries (Syed, 2003).

In EFL learning, the bulk of the responsibility for achieving the desired outcomes rests with EFL instructors (Al-Hajailan, 2003; Abu Ayyash, 2015). For example, EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia are required to help students develop and appreciate English as a foreign language (Crystal, 2003). The government also expects EFL instructors to help students understand other cultures, and share Saudi culture with members of other cultures (Cook, 1991). Through communicative competence, the Saudi government similarly expects EFL instructors to help students appreciate and share scientific and technological knowledge as a way to advance Islamic history, culture, and tradition (Litton, 2012).

However, many issues hinder the achievement of these objectives. The poor interpretation or implementation of EFL curriculum and the lack of sufficient support for EFL
instructors are central to the failure to achieve the above objectives. A study that evaluated the current and future prospects of EFL learning in Saudi Arabia established that there was a significant lack of motivation among EFL instructors (Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009). The researchers traced the lack of motivation to a poor perception of EFL learning among students and a failure to appreciate the objectives of EFL learning in Saudi Arabia from society (Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009). Some pedagogical approaches used in EFL classrooms are also an obstacle to student achievement, for example, “spoon-feeding” (Abu Ayyash, 2015). This approach aims to minimalize learners’ mistakes by interrupting them to correct them and tell them what they should have said. “By doing so, teachers must be unable to understand that the significance of the learner's mistakes is part of the learning process” (Abu Ayyash, 2015, p. 161). However, there is a significant gap in the literature about how to address these challenges beyond endorsement of conventional models of teacher education. More specifically, there is a gap in literature regarding the lack of motivation among EFL instructors and its effect on their learning process. This is not only true for Saudi Arabia, but also the wider Middle East region (Lee, 1995).

Saudi Arabia has a close, restrictive educational system that does not provide freedom for teachers to use their knowledge, creativity, and decision-making powers. Moreover, the fixed and rigid EFL program provided in the university “hinders teachers’ creativity and has a negative impact on teachers’ performance” (Sibahi, 2015, p. 347). The power hierarchy that forbids the kinds of things that make change possible is very well established. But it is self-defeating to demand an increase in EFL competence on the one hand and allow no changes on the other hand. An understanding of the interdependency among the variables teachers/teaching, curriculum, and learning could provide the basis from which to improve learning outcomes. This would give us
insight into how traditional conceptions of teaching, curriculum, and learning may affect the achievement of EFL competence among students. If a higher level of EFL competency is required, active and engaged teachers are required. In order to achieve this, we have to understand the effects of teachers’ view and understanding of curriculum on curriculum implementation and teacher and student learning.

Curriculum

Curriculum as a “document.” Curriculum is often seen as a document that describes the subject matter of a course and, in varying degrees of detail, the teaching strategies and “lesson plans” intended to facilitate student learning and performance in that course (Goodson, 1997; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013; Posner & Rudnisty, 1982; Roh, 2006). This limited view of curriculum is problematic because it constrains teachers to defined content and ways of teaching and leaves no place for the experiences and knowledge they have gained from teaching (Goodson, 1997; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013; Posner & Rudnisty, 1982). Viewing curriculum as a document leads to implication that the written curriculum is irrelevant to practice because not all what takes place in the classrooms exists in the document (Goodson, 1997). Rudolph (1977, as cited in Goodson, 1997, p. 13) warned us: “The best way to misread or misunderstand a curriculum is from a catalogue. It is such a lifeless thing, so disembodied, so unconnected, sometimes intentionally misleading.” It is important to know how teachers interpret the goals of a curriculum document and how they connect it with the reality of classroom practice because this affects students learning (Goodson, 1997). Although most people understand curriculum as a document, it is much more than that (Doll, 1996). Not everything teachers need and will experience in the classroom can be provided by a document or text or lesson plan (Hewitt, 2006). It is the time for changing
traditional/conventional conceptions of curriculum in schools, colleges, and universities for improved teaching and learning (Jackson, 2010).

In Saudi Arabia’s educational context curriculum is largely understood as a narrow and structured document (Liton, 2012). More complex theories of curriculum are underrepresented in the region. This is in part due to the political, top-down organization that dictates that traditional approaches and conceptions be used in education (Alghamdi, 2014). Therefore, given that there is a call for improved student learning in Saudi Arabia, there is a need to understand that curriculum is not static. Implementation will be different according to the needs of the students in a particular classroom (Al-Hajailan, 2003). Curriculum is, thus, better understood as something that moves, that is alive, that changes. If that is the case then what happens in a system where curriculum is static and cannot move, as it is in Saudi Arabia.

**Curriculum as a “currere.”** Connelly and Clandinin (1988) describe curriculum:

Curriculum is often taken to mean a course of study. When we set our imagination free from the narrow notion that a course of study is a series of textbooks or specific outline of topics to be covered and objectives to be attained, broader and more meaningful notions emerge. A curriculum can become one’s life course of action. It can mean the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow. (p. 1)

A broader and more inclusive understanding of curriculum sets the stage for understanding teaching and learning more deeply (Pinar, 2004). The curriculum should reflect the complexities and contexts in which teaching and learning take place. Indeed, since student learning depends on effective teaching (Dewey, 1916), it is critical to examine the current
understanding of curriculum and investigate how to develop new understandings that will lead to improved teaching and improved learning outcomes. What if we interpret curriculum as something like the journey we take with knowledge? It is the journey teachers take when they experience, understand, see, hear, and talk to each other. It is more complex than what can be captured in a book or document (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Pinar, 2004). The more teachers think of curriculum as a journey of knowledge that includes the narrative of their own experiences, the more meaningful the curriculum will be.

The more we understand ourselves and can articulate reasons why we are what we are, do what we do, and are headed where we have chosen, the more meaningful our curriculum will be. The process of making sense and meaning of our curriculum, that is, of the narratives of our experience, is both difficult and rewarding. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 11)

Curriculum as a “currere” sets the stage for viewing the curriculum as a journey or a walk that teachers take with knowledge. This journey involves four steps: regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetic. Pinar (2004) introduced the four-step conceptual framework to reflect on curriculum theory and public education. Pinar’s four-step process includes retelling the story of one’s educational experiences (regressive), imagining future possibilities for self-understanding and educational practice (progressive); analyzing of the relationships between past, present and future life history and practice (analytic); and informing new ways of thinking about education (synthetic).

Pinar (2004) argued:

The method of currere reconceptualized curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversation with oneself (as a “private” intellectual), an ongoing
project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action – as a private-and-public intellectual – with others in the social reconstruction of the public sphere. Curriculum theory asks you, as a prospective or practicing teacher, to consider your position as engaged with yourself and your students and colleagues in the construction of a public sphere, a public sphere not yet born, a future that cannot be discerned in, or even thought from, the present. So conceived, the classroom becomes simultaneously a civic square and a room of one’s own. (pp. 37–38)

Reconceptualized curriculum theory focuses on the experiences of the teacher/learner and their reflection on and articulation of these experiences (Cary, 2006; Jackson, 2010; Roh, 2006). These reflections become the incentive for transformation (Pinar, 2004). The experiences and knowledge teachers gain from teaching are essential for improved teaching and learning. Thus, including them in teaching and learning have the potential to shift the view of curriculum from a fixed document to a journey of learning. “Currere as a curriculum theory was strong enough to have the potential to move beyond the traditional focus of the curriculum debate from more deterministic positivistic positions” (Cary, 2006, p. 148).

Teachers’ experiences and knowledge contribute to their understanding of curriculum beyond the narrow conception of it as a prescribed document with daily lesson plans. Such live experience is not discovered in measured or pre-packaged curriculum that focuses on uniform order, linear sequence, and those Tylerian systems of curriculum related to rationalism, scientism, modernism, and behaviorism. Instead as Pinar (1995) asserts, curriculum in pursuit of Live-experience should be informal and individual in order to accommodate students’ needs and teachers’
interests. In order to vitalize and activate students’ Live-experience, a curriculum should transcend the simplistic teacher-proof curriculum, standardized evaluation, practices, and conventional conceptions of learning as taught in many Korean EFL classes. (Roh, 2006, p. 151)

In the classrooms, teachers encounter the challenge of how to generate learning in a particular group of students. The traditional model is based on the notion that students receive the knowledge being passed to them by their teachers. However, in reality sometimes they do not really get it, and if they do, teachers do not know how that transfer takes place without engaging the students in the journey. What happens then?

The traditional view of the transmission of knowledge was evident in the EFL classes I observed in Saudi Arabia. I have been unable to find much Saudi research on how to deal with the failure of traditional pedagogy, particularly not at the university level, and so that became a problem to be addressed in this research. This research addresses that gap by exploring how EFL teachers’ understanding and conceptions of curriculum affect EFL teaching and learning at the university level.

**Curriculum implementation.** In 1980, curriculum implementation became a major educational concern in the US because of the millions of dollars that had been spent developing it; however, many developed curriculum projects failed because of problems in the implementation. Sarason (1990) argued that educational reform in the form of new curricula failed because the people who were charged with curriculum development lacked an understanding of the culture of the schools. According to Wiles and Bondi (2011), 90% of planned and developed curricula fail to be implemented because teachers lack two things: the managerial skills and the knowledge necessary to deliver the new curriculum. Research indicates
that the implementation of a new curriculum requires restructuring and replacement of traditional conceptions of implementation that lies on following the document or the book (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013; Wiles & Bondi, 2011). For successful implementation to take place, several important points have to be considered, such as “adjusting personal habits, ways of behaving, program emphases, learning spaces, and existing curricula and schedules” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013, p. 217).

If curriculum is viewed as a document then implementation means following orders. Implementation means read the lesson, follow the script, and give the test (Pinar, 2004). Implementation means doing what you are told. In Saudi Arabia, from my experience as a teacher, teachers have to follow the books and the lesson plans as they are written. Teachers are not allowed to contribute to curriculum (Liton, 2012). If this is the case, it means teachers do not have opportunities and time to think about different ways to implement the curriculum. Teachers most of the time are frustrated trying to meet deadlines and the university agendas (Sibahi, 2015). Even if they think they should really do a certain thing but it contradicts with what they were dictated to do, they would not be able to do it. For example, when teachers think the students are not ready for that test but they have to take it anyway. Another example is when teachers are not able to cover a specific part in the curriculum in a specific time but they have to. “In such contexts, both teachers and students risk becoming merely functionaries for received knowledge” (Kooy & Colarusso, 2012, p. 83). This version of implementation is simply transmitting received knowledge, not teaching, and so what happens when curriculum is viewed as a box and the knowledge is controlled, and teachers are expected to pick up the box and put it in the heads of the students for the tests, it is what Freire (2000) called the “banking model”.
When teaching is defined as following orders, then learning possibilities are curtailed. Learning is ongoing and it is active.

The successful implementation of the broader concept of curriculum, that is curriculum as a journey, depends on the contribution of teachers. Curriculum as a currere (i.e., journey) includes all the experiences that take place in the class, it is complex and unpredictable and cannot be fully captured in a document (Pinar, 2004). Using this broader concept of curriculum, teachers use their personal understanding of the curriculum and their experience as teachers to establish what works best for their students (Freire, 2000). The contributions of teachers in the curriculum implementation process are an important part of curriculum development in the broader sense. The importance of teachers in this process is grounded on the fact that they understand the students better than the other education stakeholders do (Freire, 2000). Therefore, while the state may outline the skills and competencies required of teachers implementing school curricula, teachers provide significant insight to superiors in work into what resources they need for implementing the curriculum when they are asked for their opinions. Indeed, through the contribution of teachers to the curriculum implementation process, it may be easier to understand how a specific teaching activity devised by teachers in the classroom fits in the lesson. Teachers may also provide insight into whether or not the curriculum will engage the students (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013).

Research indicates that teachers make decisions and choose between alternative actions several times during a lesson based on several factors, for example, the students’ responses. Tanner and Tanner (2007) explained, “Curriculum development is something that all teachers do. In the classroom they do it behind closed doors. No one can control all the decisions that teachers make even during a highly specified (‘scripted’) lesson” (p. 405).
Research indicates that the quality of the initial planning of a new curriculum and the precision of the steps taken to develop the curriculum play a critical role in the readiness of the teachers to implement it (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Moreover, teachers’ feelings about how prepared they are to meet the expectations of the developed curriculum is the most powerful indicator of their ability to implement the curriculum. If they do not feel well prepared and equipped, how can they function well professionally? (Tanner & Tanner, 2007). Wiles and Bondi (2011) commented: “Any top-down curriculum change succeeds only if it is endorsed and promoted by a knowledgeable and trusted classroom teacher. We believe that successful curriculum improvement is always a bottom-up procedure at the school site” (p. 170).

Teachers have developed new knowledge and skills in the area of curriculum implementation by conceptualizing the methodologies and outcomes of the process (Guskey, 2000). Thus, their voices and experiences should be included. Oliva and Gordon (2013) and Doll (1996) supported this view and suggested a bottom-up approach that includes teachers’ voices in the development of curriculum rather than the top-down approach they believed creates revulsion among teachers.

Doll (1996) suggested that teachers should be included in every phase of curriculum development including deciding the objectives, planning the goals, and designing the materials, content, and methods. He also argued that teachers should cooperate with supervisors in order to work together to develop curriculum. Doll (1996) pointed out that:

Critics of attempts at school reform have said that many reforms ignore the power of people and emphasize instead the usefulness of things, have their basis in worn-out or partially incorrect assumptions, and capitalize on ready made plans that admit little thinking by people in the field. Real change, in contrast, is more
likely to occur when key persons, including teachers, make decisions about what is to be planned, begin their planning within local settings, struggle to eliminate barriers to reform, and stimulate people’s will to change even at the risk of making mistakes. (p. 310)

Some scholars go further, arguing that teachers are the primary or only players in curriculum development (Oliva & Gordon, 2013; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Although textbooks and other materials are important in the development of curriculum, they should play a secondary role:

Teachers must still make informed decisions about the purposes of learning certain information, what content to stress, what materials to emphasize, and how to sequence such materials. Further, teachers must decide what instructional strategies to use and what student activities are essential and appropriate for diverse class members. Also, teachers must select various assessment instruments and processes to support their teaching and students’ learnings. (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013, p. 179)

Occasionally, educational stakeholders in Saudi Arabia put pressure on teachers into adopting new techniques for teaching EFL (Al-Naqbi, 2011). As a result, some instructors develop a “this too will pass attitude” to the EFL curriculum because they believe that as the curriculum ages authorities above them will force them to adopt yet another set of techniques (Ministry of Education, 1994). When instructors perceive what they are doing negatively, students’ learning outcomes are negatively affected (Guskey, 2000). On the other hand, creating opportunities for discussions between teachers helps them to gain a new understanding of the
Some educators use the broader conception of curriculum to improve learning. For example, according to Wiles (2008), EFL learning in Saudi Arabia pays close attention to the background, culture, and social changes of the region. For example, religion, social norms, and global events have an enormous effect on curriculum implementation in Saudi Arabia. Taking a broader approach of curriculum allows implementation to take into account social and cultural factors. This approach to curriculum implementation outlines the situational approach of curriculum implementation because the context and needs of the society are the main drivers of curriculum implementation. Including local Saudi issues in the EFL curriculum would encourage active learning among the students as they could more easily relate to what they were being taught (Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009). If we adopt a broader understanding of curriculum in the Saudi context, school administrators would need to take into account the contextual factors that might affect the curriculum implementation process, in particular social and political factors. This would require an understanding of teachers’ views about EFL teaching and how they implement the curriculum.

Saudi Arabia encourages Saudis to participate in international affairs and to explore global opportunities. To facilitate this, there is a concerted effort from the government to support EFL learning. However, this support does not include allowing teachers to have input into curriculum development (Liton, 2012). Moreover, there is a strong emphasis on following curriculum step by step, and little acknowledgement that what happens in the classroom between teachers and learners is a big part of the teaching and learning process (Liton, 2012).
The review of the literature presents a gap in considering teachers’ views of curriculum and the impact of their views on the implementation process and the learning outcomes. There is a need to conduct research that investigates teachers’ views of curriculum and their implementation in EFL in Saudi Arabia. This may lead to some recommendations and suggestions that will be helpful for improving teaching and learning in that context.

Learning

**Teacher learning.** The issue of teacher learning is relatively new on the landscape and research in this area has been increasing over the last 20 years (Kooy & Colarusso, 2012). It used to be called teacher development, which consisted of teachers being sent to workshops to make changes happen based on the workshops. Studies have shown, however, that this approach is ineffective (Kooy, 2006; Little, 2012). These workshops are imposed and are conducted by experts in the area of the topic presented in them. These experts try to transmit the knowledge, the expertise they have to teachers (Kooy, 2006; Kooy & Colarusso, 2012; Little, 2012). This top-down model does not result in improved teaching and student learning in most cases because the subjects of the workshops are not relevant to teachers’ needs and the workshops are imposed on them (Kooy, 2006; Kooy & Colarusso, 2012; Little, 2012). More recently, the emphasis has been on self-directed teacher learning in small groups that is learning socially through interactions and discussions between teachers. This transition focuses on the start with teachers’ knowledge, what they know rather than transmitting knowledge to teachers from workshops (Kooy, 2006; Little, 2012). Learning as a social act has been proved to be a very effective method of education (Goodlad, 1984). In this model, teachers are encouraged to discuss issues among themselves to share knowledge about how to solve the problems that the learners may face (Little, 2003).
Research posits that conditions for improving teaching and learning are strengthened when teachers collectively question ineffective teaching routines, examine new conceptions of teaching and learning, find generative means to acknowledge and respond to difference and conflict, and engage actively in supporting one another’s professional growth. (Little, 2003, p. 913)

As learning goals are advanced, the demand for better teacher education increases, too (Little, 2012). There has been no research done on what the actual effects of professional development (PD) workshops are (Kooy, 2006). They are still mandated and teachers are still not asked what they want to learn about or what they need (Kooy, 2006; Little, 2012). But, if we want real teacher learning (learning as an active verb) then we need research into what effective teacher learning looks like. What are the conditions of such learning? If we want to shift away from the traditional concept of teacher learning to one of teacher learning for development, we need to change our vision of teacher learning.

Research on teacher learning mirrors research describing all learning as negotiated, social in nature and therefore developed through dialogic interaction. This critical relationship between teacher learning and student learning goes under-researched, yet is central to the capacity for teacher knowledge to translate into classroom practice. Teachers with access to professional learning experiences that allow them to communicate their tacit knowledge of teaching and student learning are empowered through dialogue in a social context. (Kooy & Colarusso, 2012, pp. 80–81)
Teachers talking together could provide insights into learning, which would consequently improve student learning (Kooy, 2006). This is a very beneficial and durable method of problem solving (Kooy, 2006; Kooy & Colarusso, 2012; Little, 2012).

On the other hand, if learning is not treated as a social process, it raises a source of challenge. Instructors would not know the outcome of what they are teaching learners, in that they would not know if their methodology is right or wrong because they are teaching in isolation and they are not sharing their teaching concerns and experiences with other teachers to get feedback and new insights in teaching (Kooy, 2006; Kooy & Colarusso, 2012; Little, 2012). This would be a source of panic because where there is no discussion; it only means that students will be gaining from only one source that is their classrooms teacher (Bates & Poole 2003). Ideas and knowledge are exchanged between teachers and learners, as such; the lack of exchanging ideas between teachers would simply mean that very little content would be conveyed to learners (Little, 2012).

Since it has been proven that learning conceived of as a social act is very beneficial to students, it is important for educational institutions to involve teachers in free sharing sessions where teachers can exchange ideas and conversations that help their professional growth (Little, 2012; Oliva, 1989). Many institutions would, therefore, provide time for the teachers to interact (Little, 2012; Oliva, 1989; Tanner & Tanner, 2007). Another school of thought is that the same benefits could be realized through the use of discussions between the teachers and the students for topics such as what they would like to learn about and what they need as learners. Research has shown that discussions of this kind are fruitful. In such situations, the teachers have to have an open relationship with their students so that the students will share their ideas and opinions
with them (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). This method is sometimes called the feedback method: the students give the feedback to the teacher (Richards & Lockhart, 1994).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) found that most people interested in improving learning, such as policy makers, politician, parents, researchers, and school-based leaders, recognize the role of teachers as key to educational change and know that teachers are critical to the success and improvement of educational settings and learning. However, according to the reality, “the goal of teacher learning initiatives is to make teachers more faithful implementers of received knowledge and curriculum; subject matter is a more or less static object to be transmitted from teachers to students” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, pp. 1–2). If people understand teaching this way, then the practical knowledge teachers gain from teaching is ignored. This view could be the reason why teacher learning that takes place as teachers teach is not considered to be a factor in the improvement of education (Kooy, 2006; Kooy & Colarusso, 2012; Little, 2012). Although this is the real teacher learning, not the learning in PD workshops, it is neglected. The literature of PD shows clearly that sending teachers to one- or two-day workshops where they are supposed to receive knowledge and then go the next day to apply that knowledge in the classroom does not work (Kooy, 2006; Little, 2012; Loughran, 2012).

The need to develop teachers who can conceptualize, evaluate, and modify their procedures has been emphasized by educational theorists for centuries. Today it is also increasingly important for teachers to collaborate (Tanner & Tanner, 2007). It is believed that teachers learn when they are studying, reflecting, collaborating with other teachers, and looking at the students in their classrooms. This type of learning does not happen in the teachers’ colleges separated from practice (Richards, 2001; Tanner & Tanner, 2007). The environment in universities and schools provides teachers with many opportunities for research and inquiry, for
testing and trying, and for speaking about and evaluating the results of learning and teaching (Macdonald, 2002).

**Student learning.** In schools, there is an emphasis on the view that students busy doing work not necessarily being engaged active learners. This is true of most Western countries and Eastern ones including Saudi Arabia (Loughran & Russell, 2007). The conventional conception of learning in schools views learning as static, unalterable, and measurable by tests (Bawazeer, 2015). “Established hierarchies and power relations [in education] counter any force to negotiate and alter existing patterns” (Kooy & Colarusso, 2012, p. 83). In schools, students are asked to soak up as much information as they can in a short period of time and teachers are asked to deliver lots of information to cover the curriculum and prepare students for tests (Kooy & Colarusso, 2012).

In such contexts, both teachers and students risk becoming merely functionaries for received knowledge. But this presents a complex conundrum. Even when teachers prepare to resist the narrowed perceptions of learning as transmission and initiate including student voice and establish social groupings for dialogue and learning, many students are not immediately prepared to abandon the familiar. (Kooy & Colarusso, 2012, p. 83)

This suggests that students need to understand the reasons behind changes as well. It is important to invite students to engage in a dialogue with teachers to discuss learning issues in classrooms, question unsuccessful practices, and suggest alternatives (Cook-Sather, 2008). The ideal school environment, as articulated by Cook-Sather (2009), is one where students are viewed as active participants in the educational process and their voices “included as part of an
ongoing discussion, and listening and speaking are the twin responsibilities of all parties” (p. 233).

Research indicates that teachers can benefit significantly by listening closely to what students have to say (Cook-Sather, 2006; Holdsworth, 2000; Kooy & Colarusso, 2012; Lewis, 2001). Including opportunities for students to voice their opinions is essential for learning efficiency because students can better understand their learning process. When this happens, students are able to maximize their learning potential (Yonezawa & Jones, 2009). Moreover, “when students are able to articulate how they learn best, their teachers are able to perform better in meeting the needs of the students” (Alghamdi, 2014, p. 329). Learning in school should be viewed as social and dynamic and students’ opinions should be taken into account (Kooy & Colarusso, 2012).

The ability of teachers “to observe, diagnose, and respond to students presenting behavioral/learning difficulties” (Wassermann, 2015, p. 87) frames the teacher’s role and effect on student learning. This may explain why students learn better in some classrooms than others although teachers share the same curriculum (Shawer, 2010). Students’ learning patterns are essential to their learning success.

One of the most important implications for practice is the realization that there are qualitatively different learning patterns and that some patterns are better than others in view of the knowledge they lead to, and in view of the preparation for lifelong learning competence. Assessing the learning patterns of their own student population may give a teacher, a faculty, or an institution a view of the dominant student learning patterns. (Vermunt & Vermetten, 2004, p. 381)
Moreover, student engagement both in the classroom and in the school or university community is an important indicator of learning and personal development. “Students who are involved in educationally productive activities in college are developing habits of the mind and heart that enlarge their capacity for continuous learning and personal development” (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006, p. 2). Student engagement in the classroom is linked positively to desirable learning outcomes such as critical thinking and problem solving (Carini et al., 2006). Mistakenly, some teachers and administrators think that student learning can be imposed from the outside. But research has shown that this is not the case. Learning is internal and students cannot be forced to learn but have to be engaged and interested (Alghamdi, 2014; Bawazeer, 2015; Vermunt & Vermetten, 2004).

**What the Literature Tells Us**

Although the literature review is divided into three main sections: teachers/teaching, curriculum, and learning, this is not meant to suggest that these concepts are independent. They are interconnected in the research that informs this study. The literature indicates the importance of changing our traditional conceptions of teachers/teaching and curriculum and learning new ways of thinking about them, supported by research, in order to improve teaching, curriculum, and learning.

When teachers are seen as transmitters of knowledge or information and teaching is seen as informing or telling or transmitting information, this affects curriculum implementation, teachers’ learning and students’ learning. When curriculum is seen as a document, a prescribed package, implementation means follow the orders, use the prescribed materials, and prepare students for the tests. This view is limited and ignores essential aspects of teaching and learning. But if curriculum is viewed as a currere, a journey that both teachers and learners take with
knowledge, a new way of viewing curriculum emerges and this will contribute to teacher learning, student learning, and curriculum implementation. When learning is viewed as static, unalterable, imposed externally, and measured through tests, this affects student learning negatively because student learning is social and about problem solving and it is internal; students have to be engaged, teachers cannot impose learning on them.

Teachers are often left out of discussions on learning. The focus tends to be on student learning although we know that teachers need to be lifelong learners. Teacher learning is important for their practice. But what ongoing teacher education there is tends to be imposed and external in the form of PD workshops. Teachers are not asked what they want or need to learn about. But what happens when teachers discuss their own learning needs with other teachers and what happens when we view teacher learning as a social act and about knowledge building? Teachers need to apply knowledge in content or nothing will happen.

EFL teaching and learning encounter a lot of challenges in Saudi Arabia. There is a demand for increased EFL competence among learners from the Ministry of Education; however, little has been done to achieve this goal and the students’ acquisition of English is meager. The ruling authorities in Saudi Arabia follow the traditional conceptions of teaching, curriculum, and learning. As a result, teacher-centered reforms are not possible. But the Ministry of Education cannot demand an increase in EFL competence on the one hand and make no changes on the other. If we are hoping to increase EFL competence at the university level, it is important to understand how EFL instructors view curriculum and how their views affect curriculum implementation, teaching, and student learning. This is a gap in the literature with respect to these issues that is addressed by this study.
A lack of understanding of the nature of EFL teaching and learning at the university level reveals issues related to the obstacles EFL instructors face and the support they need. The present study provided EFL instructors with an opportunity to discuss the nature of the EFL curriculum, teaching, and learning at the university level in Saudi Arabia.

In chapter two, I presented the traditional conceptions in viewing teachers, teaching, curriculum and learning and explained how these traditional conventional views are dominant. I argued that it is critical to change these traditional conceptions to improve teaching, curriculum and learning. Chapter three details the research design and methodology and explains the study rationale, how the data were collected and analyzed and all the ethical considerations.
Chapter Three: Research Design

This descriptive case study inquiry-based on a single case, examines EFL curriculum, teaching and learning at the university level in Saudi Arabia in a specific context. The complexity of the case called for a qualitative methodology for the collection and analysis of data. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study is two-fold: to describe how EFL instructors understand and implement the university-level English curriculum, and to explore how EFL instructors view English teaching and learning in the context in which they work. In this study, nine female EFL instructors who teach in the foundation year at a major university in Saudi Arabia volunteered for the study. This study is new to the Saudi research context. Consequently, a detailed description is required to establish a base for further studies in the future.

The study was designed to investigate the case in detail in order to reach a deep understanding of EFL, curriculum, teaching and learning at university level in Saudi Arabia. Case studies gather data from different sources such as documents, interviews, and observations to develop the analysis (Yin, 2014). Thus, this research involved the analysis of 18 individual interviews for nine participants, observation field notes, and three focus group discussions with seven of the participants. Data were collected from multiple resources to develop a deep understanding and detailed description of the context of the study.

In order to develop a framework for analyzing the data collected, I established an initial framework based on personal/professional experience as well as findings based on a review of the literature that exists on the topic (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This framework was refined and completed as the analysis was completed. To provide a better understanding of the methodology applied in this particular context, in this chapter I describe the research rationale. Next, the
chapter presents a description of the research design. Then, I describe the sampling and population and an introduction of the participants by pseudonym. Afterwards, the research approach, paradigm and conceptual framework are detailed. Finally I discuss how the data were collected and analyzed and the ethical and validity considerations involved.

**Overall research question.** How do EFL instructors negotiate and understand the place of curriculum, teaching, and learning at the university level in Saudi Arabia?

**Specific research questions.**

1. How do participating EFL instructors understand and implement the foundation year EFL university curriculum?

2. How do these EFL instructors understand the factors affecting students’ learning?

3. How do these EFL instructors re-imagine teaching and learning in the EFL curriculum?

4. What support for EFL instructors would facilitate improved English teaching and learning?

**Research Design**

A descriptive case study design was used for this research study to describe and explore EFL curriculum, teaching and learning in the foundation year at the university level to determine how EFL instructors negotiate and understand the place of curriculum as well as how they implement the curriculum. I investigated how the participants interpret the ways the curriculum is mandated, tested, and used for learning English and how this impacts their teaching and the students’ learning. I investigated how the context in which the EFL instructors work affects their views and implementation of curriculum, EFL teaching and learning, and how EFL teaching and learning can be improved from EFL instructors’ perspectives.
The study attempts to take into account the multiple, complex variables and events that contribute to EFL teaching and learning. To address these research questions, I conducted two individual interviews with each participant and three focus group discussions with seven of the participants. The participants comprised nine female EFL instructors who teach English in the foundation year. During this qualitative study, I took notes while conducting the interviews and focus group discussions and I observed several English classes in order to explore the similarities and differences between interview statements and actual teaching. Data collected through observation was done through note taking and each instructor was provided a pseudonym to protect her identity. Each participant willingly volunteered for the study and signed consent forms.

Qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood.

(Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544)

A case study approach allows the researcher to answer questions of “how” and “why” with the focus on how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Also, the case study approach is used when the investigator cannot control the events (Yin, 2014). The focus of the case study is on a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context. It is useful when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined and investigation is required to reveal the context (Punch, 2009). Case studies may be designed to study a particular situation, a particular program, traits, or behaviors (Lichtman, 2010).
The research context in which the data were collected in this study is unique and specific. The case is a certain intensive English language program that takes place at a major university in Saudi Arabia. The descriptive case study approach was the best approach for this study, the aim of which is to describe in depth how EFL instructors view and implement the curriculum taking into account the context in which they teach. Case study research allows the investigator to reach a deep understanding of a case and then report “the meaning of the case, whether that meaning comes from learning about the issue of the case (an instrumental case) or learning about an unusual situation (an intrinsic case)” (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). In this research, the aim of my study is to describe the meaning of the case based on an in-depth exploration and the production of thick descriptions. Researchers suggest defining boundaries for the case study under investigation to keep it reasonable in scope (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). The researcher bounds the case under investigation by time and place (Creswell, 2007). In my case the data collection took place over four months at the English Language Institute at a major university in Saudi Arabia (particularly the English program). A single holistic descriptive case study approach was chosen because I was able to collect data from several individuals in one environment/context. This form of case study will provide a better understanding of the phenomena (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Although using case studies seems to be an appropriate match for this type for research, it is not without its limitations. Generalizing information from a case study to a larger population can be problematic (Merriam, 1998). Since case studies often focused on one example, it risks not being representative of other situations, demographics, or populations (Merriam, 1998). This makes researchers reluctant to use the case study approach because it provides no basis for generalization (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). However, according to Flyvbjerg (2006), “It is incorrect to conclude that one cannot generalize from a single case. It depends on the case one is
speaking of and how it is chosen” (p. 225). This limitation can be considered a strength, as it allows the researcher to provide its audience with an extremely detailed description of events, which can then be used as a template to follow in their current situation (Stake, 2005). As case studies include a variety of other techniques, it can be considered a more complete approach to investigating qualitative research questions.

Another traditional prejudice against case study is that it is prone to a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions. Flyvbjerg (2006) responds to this, “The question of subjectivism and bias toward verification applies to all methods, not just to the case study and other qualitative methods” (p. 235). Case study, like any other qualitative methods, has its challenges, limitations, and strengths. However, it is the research purpose, questions, and objectives that determine which approach best fits the study and, as explained in this section, case study was the best approach for this inquiry.

**Rationale for Research**

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3)
The study used a qualitative research methodology to collect and analyze data. Qualitative research design was used because it is most appropriate for the collection of the in-depth and rich information essential to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Certainly, by using a qualitative research design, it was easier to obtain rich and in-depth data regarding the experiences of the EFL instructors in the context in which they work (Boxill, 1997). A qualitative research design allows the researcher to treat participants uniquely and pay close attention to the quality of each and every response (Silverman, 2009). The main advantage of the adoption of the qualitative research method is its ability to capture the experiences and sentiments of the participants, in this case of teachers with regard to EFL teaching, learning, and curriculum in the foundation year. Creswell (2007) distinguished between five qualitative approaches: Narrative, Phenomenology, Ethnography, Grounded Theory, and Case Study. Each approach has its strengths and challenges/limitations and the approach should be chosen according to the purpose of the study and the goal of the researcher. The case study approach was chosen as the research approach for this qualitative inquiry.

**Participants and their pseudonyms.** In order to investigate the ways EFL instructors negotiate and understand the place of curriculum, teaching, and learning in university while teaching in Saudi Arabia, and to explore how EFL instructors deal with a prescribed curriculum, EFL instructors teaching in the foundation year in a major university volunteered to participate in this study. To recruit the participants, an email was sent with a letter that explained the study and the process to 20 EFL instructors who were selected by the chief coordinator of the language program (see Appendix A). She selected them randomly from the instructors’ list because she thought that half at least would participate since I only wanted nine or 10 participants. She stated clearly in the email that whoever is willing to participate should contact the researcher and she
included my contact information. Nine out of a potential 20 female instructors volunteered to participate and replied to the email expressing their willingness to be part of the study. Then all the participants signed the consent form prior to data collection (see Appendix B). Although no monetary benefit was provided, food and drinks were provided in the focus group discussions and key chains as gifts were distributed to all the instructors after data collection completion as a means of showing appreciation for their participation in the study. Below are the pseudonyms for the participants of the study.

**Samar.** Samar completed her K-12 in private schools. Her undergraduate degree is in English literature and linguistics from Saudi Arabia. She obtained her master’s degree from the United Kingdom in linguistics. She worked in several administrative jobs before she started teaching. She did not have any teaching experience or training prior to working as a teacher. She decided to become a teacher because she felt that the hours of work supported her role as a mother. Upon beginning this study, she had been teaching for six years. Initially, she started in the career as an elementary teacher in UK for two years before she tried working as TOEFL teacher for a year. At the time of the study she was an EFL instructor in the English Language Institute and had been there for three years. She speaks English, Urdu, and Arabic.

**Shatha.** Shatha completed her K-12 in private schools. Her undergraduate degree is in English language and literature from Saudi Arabia. She completed teaching training practicums as part of her undergraduate degree. Shatha did not want teaching to be her career but became a teacher because it was an opportunity for a job presented to her. Her dream was to be a translator and open a translation agency. She had been a teacher for six years. Initially, she taught high school for two years in a private school in Saudi Arabia before working as an EFL instructor in
the English Language Institute where she had been for over four years. She speaks English and Arabic.

**Lena.** Lena completed her K-12 in private schools. Her undergraduate degree is in English literature and linguistics from Saudi Arabia. She worked in an administrative job for one year and then applied for a teaching job. She had no formal teacher training experience prior to working as a teacher aside from a few informal training sessions she attended when she was a tutor. After the first year she realized that teaching was what she wanted to do and what she was passionate about. She had been an EFL instructor for more than four years in the English Language Institute at the time of the study. She planned to go to US to obtain a master’s degree in TESOL. She speaks English and Arabic.

**Manar.** Manar completed her K-12 in public schools. Her undergraduate degree is in English language from Saudi Arabia. She completed teaching training practicums as part of her undergraduate studies. She obtained her master’s degree from the US in TESOL. She became a teacher because she had been very passionate about teaching since she was a student and could not imagine herself doing any job except teaching. She had been an EFL instructor in the English Language Institute for more than three years at the time of the study. She speaks English and Arabic.

**Hanan.** Hanan completed her K-12 in public schools. Her undergraduate degree is in English language from Saudi Arabia. She completed teaching training practicums as part of her undergraduate degree. She became a teacher because she believes that teaching is the best job for graduates who have an undergraduate degree in English. She had been a teacher for just over five years at the time of the study. She taught for one and one-half years in a private school before moving to teach at a university where she was for two years. After that, she moved to teach in
another university for a year. Finally, she became an EFL instructor in the English Language Institute and had been there for one year at the time of the study. She speaks English and Arabic.

**Ahlam.** Ahlam completed her K-12 in both public and private schools. Her undergraduate degree is in English literature from Saudi Arabia. She did not have any teaching training experience prior to working as a teacher. She did not plan to become a teacher; however, when the opportunity presented itself, she accepted. She started to work as a teacher after graduation in a private school. After a semester she left the school and worked as a training assistant for a commerce and industry company for one year. While there she realized that teaching was the job that best fits her. As a result, she left the job to go to the US to obtain a master’s degree in TESOL. When she returned to Saudi Arabia, she was hired as an EFL instructor in the English Language Institute and had been working there for one year. She speaks English and Arabic.

**Maryam.** Maryam spent her first few years in school in Jordan. Then she completed her schooling in Saudi Arabia in private schools until her final year, which she did in a public school. Her undergraduate degree is in English language and literature from Saudi Arabia. She completed teaching training practicum as part of her undergraduate studies. She decided to be a teacher because she felt it was a job that had hours that would also permit her to successfully perform her roles as a mother. She had been a teacher for 23 years at the time of the study; however, she had only been an EFL instructor in the English Language Institute for three of those years. Besides teaching, she was a coordinator for one of the levels in the English Language Institute. She speaks English, Turkish, and Arabic.

**Warda.** Warda completed her K-12 in public schools. Her undergraduate degree is in English language and literature from Saudi Arabia. She completed teaching training practicums as part of her undergraduate studies. She obtained her master’s degree from the UK in applied
linguistics and TESOL. She became a teacher because she loves teaching and she used to teach her friends when they needed help. She had been teaching for more than three years and had been an EFL instructor in the English Language Institute for three years at the time of the study. She speaks English and Arabic.

_Wedad._ Wedad completed her K-12 in public schools. Her undergraduate degree is in English language and literature from Saudi Arabia. She did not have any teacher training experience prior to working as a teacher. Initially, she was afraid to become a teacher because of several bad experiences she had with teachers as a student. However, she decided to become a teacher to change what she hated about the profession and to help the students. She had been a teacher for eight years at the time of the study. She had worked as a teacher in several private schools and had been an EFL instructor in the English Language Institute for one year. She speaks English and Arabic.

**Paradigms and Worldviews**

A paradigm or worldview is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). Creswell (2007) listed four worldviews that inform qualitative research and affect research practice. Social Constructivism is the theoretical framework that guides this research. In this worldview, individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2007). “Constructivists claim that truth is relative and that it is dependent on one’s perspective” (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Social Constructivism focuses on individuals' learning that occurs as a result of group socialization. This is important for the study, as part of the data collection took place in the context of focus groups where the EFL instructors negotiated and explored the place of EFL curriculum and how they implement it at the university level. The EFL instructors’ opinions and perspectives were explored both individually but also as they met and discussed
their experiences and socialized as a group to reach a deeper understanding of their experiences. Creswell (2007) observed that "the goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation" (p. 20). The participants' vision and analysis of the situation they experience really matters. The participants' beliefs about curriculum and its implementation and how these affect EFL teaching and learning eventually contribute to the learning outcome. How each instructor views and implements the curriculum is explored. Both Stake (2005) and Yin (2014) base their approach to case study on a constructivist paradigm (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This paradigm “recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning” (Miller & Crabtree, 1999, p. 10, as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). One of the advantages of this worldview is that it allows the researcher and the participants to collaborate. When the participants describe their views of the reality they live in that allows the researcher to better understand their views and actions (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The study surveyed factors that affect EFL teaching and learning from the perspectives of participating instructors at the university teaching level. Moreover, this study describes how EFL instructors addressed the challenges they encounter in teaching and how they understood and implement the Saudi university-level state curriculum. The aim of the study was also to observe what happens when EFL teachers meet and discuss their practices, and reflect on their daily tensions, conflicts and issues. Constructivist researchers often address the ‘processes’ of interaction among individuals (Creswell, 2007). As constructivists focus on the context the participants live in, they seek to know the historical and cultural background of the participants. In the course of this study, the researcher came to know a great deal about the participants' background, prior knowledge, and education. The constructivist researcher interprets the meaning of the experiences according to his or her personal, historical, and cultural background.
Constructivist researchers are positioned to make sense of the others’ opinions and the different perspectives that shape their vision of the world in which they live and construct their knowledge.

“Social constructivism centers on the philosophy that reality is a social construction” (Burr, 2003, p. 15). The research design aims to gather the different understandings of the EFL instructors of curriculum implementation and reflection. Their construction of reality and the learning process is at the center of the study (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). For example, some respondents may share a reality, but it is possible that others will construct the same phenomena in a different way (Cameron & Molina-Azorin, 2011). The social constructivist approach was appropriate for the study because it helped me to understand and structure the qualitative responses that were my data.

**Conceptual Framework**

Researchers suggest using propositions and issues as necessary elements in case study research because they are helpful in determining the scope of the study and they are essential for the development of the conceptual framework that guides the research (Baxter & Jack, 2008). “The theoretical framework is derived from the orientation or stance that you bring to your study. It is the structure, the scaffolding, the frame of your study. Every study has one” (Merriam, 1998, p. 45). Propositions can come from different sources such as literature, theories, generalizations based on empirical data, or personal/professional experience (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Issues arise from political, social, historical, and personal contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Prior to data collection, I developed an initial framework that was derived from my personal/professional experience and the literature (see Figure 1). Personal and professional propositions and issues were explained in chapter one and literature propositions were explained in chapter two.
I started with the initial conceptual framework that displays relationships between the constructs. I identified three constructs that contribute to EFL teaching and learning from personal/professional experience and the literature: policy, EFL instructors, and students. The initial conceptual framework explained how the policy affects both the learners and EFL instructors and that the learners’ performance in the classrooms affects EFL instructors teaching and vice versa. As the study progressed and the data were analyzed, the framework continued to develop and was completed by the end of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The final conceptual framework, which includes all the themes that emerged from the study, I developed upon the completion of the study (see Figure 2).
Figure 2. Revised conceptual framework of the study. © Copyright D. J. Alghamdi 2016.

The conceptual framework of the study shows that EFL teaching and learning in the context where the study was conducted was affected by internal and external influencing factors. The internal influencing factors are related to the learners and include: culture, motivation and the students’ backgrounds and experiences. The external influencing factors, which were related to the system and program, included: policy and power, content, time, and assessment. Another category of external influencing factors, which is related to the curriculum, includes the EFL instructors’ perspectives and understanding of the curriculum and how they implement the curriculum. According to the EFL instructors, to have an improved EFL teaching and learning context, the instructors must have a voice and choice in everything related to teaching, learning,
and curriculum. Moreover, a sustained teacher-learning environment should be encouraged and facilitated and necessary resources should be provided.

The conceptual framework shows that if EFL instructors have voice and choice, sustained learning opportunities and resources, they are likely to change their perspectives and understanding of curriculum positively, which will consequently change their ways in implementing it.

**Data collection.** The case study approach involves collecting data from multiple sources to ensure credibility (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2007). Interviews (see Appendix C), focus group discussions (see Appendix D), and observations were the main methods of data collection for this study. Additionally, extensive field notes were recorded.

**Phase one: Interviews.** Each of the nine participants was interviewed individually twice and each interview lasted for approximately an hour. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data I collected focused primarily on their view and implementation of EFL curriculum and the factors affect EFL teaching and learning based on their experiences. The data also focused on presenting their voices on what needed to be done to improve EFL teaching and learning. Data collection addressed my research questions about how EFL instructors understood and implement the foundation year EFL university curriculum, the factors affecting students’ learning from EFL instructors’ perspectives, how EFL instructors re-imagine teaching and learning in the EFL curriculum, and the support EFL instructors need to facilitate improved English teaching and learning. Based on the different responses from EFL instructors, the data were divided into themes and eventually into categories. The data included stories that the EFL instructors shared about their experiences including their teaching experience in the context in which they were teaching. During the interviews, follow-up questions were asked based on the
initial responses provided by the EFL instructors; however, even these supplementary questions were related to the research questions and enriched the data collected.

**Phase two: Focus group discussions.** The second method of data collection was focus group discussions. After conducting all the interviews, I asked the participants if they would like to participate in focus group discussions for in-depth data collection. Seven out of nine participants were willing and participated in three focus group discussions, each one lasting approximately an hour. The topics that were discussed in depth in the three focus group study discussions were generated from the initial analysis of the individual interviews. The aim of these discussions was to collect in-depth data that were generated in a social context. What happens when EFL teachers meet together and talk about their practices, and reflect on their daily tensions, conflicts, and issues? All the three discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Phase three: Classrooms observations.** The third method of data collection was observation. I observed some EFL classes in order to have an overview of the way the classes were conducted, to observe the students’ involvement, and to see the similarities and differences between what the instructors discussed in the interviews and how they performed in the classroom. Field notes were taken during the observations to be used in the data analysis. All the observed classes were recorded and notes were taken.

**Data analysis.** According to Merriam (1998):

Data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research. Analysis begins with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read. Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn leads to the refinement or reformulation of
questions, and so on. It is an interactive process throughout that allows the investigator to produce believable and trustworthy findings. (p. 151)

For my benefit and to maintain confidentiality, I transcribed the interviews. During the transcribing, I focused on the meaning of the participants’ remarks and the verbal ticks they used in the interviews. Reflexivity was an important consideration, as I was reflexive throughout the study. In order to do so, I had to state clearly what I thought about the participants' responses and what I understood from their experiences. The participants' voices were carefully considered. I was careful in analyzing the data and stating any biases that were relevant to this analysis. To minimize any bias, I put my personal experiences aside even if they were relevant to the participants’ experiences and analyzed the data objectively.

I described my own experience as an EFL instructor and why I wanted to explore this topic in chapter one. Then, I reviewed the section in the field notes where I had documented my own beliefs and ideas during the interviews. This served two purposes: it assisted me in keeping my personal experiences aside and focusing more on the participants’ experiences in the study. It also helped me to avoid my biases as a researcher. Following this, a list of significant statements from the interviews was developed to determine how the EFL instructors addressed the challenges they encountered in teaching and how they understood and implemented the Saudi university-level state curriculum. Also from the interviews I took statements regarding the factors that affected EFL teaching and learning from the perspectives of the participants. This allowed me to develop a non-repetitive list of statements. The participants’ significant statements were then categorized into meaningful themes so that I could develop a textured description of what participants in the study experienced as EFL instructors by using verbatim quotes. Next, I began writing the structural description: in this section, the factors affecting EFL teaching and
learning from the perspectives of instructors were detailed and explained. I described how the EFL instructors addressed the challenges they encountered in teaching and how they understood and implemented the Saudi university-level state curriculum. Then I explained the meaning of building knowledge in a social context. What happens when EFL instructors meet together and talk about their practices and reflect on their daily tensions, conflicts, and issues? Finally, a composite description of the EFL instructors’ experience was written that presents their opinions, ideas, and experiences. In addition, how the EFL instructors re-imagined teaching and learning in the EFL curriculum as defined by them was determined and the types of support needed for EFL instructors to facilitate improved English teaching and learning was identified. Within the data analysis, I attempted to broaden the depth of my understanding by using thick descriptions in the analysis. This was done through explaining not just the behaviour of the participants, but its context as well, such that the behaviour becomes meaningful to the readers.

**Validity and reliability.** It is important to ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative study. This was done using several strategies. Creswell considers validation in a qualitative study to be “an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 206). To validate the study, I used several strategies for validating any qualitative research. I used triangulation in both data collection and data analysis. In data collection, I collected data from three different sources: observations, individual interviews, and focus group meetings.

In data analysis, I gave several portions of different interviews and focus group discussions to two other researchers and asked them what themes and categories they saw in the transcripts and then discussed it with them to check agreement and discrepancy. Moreover, I used rich, thick description to allow readers to make decisions about transferability. Since this is
a descriptive case study, in-depth description is required to present the context EFL instructors worked in. The readers could judge whether or not some of the characteristics described in the findings may or may not be transferred to other settings or contexts. For this reason, detailed description was critical for validity.

Also, an external auditor was asked to examine both the process and the product of the study to assess its accuracy. The researcher clarified her biases from the beginning of the study so that the readers can take them into account and consider how they might affect the inquiry.

**Ethical Considerations**

To recruit the participants, the chief coordinator of the language program emailed 20 English language instructors at a major university in Saudi Arabia. She stated clearly in the email that whoever is willing to participate should contact the researcher and she included my contact information. I was not given any of the instructors’ names nor was I given any of their contact information. None of their information was available publically. The only information I was provided came directly from the instructors themselves who contacted me. I never knew the names of the remaining 11 instructors who did not want to participate because they did not contact me. The nine instructors who volunteered to participate in the study were given a consent form to sign that explained their right to withdraw from the study at any time if they did not wish to proceed. Also, all the participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities.

As this study used human participants, the EFL instructors, specific ethical issues needed to be addressed. The consideration of these ethical issues was necessary for the purpose of ensuring the privacy as well as the safety of the participants. Informed consent was provided and no harm for the participants was identified. Significant ethical issues considered in the research process included consent and confidentiality. In order to secure the consent of the volunteer
participants, I relayed all important details of the study, including its aim and purpose to them in the consent form. Because these important details were explained to them in the consent form, the EFL instructors were able to understand the importance of their role in the research and know their rights. Prior to beginning the study, the EFL instructors were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. The confidentiality of the EFL instructors was also ensured by not disclosing their names. Only relevant details that aided in answering the research questions are included in this dissertation.

In the consent form, participants were informed that any identifying data collected would be kept confidential. This information included names, identifying information, or any other piece of information that may reveal a participant’s identity. Moreover, participants were informed that, for the purpose of confidentiality, the researcher would personally transcribe all recordings of interviews. No other person besides the researcher and the supervisor would have access to the recordings. Moreover, the participants were informed that their real names and the name of their university would not be disclosed. After conducting the research, the data would be stored in a secure place for 3 years before being securely destroyed. I explained in the consent form that the participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, the purpose of the study, how it will be conducted, any risks associated with participation (although, no risks have been identified for this study), how consent will be obtained (prior to the first interview the participants must sign a consent form following this, if an interview is needed, consent will obtained verbally). The consent form also included a reassurance that the participants’ information would be kept confidential. I clarified for the participants that my focus was on identifying the factors that affect EFL teaching and learning from their perspectives and how they addressed the challenges they encountered in teaching and how they understood and
implemented the Saudi university-level state curriculum, and that I believed this study would add to the knowledge about and understanding of EFL teaching and learning.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I explain why qualitative descriptive case study design is the best choice for this study. I also explain the reason for choosing a descriptive case study approach and the research paradigm and conceptual framework. Furthermore, the chapter presents how the data were collected and analyzed taking into account ethical and validity considerations.

In the next chapter, the research findings are presented in detail with selected participants’ statements. The research findings include details about how EFL instructors understand and implement the foundation year EFL university curriculum. It also explains the factors affecting students’ learning from EFL instructors’ perspectives. Furthermore, the chapter presents how EFL instructors re-imagine teaching and learning in the EFL curriculum and the support they need to facilitate improved English teaching and learning.
Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter reports the findings of a study conducted over four months at a major university in Saudi Arabia. Participants were EFL instructors teaching English language in the foundation year, which is a bridging year the students have to complete successfully before they can start the first year in the major of their choice at the university. The study surveyed factors that affect EFL teaching and learning from the perspectives of the participating instructors at the university level. Moreover, this study presents how the EFL instructors addressed the challenges they encountered in teaching and how they understood and implemented the Saudi university-level state curriculum.

To that end, I interviewed nine EFL instructors twice individually during their teaching over the course of four months in 2014. Seven instructors met in three focus group discussions to discuss the issues of EFL curriculum, teaching, and learning. I audio-recorded all interviews and discussions. I present the data below based on four research questions that guided my inquiry.

Research Findings

The research findings indicate that from the perspective of EFL instructors the factors affecting EFL teaching and learning are time, curriculum, policy and power, motivation, support, voice and choice, culture, and resources. The data presented are organized by themes using the research question. To provide evidence for these themes, key participant statements have been selected.

Research question one: How do participating EFL instructors understand and implement the foundation year EFL university curriculum? This section describes how EFL instructors view and understand the curriculum, implement the curriculum, and express the need
to change and modify the curriculum to adjust to their goals for teaching and learning. It also presents their view of the consequences of the ways the curriculum is mandated, tested, and used for learning English.

**Instructors’ perspectives and understanding of EFL curriculum.** All the EFL instructors in the study viewed the curriculum as a document. They interpreted curriculum as instructional textbooks, learning objectives, a plan to be followed and applied, and finally how the learning outcomes (products) are measured. They listed the components of curriculum as books, online resources, worksheets, class presentations, objectives, learning outcomes, timeline, and pacing guide. Samar commented:

> A curriculum is a selection of books, worksheets, and exercises that need to be delivered and covered in order to achieve that level or pass that grade. A curriculum usually entails everything that students need to learn that term to pass it and move on to the next level. You can add to the curriculum but you cannot change it.

The instructors talked about how hard it is to follow the curriculum exactly and said that they wished they had opportunities to modify it and use their creativity more in their teaching.

While all nine instructors spoke of the sufficiency of the curriculum in terms of instructional content and process, six instructors spoke of alternative teaching approaches. Warda commented: “I would like to change the teaching approach that is followed in the book we are using. Although it is adjustable and can be adjusted to any teaching style, still there are some areas that need to be worked on and developed. It is required that we follow the pacing guide.” The unalterable reality affects each instructor who feels bound to take the curriculum as whole
and sufficient for the course. While all instructors agreed to speak to the curriculum as fixed, six found ways to re-thinking curriculum as a prescriptive document (product). Some began to search resulting from challenges and experiences in the classroom. They noted that learning outcomes proved difficult to achieve. Their re-thinking emerged from classroom experiences in which the curriculum failed to address the challenges students and their instructors faced in their learning environments. Samar said, “I wish that they experiment [with] a new book, so we can find the one we need.” Also Shatha commented on her desire to choose the reading for her students saying, “It would be beneficial if teachers can choose the reading supplements.” Lena is one of the instructors who shifted her thinking about the curriculum. She commented, “I think we should see the curriculum as a tool that we use and add to and change according to our students’ need.”

Instructors expressed frustration at the lack of time for “covering the content.” Lena suggested, “If the time will not be changed and we are going to be stuck teaching in six weeks, then they should cut content by half at least.” Ahlam agreed: “The students can’t follow up with the curriculum because it is difficult for them. I don’t think the main problem is in the curriculum but I think it is in the timeline.”

Instructors spoke to the difficulties of the content they were required to “deliver” to their students. Manar commented: “The content we teach is hard for the students’ level and sometimes I feel that I have to just finish everything. It doesn’t matter if students understand or not because of the short time.” The EFL instructors clearly explained that it was very difficult for them to find that balance between covering the hard content in the limited time they had and making sure the students understood what they were being taught. The instructors reached a point where the
most important thing was to cover the curriculum whether the students understood or not. But, they pointed out, the content was difficult and the students needed more time to grasp it.

**Curriculum implementation.** I identified three main themes from the EFL instructors’ views about implementing the EFL curriculum:

1. pacing guide,
2. teaching style, and
3. teaching for the exam.

The instructors were expected to follow a “pacing guide” for their teaching that stipulated both content and timelines for teaching. All the instructors stated that they followed the pacing guide as required. The pacing guide facilitated preparing for the lessons and described clearly what to do in the classes. However, lacking authority and time prevented the instructors from adjusting the curriculum for their own teaching styles and the needs of their students. Warda commented: “I am talking about the teaching style we’re supposed to follow when we deliver the lesson. Sometimes we do not have that space and authority to make changes as we follow the pacing guide.”

The instructors organized the course differently. Some followed the pacing guide exactly step by step, while others made some changes according to the class and the students. However, the changes were minimal because of the rigid curriculum, strict policies, and limited time. If the instructor did make changes, they were in the form of switching task orders or adding some activities. Manar said: “There is no flexibility in our teaching. For example, if I say I couldn’t finish this unit because I was doing another thing with the students, they say no you have to finish this week according to the pacing guide.”
Following the pacing guide overrode any personal teaching style instructors may have wanted or even needed to develop. Possibilities for change of style were short-circuited by the mandated teaching of the pacing guide. Samar stated, “A curriculum is limiting because sometimes you don’t have time for creativity.” It was hard for them to implement the changes they desired because it was not allowed. Also if they wanted to use extra materials to support their lessons, they needed to obtain permission ahead of time from the level coordinator. As a result, they preferred to follow what they had in order to avoid having to go through the process of seeking permission.

The EFL instructors admitted that their teaching was shaped by the exam because of the context and conditions in which they worked. The teachers said that early on they were motivated by a passion for language teaching, an eagerness to share their knowledge of language learning and development – however, the realities of their classroom experiences and the time crunch changed their practices moved them toward implementing curriculum in order to achieve exam “success” for their students. Lena said: “Honestly, I am preparing my students to be ready for the exams. I would like to have the romantic notion of, yes I love teaching and it gives me a lot of sense of well-being. It does, but with this amount of time, the only thing I am able to do in these six weeks is just prep them for the exam.”

Ultimately, the EFL instructors focused on supporting students in passing the exam not on helping them master the language. When they started teaching English, this was not their sole focus; However, they stated that what they experienced in teaching and the pressure of covering a large content in a short period of time with weak level students changed their approach. This context shifted their goal from teaching the students the language to teaching them to pass the exams.
In general, EFL instructors implemented the curriculum as described in the pacing guide. They covered what they were expected to cover every week. They had no freedom or time to change or adjust the curriculum. They targeted the exam more than helping their students to learn the language.

I noticed when observing one of the long classes that the instructor was teaching the students several grammatical rules. Almost all four hours of the class were about grammar. When I asked the instructor why she was teaching several grammatical rules one after the other in one lecture and whether this was effective, she mentioned that she was following the pacing guide and this is what she had to cover on that specific day. I believe that the students got bored and confused being given all these grammatical rules in the same lecture. This is was clear in the students’ answers and participation and their low level of engagement in the class. (Observation note, March 2014)

Research question two: How do these EFL instructors understand the factors affecting students’ learning?

Factors affecting students’ learning. The EFL instructors described three main factors that affect students’ English language learning: (a) culture; (b) motivation; and (c) instructors’ perspectives on students’ background and experience. These factors created some challenges for the instructors. They discussed how they try to overcome them. However, they are still affecting students’ learning and required more consideration. The three factors presented below are organized from the most to the least important, as reported by the EFL instructors. The discussion of each factor includes some of the instructors’ statements that illustrate their opinions about them.
Culture. Three main themes emerged from comments made about culture:

1. the effect of society on students’ mentalities and personalities,
2. the alternative orientation of learning by making errors, and
3. how culture affects students’ participation in the class.

The instructors described the impact of society on students’ mentalities and personalities. They discussed how society affects students’ decisions and how it affects how students see themselves and whether they believe in themselves. Lena explained:

I am trying to help them get rid of the idea that they are not good enough to do anything, especially these girls in this campus, because they are humanities. They’re set already for what they want, this is what you are good at, this is what you are going to do, and these are the majors we think that you will going to work at and that’s it. The girls already come to you with this is what we are going to do and there is no other way that we going to excel. It really breaks my heart. Of course I try to let the girls understand that here is different, you can do whatever you want and express yourself. You can talk to me. We can communicate both ways (English & Arabic). But it is hard. Honestly, it is hard.

Lena said that the girls who finished high school in humanities were mentally set to underestimate their ability to learn. The other instructors agreed and mentioned that the girls in this campus (where the study was based) were different than the girls in other campuses who completed their high school in science. Girls who believed in their abilities usually demonstrated higher levels of English. The instructors encouraged the students in their classes to learn by
making errors. Lena said: “I am always trying to convince my girls to make mistakes all the time. I try always to convince them, saying this is a class where you do mistakes.”

The instructors described how society influenced the students’ self-perception in a way that made them underestimate their ability to learn and excel. This posed a big challenge for the instructors. They reported that they were trying their best to address this problem of culture by explaining to the girls that making mistakes is part of the learning process, that learning a language needs determination, and that they should not underestimate their ability to learn. Although the EFL instructors included opportunities for classroom conversations focused on developing conversational skills and how important it is to feel free to make errors, the students’ perspective remained unchanged.

The EFL instructors explained how the culture affects students’ participation in the class. The students were reluctant to speak and participate because they were shy and had not been encouraged from childhood to express their ideas and opinions. Shatha commented:

Another obstacle is speaking. Students are very shy because our culture doesn’t encourage people to talk and have ideas and thoughts. So, speaking is a big obstacle for students. It is hard for them to speak English even if they know how to speak a little bit. They are worried that they may commit some mistakes or they are worried that they may not be able to produce a complete sentence. So, overcoming such an obstacle is by encouraging them to stand up and speak. Also, trying to make them comfortable by saying that you are coming to learn and learning happens when we do mistakes. So, I always tell them learning English needs practice, practice, and practice.
The instructors considered this to be a big challenge that was hard to overcome given the time restrictions. The negative culture has developed over years, and due to the limited time they have to interact and support the students’ learning in English classes, it was difficult to help them unlearn the habits and ways of thinking that made it difficult for them to learn or even retrain them to be more open-minded and willing to try. The instructors observed that talking to the students and encouraging them was not enough, but it was the only thing they could do.

Motivation. The instructors described several reasons why their students were not motivated to learn the language. First, students study English because it is a prerequisite of the major they want not because they want to learn the language. Second, students believed that there was no place where they could use the language so it was impractical. Third, the instructors did not have the power to give the students marks for their participation in class and their assignments.

The instructors experienced frustration because of unmotivated students. Samar explained: “They enter with the wrong perspective. They enter with ‘We have to do it because it is mandatory’ not because they want to do it.” The instructors explained that students did not want to learn English because they did not believe in its importance. They did it simply because it was a requirement for enrolling in university. Some of the instructors mentioned that the students were unmotivated because it was a difficult program for them. Ahlam commented: “They know it is a very intensive program. So they come with low motivation from the beginning.”

Students also felt unmotivated given their belief that there was no practical use for the language and no place where they would use it. Maryam stated:

Some of them say I am not going to use English. So, I say “how come?”
Wherever you are going to work when you graduate, you need to have English and computer skills. Both of these. But they are not interested and they say ‘We are not going to be teachers and we will find something to do in our life that doesn’t need English.’

Students were unmotivated because the only English they did was in the class. Outside the class, all the communications proceeded in Arabic, the mother tongue. As a result, they did not feel a need to learn English.

The instructors believed that the students’ lack of motivation in learning was a challenge they encountered in classes daily because they had no power to award marks. Warda commented:

I can help them more and give them extra materials and activities but, they don’t respond because they know that the teachers have no grades in their hands. So, all the grades go to exams. They have said this frankly ‘if there (are) no marks for homework that we do at home, why we should do it?’ So, they don’t trouble themselves at all.

Instructors also kept pointing to the fact that they needed the power to award marks in order to motivate these students to participate and make an effort to learn in the class. Most instructors agreed that students lacked motivation because all the marks came from the exams and assessments and their teachers had no marks to give them for their work and participation in class.
EFL instructors recognized the importance of motivation for learning. They did their best to motivate the students by introducing different activities and games designed to increase enthusiasm and engagement, which in turn increases student participation. Wedad said:

I brought a box that has this statement on it ‘Let’s speak English.’ Then I asked them to write the topics they want to speak about in a small paper and put them inside the box. I told them any topic you want even if it is not related to university and no names on the paper, so we don’t know who wants to speak about the certain topic. I told them whenever you feel bored and cannot really concentrate on the class, just say Let’s speak English. Then I will stop the lesson and bring the box and choose a paper from the box and talk about the topic in the paper in English. I felt they like it but I don’t allow them more than 15 minutes because we have a curriculum that we must cover.

Despite the instructors’ effort, the students were lacked a strong incentive encouraging them to work such as marks for their participation. However, the instructors still believed that marks should not be the only motivation for the students. The instructors suggested that they needed workshops to help them understand how to motivate disengaged students.

**Instructors’ perspectives on the effects of students’ background and experiences.**

Another challenge the instructors reported is meeting the needs of the all students when many disparities existed between their backgrounds and experiences. In the focus group discussions, they noted several factors that affected the students’ experience of learning the language, such as (a) schools and education, (b) backgrounds, (c) exposure to the language; and (d) experience of learning, both in and outside of the class.
The instructors stated that previous education contributed to language learning. They said that the students who come to the Institute are primarily from public (government) schools, which offer a different experience than private schools. They explained that students who come from public schools were very wary of using English because they had had very little English experience in school.

The instructors believed that students who come from backgrounds where they do not use the English language frequently are often quite intimidated about speaking and using it. The instructors described two types of students: confident and assertive students; and insecure and hesitant students. There were relatively few students described by the instructors as falling outside these categories. The EFL instructors explained that the portion of students who were confident with using the English language was small. Samar stated:

So the minimum you can [have in a class is] six … but the maximum is 30, no more than 30, and like what I said maybe five percent are confident students. It doesn’t mean that they can speak English fluently but they are happy to learn it, happy to explore it, and happy to try. The rest are usually in the stage where they are worry, intimidated, they are scared and not confident. They are scared of making mistakes, so that is the core, that is the really the area I am concentrated on. The ones that are confident they are learning when they practice. They are happy to practice it, but the problem [is] that sometimes when the class hear them, they are just quite down because somebody is taking over and answer for them.

The instructors’ noted only two to three students out of a class of 30 are confident students. This resulted in the challenge of having to deal with both types of students effectively, which takes a lot of work and patience.
Exposure and accessibility contribute to the language learning. The EFL instructors reported that some students are more likely to be exposed and have access to the language than others. Lena explained:

We are more exposed. These students are not exposed. For example, I had chances that made me exposed to different types of cultures. [That goes] back to family and exposure. These girls are not exposed to travel or other cultures. They don’t have depth, but we do because we are lucky and our life are different. I got to study English from kindergarten until high school. These girls only studied English in high school. No wonder if they are so weak. Moreover, not all the teachers are good in schools.

Some students are better in English than others. This may be due to one or more of several reasons, such as having been exposed to an English-speaking nanny at home or having travelled outside Saudi Arabia. Such students have exposure to and experience with hearing and using the language.

Another challenge the instructors mentioned in the interviews is the students’ experience of learning both in and outside of the class. Despite the instructors’ efforts to encourage students to participate and use the language, getting the students to speak was the most challenging task. In the focus group discussions, two instructors suggested different methods that they had tested and proved to work to encourage the students to speak. The other instructors in the meeting were excited to try them.

Finding opportunities to practice the language at home or outside the class was the biggest problem for students. Samar commented: “I asked them a lot to listen and watch English
documentaries or speak one hour of English [a] day, but they never do. The only English they do is here [university]. Because of that their progress is so slow.” Most students did not go home and pick up the English books to practice what they learned in the class. As a result, they did not learn the language. The instructors argued that through practice, students move forward more quickly through the whole curriculum because they got the feedback they need to enforce the things they learn.

I observed in all the five classes I attended that, most of the time, there are two students who always respond and participate while the other students are shy or seem unable to answer the questions. Also, the instructors pointed to these two students every time they asked questions and no one answered. (Observation note, March 2014)

**Research question three: How do these EFL instructors re-imagine teaching and learning in the EFL curriculum?** The EFL instructors stated that the textbooks were customized to fit the Saudi culture by OUP; however, several issues needed to be dealt with and adjustments made to develop the curriculum and improve English teaching in the foundation year in order to achieve better learning outcomes. The instructors re-imagined teaching and learning in the EFL curriculum through changes in four main aspects: (a) policy and power; (b) time; (c) content; and (d) assessment.

**Policy and power.** EFL instructors described how policy and power contribute to EFL teaching and learning through discussion of two considerations:

1. the policy is rigid and contains several restrictions that affect teaching and,
2. the policy is applied inconsistently or is not firm or restrictive enough in its guidelines for the students.

The EFL instructors found the English Language Institute policy rigid and that it contained several restrictions and regulations that they were expected to follow exactly. This was reflected in two areas: (a) they needed permission to use extra materials in the class and, (b) the policy negatively affected students’ attitude toward their instructors and English classes.

The EFL instructors reported that they could not do anything without seeking permission from their superiors even bring in extra materials to use in the class to support their lessons. Samar stated: “Everything we bring from outside must be approved first. We have to show it to the level coordinator and see if she approves it, so that has to be done. Once that is done, we introduced it.” The EFL instructors repeatedly complained in the interviews about the lack of freedom and control, and about having to follow exactly what their superiors dictated. Lena was frustrated at having to get permission to use materials she had used before and had already sought and received permission to use. She commented:

Sometimes a teacher wants to use certain type of materials in the class, but in order to do so, she needs to submit a paper two weeks ahead for approval. And sometimes as teachers we find these materials while we are preparing for the lesson one day earlier or maybe at the same day. To me, honestly, this is a waste of time because not every teacher prepares two weeks in advance. I have to be honest and tell you that this procedure sometimes makes me feel that I don’t want to bring extra materials. It affects me in a way having to think that I need to send the papers two weeks ahead for approval. Sometimes it happens that I used these materials two years ago and I got approval for them, but I need another approval
because it is a different level or maybe a different coordinator.

This indicates that even if the teachers wanted to use extra materials to support their lessons, this policy would prohibit them from doing so. Teachers in these programs were extremely busy and are already managing many demanding challenges. With limited time for planning, this proved an additional, time-consuming hassle.

A superior power dictated what the instructors had to do exactly and what they had to avoid. The rigid policy made it hard for the instructors to be flexible and make adjustments according to their lessons and students’ specific needs. As a result, EFL instructors had very limited power, and this apparently affected students’ attitudes toward them and the English classes. The students knew instructors had very little power and, as a result, it was difficult to discipline the students and make them respect the instructors and classes. Shatha reported:

This generation is different, as some of the students don’t show respect to the teachers or classes and we don’t have authority to discipline them. This is unfair because students do something wrong and as teachers we should have authority to deal with them in a very appropriate way. One of the things that happened with me is that I had an exam once. It started at 8:00 a.m. and the student showed up at 11:00 a.m. she entered the class without a real excuse for being late and they tell you just let her in. We cannot do anything about it. What are we teaching students? Being irresponsible!!! We need from higher authority people to give us some authority and respect to deal with students within limits. We don’t have control in anything here, so no control in marks and no control or authority in anything. I find myself tight and my hands are tight. I cannot do anything because I have no authority. Some students just don’t respect anything except marks, so
maybe if we have some marks on our hand, they will respect you.

All the EFL instructors in the study agreed with Shatha. They all shared their frustrations with the way students treat them and all agreed that policy is the main problem. They mentioned that they feel that their power is really limited and this affects them as teachers and consequently the students’ attitude and learning.

On the other hand, in several areas, policies are applied inconsistently or not restrictive enough with the students. This is reflected in the lack of policy with respect to the disciplining of the students and in the fact that the policy helped students pass the exam and move from level to another even if they did not deserve to pass.

The lack of firm policy with regard to the students is the main reason why they are undisciplined. Lena said: “There is no policy to discipline these students in anyway. They get away with so much. They get away with absence. They get away with low marks. They get away with a lot of stuff.” For example, the specific policy regarding student absence stated that students who exceed the maximum number of class absences will be entered on the deprived students’ list and be unable to write the final exam. The EFL instructors indicated that there had been a number of instances of students exceeding the maximum allowed absences, they simply going to the head of the department and providing any excuse so that they could attend the final exam.

The issue of assessment and how the policy encouraged passing the students from level to level, even students who did not deserve to pass is worth noting. Wedad said: “The problem is from the policy. The girl passed when she shouldn’t pass and she goes from level one to two and
then from two to three and basically she cannot even give you a correct sentence. She should fail.”

The instructors explained that the students move from level to another, but their English language is low. They do not look like students who have had an intensive year of English learning. Maryam explained:

Like if she [student] has 50/51. If you give her one mark here and one mark there, she will reach 54 and then automatically the computer will make her 60, so if she has 53, she got two marks from Student Service Committee and then she can pass.

In sum, the policy indirectly contributed to the context of English language teaching and learning from the EFL instructors’ perspective. The authorities affected the way teachers taught, the way teachers managed their classes, and the way students dealt with their instructors and curriculum, which consequently affected the learning outcomes.

**Time.** The issue of time had two dimensions. The first relates to the length of the classes and its effect on the students’ performance. The second relates to the duration of the teaching modules and its effect on EFL teaching and learning.

The EFL instructors noted that the long hours of instruction and the long days were not appropriate and this affected the students’ performance in class. Wedad shared:

As a teacher, I can tell that one of the obstacles that prevent students from learning is the long hours. The long hours is not really helping them. After the first two hours and a half, the girls change completely. They are bored and they don’t really want to learn. No matter how hard the teacher tries to make it fun for them, still they are bored and they cannot really handle it more than two hours and
a half. So I think timing is not really helping us.

There were five classes every week: three days of short classes in the morning and two days of long classes in the afternoon. The long classes lasted as long as four hours, from 11:00 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. with two short breaks of 20 minutes each. The EFL instructors complained a lot about the long classes. Shatha stated:

One of the things I would like to change is the long hours. The students in the ELI are taking other subjects besides English. They have mathematics, religion, and Arabic and computer science. So they are not coming to the Institute just to learn purely English language. It is not like when you register in any language institute to learn English. So imagine the student is coming from 7 a.m. and she is having two or three lectures and one of them is English from 11 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. It is too much. Even if you teach them, they are not following you. They are basically in another world. They stop functioning. They stop listening to you because it is too long for them. Honestly at 2:30, they became different people who are not with you. This is a big problem.

Shatha clearly described her frustration and implies how she suffered from the long classes and her students too. She revealed that no matter what she teaches and what she does, the students will not get it. Shatha suggested that learning is not about how long we teach. Shorter hours are better sometimes and long hours could just be a waste of time as was happening in the English classes. All the instructors in this study complained about this issue. Samar shared:

Definitely the first thing I would like to change is the class hours. We have two days or three in the week where we have long hour classes. I think those long
classes are wasted because the students are so tired and exhausted. So, the students are not getting anything. I think three hours per day is enough for these students. Definitely after teaching three years here, I can say that they cannot handle more than three hours per day. They tell us don’t do hard lessons on the late afternoon class like grammar. But no matter what we do, even if we put video, they would rather prefer to be home. They made that clear to us as teachers.

Samar clearly indicated that it is not just the teachers’ observation about the length of classes; students tell the instructors themselves that they do not want long classes. Lena commented:

Once I asked the students to write in a small piece of paper what they want to change or add. The result was that they all want to leave an hour early. They were only three students in the class who pointed out different things. I was shocked because the majority wants to leave early because I am doing the longer classes the one from 11. Honestly, at 2:00 p.m., the girls are dead. There is nothing that you can say, they will listen to. So 1:30 to 2:00 is the maximum for them. Even if you play a video at the end, they will not listen to or watch with focus, they will sleep. They will sit not interested in what you are showing them or what are you going to ask after watching the video.

In my notes, I wrote:

The EFL instructors reported that one of the negative consequences of long classes is that students do not return to the class after the second break. I noted
when observing three long classes that the students got bored and they kept looking at their watches. And this is clearly shows how they lose interest. Another thing I observed is that not all the students come back after the second break.

(Observation note, March 2014)

The second dimension of time relates to the duration of the modules. Each module was approximately seven weeks and the textbook consisted of 12 units. Although the instructors cover only nine units, they reported an overwhelming amount of content for the short time they had. The instructors explained that this schedule did not allow adequate time for students to practice what they learned. The instructors tried to cover the required material within the allotted time and that ironically negatively affected student learning. Ahlam shared: “Well. We squeeze our students and we squeeze ourselves to finish. It is very tight. It is very intensive for the students and especially that the students usually skip the first week.” All the instructors agreed that the time was short and tight for the amount of content to cover. Lena commented on the problem of the strict policy regarding the length of time given to each module saying:

I swear it is crazy. I mean we have all these people in development and we have all these people in curriculum and I am pretty sure if they put their heads together, they can come up with a better plan. I don’t know why we are stuck with this plan for four or five years now. The curriculum changed but it is the same policy. It is like we are facing the same problems but there are no solutions only divergence, you know. Ok let’s do damage control. This what is happening [is] no solution.

During the data collection, the EFL instructors finished one module and started another. In one of the focus group discussions, at the time of starting the new module, the instructors
stated that it was the shortest module in the year, approximately five and a half teaching weeks. Samar shared: “We’ve been here a week now and the pressure and the stress already is there that we have only four weeks left. It’s the time issue. This module is very short. We can’t reach the objectives with this unrealistic time.” Lena added: “It is very short. There is no time for anything.” Shatha agreed saying, “We are just finishing the curriculum,” and Warda said: “The previous one was better: seven teaching weeks. But this one is five weeks and a half only.” All the instructors’ statements reflected clearly their frustration and the pressure they felt because of the tight timelines for the teaching modules.

**Content.** EFL instructors pointed out several issues related to the EFL content:

1. the distribution of the skills and tasks;
2. the reading passages in the books;
3. the reading supplement package; and
4. the inconsistencies between each level in the curriculum.

Some instructors complained about the distribution of tasks and grammar and teaching of other skills, that they considered did not help students and teachers. Wedad commented:

The book itself has a problem. For example, you can go with two units that have a lot of grammatical rules and then start a third unit that has little or no grammar, so the distribution of tasks and grammar is not equal. For example, in one week, I had to do four tasks plus the grammar, which is too much for the students. So I suggest that whoever is responsible for designing the curriculum should really consider the distribution for tasks and grammar for each week.

I wrote the following in my notes:
I noticed when observing one of the classes that the instructor was teaching the students several grammatical rules. Almost all the four hours were about grammar and this is because that part of the unit has several grammatical rules one after another while this is not necessarily the case with all the units as the distribution of tasks and skills is not consistent through the book. (Observation note, March 2014)

Another issue content involved the reading passages in the book and their difficulty for the students because of the topics that students could not relate to, such as skiing or Formula One racing. Some students could never understand these topics because they do not know even about them in Arabic, their mother tongue. Most students had never travelled even within Saudi Arabia to a different city. Although the textbooks were customized as religiously and culturally appropriate, they were not culturally oriented. The instructors stated while it is good for students to learn new things, it is hard to do so because of the lack of time and the level of the students’ familiarity with English.

In one of my observations of a two and a half hours class in the morning, I observed that the instructor speaks most of the time. The students hardly contributed to the class. If they did, it was only a one word or a sentence. They were somehow sleepy and not energetic although the class was in the morning. I also noted that the instructor was nervous and frustrated because when she asked questions the students did not answer or participate. The instructor said, “What is wrong with you today?” and still they did not respond. After the class, a discussion took place between me and the instructor about the class and the instructor stated that the reading passage was hard and boring for the students. I
mentioned that I had noted that the instructor was talking all the time and there were no activities in the class which I believed was one of the reasons the students were not engaged in the lesson. (Observation note, March 2014)

Another issue concerned the reading supplement packages. The instructors complained that they were boring. Shatha said:

I have another issue with the textbooks. Sometimes the reading articles are really difficult and it doesn’t help students in any way. The topics are not important to know for them as EFL students. It is hard for them because of the language and besides this most of these students have never travelled abroad. So when you give them difficult reading articles that have new information for them taking into account their weak level, they will not learn. They will read and learn some new vocabulary and that’s it. Moreover, the reading supplement packages we have in some cases for certain levels have interesting topics but for other levels they are extremely boring. It would be nice if teachers can choose the reading supplements.

Shatha and some other instructors suggested that the instructors should choose the supplemental readings and some of them thought that the students could also contribute to this; they could be asked what they would like to read or learn about. The instructors said that part of the lack of student motivation resulted from readings that are too difficult and boring.

Another issue related to the inconsistencies between the curriculum levels. Manar commented: “I think they should change the books. I taught level one and two and I think they are the same, the same vocabulary and grammar. Almost nothing is new as they are almost the
same.” The inconsistency between the levels is seen clearly in the contrast between the similarity between level one and two, the big gap between level two and level three, and the similarity between level three and four. The EFL instructors explained that when the students pass level one and move to level two, there was no problem because they were similar; and the same is the case when they move from level three and four. However, when the students move from level two to three there are difficulties. Shatha said:

One of the things that I found it will be beneficial if I change it is the gap between level two and three because there is a very big jump for the students because they may hardly pass from one and two but when it comes to three, they mostly fail. So if I have a chance to change this, I will put something in between to bridge this gap. Maybe we can do an introduction for level three or simplifying level three. I don’t know what exactly, but we have to change this. The percentage of failure is mostly in level three because the level has a lot of information that we must cover in the same time of the other basics level and for the same students. So I have seven weeks to cover level three, which is a big jump from level two, and they have a lot of information to absorb and they are in their same weak level.

The EFL instructors found that when the students passed level two and moved to level three, they had to repeat the level because of the big difference in the content difficulty as well as the expectations between level two and three. Samar suggested:

One of things would be experiment of new books. I wish that they experiment a new book, so we can find the perfect ones and I think having customized the Oxford books to fit us means that we would probably be stuck with them for more few years. I am not really sure how the contract works with the publisher, but I
would imagine that if they customized it for us, this probably will make us use it for long time. What we have is quite a good book, but we need to experiment new ones to find better books. Or we can see if we can bring more resources, for example do the reading from another book and the listening from other resources. It is better than doing everything from one book because there are some reading articles in the books that are not interesting for the students. I think teachers need to have some space and more freedom in making decisions.

When the teachers started a new module and reflected on how their classes and students were doing, Maryam shared: “I am teaching level three this module. I have 27 students. They are all repeaters.” So, Maryam had the 27 students repeating level three in her class. The instructors reported that the failures and repeaters were mostly in level three because of the difficult content of the book at this level. As a result, some instructors suggested opportunities to experiment with new books.

*Assessment.* In the foundation year, student achievement is measured by a variety of assessment tools, including mid-module and final examinations (70%), two writing examinations (10%), two speaking examinations (10%), and continuous assessment/portfolio (10%) (ELI, KAU, 2011). The mid-module and final examinations focus on listening and reading comprehension, grammar usage, and vocabulary. Continuous assessment/portfolio consists of writing and reading assignments.

The EFL instructors discussed several issues related to assessment. These included:

1. the distribution of marks;
2. the nature of the exam questions and the policy governing the writing of the exam questions; and

3. the stress of passing the exams for both the students and the instructors.

In the foundation year English language program, all grades were awarded on exams and other assessments such as writing and speaking. One issue that English instructors complained about is the distribution of marks on exams and assessments. They stated that they did not possess the ability to evaluate students and give marks in the way they wanted. Samar said: “The other thing we all requested is having some grades on our hands that we can give the students but they worry that some teachers would give it to students for nothing. I think the teachers’ morality and all of these come into questions. We need to control students through grades. They need to work harder.” Lena also agreed that: “Teachers need to have some grades in their hands because this could make a great difference at least in the class management. We need to motivate the students by marks.” The EFL instructors reported that they had repeatedly asked to have the ability to hand out at least five marks; however, no change had taken place and the grading system policy remained the same. The EFL instructors believed that not having the ability to grade students affected student participation in class. They also believed that being allowed to award some marks would motivate the students to learn and participate in the class.

Moreover, some instructors said that most of the marks should not go to the mid and final exams. In this regard, Warda commented:

I would also change the examination system, so instead of having these multiple choices questions (MCQ), the mid-module and final exams are all MCQ. There is a speaking exam and a writing exam at the end of each module but little marks are dedicated for these and the huge portion of marks goes to the mid and final
exams. The MCQ doesn’t measure the student’s real ability and what they accomplish during the module.

Thus, the EFL instructors thought there could be a better way to distribute the marks. Instead of allocating significant portions of the marks to mid and final exams, they suggested that some marks could be in their hands to be given for practical works or projects that the students would enjoy and learn from.

The EFL instructors also reported that they were not allowed to create exam questions and not permitted to see the exam questions before the exam day. The exam questions came from the main campus. Lena said:

The exam came from the main campus, we didn’t even see it. We didn’t even know what it looks like. We didn’t even have samples to practice with students. We did a different book then and the questions came from the main campus from the boys’ campus.

The instructors felt uncomfortable not having a role in preparing the exam questions or at least an opportunity to check them before the exam day to see if the questions were suitable for the students’ level, especially those students of the humanities campus who were the weakest. They believed that it is unfair to equate them with the science students by giving them the same exam. In describing how the exams questions are not suitable for the students’ level, Samar remarked:

[They] need more time for them to be ready for these exams or the other way around make the exam just simpler for them. So the ultimate purpose is not you have to pass the exam. The exam actually should be like a bridge for them to
acquire the language. The questions should suit their levels.

In response to Samar, Ahlam said, “they bring in the exam long passages and the students are not used to [reading] in English.” Also, Lena shared: “Some vocabulary in the exams are not familiar. If they have something they are unfamiliar with, they will not answer.” To emphasize Lena’s point, Samar commented: “Because they really bring a new subject. It could be about astronomy for example. It is not just the words. It is the subject matter.” As a result, the students become unmotivated when studying. Wedad said:

It has to be fair. It is the exam basically because honestly I had a student she said I hate English but I want to learn it. I want to be able to learn it but when I study a lot. I stay in the class and get the grammar but when I come to the exam day, I can’t really answer it because I feel the questions are not really the same as you were giving us in the class or whatever we do in the class or the homework. It is not basically the same. Another student told me that she studies so hard for the exam but she finds in the exam paper very difficult vocabulary that she didn’t hear about before, so she gave up.

The instructors believed that on the exam day, the students become even more frustrated because they feel unable and unprepared to answer the questions due to their level of difficulty and challenging vocabulary that was not presented to them in the curriculum.

Student stress, such as taking the exam, is yet another issue the EFL instructors discussed. Samar shared: “The stress for passing for the students and for us and the stress of finishing the curriculum are all combined together. At the end, yes they pass, but do they really learn? This is another issue.” The EFL instructors stated clearly that they were preparing the
students to pass the exams not to learn the language because they were realistic and totally aware of the context and the students. They described how the pressure on them and the students forced them to shift their goal from preparing the students to be able to use the language to preparing them to pass the exams. The ultimate goal of the students was to pass the exams to enter the university.

**Research question four: What support for EFL instructors would facilitate improved English teaching and learning?** Three major themes emerged with respect to this question: (a) voice and choice; (b) sustained teacher learning; and (c) resources.

**Voice and choice.** Four main themes emerged from the notion of voice and choice:

1. EFL instructors’ lack of power and control to make decisions about teaching;
2. the instructors’ voices are silenced and their suggestions are not included;
3. loss of credibility with the students; and
4. the lack of freedom to choose the lesson the instructors want to teach or the lesson plan they want to use when they are being observed by mentors.

During the interviews, the EFL instructors repeatedly called for opportunities to voice their concerns and needs and to have choices. With respect to their use of the curriculum, Lena explained:

Honestly, I need more freedom for the materials I use on my own time management in the class. Even if I do a power point, I need to send it for approval before I use it. I need things that I can use to motivate girls like marks. The freedom to me is to manage the class the way I want regarding the time.
Lena, like the other EFL instructors, expressed feeling powerless and disappointed over being unable to make decisions in her classroom. The instructors wanted to have some control over teaching content. They wanted a space to decide what they wanted to teach, but this was hard for them because they had to follow the pacing guide. They mentioned that they needed some freedom to teach their own way use the materials they wanted to use.

Furthermore, they felt disappointed that no matter how many times they made suggestions or asked for things they needed, no action took place. As Samar stated: “They ask us about our opinions. They don’t always take them on board, you know, but they do ask. That is another thing, I think teachers’ experiences, opinions, ideas, and suggestions should be taken more on board about how the curriculum should be and how much it is.” The instructors wanted their voices to be heard. They believed that their opinions and experiences were valuable and important and should be taken into consideration because they knew better what they encountered daily in the classes than any other, external entity did.

The EFL instructors mentioned that they lost credibility with the students because they would say one thing but then something else happened. Shatha argued: “Students can get away with so many things in this campus. They know very well what our limits [are] as teachers.” The instructors were desperate for more authority or autonomy in the classroom to better maintain order and the respect of the students.

The lack of freedom was not limited to the English classroom. It extended to include the observation sessions the mentors attended to evaluate teachers’ performances. The EFL instructors stated that one mentor asked to attend a class covering a particular part of the curriculum, a skill she chooses or asked that the board be organized in a particular way, for example, that the lesson objectives be listed on the right side of the board. Samar remarked: “It is
such a fake thing you do for observation because you don’t do this for every day. This doesn’t make any sense. This is so misleading.” Moreover, the instructors found that some mentors forced them to use a specific form of lesson plan and specific teaching techniques because the mentors are familiar with them and it makes them comfortable when they attend the instructors’ classes to observe. Lena described an experience of one of her colleagues when a mentor observed her class: “She repeated the observation because she wanted a grammar lesson. Also there was something with the lesson plans she didn’t like and asked her to repeat it. She gave her a sort of headache. Now I am little scared.” The EFL instructors stated that they should have freedom to choose the lesson they want to teach when the mentors attend and use the lesson plan they want to use.

**Sustained teacher learning.** The instructors described their desire to learn about things they felt they needed help with to improve their teaching. They called for two things to grow in their teaching practices: (a) professional development workshops; and (b) effective feedback from the mentors who observed their classes.

They expressed their desire to attend professional development workshops to help them to learn the things they need to know, such as how to deal with multilevel classes, how to improve reading levels, and how to motivate the students. These are just two out of ten from the list of topics the EFL instructors mentioned that they needed help with. Warda said: “We need professional support. We need to be provided with professional workshops. We need some workshops about how to deal with the students and how to motivate them.”

Instructors attended several workshops offered by the university for which attendance was mandated; however, they said that they learned nothing from these workshops for two reasons: (1) workshop topics were not the topics the EFL instructors wanted to know about. The
university did not ask them in what areas they thought they needed workshops before designing them; (2) the workshops were prepared and presented by EFL instructors who were not experts but, as they called them, “local people” from the same university. The EFL instructors said that they left these workshops with nothing because they were generally already familiar with the presented materials, so there was nothing new for them. Samar commented on a workshop she attended outside of the campus that was held by the British Council as follows:

In every field, there is black and white. The school of thoughts, there is room for the grey area in every field that how it is subject matter. You are not allowed to approach that grey area here and examples are the workshops we attend. Who attends the TESOL (Teaching English of Speakers of Other Languages) two years ago? I swear that is the only thing I actually learnt something from. That is the only one I might have learned something from in three years PDs (professional development workshops). It is happening now and I am going to go because it is the only one I learned something from. You know how it is enriching to hear a panel discussion in the subject. You are not around creativity here. You are not allowed to go to the grey area. For example, using Arabic, in the KESOL, they said life is too short, if you have to use your first language, use it. That is the only one in three years I really liked. I really feel I learned something out of it.

Samar noted that all the workshops that she had been forced to attend over three years had not added to her knowledge. All the other instructors agreed that they did not remember the content because they did not find any value in them. The instructors mentioned they were desperate to attend workshops in the areas where they needed help. They wanted experts with a wide knowledge base and a breadth of experience to deliver these workshops.
Describing the lack of effective feedback from the mentors who observed their classes included that some were not satisfied with the feedback because, they said, it added nothing to their teaching practice. Warda commented:

We need also a kind of advisory support or something like that because when you deal with people with experience you get a lot out of them. I think we need professional mentors that give us a helpful feedback when they observe our classes. People who we could benefit from. I am not satisfied with the people who observe us.

In discussing the nature of the feedback the EFL instructors received and if they benefitted from it, Samar commented: “It depends. Once yes. The second time, no not really, and the third time didn’t hear back and I am not sure if I ever will [laughs].” The instructors called repeatedly for opportunities for opportunities for teacher learning because they wanted help in different areas and they did not receive the support they needed.

**Resources.** The need for more resources and facilities to support instructors’ teaching included (a) physical space; (b) Internet access; and (c) the library.

*Physical space.* Physical space is one of the issues that the EFL instructors complained about. They complained about: (a) having unmovable chairs that are stuck to the floor in the classrooms; and (b) the challenges they encountered because some classes were being held in the computer lab.

The classrooms design made it impossible to move the chairs because they are stuck to the floor. Shatha said: “I would love to have movable chairs in the class because the chairs are stuck to the floor. It is difficult to move the students and make group works. It is very difficult
for us. We spoke about this but it is difficult to change it because it is done. The chairs are nailed to the floor.” Lena thought that the superiors did not agree that the instructors needed movable chairs. She commented:

I would like to adjust the seating. We can’t do that. The chairs are already nailed to the floor. So the class is in rows. You know in teaching English you want to have that variety, to move your girls, to make circles, to make them working in groups. You need your class to be dynamic. But with the settings that I have, you just have to go around and inside those rows. I am pretty sure that the superiors don’t agree with me.

While learning a language needs a dynamic environment where students can move around the class and instructors can set groups to work together and use other collaborative learning techniques, the classrooms are not physically designed for this. Nevertheless, instructors reported that they still did group activities even in this context.

I observed in one of the classes that an activity that required students to work together was not easy to do because of the arrangement of the chairs.

(Observation note, March 2014)

Another issue involved classes that took place in the computer lab with a lot of computers. The seating made the students face the computers not the instructor. This also made it harder for the instructor to see the students’ faces. In order for her to see them, she had to walk around all the time. Moreover, the computer labs did not have white boards mounted to the wall. Instead they had a small movable board that is less than the half size of the regular board and sometimes not even that. One instructor reported that she had to teach a whole module to her
classes without a board when I expressed surprise, she said she was not teaching grammar or writing because her partner took this part. She was teaching reading and speaking. Her partner’s classes were held in a regular class not the computer labs. She said that arranging the skills according to the space was all she could do because she could not move to another classroom despite her and the students complaining multiple times to the superiors.

I observed a class in the computer lab. It was different than the other classes. I noted that the instructor could not see the students’ faces because of the computers. As a result, the instructor had to move around a lot, which was annoying for her. Also, the white board was very small and it was hard for the instructor to write on it the way she wanted and she had to erase it several times. Moreover, after the break, when the instructor returned to the lab, she could not find the board. She left the lab to look for the board but she could not recover it.

(Observation note, March 2014)

The instructors stated that they needed to use the Smartboard. Maryam shared: “We need to use the smart board. It is easier for us because I only have a small board to write on in the lab. The smart boards are here but nobody uses them.” Although Smartboards were installed and the instructors attended an orientation session on how to use them, they had not been set up.

Internet. The EFL instructors reported limited Internet access with the computer labs being used mainly for exams. Samar commented: “We probably need more labs but the Internet usage is very limited. They all use their phones to access the Internet because the labs are mainly for exams. So I cannot take the students to the lab and there will be an issue of what they are checking in the Internet although it is filtered and they cannot access whatever they want.”
Some instructors encouraged use of the Internet and social media to help students learn. Hanan said:

I would like to use the social media in the curriculum. I think it will help a lot if we use it and some teachers are using WhatsApp with the students and they do groups with the students and interact with them. But for me, I didn’t use the WhatsApp. I like to use the Facebook. The students like it but not all of them participate because some do not have Internet in their home. We need Internet access for them in the campus so they can participate while they are here.

To facilitate the use of social media in English teaching and learning, the EFL instructors requested Internet access for the students on campus so they could use their phones and social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, to participate in the class. The instructors reasoned that because students like to use technology it would be smart if they could use it to support English teaching and learning.

Library. Instructors needed a bigger library or resource room. Samar shared: “The resources room, as it is called in the campus, is a very small library. It is like the size of a small class that takes 20 students.” Shatha agreed, “We have a very small library and it would be better if we have bigger library with more English books and stories.” The campus library they had was very small and not adequate for the size of the campus and the number of students. As a result, the instructors needed to book it early if they needed it for a class. They said that they needed to use this room often because it had movable chairs so provided a welcome change for the students who otherwise spent their whole day in chairs stuck to the floors that could not be moved.

I conducted one of the focus group discussions in the resources room. It was a
very small room, only large enough for 20 students. Also, the resources they had are not adequate for this large campus. I saw that they needed a bigger library that is fully equipped with books, computers, and Internet access to better support the instructors and students because learning a language requires materials and resources. (Observation note, April 2014)

**Concluding remarks.** The instructors’ attitudes toward what they experienced in English teaching and learning in the foundation year can be divided into two categories, (a) their feelings; and (b) their beliefs, as presented below.

**Instructors’ feelings.** The instructors’ feelings about what they were going through and the challenges they encountered were similar. They agreed that students were unmotivated, the curriculum was challenging, the students’ academic English level was weak, the time was short, and the policies did not support instructors’ needs. The instructors felt powerless, unmotivated, and pressured. They were desperate because their opinions and suggestions were not being taken into account and they wanted to have a voice and a choice in their teaching. Despite the changes and the progress that had taken place in the English Language Institute at the university, the issues and problems described by the study participants remained.

**Instructors’ beliefs.** The EFL instructors’ actual practice and how they responded to the issues mentioned above differed. Instructors with several years of teaching in the same place under the same policy and the modules system, had given up. As a result, they succumbed to the structure and stopped resisting preparing the students to pass the exam rather than to learn the language. On the other hand, some instructors intentions and goals still focused on teaching the students the language. Those instructors had less experience teaching. Regardless of the different directions they took, all of them said that they were losing enthusiasm for teaching.
Chapter Five: Reflections and Conclusions

This closing chapter reflect on and interpret the data collected and analyzed in the course of this study. The chapter is divided into six main sections: (1) Interpretation of the data; (2) Implications for EFL curriculum, teaching, and learning; (3) Implications for EFL instructors; (4) Limitations of the study; (5) Further questions and issues; and, Concluding remarks.

The rigid, hierarchical educational system and its effects on EFL in the university foundation year as a result of its top-down organization, fixed curriculum, limited time, and poor outcomes drew much response from the instructors in this research. I contend that this study is a first step on the journey to improving EFL teaching and learning at the university level in Saudi Arabia. Conducting this research has also made me a better teacher and a researcher. One of the emerging considerations from this research is that we need to rethink traditional, conventional conceptions of EFL curriculum, teaching, and learning at the university level in Saudi Arabia.

Interpretation of the Data

Research question one: How do participating EFL instructors understand and implement the foundation year EFL university curriculum? The findings of this research highlight the relationship between EFL instructors’ understanding of EFL curriculum and their implementation of it. If EFL instructors view curriculum as a document, their implementation is confined to following the book and using the instructional materials as prescribed in the curriculum documents, then teacher learning, teaching and student learning are negatively affected (Al-Hajailan, 2013). The study suggests that EFL instructors rethink their views of curriculum, teaching, and learning as a first step to improving the EFL program.
Instructors’ perspectives and understanding of EFL curriculum. Participating EFL instructors view curriculum as a document. They think that having a prescribed document with instructional materials and pacing guide is convenient and helpful. However, still they complain about being unable to contribute to or modify the curriculum as needed (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). If curriculum is viewed as a complete product, learning opportunities are lost for both teachers and students (Goodson, 1997; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013; Posner & Rudnisty, 1982). Since each class has its own environment and different students have different needs, curriculum does not change according to the students’ needs and the teachers’ experience in the classroom (Wassermann, 2015). How can the full learning potential of the teachers and students be reached?

When participating EFL instructors implement the curriculum, they face many challenges. To overcome these challenges, they need knowledge to develop themselves and then learn while they search for knowledge (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013; Wiles & Bondi, 2011). This journey of learning is essential for both teachers and students. Thus, there is a need to shift from viewing curriculum as a document to viewing curriculum as a “currere”, that is, a journey teachers and students take with knowledge. If teachers view curriculum as a “currere”, curriculum becomes dynamic and changes in response to particular challenges or changing needs (Pinar, 2004). Learning cannot be predetermined because teachers need to be able to respond to whatever surprising and unexpected things take place in the classroom (Hewitt, 2006). If teachers do not change or modify according to what they encounter, curriculum implementation will fail, which will affect learning outcomes (Sarason, 1990; Wiles & Bondi, 2011).

The central power of the education system in Saudi Arabia imposes the view of curriculum as a document (Liton, 2012). This is clear from the reports of the EFL instructors in
the study. However, some teachers in the study came to realize that curriculum is not a document but must be flexible enough to accommodate the challenges both students and teachers face in the classroom and the learning environment. As a result, they started to rethink curriculum to find ways to improve their and their students’ learning experiences. This research indicates that the ways EFL instructors view and understand curriculum affects the ways they implement it, which, in turn, affects both teachers and students.

**Curriculum implementation.** When curriculum is seen as a document, implementation means following the book, the instructional materials, and the pacing guide. It also means teachers have no room for creativity and are limited to teaching for the exams (Doll, 1996). When teachers are told exactly what to do with the content and how much time they should spend and how they should present in each task, teachers are seen as transmitters of knowledge and implementers of received knowledge (Sibahi, 2015; Ying, 2012). But this way of implementing curriculum will affect students’ learning negatively because what they need is not considered (Wassermann, 2015). Moreover, teachers will be affected negatively because this will limit their search for knowledge and learning (Loughran, 2009). It will also fail to take advantage of their creativity because they are seen as machines that do exactly what they are asked to do (Loughran & Russell, 2007).

The findings of this research suggest that implementing the curriculum following the pacing guide exactly prepares the students to pass the exam but not necessarily to learn the language. This approach is not even very successful at getting students to pass the exam. EFL instructors note a large number of failures and some of those who pass have only a low level of English proficiency. This strongly suggest a need to shift the way that curriculum is implemented and the thinking about teachers from implementer of others’ knowledge to knowledgeable
professionals who can implement the curriculum the way they believe will work best for their students and classes in their journey of teaching and learning (Tanner & Tanner, 2007). In Saudi Arabia, viewing curriculum as a document and implementing the curriculum as following orders has been proved not to be productive over many years. It is time to change the approach.

Research supports changing the view of curriculum as a document for improved teaching and learning (Goodson, 1997; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013; Posner & Rudnisty, 1982). Some researchers emphasize that the views of curriculum as a document is limited because in most cases curriculum is unconnected to practice and most of what happens in the classrooms misleads, since much actual practice is not in the document (Goodson, 1997). Research supports what the instructors discussed in the study and how they feel frustrated not having an authority to change/modify the curriculum to create opportunities for teaching and learning (Jackson, 2010). The study shows that curriculum is viewed in Saudi Arabia as narrow and limited to the document and that work superiors’ dictate teachers what to do. This hierarchy of power imposes on teachers what they have to do in their classrooms (Alghamdi, 2014; Liton, 2012). The instructors called for opportunities to act according to what takes place in the classrooms with their students. This is supported by the view of curriculum as a “currere”, the journey that teachers take with knowledge from the interactions between them and their students (Pinar, 2004). Teachers described being uncomfortable following the pacing guide and implement the curriculum regardless of the needs of students and how they, as instructors, feel. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) support this by stating that the curriculum is more than a document and how it could be the path teachers have followed and the path they intended to follow. The study suggests given teachers opportunities to reflect on their experiences with the
curriculum for better curriculum development and implementation (Cary, 2006; Jackson, 2010; Roh, 2006).

**Research question two: How do these EFL instructors understand the factors affecting students’ learning?** They disclosed three internal factors affecting students’ learning: culture, motivation, and students’ backgrounds and experiences. Students bring these with them to the classroom and affect their learning.

**Culture.** Participating EFL instructors consider culture one of the important factors in students’ learning (Syed, 2003). In Saudi Arabia, the social attitudes affect students’ belief in themselves and their abilities, which consequently affects their performance and learning outcomes (Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009). For example, if students hear others such as parents, friends, or teachers say, “the only thing you can do is humanities,” or “you cannot excel in science,” or “this is your limitation and you cannot do more than this,” they are likely to underestimate their abilities and feel that whatever they do, they will not succeed. As a result, they fail in learning the language. Students learning outcomes are, in part, a result of the messages people send to them. If students receive positive messages that encourage them to learn, try, and excel, they are more likely to succeed. On the other hand, if students receive negative messages that underestimate their ability to learn and excel, they are likely to fail (Alghamdi & Walters, 2015).

What teachers think about students and what they take for granted may affect both teaching and learning. The EFL instructors have the perspective that Saudi students are weak and not much can be done to improve their performance and competence. They have started to give up on their students (Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009). As educators we believe that if teachers have faith in their students and if they believe the students can learn the language, the students are
more likely to learn the language. On the other hand, if the instructors believe that the students will not be able to learn, they are more likely to resist and fail. What we think about students may be reflected in our performance as teachers and then reflected in the students’ performance as learners (Alghamdi & Walters, 2015). The study recommends that EFL instructors change the way they think about their students in order to encourage them to learn. Culture affects how these students were raised and what their priorities are. Is education even on that priority list? For some it is not. When the students are not exposed to the English language and learning it is not one of their goals and the culture has affected their belief in themselves negatively, what can be done? Are there strategies that could help or modify what students have come to believe over the years? How can instructors shift the students’ belief from “we can’t learn the language” to “we can”?

Motivation. A lack of motivation exists among both teachers and students in the EFL classes at the university according to the EFL instructors (Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009). Students tell their instructors that they study hard for the exam, but when it comes to the exam day, they are unable to answer many questions. As a result, they feel disappointed and they do not study the next time. Having several unsuccessful experiences make the students lose their motivation to learn (Abu Ayyash, 2015). Students also lack incentive. Since they know that instructors cannot give marks even if they work hard in the class. Also, the lack of connection between the students’ lives and the lessons makes it hard for them to learn the language. To solve this, the instructors have to answer these questions: How can we motivate the students? What would the effect be of connecting the curriculum with the students’ real lives?

The interviews revealed that not only are the students unmotivated, but EFL instructors are not motivated to teach. They have the idea that whatever they do in the classroom for their
students, there will be no improvement (Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009). When the teachers experience failure repeatedly over the years, they become less motivated to teach. When the students show no interest in learning and do not participate in the class, they send negative energy and feelings to the instructors and vice versa. Nevertheless, some instructors stated that when there is one excellent student in the class who shows that she is eager and enthusiastic about learning, this motivates them. What are some of the things that increase teachers’ enthusiasm about teaching? What is the relation between teachers’ enthusiasm and students’ motivation? These questions need to be investigated.

**Students’ backgrounds and experiences.** Students are different, they come from different backgrounds with different life experiences. These differences create a big challenge for EFL instructors in the classroom because they need to address these differences in order to facilitate learning for all their students. If teachers ignore these differences, the students are likely to have difficulty in learning the language. Teachers need support in this regard because the context in which they teach already imposes lots of challenges: too little time, too much content, weak students, rigid policies, lack of power and lack of opportunity to have input in the curriculum. If teachers are dealing with all these obstacles, how are they going to address the different needs of their students? If they do not have time, how can they allocate more time for students who need it? If they do not have a voice, how can they make changes according to students’ needs?

Research indicates that students’ engagement in their classes is very critical to their learning (Carini et al., 2006). Some administrators and teachers think they can impose learning on students; however, learning is internal and we cannot force students to learn if they are not motivated (Alghamdi, 2014; Bawazeer, 2015; Vermunt & Vermetten, 2004). The instructors are concerned about their inability to motivate students and encourage them to learn. One of the
ways to motivate students to learn is by including their voices as they learn. This allows teachers to benefit from hearing the students’ ideas so they know what and how the students want to learn (Cook-Sather, 2006; Holdsworth, 2000; Kooy & Colarusso, 2012; Lewis, 2001). Moreover, learning should be viewed as social and dynamic and this happens when students’ voices are included. The ideal school environment exists when students have active voices in the educational process (Cook-Sather, 2009; Kooy & Colarusso, 2012). To overcome the learning barriers that culture and lack of motivation cause, research suggests that teachers create conditions for learning the language in the classrooms through initiating a dialogue about how students would like to be taught the language (Walters & Alghamdi, 2005). When students share their opinions, read, discuss and talk, they will start constructing knowledge, learn and build self-confidence. Building self-confidence will help students gradually to overcome the negative impact of the culture, presented in this study, on how they see themselves as lacking the ability to excel and succeed (Dudley-Marling & Searle, 1991). When the students start to believe in their abilities, they will interact with the teacher and engage in the class activities where they learn the language through interactions in meaningful events (Raison, Rivalland, Cowan, & Australia, 1994).

**Research question three: How do these EFL instructors re-imagine teaching and learning in the EFL curriculum?** Four external factors that contribute to EFL curriculum, teaching and learning emerged from this study. The EFL instructors in the study re-imagine teaching and learning through changes in policy and power, time, content, and assessment. All four external factors put pressure on EFL instructors that result in difficulties in the classroom and low student performance.
**Policy and power.** It is very important to have a clear policy in each university; however, policy should not interfere with pedagogical practices because teachers know their classes and what works and what does not (Doll, 1996). They are the primary source able to determine how to solve or manage any issue in their classes. Dictating to teachers exactly what to do in the classes is not wise because usually those who do so are people who are away from classrooms either who have never been teachers or have not taught in a while (Al-Naqbi, 2011). Teachers know best what happens in the classrooms (Wassermann, 2015). For example, if teachers are forced to obtain approval for extra materials they want to use in the classrooms as the instructors in the study reported, this suggests a lack of trust from their superiors. If teachers feel disappointed and powerless, this will affect their performance and level of enthusiasm for their work (Loughran, 2009).

**Time.** When both EFL instructors and students complained about the time issue for years and still no action, we need to stop and think about this deeply. The instructors are teaching in the same context for several years and they insist that the issue of time proved not to be working all these years. If something proves not to be working, why has nothing been done? The time for each module is very short compared to the large amount of content that instructors have to cover, which affects students’ learning negatively. The short time allowed for each module makes the EFL instructors very frustrated (Sherry & Hann, 2012). In the short period of seven weeks, so many things must be done, such as regular weekly assessments, daily lesson planning, the mid-term exam, and the final exam. As a result, EFL instructors do not have time to reflect, collaborate, and discuss their teaching and this decreases teacher learning opportunities and increases challenges in teaching and learning (Larrivee, 2000). Moreover, students think that some of the classes are too long for them. They have reported to the instructors that the four hour
classes, especially those take place at the end of the day are too long, and well before the end they feel they are no longer able to take in the material (Darandari & Murphy, 2013). Thus, this research suggests finding a balance between time and content (Wopereis, Sloep, & Poortman, 2010). One of the solutions by suggested EFL instructors in the study is to either reduce the content in the course or allocate more time for covering the required material at each level. Another suggested that the number of hours of the long classes that take place at the end of the day be reduced.

Content. The content of the English language curriculum is customized to fit Saudi culture; however, several issues need reconsideration: For example, Oxford Press produces the books for the course meaning the texts are produced by people not aware of the nature of EFL teaching and learning in the Saudi context. They are unaware of the students’ levels and needs. It would make more sense if teachers were asked to contribute to the curriculum and give their opinions. As the EFL instructors implemented the curriculum for many years, many issues emerged: The distribution of skills and tasks, the inconsistencies between each level in the curriculum, and the selection of reading passages and reading supplements.

The study suggests creating opportunities for EFL instructors to contribute to the curriculum (Oliva & Gordon, 2013). Moreover, giving the instructors chances to use supplementary materials when needed without asking for permission. Teachers should be trusted and supported to be motivated and comfortable in their teaching (Guskey, 2000). I was talking with one of the instructors after the completion of data collection and she told me “I am thinking to leave this university. I do not want to teach anymore. Everything is so controlled. I feel like I am a machine who listens to orders and apply them not a teacher.” If teachers feel uncomfortable and controlled to the extent that they cannot contribute to the curriculum, they are likely to feel
unmotivated, uncomfortable, and frustrated (Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009). This may affect them negatively to the extent that they leave the profession.

Assessment. This study revealed that assessment is another external factor that affects students’ learning and also one of the issues that imposes challenges on the EFL instructors. When the students know that their instructors cannot award marks for their classroom performance, they are likely to not participate in the classes because there is no incentive that motivates them. When they know that all the marks are based on exams and assessments, why bother participating or engaging in the class activities. Darandari & Murphy (2013)

The concentration on grading by traditional approaches to assessment forces students to focus on their marks and grades, rather than on the actual process of learning. It defines the curriculum around the assessment rather than the learning processes. Furthermore, traditional assessment methods may cause surface learning and can result in increased anxiety for students. (p. 64)

Another issue related to assessment is that almost all the grades on exams and formal assessment are based on the four language skills. So, no marks are assigned to activities, papers or presentations (Darandari & Murphy, 2013) This supports teaching to prepare students for exams not to learn the language. Also, having very limited time and a large content to be covered gives the instructors no choice but to prepare the students for the exams (Darandari & Murphy, 2013).

Another variable is related to the exam itself. If students study for the exams but nevertheless find that they are not able to answer lots of questions because of unfamiliar, difficult vocabulary or any other issues, they are likely to be depressed and lose their motivation to learn.
To solve this, the findings of the study suggest considering allowing EFL instructors to contribute to the design of the exam questions because they know the level of their students. But exams should not be the only method of assessment. There should be variety of assessment methods to measure different aspects of learning and also to motivate students to learn. Having high scores in the exams does not mean that learning of English has taken place. Darandari and Murphy (2013) noted:

This change implies a transfer from standardized tests to contextual assessment that is based on the context of teaching and learning. It also stresses personalizing assessment and directing it to discover and match student learning styles, encouraging the student to choose their assessment and to conduct self-assessment. Besides, it shifts the focus from inputs to outcome standards which identify quality levels that need to be achieved. (p. 65)

In this study, the instructors reported how the students’ level in English is very weak and how they are coming to class not ready for the content of the curriculum they teach in the foundation year at the university. Alnassar and Dow (2013) believe that:

It is easy for those receiving students at a particular level to ‘blame’ the teaching at the previous level for poor and insufficient preparation, saying that students have not been taught subject content needed or expected, that their preparation in the language of the medium of instruction is inadequate and that their understanding of how to learn is poor because they have simply been drilled to answer predictable exam questions about content rather than having been taught for understanding. (p. 51)

This could be true; however, in the study the instructors reported several challenges such as policy, time, content and lack of opportunities to make a change. The study indicates that even
if the instructors would like to improve the students’ ability to learn and excel, the context where they work is very tight and inflexible. Nevertheless, the University puts pressure on EFL instructors to produce competent students. Alnassar and Dow (2013) stated:

In all countries there is wide agreement that learning and teaching in universities can and should be greatly improved. Most people see that this improvement needs to come, first and foremost, from university teaching staff using more effective means of instruction, being clearer about course objectives, using small group teaching methods to promote genuine interactions with students, effectively using the modern technologies now available and relating the assessment of students directly to course objectives. (p. 49)

Teachers are the first ones to be blamed when the students are under-performing in the class and this measured is mainly through exams. The instructors reported that the rigid policy control so much what is going on the classrooms that it prevents instructors from making a change. Al-Eisa and Smith (2013) revealed:

The current governance model in Saudi universities, in which the Ministry of Higher Education has significant direct control over all aspects of university education and administration, may no longer be appropriate in meeting the range of important challenges now facing universities and the Kingdom. Universities need much greater autonomy over their operation and direction if they are to adequately and appropriately serve the diverse emerging needs of all their stakeholders and to properly service the needs of the Saudi economy and job market into the future. (p. 34)

The power hierarchy is well established in Saudi Arabia that impact teaching and learning negatively (Sibahi, 2015). Beside the strict and inflexible policy, time plays a critical
role in preventing the instructors from several things they reported in the study as collaboration, reflection, allocating appropriate time for each lesson in the curriculum according to students’ needs. Larrivee (2000) indicates the importance of allocating time for solitary reflection for teachers. She suggested that teachers use self-reflective journals to ensure time is set aside for daily reflection as this will help them to question the status quo and become a problem solver and also build their knowledge. If teachers are busy running from one task to another and have no time to reflect and collaborate to develop themselves, teaching and learning, how can the EFL classes be improved? Researchers emphasize how it is important for the educational institutions to provide teachers with time to have discussions and interact with each other for improved teaching and learning (Little, 2012; Oliva, 1989; Tanner & Tanner, 2007).

Curriculum content poses challenges for the instructors and students because not everything that teachers need is in the curriculum and they have no authority to modify it and what they experience in the class is different than what the documents include. There is a difference between theory and practice. What makes sense for people who designed the curriculum based on theory is not necessarily a good fit in the specific context (Sarason, 1990). Literature supports what the study reveals regarding the importance of giving teachers authority to adjust to the curriculum and power to act according to students’ need in the classrooms, allocating time for teachers to collaborate and reflect and using different methods of assessment not only exams.

Research question four: What support for EFL instructors would facilitate improved English teaching and learning? The findings of the study suggest some changes that may facilitate improved English teaching and learning. These include voice and choice, sustained teacher learning and resources. The study shows that if EFL instructors were to have voice and
choice in different aspects of teaching and curriculum, this would improve their teaching and the students’ learning. This is because the instructors’ contribution to curriculum and teaching strategies and styles would be according to what they think is best given students’ needs and the class environment (Loughran, 2009). Another variable is sustained teacher learning. The lack of teacher learning opportunities hinders EFL instructors’ growth and consequently affects their teaching and students’ learning (Kooy, 2006). Finally, a lack of resources as the findings reveal may act as an obstacle in the classroom and the learning environment such as boards, library, the way the classes are designed and technology (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013).

**Voice and choice.** Including teachers’ voices is very important in curriculum, teaching, and learning (Kooy, 2006). The lack of EFL instructors’ voices and choices in teaching proved to create challenges for students’ learning according to the participants in the study. If teachers are not allowed to adjust their teaching in response to students’ needs, and teachers’ preferences, how can teaching and learning be accomplished? It is teachers’ right to manage their classes the way they want and believe will best serve students’ learning needs (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013).

Teachers’ voices should not be considered exclusively for matters of teaching in the classrooms. They should be heard outside the classroom door in issues related to curriculum development and improvement (Guskey, 2000). When teachers are asked to report on things they encounter in their teaching and what recommendations they have, their opinions should be taken on board because of the knowledge they have from teaching and interacting with the students (Loughran, 2009).

In this study, the EFL instructors complained that they do not have voice or choice in the lesson they want to teach and how they want to present it when it came to having their performance evaluated by a mentor. In some cases, the mentors may ask the EFL instructor to
teach a certain skill and to follow a certain lesson plan when she attends a class for observation. Teachers are better to decide which lesson they want to cover, the lesson plan they want to use and how to deliver a lesson (Wassermann, 2015). There is no point to control this by mentors. These decisions should be left to teachers. EFL instructors can better determine what to teach and choose the approach they think best fit the lesson (Bozik, 1990).

**Sustained teacher learning.** According to the study participants, good teacher learning opportunities were not available to them. What they received were limited PD sessions that were presented by colleagues who had almost the same level of knowledge and experience. These PD sessions did not actually provide opportunities for development according to the EFL instructors in the study. Teachers should be asked for their opinions about what they would like and need to learn about. Another thing is that PDs should be presented by experts on the topic covered not by teachers who have limited knowledge in the area. Since PDs as described by the participants fail to add to EFL instructors’ knowledge, there should be more sustained teacher learning opportunities offered regularly to help teachers to grow and, subsequently, improve student learning.

One of the opportunities presented in the study is building a learning community among EFL instructors (Kooy, 2006). The study shows that EFL instructors only talk together about the classes and what they go through during the official meetings. There was no community spirit among them because the short timelines keep teachers extremely busy preparing lessons, teaching, and assessing the students. After I conducted the individual interviews, I asked the 9 participants if they would like to participate in focus group discussion, they all expressed their willingness to do so if they had time. Throughout the journey of data collection, I noticed that time is the big issue and lack of time is the obstacle that was preventing teachers from building a
learning community. It was interesting to watch them in the group meetings and notice the
difference between the first meeting and the last one. Although there were only three meetings, a
huge difference between the first and the last one was clearly apparent to me as a researcher. In
the first meeting, some EFL instructors were somehow reluctant to speak. I could see that
instructors who shared the same office were close to each other but not to the rest of the group.
In the last meeting, I was left with the impression that if we had been able to continue the
meetings for a while this group would likely become a community. This was indicated by the
fact that during the discussion in the third meeting the instructors went off the topic and started
to talk about their undergraduate degrees and their English learning experiences and realized out
of the discussion that six of them were taught English linguistics and literature in the same
university by the same professors. They were talking and laughing sharing stories about
situations they went through as students doing their undergraduate degrees. They shared their
opinions about several professors. They were surprised that they had not known that they had
graduated from the same university although they are teaching in the same place and their offices
besides each other. They started to say, “What a small world,” and exchanged more stories.

After that, they started to feel more comfortable with each other and talked about the
observation feedback they received from the mentors. The instructors who were done with their
observation class and had received the feedback from their mentors started to give tips and
guidance to the instructors who were expecting to be observed soon. What is the role of the
superiors in creating a community between the instructors? What would be the first step in
creating this community? Is it time? A community in which teachers speak freely and exchange
experiences is a sustained teacher learning opportunity (Goodlad, 1984; Little, 2002, 2003).
**Resources.** Having the resources essential for teaching is very critical because the lack of any of them affects teaching and learning negatively (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). This was clear from the experiences reported in the study. If the classrooms have chairs that are fastened to the floor, it is hard to have a dynamic class, especially in teaching the language, because there are lots of activities that are best done in groups. It is hard to work in groups when the chairs cannot be moved. Thus, this affects both teachers and students. Also, because some English classes were conducted in the computer labs because of the lack of appropriate spaces, several issues emerged, such as difficulty making eye contact with the students because of the computer screens in front of them. Also, the computer labs had only a small white board which the teachers reported did not give them enough space to write in order to explain the lessons.

The absence of the teacher’s voice in the curriculum is a challenge for the instructors in the study. The rigid and fixed EFL program at the university impacts teachers’ performance and students’ learning negatively (Sibahi, 2015). It is recommended that instructors have a say in the curriculum for improved teaching and learning (Cary, 2006; Jackson, 2010; Roh, 2006). It is hard to control what takes place in the classrooms and teachers know the needs of their students better. Thus, their voice is essential in curriculum development and implementation (Tanner & Tanner, 2007).

It is not only the absence of the teachers’ voice and power due to the over controlled system that has been problematized, but also the absence for learning opportunities for teachers. The opportunities presented for teacher learning were meager and in the form of workshops and were not meeting their needs and not helping them in teaching. Research indicates that those PDs proved to be ineffective (Kooy, 2006; Little, 2012). These workshops are imposed on teachers without taking their opinions about what they would like to learn. Thus, it is recommended that
we start with the teacher knowledge through imitating group discussions and opportunities for teachers to learn in a social context (Kooy & Colarusso, 2012). As this will need allocating time for teachers to have these discussions, it is recommended that the educational institution support creating these opportunities (Little, 2012; Oliva, 1989; Tanner & Tanner, 2007).

The lack of resources is another challenge that prevents some learning opportunities for students. Instructors problematized the lack of some resources and the inadequacy of some existed resources in the university. They believe that having all the needed resources are critical to EFL teaching and learning. “In particular, universities need much greater autonomy over the way they allocate resources and promote quality teaching and learning” (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013, p. 34).

**Implications for EFL Curriculum, Teaching and Learning in Saudi Arabia**

To improve EFL curriculum, teaching and learning at university level, the findings of this research suggests the following:

1. Including EFL instructors’ voices in the curriculum; and
2. Modifying some aspects of the policy and the EFL program.

**Including EFL instructors’ voices in the curriculum.** The absence of EFL instructors’ input in the curriculum is considered one of the biggest challenges for teaching and learning (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). In the Saudi university context, teachers’ voices are completely absent in curriculum development and implementation. Although teachers are asked to present their opinions during a formal meeting held at the end of each module, their opinions are not taken on board. What could happen if superiors started to take EFL instructors’ suggestions seriously as a first step for improvement? This research suggests that we start with teachers’
knowledge instead of replacing it with others’ knowledge and forcing EFL instructors to teach accordingly. The English curriculums at the university have been changed several times. Yet, there has been no improvement. Instead of having administrators change the curriculum from the outside, why not try making changes based on EFL instructors’ experiences with the books, students, and context. In this case, changes would be based on what teachers learn when reflecting on and supporting their students. Moreover, this would help in reducing the costs of creating new curriculum from outside the university. However, in order to make this happen, EFL instructors would need support such as time for them to meet with each other and with experts in curriculum development.

**Modifying some aspects of the policy and the EFL program.** The findings resulting from the study highlight some insights about policy and EFL program improvement as follows. It is recommended that:

1. EFL instructors use supplementary materials of their choosing not only the ones imposed on them.
2. EFL instructors implement the curriculum using the teaching style they choose for each skill so as to best fit their students’ needs and the environment of the class.
3. Administrators change the long classes to shorter ones and the module system to a semester system.
4. Curriculum developers reconsider the number of chapters and the length of the curriculum to allow for more time and accommodate the levels of students.
5. EFL instructors be able to award marks for class participation and other class activities as an incentive to motivate the students.
6. EFL instructors teach the students the language instead of preparing the students for the exams.

7. EFL instructors encourage students to participate and support them when they make errors.

8. Administrators assign some grades for learning language activities rather having all the marks assigned for exams and formal assessments.

9. Administrators make rules to give the EFL instructors authority to discipline the students when they misbehave.

10. Student should not pass the level if she is not ready to pass.

11. Administrators provide EFL instructors and students with all the essential resources of physical space, technology, Internet, and library.

**Implications for EFL University Instructors**

Because of my experiences collecting the data for this study, I came to realize that we cannot always blame English teachers for students’ poor performance in language learning because in most cases there are several factors, other than the instructor, that contribute to it. The focus group discussions with the participants created a safe environment for sharing experiences, narratives, ideas, opinions, and suggestions to try to find solutions to the issues/problems/obstacles they have in teaching. The findings of this study suggest two important recommendations for EFL university instructors to be considered:

1. Collaboration between EFL instructors.

2. Self-reflection.
Collaboration between EFL instructors. The context in which the EFL instructors in the study worked did not encourage collaboration between them and this was clearly because of a lack of time. For example, there was no three-day pre-module time for teachers to meet, prepare, and collaborate. This is critical because two instructors share teaching of each class. Due to the lack of time, teachers were working in isolation. Although partners teach the same class, they do not collaborate in preparation and they do not meet to discuss issues related to their class and students. What they do is inform each other where each one stopped the lesson and what she covered in her class time. Is this enough? We can understand that EFL instructors do not collaborate because of time, but it is very difficult to understand how two instructors who are sharing the teaching of one class do not collaborate at all. They do not even talk about their students and try to think together how to improve their class and the level of their students. How can we initiate collaboration between instructors? What is the role of level coordinators in this? What difference would this make if partners started to collaborate? All these questions need to be answered.

Self-reflection. The teachers in the study reported that they had no time to reflect on their pedagogical practices. They were busy running from one task to another. They stated that they did not have time to reflect and if they did, it was a surface reflection not critical one. The time the teachers spent in reflection is almost five minutes and not necessarily after each class. They stated that they did a quick reflection in their minds without taking notes and sometimes they did not reflect at all. If teachers do not have time to ask themselves questions about their classes, how are they going to improve? (Larrivee, 2000). Teaching is not only about preparing and explaining the lessons in the classroom. It is a life-long journey during which teachers continue to learn through reflecting on their lessons and classes. Teachers need to reflect deeply and
critically on their pedagogical practices and what works and what does not work. They should always ask themselves: How can they improve their teaching? How can they improve the students’ learning experience? How can they improve learning outcomes?

**Limitations of the Study**

Due to the small number of participants and the fact that participants were all female, the results are not generalizable. Nevertheless, the study provokes new learning and questions that can be researched and developed in other educational contexts.

**Further Questions and Issues**

*What can EFL instructors do to motivate English language learners?* During the interviews and the focus group meetings, the EFL instructors stated that they did not know how to motivate the students. Although the findings of the study recommend providing EFL instructors with the ability to award marks as an incentive to motivate the students, interviews should be conducted with students at university to investigate what would motivate them to learn the language.

*What is the best format or structure to facilitate sustained teacher learning?* The findings of the study show that the teacher learning opportunities were meager. Such that there were took the form of PDs. Thus it is apparent that there is a need for alternatives to the formal PDs and changes in the structure and topics of the PDs presented to meet the instructors’ needs. One of the alternatives suggested from the study is that a learning community be built so that the EFL instructors in the context where the study could become a community rather than a group that does not collaborate and share the issues arising in their classes. More research is needed to explore ways of initiating and sustaining teachers’ learning.
What are the male EFL instructors’ perspective on EFL curriculum, teaching, and learning at university? The education system in Saudi Arabia segregates males and females in schools and universities. This research was conducted in one of the female campuses at the university. It would be beneficial if further research took place to investigate how male EFL instructors’ view and understand EFL curriculum and the impact of this on teaching and learning at university.

What are the opinions of the administrators and superiors on the EFL curriculum, teaching, and learning? Since this study was conducted with EFL instructors, the findings present only the nature of EFL curriculum, teaching and learning at university level through one lens. Therefore, further research is needed to explore how administrators who make the rules see the challenges EFL instructors encounter in implementing the curriculum, teaching, and learning and growing themselves.

Concluding Remarks

In the first chapter I describe my personal experience as an EFL instructor and what drove me to conduct this research. Although there was a difference of five years between the time I left teaching to pursue my master’s and PhD degrees and the time I collected the research data, there are still similarities between what I encountered in teaching and what the participants in my study described. Although I was teaching in a medical institution not a university, some of the experiences described by the participants are similar to my own. This could be, at least in part, because I was teaching students of the same age.

After conducting the research and comparing my findings with my past experience EFL teaching in a similar context in Saudi Arabia, findings both surprised me and confirmed some what I had already experienced in the Saudi education system. However, I did not expect to find
that EFL instructors were teaching in such a very rigid, inflexible context that posed lots of challenges. Although I had nine participants in the study with different backgrounds and experiences, there was a high level of agreement among them on all the issues presented in the findings.

While scholars are beginning to explore the importance of changing our traditional conception of curriculum, teaching, and learning and PDs, hierarchical model of power is still dominant in the Saudi context, and that affects EFL instructors’ views and implementation of curriculum, their teaching and learning, and the student learning negatively. We need more research on the effects of including teachers’ voice in the curriculum on their growth and students’ learning, and the value of sharing knowledge among EFL instructors and the effects this would have in the classroom.

This research reveals that how EFL instructors implement curriculum is based on their views, which are imposed by their superiors. Moreover, this research highlights the effect of the hierarchies and power on EFL instructors’ teaching and students’ learning and how in the case of Saudi Arabia this hinders teachers’ learning and students’ outcomes. Moreover, this research presents some recommendations that could be a cornerstone to moving forward to an improved EFL curriculum, teaching, and learning at university.
References


Appendix A
Recruitment Letter

My name is Dalia Jamal Alghamdi. I obtained my bachelor degree in English Language and Literature from Girls’ College of Education, King Abdul Aziz University. In June 2011, I obtained the Master degree from University of Toronto, Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development department. Currently, I am a doctoral student in the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Department at University of Toronto. As a part of the PhD program, I have to conduct a research that is related to my major. My research title is “EFL Teaching in University Classrooms in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study of Instructors and Curriculum and Implementation for Language Learning.” For collecting the research data, I have to interview EFL instructors who teach undergraduate students in the first year. If you are interested in the topic and would like to participate in this study, please contact me and we will discuss it further. I am ready to answer all your questions before you decide to be a part of this study.

Sincerely,

Dalia Jamal Alghamdi, PhD Candidate
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Curriculum Teaching and Learning
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Email: dalia.alghamdi@mail.utoronto.ca
Phone:
Appendix B
Informed Consent Form

University of Toronto
Faculty of Education
Informed Consent Form

Research Title: EFL Teaching in University Classrooms in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study of Instructors and Curriculum and Implementation for Language Learning

Investigator: Dalia Jamal Alghamdi

The purpose of this research is to investigate how EFL instructors understand and implement EFL curriculum. It hopes to uncover what EFL Saudi female instructors need to support their practices and help them overcome teaching obstacles. Interviews will be conducted several times if there is a need and each interview will last approximately one hour. During these interviews, questions will be asked regarding your interpretation of curriculum and teaching decision and practices. These tapes will not be shared with the college faculty, but the final report, containing anonymous quotations, will be available to all at the end of the study.

There may be no direct benefits to the participants of this study, but there may be changes that help other EFL instructors following the completion of this study.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT I, ---------------------

HEREBY agree to participate as a volunteer in the above named project. I understand that there will be no risks to me resulting from my participation in the research.

I hereby give permission to be interviewed and for these interviews to be audio-recorded. I understand that, at the completion of this research, the tapes will be in a secured place and then the data will be destroyed after three years. I understand that the information may be published, but my name will not be associated with the research.

I understand that I am free to deny any answer to specific questions on the questionnaires. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and terminate my participation at any time, without penalty.

I have been given the opportunity to ask whatever questions I desire, and all such questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

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Participant        Witness                Researcher

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Date
Appendix C
Interview Questions

Interview One

1. Tell me about your K-12 schooling.
2. Tell me about a teacher who influenced or changed you.
3. Why did you become a teacher?
4. How long have you been teaching?
5. Tell me about your classes and students here at the university.
6. Tell me about the curriculum.
7. Tell me about the grading system and assessment.
8. What are some of the strength you have as an EFL instructor?
9. What are the areas of improvement you think you need as an EFL instructor?
10. What are the resources you have? What are the resources you use? What are the resources you need?

Interview Two

1. How do you define your role and practices as an EFL instructor?
2. If you have a chance to change three things in the curriculum you teach, what would you change?
3. Tell me about a lesson/unit that you did with the students and was very successful.
4. Do you reflect on your teaching? If yes, how long it takes you to reflect and how/what is your way of reflection?
5. In your opinion, what is curriculum?
6. Have you ever join a group of teachers for teaching/learning discussions?
7. What is teaching?
8. What is learning?
9. What are the obstacles you face teaching EFL? How do you overcome them?
10. What support do you need to teach successfully?
11. What do you think about the teaching environment here?
Appendix D
Guide for Group Discussions

Introduction

Good afternoon.
Thank you for coming. A focus group is a relaxed discussion for the themes I generated from your interviews

The purpose

We are here today to talk about your teaching experiences. The purpose is to have in-depth discussions for the issues you talked about in the interviews. I am not here to share information, or to give you my opinions. Your perceptions are what matter. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. You can disagree with each other, and you can change your mind. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel.

Discuss procedure

I will be taking notes and audio recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to say. I explained these procedures to you when we set up this meeting. As you know everything is confidential. No one will know who said what. I want this to be a group discussion, so feel free to respond to me and to other members in the group without waiting to be called on. However, I would appreciate it if only one person did talk at a time. The discussion will last approximately one hour. There is a lot I want to discuss, so at times I may move us along a bit.

Participant introduction

Now, let's start by everyone sharing their name, what they teach, and how long they've been teaching.

Discussion Topics

- Curriculum/Curriculum Implementation
- EFL teaching/leaning Challenges
- Content
- Time
- Motivation
- Policy
- EFL instructors’ input
- Support/ Facilities/ Resources
- Professional Development Workshops
• Learners
• Assessment/evaluations
• Exams

Closure

Is there any other information regarding EFL teaching, Learning and curriculum that you think would be useful for me to know?

Thank you very much for coming this afternoon. Your time is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful.