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STUDENT VOICE: ITS IMPACT ON SCHOOL REFORM EFFORTS AND THE REASONS BEHIND THE SUCCESS SAUDIS ACCOMPLISHED IN LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN CANADA COMPARING TO THEIR UNSUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES IN SAUDI ARABIA

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This paper sought to understand the reasons for the students' inability to learn English in Saudi Arabia while they achieve success in learning English abroad. This paper examines the factors of both failing and successful experiences in learning English in Saudi Arabia and Canada. The research emphasizes the importance of including students' voice for school reform and better teaching and learning outcomes. To gather the required data, the researcher interviewed six Saudis who studied English in Saudi Arabia and then decided to study abroad. The interviews reveal the missing pedagogical practices in Saudi Arabia in teaching English language. This study highlights the important factors in learning English such as curriculums, qualified teachers, pedagogical practices and environment. The findings of this research will fill the literature gap regarding teaching English as a Foreign Language in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Curriculum, Teaching english, Learning english, Pedagogical practices, Environment.

Introduction

The educational system of a country is rightfully regarded as a core component for the identity and advancement of the nation because through educational institutes children and youth are socialized and made into productive members of the society. Educators and policy makers all over the world are therefore constantly looking for ways to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of schools since quality education is directly linked to a nation's productivity. Recent years have particularly been characterized by educational reform efforts geared towards increasing student achievements. Smyth (2006) notes that these urgent calls for school reforms have been as a result of significant decreases in students' achievements in many schools. The past two decades has therefore been characterized by constant strivings by schools to improve student outcome as well as the school climate.

Sands, Lydia, Laura and Alison (2007) point out that despite intense endeavors to promote educational change to affect student achievement, the voice of the students themselves which could inform the debate of how to increase student achievement is sorely lacking. This assertion is corroborated by Mitra (2004) who notes that while many schools struggle in their quest to find the recipe for school improvement; very few go straight to the source and ask students.The reform measures that have been implemented in most cases have been stringent controls such as increasing standards aimed at strengthening accountability. However, evidence indicates that these strategies have failed to achieve the

desired goals of improved student outcomes in schools. This paper will argue that student voice has the potential to help improve teaching and learning, and act as a catalyst for positive change in the school and it should therefore be included in school reforms.

The Purpose of the Study

In Saudi Arabia, teaching English used to start from grade 7 and recently changed to be from grade 6. Students take English classes 4 days a week and each class lasts for 45 minutes. The majority of the students graduate from high school and the English language acquired is meager. The policy makers, people in authority, administrations and teachers usually try to find solutions for this dilemma and suggest changes in the materials of teaching. However, they never ask students about the reasons behind their failure to learn the language. So students have no input in the learning process. As a result, the researcher thought it is critical to interview several students who tried learning the language in two different contexts and face failure and success to compare between both experiences and elicit the essential problems in learning the English language in Saudi Arabia to try to find alternatives and solutions. This research emphasizes including the students' voice for better teaching and learning outcomes. Moreover, it highlights how learning abroad has an impact on: 1) facilitating students' learning 2) providing a suitable environment for practice and 3) social interactions and performance.

Research Questions

1. What are the difficulties and challenges that Saudis face in learning the English language in Saudi Arabia?
2. What are the reasons behind the success Saudis accomplished in learning the language abroad?
3. How can we improve teaching and learning English in Saudi Arabia?

Literature Review

The Need for Student Voice

Before the early 1990s, there was a marked exclusion of student voices from conversations about learning, teaching, and schooling. Kozol (1991) captured this phenomenon by lamenting that "the voices of children have been missing from the whole discussion" (p.5). This absence of student voice is further accentuated by Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder and Reay (2004) who observed that while schools have over the course of the centuries evolved significantly, they have done so without listening to the voices of students. This assertion is backed by numerous research efforts which demonstrate that the dominant culture of schooling prevents practitioners from listening to students' own ideas about how school reforms can be made so as to better address the needs of the students (Cruddas & Haddock, 2003). This attitude by teachers, administrators and policy makers resulted in poor outcomes for students and the school. A number of educators and social critics therefore advocated for the inclusion of the voices of the youth who had been up to then expelled from the learning centers.

Student voice means more than just eliciting the views of young people on trivial issues such as food and uniforms; it also means developing a constructive dialogue about the meaning of learning in school for all members of the community (Lodge, 2005). Student voice calls for students having a legitimate perspective and opinion on the affairs of the school. While students cannot be expected to organize schools or the content of the curriculum, their input on issues should be included since when their interests are considered, the standards can be significantly raised. Students are supposed to be provided with the avenue to play an active role in the decisions about and implementations of educational policies

and practices in their various institutions (Holdsworth, 200, p.355). Having a voice in the student context means students having the opportunity to express opinion and to influence outcome in educational policies. Research indicates that majority of educational institutes are not structured in ways that encourage or recognize student voice (Mitra, 2003; Cook-Sather, 2002; Costello et al., 2000).

In the 21st century, efforts to ensure that the voices of the students are heard have resulted in reform efforts which "encourage reflection, discussion, dialogue and action on matters that primarily concern students, but also, by implication, school staff and the communities they serve" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p.362; Kooy&Colarusso, 2012). Novel notions such as treating the student as someone whose opinion mattered have been proposed and arguments raised that treating students as capable persons could bring about positive outcomes in the learning experience. Ardent proponents of student voice assert that successful educational reforms must include the voice of students. Cook Sather (2002) declares that as long as student perspectives are left out of reform efforts, this efforts will be "based on an incomplete picture of life in classrooms and schools and how that life could be improved" (p.3).

Impacts of Student Voice

Impact on Reform Efforts

School reform efforts are undertaken on the realization that the current system is not optimal. Reforms aim to identify core issues within the school and deal with them in a constructive manner so as to facilitate positive outcome from the students in both academics and personal development. Student voice will result in the school administration working together with the students to deal with problems (Gunter & Pat, 2007). By working hand in hand with students to identify school problems that impact the student's academics and personal development and possible solutions the school is able to benefit from a gain deeper understanding that is brought about by the unique perspectives possessed by the students. Mitra (2004) elaborates that seeking student views on school problems and possible solutions "reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives" (p.289). Student voice initiatives also increase the likelihood of solutions arrived at by the school being supported by the school's student population. This is because when student voice initiates are engaged during the problem solving stages, there is a sense of ownership for the solution found by the students since they are a part of the solution (Sands et al., 2007). Individual students therefore feel a heightened level of commitment to ensure that the solutions arrived at than would be the case if the solutions were generated by the adults without consulting the students.

Most school structures are flawed and the culture established in these institutes is detrimental to the student's well being. Lodge (2005) reveals that traditionally, children were viewed as lacking competence to take an active role in shaping their own experiences. Most schools therefore adopt authoritarian measures to guide children and youth who are viewed to be in need of constant guardianship of adults. Lodge (2005) further states that some schools hold the view that "young people should be seen and not heard". This view is changing with the recognition that young people have a great understanding of social and moral issues. When adults begin viewing students as people in their own rights and not as potential persons, they can benefit from their insights on issues affecting the school. For example, administrators and policy makers may be oblivious to flaws in the school such as poor teaching practices. Student voice results in attention being called to such flaws which are evident to the students. Adults are also forced to acknowledge and react to issues that they would otherwise miss.

Through student voice efforts, open conversations about injustices in schools can be held. These conversations results in equity issues that the administrators would naturally shy away from being discussed. As such, including student voices into school reforms has the advantage of broadening the conversation that adults typically have when they are engaging in school reform efforts (Fielding, 2006). School reforms that consider student voice are more holistic since they are made while taking into consideration various perspectives. As a result of the student input, the information available to aid in the student reform efforts is more complete. Parsell (2000) notes that student voice activities help to

overcome the limitation on knowledge that school administrators, teachers, and policy makers may have. Involving students makes it possible to pool information which is then used to formulate more effective policies for the school.

Traditionally, many schools have suffered from the problem of blame shifting where school personnel shift the blame of failure to the students. This blame has in most cases been directed at students who fail subjects and those who rarely attend school. Since the students have not been able to give their perspective on the issue, they have been seen as the cause of their failure (Mitra, 2004). While this may in some instances be true, research indicates that student failure may be precipitated by underlying issues in the school environment.

By including student voice school personnel become accountable since the students can now offer their perspective concerning failure (Bragg, 2001). By use of tools such as focus groups, the input of students on issues such as why many students fail in exam or choose to cut classes can be addressed. Rather than blaming the students, a deeper look into the problems that may exist in the school's structure is undertaken.

Schools engaging in student voice initiatives by extension invest students with relational power. Smyth (2006) elaborates that relational power refers to the "building of trust within and across a range of groups in schools in ways that enable the development and pursuit of a common vision about how schooling can work for all, including those most marginalized and excluded" (p.292). Warren (2005) goes on to state that relational power acknowledges that effective learning can only take place in an environment of trust and cooperation. In such an environment, students are more motivated to learn and to achieve the academic objectives that have been set for them.

Many school reform efforts have been aimed at the curriculum which is a program of activities structured to help the students to attain, to the maximum extent, the educational objectives that have been set for them. Policy makers have acknowledged that an effective curriculum is a key to achieving positive student outcomes both in terms of academics and personal development.

Cook-Sather (2006) asserts that an effective curriculum is one that is often deemed relevant by the students. Student voice can assist the administrators to gauge the relevance of the curriculum and make appropriate amendments to suit the student needs. Student voice efforts can be used to make changes to curriculum and instructions. Such a move will result in improved student learning since the curriculum will take into consideration the student concerns (Adonis and Macayan, 2010). Student involvement will help policy makers to see if the students are able to form an explicit connection between the subject matter that they are taught and the real world work environment they expect to join in future.

Another manner in which student voice can help in school reforms is by keeping teachers focused on the tasks at hand. Without student involvement in the school’s reform efforts, teachers can end up being derailed from their reform work by petty rivalries, resistances to change, and unprofessional behavior. Mitra (2003) reveals that when students are involved in the reform work and required to work hand in hand with teachers, the teachers are pressured to act in a responsible manner and demonstrate that they are able to accomplish set goals. The presence of students compels teachers to be accountable and to demonstrate tangible outcomes in reform efforts.

Most educational institutes include students alienated from school. They exhibit little commitment to school efforts and these results in poor academic performance. Bragg (2001) suggests that student voice can assist in the reengaging of previously alienated students by inculcating a greater sense of possession of the school by the students. When students have a sense of ownership, they become engaged since they know that they have a crucial part to play in the well being of the school (Warren, 2005). The outcome of this is that the school benefits from improved performances as a result of the student voice opportunities.

Involving students in reform efforts results in the students gaining an understanding of school reforms and the various complications that exist therein. Mitra (2004) demonstrates that when students are given the opportunity to involve themselves in the reform process of the school, they observe first hand the various hardships that the adults have to contend with when engaging indecision making. The students are also made aware of the many compromises that may have to be made in an attempt to come up with the most effective reforms. This in-depth knowledge leads to students empathizing with the

school administration since they are aware of the process involved in school reforms. Students are therefore more likely to accept reforms that would otherwise have been seen as unfavorable if they understand the process that was taken to enact them.

School reforms are at times geared towards coming up with best practices in the teaching arena. The feedback provided by students has a transformative impact on teaching practices and curriculum development. Seale (2010) states that feedback from students' results in teachers and administrators learning something new or unfamiliar that may challenge previous assumptions and therefore lead to a refinement of current practices. Student voice therefore leads to actions or improvements if the adults choose to act on it. An advantage to this is that the students become more engaged since they are able to participate in key decisions concerning the context and content of their learning.

Impact on Teaching

Teachers are fundamental to the success of all reform efforts aimed at improving student learning. Regardless of the number of policies adopted and the amount of resources dedicated to the reform efforts, nothing of significance occurs without the teachers; they are lynchpins utterly critical to the success and failure of any initiative. This ads urgency to including their voice in the reform movements, to be sure, but it also adds significant heft to their effect when they use student knowledge and perspective to feed their own teaching by learning -- student voice as "teacher", for instance

Student voice has an impact on how teachers relate to the students. Dunleavy and Milton (2009) note an important relationship between the quality of learning environments and the student achievement with the quality of teaching directly determining the level of student achievement. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that students improve academically when their teachers structure the classroom in a manner that gives due consideration to student voice (Cook-Sather, 2002; Silva, 2001). Student voice involvement can cause teachers to reflection on their own classroom practices (Yonezawa& Jones, 2009). This can bring about self-evaluation on the part of the teacher which has the potential of producing changes in teaching practices that are not productive. The input from students helps teachers to develop a more complete picture of the needs of the students and the kind of classroom strategies that best support student learning and eventually academic success. A study by DeFur and Lori (2010) revealed that students are expert witnesses of effective instruction and they are in a position of authority in identifying effective instructional practices.

Adonis and Macayan (2010) demonstrate that the teaching method employed by individual teachers has a huge impact on the learning outcomes of the students. Most teachers are inclined to engage in one particular teaching style which they perceive to be most effective. This assumption by the teacher on what is the best teaching method for the students may be wrong (Seale, 2010). Student voice has the ability to provide feedback that can be used to enhance the learning environment. Literature suggests that the most important aspect of gathering student feedback on classroom practices is responding to it (Cook-Sather, 2009; Cook-Sather, 2002; Lewis, 2001). For the feedback process to be viewed as effective by students, it has to validate the students input.

Student voice initiatives assist teachers to learn which teaching strategies are most suitable for individual students and the reasons why some students do not respond to particular teaching methods. Mitra (2004) reveals that initiatives such as student forums where students act as "experts" of the classroom experiences provide teachers with feedback on how students perceive the pedagogical strategies applied. These assertions are corroborated by Cook-Sather (2008) who demonstrates that in a case where faculty members' were working with student consultants, the faculty members reported getting honest feedback and recommendations on their teaching methods from students.

The regular power dynamics in a classroom place the teacher as the purveyor of knowledge while the student is the passive recipient. The teacher has a position of power and the student may feel intimidated to confront or even correct the teacher. Chances of honest opinions or assessments of the faculty being given by students who are constrained by this regular power dynamics in a classroom are minimal at best.

A student consultant is not under this regular power dynamics and he/she can therefore give an honest and unbiased feedback since they have no fear. Cook-Sather (2008) elaborates that "The special status of the student consultant as a student not in the course frees up the relationship from some of the constraining social, academic, and emotional elements in the typical faculty–student relationship" (p.477).

Cook-Sather (2008) proposes that student voice can result in an enriched learning experience. This is especially the case when student consultants are actively used by Faculty members. Cook-Sather (2008) demonstrates that the student offers an angle of vision that the faculty member or his/her colleague could not have perceived due to their predisposition. Students look at lectures and interactions in a different manner than faculty and they are therefore able to notice things that the lecturer could not (Parsell, 2000). Teachers are predisposed to observe only what they expect to observe and this results in them missing the things that they are not looking out for. Since the student does not have any preconceived expectations, their observations are more holistic and can therefore be very useful to the teacher.

Research indicates that teachers can benefit significantly by listening closely to what students have to say since this will help them improve their practice (Cook-Sather, 2006; Lewis, 2001; Holdsworth, 2000; Kooy&Colarusso, 2012). Student voice can improve the efficiency of teachers and provide some reaffirmation to teachers therefore improving the quality of the teaching that takes place in the classroom. Cook-Sather (2009) authoritatively declares that the core purpose of gathering feedback from students in a particular course is to "assess what is working and what could be improved in that course" (p.231). Research indicates that some faculty members suffer from a lack of insights into their teaching habits. Such tutors are unable to properly distinguish the practices that they employ which work and those which do not work (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1999). Involving student voice results in the faculty members being provided with concrete insight on their teaching practices. From such insights, the faculty member is able to capitalize on the practices which are effective and make changes to the ineffective ones. Student voice therefore results in improved classroom practice as the confidence of the teacher is increased.

When student voice is taken into consideration, student engagement can almost certainly be guaranteed since speaking out signals involvement and some level of commitment to what is going on (Cook-Sather, 2006). Whether the student voice is expressing support or dissent, its presence signals engagement and this is a positive aspect since it indicates an active participation by the student. When students are encouraged to speak out, they take up a critical stance towards knowledge; cease to be passive recipients and become active participants in the learning process.

The traditional teacher-student hierarchy often results in stereotypical views being held by teachers concerning students and vice versa. These stereotypes sometimes lead to tensions and a misinterpretation of opinions between teachers and students. Research by Mitra (2004) found that student voice activities helped to reduce the tensions between teachers and students and dispel of the stereotypes since teachers and students work in a collaborative environment which fosters deeper growth in teacher/student understanding and receptiveness of each other's perspectives.

Impact on Student

Impact on Learning Process

Students who engage in student voice efforts obtain some major benefits from this involvement. Cook-Sather (2008) declares that inviting students into an open dialogue about classroom practices with faculty members has the potential to make a collaborative dynamic between the teachers and the students. In such a scenario, the student is positioned as an agent in the process of transformative learning (Lincoln, 1995). When students are viewed as authorities, they are no longer confined to the typical teacher-student hierarchy where the teacher is the absolute authority. In such an environment, the students can inform critical dialogue about teaching and learning from the knowledge and experience that they have.

By being given the opportunity to work with their teacher's students are prompted to reflect both on teaching and learning practices (Harding, 2001). This is especially the case when the student is given the

opportunity to act as a student consultant. Cook-Sather (2008) reveals that when students are exposed to the various pedagogical issues that teachers face, they gain perspectives and insights on teaching they otherwise would not be likely to have. When the students appreciate the amount of work and effort it take in teaching, they are more likely to be cooperative in the classroom.

The efficiency of the learning process can be improved by student voice opportunities. This is because student voice in classrooms can help the student's to better understand their learning process (Yonezawa& Jones, 2009). When students understand their learning process, they are able to maximize their learning potential. In addition to this, when students' are able to articulate how they learn best, their teachers are able to perform better in meeting the needs of the students.

Social Impact

A key ingredient to student voice is the affordance of respect for the student. Levin (1994) argues that if educators take seriously the notion that students are rational individuals with rights, then respect for their ideas and opinions must be guaranteed. Student voice facilitates "students feeling respected and engaged in the classroom" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p.367). Respect when applied to the educational process implies listening to divergent opinions and looking for the merits that these opinions have. When students perceive that they are respected, they can constructively participate in the class. A good relationship between the teachers and students also emerges from this and the two parties can communicate with and learn from one another (Arnot, et al., 2004). Respect also brings about better communication which is essential for a good learning environment to be created. Students who feel respected have a greater sense of respect and belonging to the particular institute to which they belong. They are therefore less likely to act contrary to the goals and objectives of the school.

Student voice opportunities also have a positive impact on the growth and development of the youth. Mitra (2004) reveals that "students working with teachers and administrators to co-create the path of reform could help youth to meet their own developmental needs and could strengthen student ownership of the change process" (p.654). Some of the specific development needs that student voice activities can help to develop or enhance include; problem solving skills, analytical thinking, and assertiveness. These positive outcomes are as a result of the increased sense of self worth that student's develop when they observe that they are being listened to and that their thoughts and ideas are being acted upon. In addition to this, student voice will help the youths to develop closer and more intimate ties both with the adults and with their peers.

Some Challenges of Student Voice

While the inclusion of student voice in school reforms is a key factor to the success of the school, there are some peril associated with some student voice initiatives. Silva (2001) notes that some student voice efforts reinforce a hierarchy of power and privilege among students by positioning some students as the spokespersons' of the entire group. Such an initiative will result in domination by some students gain power and a voice while others remain voiceless (Fielding, 2001). Seale (2010) expresses concern that some schools are using student voice as a way to encourage compliance rather than the active participation by the students in a democratic process. In some cases, selected students are used to formulate school rules which are then imposed on the rest of the school. The other students are exhorted to keep the rules on the grounds that they were formulated by their representative. Such practice ends up using student voice to control the students instead of giving them a platform from which they can express themselves and be heard. Student voice is therefore used as an agent to control students which results in manipulation of the students.

Another negative aspect of student voice is that it might be used for or against teachers and students. This is especially the case in institutes where student voice efforts are mandated by the government. In

such scenarios, the school administration takes account of what students say since it is mandatory. However, this information is sometimes used as the basis for criticizing or praising teachers. When the opinion of the students is used to criticize the teacher in an unconstructive manner, retaliatory action may be taken by the teacher (Gunter & Pat 2007). This will reduce the quality of the learning experience of the students since the teacher will be wary and view the students as adversaries.

Another issue is that student voice has the potential to become highly political because it challenges the existing dynamics of the school system. Gunter and Pat (2007) state that student voice is directly linked to teacher voice which has also been muted as reforms have centered on teachers as the core problem in education. As such, student voice can have the undesirable effect of leading to an exclusion of teachers. Student voice initiatives should recognize that the power relationships between the teacher and learner are not equal and this fact must be respected in as much as focus is being given to student voice.

Discussion

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 peaking are the twin responsibilities of all parties" (p.233). The arguments advanced in this paper support the belief by many researchers and senior policy makers that students outcome will improve and school reforms will be more successful if students are actively involved in shaping them. Students provide valuable insights that can contribute significantly to educational reform efforts in a country. Students have a solid sense of what is effective and important to keep them engaged and successful in learning efforts and listening to the students will ensure that the school administration is appraised of this methods.

At the present, student voice has served as a catalyst for changes in schools and it has helped to improve teaching practices as well as the curriculum used in many schools. Student voice involvement has contributes to teachers being effective as due to the input of the students. Goe, Bel and Little (2008) go on to articulate that effective teachers not only contribute to the academic success of students but they also play a part in other positive social outcomes such as active participation in class and regular class attendance.

A major challenge to achieving the ideals proposed by "student voice" stems from the fact that student voice goes contrary to most of the premises on which schools are built. Schools are set up on premises of prediction, control, and management and as can be seen, student voice challenges this premises which are the core foundation of educational institutes. However, considering the various advantages of including student voice in schools, teachers, administrators, and policymakers should endeavor to engage students through embracing student voice.

For schools to enjoy the positive impacts that can be gained from student voice, the adults have to create and support student voice initiatives. For an environment where student voice is given preference to be created, there has to be a major shift in the old ways of thinking about learning and the traditional role of the student and the teacher. Long standing assumptions and structures in schools must be destroyed so as to make room for a culture that appreciates student voice.

Research Design and Methodology

This study uses a narrative approach. In order to ensure accuracy and reliability of the data, all recorded data was transcribed and coded and categorized. This qualitative approach focused on verbal and holistic information rather than numerical data or value. The study included six research participants, all whom volunteered and were selected from different language institution in Canada. Participants had to sign a consent form to participate in the study, and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without repercussion.

Participants

All participants were assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their identities and personal information. There were six participants in the study, three females and three males. They studied English in different cities in Saudi Arabia and different universities. Also, they studied in different language institution in Canada. The three female participants are Bedour, Amal and Maha. The three male participants are Hani, Ali and Jawad. In the interviews, they talked about their experiences since they started learning English in grade six until they graduated from high school. Then they talked about their learning experiences at universities until they obtained their bachelor degree. After that, they presented their experience in learning the language in Canada.

Findings

After conducting the research, the findings demonstrate that there is a positive causal relationship between flexible designed English curriculum and professional pedagogical practices. If teachers have flexible designed English curriculum, their ability to apply various pedagogical practices will be increased. Also, there is a positive causal relationship between pedagogical practices and positive outcomes. If teachers apply various pedagogical practices in the classrooms, there is a chance that the positive outcomes in the class and the ability for the students to learn will be increased. Another variable that has a positive causal relationship with positive outcomes and enhancing the ability of students to learn is the self-esteem. If teachers have positive outcomes in their classes and if they notice that the ability of students to learn is increasing, they will be likely having more confidence and self-esteem. Another variable that has a positive causal relationship with self-esteem is qualified teachers. If teachers have self-esteem, they will be able to take teaching decisions and be qualified enough to teach English which may lead to better education (figure 1).

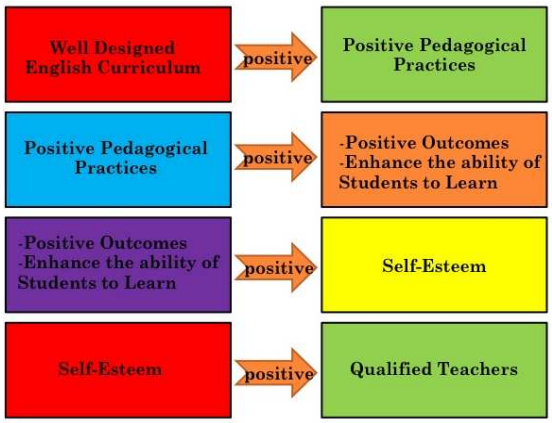


Figure 1. Conceptual map of relationships within the research variables.

So, what are the elements of effective English language learning according to the participants in this study? To better address this question, the research findings have been divided into five areas: well, flexible designed curriculum, various pedagogical practices, qualified teachers, supportive environment and students' voice inclusion.

Curriculum

The participants of the study think that textbooks should be changed because there are several issues that need to be addressed in the English curriculum. First, the way the lessons are organized needs

development. The participantsstated that teachers start always by discussion, then reading and after with grammar. They follow the same order every unit with no integration between skills. So, each skill is taught separately in a very traditional way that focuses on rote learning. On the other hand, they emphasized how integrating the four skills in teaching the language in Canada facilitated their learning. Maha said " I think syllabus need to be developed in some areas; most of the subjects in Saudi Arabia to be honest are the same since 30 yearsago. It is really helpful if there is an improvement in the order of each section for example in each unit you have first the discussion, then reading then grammar, I heard from others that if you integrate these instructions instead of separating them this will be useful for students".

Another issue that affects the students' learning from their perspectives is the rigid curriculum they have. The participants mentioned that teachers must follow the book as it is and cover it in a specific time frame. So, they were never asked what they want to learn about and what they need to learn about because teachers have no time to consider their needs and include their opinions. As a result, teachers are totally following what they have exactly with no alteration or adjustment.

Regarding their experience in Canada, the students reported that teachers used different handouts and variety of materials in teaching the language. There is no specific book that they use and follow lesson by lesson. When they were asked about the impact of this on their learning. They emphasized how this facilitated their learning because in some cases, if they don't understand a certain part and they need more expanding, teachers bring extra materials and handouts where they can practice more and learn. Describing the materials students have in the classes, Bedour said, "We never have textbooks as most of the time we have daily specific handouts".

Teaching Methodology

Regarding the teaching methodology, the participants in the study reported that English teachers use teacher-centered classes where they have more input than the students. As a result, teachers talk more than the students in the class where the students have little chance to practice the language. Maha said, "It is teacher-centered classes I have never experienced group discussion in English. Never".Moreover, teachers ask the students to do the class exercises individually with no cooperation among students. Regarding his experience in learning the language in Canada, Ali stated that "team work encourages everyone to participate". Also, the participants stated that there is a lack of using technology and there was no variety of teaching methodology.In regard to using technology, Hani said, " In Canada, we use the technology in learning. Teachers here in Canada use videos, CDs and music too. We have fun while we are studying English but[in Saudi Arabia] teachers depend on books and don't use other materials to involve us and make us feel interested in learning the language". Furthermore, the participants mentioned how they were introduced to Wiki and blackboard and how this supported them in learning the language and expanded their relations with people from different cultures.

Teachers

The participants all mentioned that teachers use Arabic language in teaching English most of the time. When they were asked about the reason, they believe that teachers want to use the easiest way instead of working hard to explain things in English. The participants explained that teachers get bored when the students don't understand what they teach, so they give up easily and explain most of the lesson in Arabic.

> Bedour said,I would describe my experience as a poor experience especially in a middle school. I started to learn English at that time, so the teachers started to teach us letters as a beginner and she described the English language in Arabic even the grammar, so this is the way to understand, otherwise we just open our mouths and stare at her and we won't understand anything from her.

> Instead of teaching us English in English, she used the easiest way and taught us in Arabic and that was a disaster for us as we suppose to learn in English even if we find difficulties at the beginning, I guess she should teach us in English because it is English language class.

Another issue that came up in the study is the belief of the students that some teachers are not qualified to teach the language taking into consideration their mispronunciation of the English words and other issues in teaching the language. They recommended that teachers use dictionary to check how the words are pronounced before they teach them to the students. Jawad said, " for example, the word "determine" four teachers pronounce it wrongly when I came here I realized how I used to pronounce it the same way four teachers taught me." Hani said " I used to have a teacher from U.S until I get to high school, then they changed him to a Saudi teacher when we began to have trouble for example, he didn't say "have" he said "half" as he used to pronounce the letter "v" as "f". Many students in the class speak and write better than the teacher, how can he help us!!! He needs help". In regard to qualification Ali said, "If I have the power to change something, I will not give the job to anyone who is graduated from English Department because those teachers should take an exam like TOEFL to access the profession of teaching English. They also can have exam regarding their skills and the ways of teaching, so the teachers will be tested in both sides".

Describing her experience in learning English in Canada, Amal stated that

> It was creative, beneficial and fun and I think having fun while studying English is a very important thing. If you don't enjoy what you do, you will feel bored and give up and you will not be able to continue what you do. For example, teachers here if you don't understand something, they try harder and harder to explain it. They make an appointment every week with students to address the weakness of each one.

Environment

In Saudi Arabia, the official language is Arabic. English is considered a foreign language, so it is harder for the learners to practice English because Arabic is the language that people use for the daily communication. Contrary to this, In Canada the official language is English, so the learners have to speak the language in order to communicate with others. Ali mentioned how working with a company that has employees from different cultures and uses English in all the communication helped him learning some English in Saudi Arabia. He said,"I think I learned English from work because I worked with people from different countries and I had to speak English".

Including Students' Voice

According to the participants, the students' voice must be included in the learning process for better outcomes. They believe that their opinions, needs and perspectives should be considered because they are the learners. This paper set out to argue that student voice can help improve teaching and learning and lead to the success of school reform efforts. The paper has shown that students can be potent agents of change in schools and that the involvement of student voice has major impacts on teaching and learning. By listening to what students have to say, educators can get a clear perspective on what is dysfunctional about the system. From this understanding focused reforms can be made so as to make the schooling experience better for the students with positive results for both the school and the student. It has been demonstrated that by making students essential actors in school decision making, student engagement and commitment is guaranteed and positive results can be attained. Student voice also results in students developing a deeper understanding of how school policies are decided upon which leads to higher levels of compliance. The paper has also shown that teachers benefit greatly from student voice since their teaching strategies can be enhanced and their relationships with students fostered.

However, the paper has taken care to note that there are both positive and negative aspects of student voice. As such, efforts must be undertaken to capitalize on the positive aspects of student voice while at the same time guarding against the negative aspects of the same. By doing this, the school can utilize student voice to create an effective learning environment which results in the desirable outcomes of improved student performance.

Recommendations

From the data collection, the researcher came up with the below recommendations from the participants.

- English curriculum should be developed in a way that doesn't follow a specific book in order to leave a space for teachers and students to have their inputs. It is recommended that teachers have a sit of objectives for each unit and supporting materials, so they can add from their own according to the class's needs.
- Teachers should practice teaching before they handle the responsibility of classrooms (join a practical program – have a license).
- The participants suggested that Learning English should start earlier not at grade 6.
- It is recommended that teachers try to decrease the use of Arabic language in the classroom.For example, teachers can start by using 20% of Arabic language in the class. Then the more the students' level of English increase, teachers can decrease the level of using Arabic until they reach the point of using English all the time.
- Technology should be integrated as a helpful tool to support the lesson delivery if there is a need. Teachers should know where and how to use it effectively and avoid using it for the sake of using technology. In other words, if using technology is not going to support the lesson, teachers should not use it.
- Learning should be through having fun and teachers should find the suitable pedagogical practices to deliver each lesson.
- All the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) should be integrated in teaching the language.
- Teachers should move from teacher-centered classes to student-centered classes and there should be an emphasis on the use of group work in classes.
- Teachers should be present to support students even outside the class (appointments).

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