Higher Education in Saudi Arabia: Rooted in Bureaucracy, Inspired by an EFL Semi-Decentralization Model

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Abstract

Educational initiatives and plans worldwide are now heading towards more decentralized systems including curricular decentralized models which are assumed to enhance teaching and learning outcomes and allow the whole educational community to participate in decision making. Decentralized approaches foster whole communities to share the development of teaching and learning management and processes. Providing a comprehensive description of a proposed semi-decentralized model, smoothly built into a higher education institute in Saudi Arabia and synchronized with the current Saudi Vision 2030, this paper illustrates a planned and deployed road map that guided the reform of some major aspects of the organization starting from the vision, mission, philosophy, principles, curriculum and decision-making, to teachers' autonomy and creativity, and students learning outcomes.

Keywords: decentralization, centralization, curriculum, autonomy, reform, education

1. Introduction

The responsibility for providing good education is firmly written into the policies in nearly all countries. Whether nationally or internationally, governments often provide free education, and at the same time, local entities represented by ministries of education legislate regulations and bureaucratic bylaws to govern and systemize education. In a centralized educational system, most decision-making, and management functions including those related to students, teachers, curriculum, funding, and facilities are concentrated in the hands of an education ministry or department. While the education system is a product of such legislations, reform efforts will require changes in these legislations. Reform emerges from the changes made to existing systems. Defined by Hanson (1995), decentralization is built gradually around existing systems rather than forcefully constructed. According to him, the result of decentralization is that the culture we are used to in any organization (e.g., "how we are used to doing things") should change too such as introducing new roles, and leadership styles. In other words, moving from commanding to assisting behaviors), practicing reversed communication patterns, alternating planning procedures through bottom up and top down, approaches and developing new evaluation and assessment systems.

Exploring decentralization initially targets the reasons which motivate decentralization and the pursuit for innovation. Leonard (1977) explains how development cannot be reinforced or cared for solely by the central government. In fact, all development plans and initiatives created by leaders can progress and flourish when they are supported by higher authorities. This support explains the important link between local and higher organizations leading to more constructive responses to development priorities for the whole nation.

Within the local scope of this paper, Saudi education needs to prioritize the initiatives of decentralization as a response to national development priorities. Albahiri (2010) presented his argument pertaining to the Ministry of Education, which, since 1970 has not updated its main policies and educational priorities. This is despite the fact that many components of education have been recreated such as curricula, teacher preparation programs and licenses. In addition, although educational changes are happening rapidly at a global level, demanding the ministry to cope with these rapid developments and resulting in corresponding efforts the lack of long-term official goals continues to exist. An opposing approach toward decentralization is described later on in this paper which then provides a comprehensive description of a proposed semi-decentralized model that has been smoothly built into a higher education institute in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as synchronized with the current Saudi reform illustrated in its Vision 2030. The paper illustrates the planned and deployed road map that has guided the reform measure covering some major aspects of the whole organization starting from the vision and mission, philosophy, principles, curriculum and decision-making and extending to teacher autonomy and creativity, and students learning outcomes.

2. Background

2.1 Bureaucracy versus Change

Bureaucracy, as described by Lauglo, (1996) comes in many forms such as generating

decisions on several topics by top government officials leading to minimal authority to lower level individuals in the organization with very tight routinized processes. Central governments are logically claimed to be the trustees; accordingly, they should be the group who create national goals which are in turn taken as prescriptive regulations for the whole system including all individuals at lower levels of the organization. Another dark side of bureaucracy is described simply by Rado (2010): all individuals must comply with and act under the central governing office, resulting in damaging impact.

2.2 Why was education centralized?

There are several justifications for the "why" illustrated by Welsh and McGinn clarifying that as governments started to develop, stronger, education systems have grown and expanded especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with more focus on standardized education including schooling processes and content. They also indicated that in a few countries municipality offices and communities that were small used to initially govern education while it was the bigger authorities at the state or provincial levels in other countries that took over the governance. However, the actual running and governance of schools were taken over by governments in most countries, while non-government entities in a few countries such as private groups used to run and monitor the schools. (1999).

The case of Saudi Arabia indicated many specific reasons for expanding and institutionalizing the schooling processes. Like many countries, education in Saudi Arabia generally aims at satisfying its local populace representing the related values and ideologies of the citizens. With this in mind, the Islamic and national culture was officially considered as the main goals of the educational systems simultaneously putting, pressure on education to promote the economic growth of the country. With the identification of the educational needs of the citizens, three types of secondary education have been launched: general high schools, Qur'anic schools, and vocational schools. Each of the three types of schooling, as described by Wisemen (2008), has its own goals and educational processes.

Generally, however, non-government groups were no longer dominating education as a result of the government's control over education policies leading to more centralization and control. (Welsh, T, and N. McGinn, 1999). Conversely, 'decentralization' refers to actions that are scattered then formed or concentrated on one area described by Panthee (1996) in the visual representation of a pyramid. The illustration aptly describes the scattered situation at the base of the pyramid with several justifications for decentralization. The question arises here of whether decentralization which is meant to promote educational management is more efficient. Some bureaucratic practices result in very slow improvements, because ~~as~~ sometimes ~~it~~ they cannot tackle issues of teacher involvement and creativity, teacher motivation, providing flexible and open-access material and resources. In such cases, decentralization appears to be the solution. In many cases, people and practitioners in an institution are very eager to be part of the decision-making process in their workplace. Whatever the reasons may be, decentralization ensures that there are clear criterions for fair and group accountability which minimize the errors in decision-making. There are many other reasons for the steps toward reform initiatives. In some developing countries the

primary motive for decentralizing education is to find extra and novel resources keeping in mind that local levels of management will be able to mobilize resources under the principles of decentralization.

In a world where most governments have experienced the pitfalls of centralized education service provision, mainly: opaque decision-making, administrative and fiscal inefficiency, and poor quality and access to services, the theoretical advantages of decentralization have become extremely appealing. In general, the process of decentralization can substantially improve efficiency, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of service provision compared with centralized systems. Decentralized education provision promises to be more efficient, better reflect local priorities, encourage participation, and, eventually, improve quality. (Litvack, 2020). Simultaneously, enrolments around the world are greatly expanding. The growing number of teachers and students puts a lot of pressure on the bureaucratic management to promote the quality of education. The dissatisfaction among the communities have resulted in the move to shift the decision-making from central authorities to local groups. The transition to decentralization with more control of the educational systems has been facilitated with the quick merging of technology and communication systems. This has resulted in a new philosophy of educational administration focusing more on outcomes, thus adding more significance to local participation in decision-making.

The case of Saudi Arabia indicates several significant factors that account for the increased interest in decentralization in the country or the Arab world. First, economic and financial reform in the Arab word post the Arab Spring has further urged central governments to improve services and accountability. Second, supranational organizations have reduced national sovereignty. Moreover, decision-making has been built upon market demands resulting in strengthened local groups and difficulty in capturing funds for social programs from the government. The expansion of public higher education providers in the Kingdom has been rapid. From just seven universities in the 1980s, Saudi Arabia today boasts 28 independent public universities, situated in each of its key towns and cities. In turn, these institutions have created eco-systems of their own, engaging, employing, and developing their local communities, while also attracting the finest Saudi and foreign minds to their doors. While universities expand, it sometimes becomes difficult to categorize the impact of decentralization on local policy-making and the wider community influence. Outputs too can be too varied and wide-ranging to be organized neatly. What might appear as a lack of focus has actually proved to be a source of strength within the smaller body of a university such as an English language institute, so a tighter focus might lead to a premature step that can expand as well and be modernized.

Speaking within the GCC zone and specifically in the context of Saudi higher education, these Arab countries have come to recognize a good education system as the cornerstone of economic progress, as indicated by Maroun, et al (2008) in their report on How to Succeed at Education Reform. The urgency for education reform in the Arab world has been manifested in the various initiatives aimed at improving the quality and quantity of education, especially with a rising young population that represents the majority. Educational reform that covers comprehensive aspects has been noticeably growing in many Arab countries nowadays. Such

reform might lead to building a workforce that is skillful and knowledgeable and in alignment with the socioeconomic aims and reform plans.

Two success stories of Saudi universities showcase the decentralization efforts in Saudi higher education described by Maroun and his colleagues. One success story in the Kingdom is represented by King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM). Higher levels of autonomy and clear mandates have been boosted by the university's focus on the sciences and technology leading to a big difference from other universities in the country which have operated under fixed regulations for many years. Significant efforts in the area of curriculum design, based on industry demands and international standards have led to more anti-bureaucratic features granted to the university where stakeholders' consensus matters. The curriculum has been built in consultation with major national companies and international institutions. One example of decentralized operations is the constant development of the curriculum such as adding a social skills program at the university which was certainly not determined by centralized textbooks.

This success story of KFUPM has created more enthusiastic governmental efforts evident in the generous funds being allocated to higher education and the establishment of more universities such as the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST). This university provides graduate programs in science and technology. As a decentralized university that demonstrates its commitment to progress, it is governed by an independent board of trustees. Other studies such as that conducted by Meemar (2014), speaks briefly of basic education in Saudi Arabia, where traditional models of education have prevailed. The disadvantage of the traditional model was evident in the results of the Saudi students' who participated in the TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) in 2003. The students in grades 4 and 8 (primary school) were placed among the lowest of all 45 participating countries in the study (TIMSS, 2006). The unsatisfactory results compounded the already existing burdens, such as the increase in population and diverse cultural differences which were making it difficult for centralized education to operate effectively. Accordingly, in 2011, the Saudi Ministry of Education (MOE) conferred 21 new authorities in addition to the previous 31 to their school principals followed by selecting 900 schools for the purpose of adopting a more decentralized model for school districts.

Most centralized systems of education globally, exist in developing countries where the education providers are the central educational governance. Other countries have moved the educational responsibilities to more decentralized governing agents, decreasing all forms of bureaucracy. Such reform has been applied to many models and resulted in more autonomy and community participation as well as students' roles in their learning experiences. (Rado, 17).

As indicated by Litvack, the decentralization of education relies on several theories and will not succeed without solid political commitment. On the other hand, there are other factors that may undermine the reform process including the motives and depth behind the reform, and the general conditions of the country or institution. (Litvack, 2020).

Several factors attribute to the motivation for reform. First, decentralization is accepted and

perceived by governments as a practical means of improving the efficiency of specific educational systems and avoiding management complexity in a rapidly progressing society like Saudi Arabia. Second, decentralization meets each individual student's needs rather than an aggregated mix of resources and procedures randomly for all students. Decentralization increases teacher autonomy and leads to less bureaucratic control over their teaching. This is nicely summarized by Florestal & Cooper, who state that legislative actions sometimes do not have any role when decentralization happens. (1997).

2.3 Education System and Legislations in Saudi Arabia

Since King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud inherited the throne in 2016, significant changes in the government structure, legislations, and the selection of ministers has taken place. The new government has started a rigorous reform plan aimed at cutting spending and improving efficiency. The reform plan called the 2030 Vision is the deadline by which the government expects to reach its main goals for diversifying the economy and reducing dependence on oil revenue. The 2030 vision focuses on the essential aspects of economic growth: education, health care, and creating new jobs for the Saudi youth.

As a step toward reform and consolidation in the field of education in Saudi Arabia, the government has merged the Ministry of Higher Education with the Ministry of Education. The latter was managing basic education, and at a later stage had appointed the education minister to be the head of the vocational educational council too.

This first reform will help in forming one vision for the development of education and should facilitate communication between the policy makers at the Ministry of Education and other related bodies within the government. It also aims to cut spending by avoiding duplication within administrations. However, the merging of the two huge and pivotal organizations came like a bolt from the blue, adding layers of bureaucracy and slowing the work and development plans, which left many scholars skeptical of the effectiveness of the mergence. They reason that the educational authority has become even more centralized. Theoretically, this trend toward centralization might be attributed to the importance of the authority's relationship with external stakeholders such as the parents, the community, and minor bodies. The centralization of authority would theoretically and practically minimize the power of these external members and strengthen the power of the vertical hierarchy within the educational governance. Additionally, the social political environment has always been the scapegoat for the excessive concentration of power. The absence of an accountability system, and the family and tribal mentality are all factors hindering government endeavors in the delegation of decision-making and decentralization.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Education has been experiencing intense pressure from the government and the community. There was always dissatisfaction with the quality of the curricula and the learning outcomes of the schools, and universities which did not correspond with the stupendous growth in government spending in education over the last ten years. The growth of decentralization in tertiary education in Saudi Arabia, has led to many universities establishing their own roadmaps to develop their faculties, build relationships with international bodies and gradually build a privatized future.

This paper is intended to be descriptive. It illustrates the developing of a semi-decentralized system at an English language institute in Saudi Arabia. The semi-decentralized model was carried out from 2015-2017 prior to the new government's reform plan. This paper will discuss the organization's behavior looking at contextual challenges from an academic and management perspective and will introduce a working model aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the organization by improving learning outcomes and the working environment, with special attention to the accommodation of some of the bureaucratic practices.

Though the government provides most of the university's financial resources and has established centralized control of higher education, this proposal introduces a semi-decentralized model of management that is built around the university authority and aims at making the model more realistic. This newly introduced model falls within the guidelines of the Ministry of Education that has illustrated several ways in which the Vision 2030 can be deployed. These guidelines are also found on the Ministry of Education's website. In the educational context, the guidelines include: learner-centered teaching methods, the inclusion of 21st century skills pertaining to personal development and creativity, increasing performance, operational efficiency, minimizing spending, and the enhancement of all administrative. All these aspects are conducive to the decentralized model of management.

The development of the proposal is as follows. Section 1 presents the biodata of the higher education institute undergoing decentralization. Section 2 refers to the main components of the proposed model of the higher education decentralization initiative in a Saudi public university. Finally, the conclusions are presented in Section 3

These sections allow us to suggest some practices concerning decentralization in higher education and its perceived effects on quality. We provide some data on the evolution of the ELI, university management structure, governments, and data on students, teaching staff, curriculum and quality of education.

Although the data on decentralized curricula in higher education is not available in the region, the move toward a decentralized curriculum was an interesting and powerful initiative. On the one hand, a centralized curriculum as mandated by the international publishers of textbooks has more than doubled in recent years among public universities. On the other, there are significantly successful decentralized curricula efforts across language centers and programs around the world, which suggest heterogeneous preferences of content knowledge, competencies and skills in higher education.

2.4 Biodata of the Higher Education Institute Going under Decentralization – The English Language Institute

The English language Institute started out as a branch of the parent Institute of King Abdulaziz University. With the Royal decree in 2014, the English Language Institute became an independent body within the second public university, now known as the University of Jeddah. Aiming to grow bigger, the ELI signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. This agreement focuses on raising the standards of the learning outcomes of the foundation year program in

the university and specifically ~~for~~ of the English language curriculum provided by the ELI. The action plans include academic seminars and professional training to all ELI teaching staff, developing academic research and designing diplomas of related fields. Following that, the ELI joined the prominent IATEFL and became an associate- The Saudi Organization of EFL Education. In 2016, the ELI organized its 1st International Conference of EFL Education with the participation of six prominent guest speakers from prominent universities such as Harvard, Oxford, Stanford, Exeter and UC-Berkeley.

By the beginning of the new academic year, 2016-2017, the ELI launched its newly structured EFL curriculum serving foundation year students. The two staggered levels target a blended framework composed of CEFR levels (B1-B2-C1) and the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB 4-5-6-7-8). The ELI has a vision of being a premier English language, education and research institute in the Gulf region serving the wider community. Its mission is committed to providing the students with a progressive language curriculum infused with thinking and communication skills. This mission is pursued through uniquely contextualized research and professional staff development which also extends to corporate business. A few potentials of the ELI are listed below:

1) It operates in 5 campuses: The Main Men's Campus, two Main Women's Campuses and two rural branches affiliated with the university. Over 100 instructors with recognized experience in multiple areas such as instruction, training, and assessment, attend fortnightly/monthly seminars and training modules delivered by professors from the English Language Institute and University of California Berkeley, and adopt the blended learning approach using LMS (BlackBoard and other online platforms);

2) Over 10 researchers actively involved in different types of research in the field;

3) Senior management bodies with more than 10 years of experience in the area of language and education.

4) Four international consultants supervising the current teaching/learning areas including educational policy, management and leadership, curriculum design, innovation and assessment of instructional performance. The consultation roles are part of the contract signed between the ELI and Graduate School of Education at UCB (University of California, Berkeley);

5) Multiple resources and materials obtained from three sources: ELI created materials; materials officially obtained from prominent publishers and open resources;

6) A Certified IELTS Center where students are prepped and allowed to sit for the proficiency exam.

2.4.1   Key Principles of the ELI Culture

1) Focus on Students: students as researchers, speakers, thinkers, and academic achievers and able to share a social responsibility.

2) Collaboration: Teamwork is common practice between senior and junior staff as well as

with local and global communities.

3) Quality: Practice is grounded in research and deployment of a comprehensive evaluation system.

The total number of students is about 3500, enrolled in all campuses. The hierarchy consists of a Dean and two vice-Deans, one male and one female with a number of administration staff in each campus. There are also two chief academic program directors per campus and several coordinators. Each group of 15 instructors are assigned to a coordinator. Some teaching staff participate in the central committees such as the exam committee, or curriculum committee. The university works on a centralized model with a strong bureaucratic presence. According to Weber (1968) "the individual cannot squirm within a system he is controlled by". The bureaucratic working model is rationalized by a hierarchal chain of command, standardized procedures and routines, and most importantly, control. Therefore, in order to improve the efficacy of the institute within the controlled system, it is important to deploy a semi-decentralized model.

3. Method

The ELI's philosophy of change has emerged in compliance with the country's interest in decentralization and local growth. Everything from roles delegation, committees' formation, curricular objectives and assessment tools to teacher performance and creativity (and, often, learning materials decisions and learning outcomes) is being restructured at the institute level rather than the university level.

To better understand the philosophy of change in the ELI, it is worth referring to the United Nations Development Program (1998) about the nature and purpose of decentralization. Their report illustrates that centralization and decentralization are not alternatives to each other. Both concepts reflect opposite ends of a sequence and the real meaning is to create a balance between official control and the participation of the local community pertaining to public policies. With these basic concepts, the transition to all semi-decentralized operations can be done smoothly and around the existing centralized model.

The component of the proposed model of decentralization in this paper has been limited to the deployment of a newly structured curriculum that has been designed and delivered in a semi-decentralized mode preceded by exploratory questionnaires and ending with a post curriculum survey that investigates teachers' opinions on the new semi-decentralized curriculum.

3.1 Harmonization of Educational Goals

The University of Jeddah (UJ) started out as small campuses in the north of Jeddah, which is a semi-rural area and sparsely populated as compared to the city center. While educational practices remain the main responsibility of the institute, it aims at expanding not only geographically, but also in quality. Its goals include creating academically and vocationally qualified graduates who are confident to compete in the job market at all levels through deploying a curriculum that embraces knowledge, and multiple skills with the necessary

authentic exposure to many fields. The university also aims to participate in fulfilling the Saudi Vision 2030. Therefore, the following goals have been targeted and shared across the institute:

1) Prepare students academically to meet the course requirements and language proficiency.

2) Encourage a research environment through publishing high-quality articles in the Institute of English Education Journal, newsletters and international conferences.

3) Encourage all teaching staff to obtain English teaching certifications.

4) Establish a professional development culture through organizing an annual conference and extended PD activities.

5) Maintain a professional administration environment through the training of administrators and personnel and enhancing the institute's policies and procedures.

6) Extend the language program by introducing tailored ESP courses that suit the wider community.

7) Incorporate technology tools to enhance the institute's overall performance.

8) Support the university's fund through establishing external sources of fund-raising for the Institute of English Education.

9) To constantly raise the level of satisfaction among other faculties of the university and extended community sectors.

4. Discussion and Results

As part of the overall plan to decentralize the education system, the curriculum, has been the first and main focus of decentralization. Thus, identifying changes to the curriculum have been worked out around the goals of the entire decentralization model. The key to reform is to maintain a well-integrated and unified system and at the same time enable teachers and students to flourish. The curriculum should provide teachers with a successful career experience and help them continue to be attracted to the profession as well as guaranteeing guarantee their professional rights to be creative and innovative which in turn leads to quality learning experiences and fair assessment for their learners.

Many studies have developed several theories and approaches to the curricula of second language acquisition. Prominent, researchers such as H. Douglas Brown, James Dean Brown, Jack C. Richards, and others have written profusely on these issues and recent debates prove that deploying a single approach might not aspire to the expectations of the teachers and the learners. Thus, the approaches that have been proposed are built around learners' needs analysis and a blend of multiple teaching methods. During the design phase of the semi-decentralized environment, many consultations took place which resulted in the reform leaders drafting a reform plan. The initial plan illustrated how decentralization will solve several educational problems and challenges and presented the positive impact that we can see in our classrooms today. A continuous theme of the decentralized curriculum as indicated

in many studies is the importance of defining the roles and responsibilities of all individuals and sectors involved. In addition, the decisions on curriculum-related functions are decentralized primarily in context, considering the institute's size, management levels and resources. Three surveys were constructed and distributed to 3 purposeful population samples: 1- sophomores, 2- English instructors, 3- instructors of other departments to explore their opinions on the current curriculum outcomes, their English language needs and how urgently a reform is was needed. The survey directed to 246 students, tackled issues related to several concerns pertaining to rating their knowledge and use of English, most used skills and sub-skills, preferred topics, general opinion on the current curriculum, the learning objectives and teaching methods, most needed skills, and purposes of studying English. The following discussion summarizes the results of the survey as follows:

Table 1. Background information

Gender	51% Male
	49% Female
Age	18-24
English learning experience	39% 1-5 years
	42% 6-10 years
Level	44% Foundation
	24% Second/Third year
Specialty	38% Engineering
	14% Medicine
	13% IT
	12% Business
Level in English	49% Very Good
Where do you speak English?	40% at university
Using English at university	45% Sometimes
They speak English with	49% Native speakers;
	42% Teachers/Administration
Foundation course content	86% General English
	4% Specialized English
Language(s) used in class	12% Arabic
	26% English
	63% Both

N=246

Table 2. Students' rating their knowledge and use of skills and sub-skills

Skills, Sub-skill	Knowledge	Use
Listening	30% Excellent	40% Very Good
Speaking	42% Very Good	45% Very Good
Reading	42% Very Good	40% Very Good
Writing	37% Very Good	38% Very Good
Grammar	37% Average	38% Very Good
Spelling	34% Excellent	38% Very Good
Pronunciation	41% Very Good	46% Very Good
Vocabulary	41% Very Good	43% Very Good

Table 3. Most used skills and sub-skills

Listening	48%
Speaking	81%
Reading	44%
Writing	51%
Grammar	40%
Spelling	21%
Pronunciation	33%
Vocabulary	39%
Presentation skills	48%

Table 4. Preferred topics in an English course

Football and sport	18%
Foreign movies	50%
Travelling	43%
Knowing about other cultures	43%
Education	50%
History	15%
Daily life issues	68%
Science and technology	29%
Business and economy	33%
Media and social networking	51%

Table 5. Students' perceptions of the curriculum (based on the 5-point -Likert scale - Strongly Disagree SD, Disagree D, Neutral N, Agree A, Strongly Agree SA

Meets their needs	35% A
All skills	41% A
All sub-skills	46% A
Comprehension of the curriculum objectives	31% N
Curriculum content and future career	25% N

The curriculum reflects their culture	27% D
Interesting content	25% D
Teaching methods and the curriculum	34% A
The curriculum reflects their field of specialty	29% D

Table 6. Students' justifications for learning English in the university or using it in their future career (based on the 5-point Likert scale - Strongly Disagree SD, Disagree D, Neutral N, Agree A, Strongly Agree SA

To speak with friends	48% SA
Read and comprehend specialized texts	48% SA
To write coherent reports	32% SA
To use grammar rules in context	54% D
To write correct and coherent emails	62% A
To cope with technology	33% N
To get a job	36% D
To get a university degree	36% A
To be able to speak English fluently	32% SA

Table 7. Preferred perception of skills in an English course

Perceptions of skills	▪ In a separate way 69%
	▪ In an integrated way 31%

The second survey directed to 45 instructors who teach courses at other departments and use English as the language of instruction tackled issues related to several concerns pertaining to rating their perceptions of teaching other courses in English and the importance of such a language to their students. The following discussion summarizes the results of the survey as follows:

Table 8. Background

Gender	▪ 78% Female
	▪ 22% Male
Age	▪ 40% (30-35)
	▪ 11% (46 and above)
Qualifications	▪ 6% BA
	▪ 56% MA
	▪ 36% PhD
Teaching Experience	▪ 56% (1-5)
	▪ 7% (16-20)
	▪ 9% (20 and above)
ELI Teaching Experience	▪ 37% (more than 3 years)
Teaching level	▪ 48% (first/second years)

Self-rating in English	▪ 7% average ▪ 54% very good
Students' level in English	▪ 51% poor ▪ 9% good ▪ 0% very good

Table 9. Reasons your students need to learn English

To be able to cope with the age of technology	47% SA
To find a job	38% SA
To graduate	43% A
To learn a new language other than Arabic	27% Neutral

Table 10. Speaking English with students in class

Do you speak English with your students in class?	5% No 32% Sometimes 30% Always
Do students need English?	100% Yes
Kind of English	25% General 13% Specialized 88%: Specialized and General English

Table 11. Perceptions toward the important use of English by students

To speak fluently with their colleagues	39% A
To read and understand specialized texts	68% SA
To know how to construct coherent sentences	61% SA
To write coherent essays	73% SA
To use grammatical rules in context	70% SA

Table 12. What students need to improve their English

Watch TV, movies, the news, etc.…	44% SA
Read English materials	61% SA
Deliver presentation in English	49% A
Attend conferences	40% A
Write in English	57% SA
Visit English websites	49% A
Memorize and performing dialogues	43% A

Table 13. Importance of learning English for international tests

International tests	Yes (55%) No (28%)

Table 14. Urgency of English curriculum change

Do you think the curriculum should be changed?	Yes (50%)
	No (10%)

The third survey directed to 85 EFL instructors who teach English at the foundation year program tackled issues related to several concerns pertaining rating their perceptions of teaching English and the importance of such a language to their students. The following discussion summarizes the results of the survey as follows:

Table 15. Background

Gender	▪ Male (45%)
	▪ Female (55%)
Age	▪ 23-29 (44%)
	▪ 46 and above (21%)
Recently awarded qualifications	▪ BA (45%)
	▪ MA (49%)
	▪ PhD (6%)
Other certificates	▪ CELTA (94%)
	▪ DELTA (20%)
Years of teaching experience	▪ 1-5 (54%)
	▪ 20 or more (16%)

Table 16. Instructors rating of their students' knowledge and use of English

Skill, sub-skill	Knowledge	Use
Listening	51% Satisfactory	52% Satisfactory
Speaking	47% Satisfactory	41% Poor
Reading	51% Satisfactory	49% Satisfactory
Writing	47% Poor	52% Poor
Vocabulary	52% Satisfactory	44% Satisfactory
Grammar	32% Poor	42% Poor
Pronunciation	43% Satisfactory	54% Satisfactory
Spelling	52% Poor	54% Poor
Thinking skills	33% Poor	34% Poor
Presentation skills	38% Poor	43% Poor
General research skills	56% Poor	57% Poor

Table 17. Skills and sub-skills importance

Listening	43% Very Important
Speaking	55% Very Important
Reading	44% Very Important
Writing	45% Very important

Vocabulary	46% Very Important
Grammar	43% Very Important
Spelling	38% Important
Thinking skills	42% Very Important
Presentation skills	39% Important
General research skills	27% Very Important
Pronunciation	37% Very important

Table 18. Uses of English in or outside the classroom

For study	32% Always
For leisure	39% Sometimes
For promotion	27% Never
For examination	45% Always
For writing in class	33% Sometimes
For extensive reading	43% Never
Doing shopping	28% Very Useful
Getting information	31% Very useful
Ordering food	41% Very Useful
Talking to friends	29% Useful
Talking to native speakers	58% Very Useful

Table 19. Rating of students listening skills

Understanding lectures	48% Satisfactory
Understanding the main ideas	41% Very Good
Taking notes while listening	48% Poor
Listening to teachers' instructions	37% Very Good
Listening to the radio	44% Satisfactory
Ability to infer relationships (e.g., cause, effect, conclusion)	41% Satisfactory

Table 20. Rating of students speaking skills

Saying what they want quickly enough	44% Satisfactory
Saying something in English	54% Satisfactory
Pronunciation of English words	60% Satisfactory
Coherently structure my speech	43% Satisfactory
Formal conversation	48% Satisfactory
Saying what they want quickly enough	44% Satisfactory

Table 21. Rating of students writing skills

Making notes	39% Poor
Summary writing	38% Poor

Essay writing	63% Poor
Writing articles	50% Poor
Writing a research project	89% Poor
Writing instructions	46% Satisfactory

Table 22. Rating of students reading comprehension skills

Reading articles	74% Poor
Reading newspaper articles	61% Poor
Reading chapters	38% Poor
Reading exam papers	49% Satisfactory
Reading letters	26% Poor
Reading e-mails	48% Satisfactory
Reading articles	74% Poor

Based upon the results which showed a consensus on reform, plans were laid out to propose, design and launch a new curriculum with new themes, structures, amended skills and expected learning outcomes.

The philosophy of the new curriculum adopts the "eclectic approach" as presented by Professor James Dean Brown. This approach takes care of the learner as a "whole person" in which a teacher is allowed to innovate the teaching/learning experience using a wide range of content, methods and teaching tools that should be customized to suit specific students in particular learning situations and purposes. Such flexibility in choice, as described by Nation (2007) maximizes the teacher's skills to meet his students' needs and expectations. Skill areas include the eclectic classroom instruction focusing on the principle of the four strands as illustrated by Nation (2007) covering 8 core skill areas: Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing, Presentation skills, thinking skills, and language knowledge. (Table 1).

Table 23. Four strands of language learning

Strands of Language Learning	Relevant Skills
Meaning-Focused Input	1. Listening 2. Reading
Meaning-Focused Output	3. Speaking 4. Writing
Fluency Development	5. Presentation skills 6. Thinking skills (Thinking Routines)
Language-Focused Learning	7. Grammar 8. Vocabulary

While focusing on the 8 skill areas, blended methodologies of instruction are deployed such as (1) the communicative approach, (2) direct methods of teaching and (3) thinking skills inclusion, and Task-based teaching and learning. These methodologies engage students in meaningful situations that imitates the real world routines and enable them to apply the skills

beyond the classroom. As every teacher aims at thoughtful learning experiences for their students, the thinking skills are contextualized in a flexible framework where classroom learning fosters students' intellectual development. In a broader sense, the curriculum is meant to build students' English proficiency in the four language skills and enhance these skills with linguistic and lexical competencies. Boosted with thinking skills, students complete the assigned language levels with an academic and personal preparation. The specific objectives include:
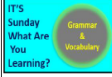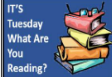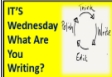
1) Teaching students key functional language related to multiple contexts;
2) Helping students understand the skills they need to master to achieve the learning outcomes.
3) Building students' confidence to practice the skills competently.
4) Improving students' ability to recognize, manage, and continuously build upon their own EFL skills and evidence of learning through portfolios.
5) Raising students' understanding of different types and levels of thinking connected to language learning;
6) Helping students learn key academic research skills and produce academically oriented research essays.
7) Equipping students with the knowledge and skills to embark on an IELTS proficiency and reach 5.5 aggregate in the exam.

The syllabus in its semi-decentralized mode is organized in accordance with two English levels and around three overarching themes- Community, Academics, and Employment. These themes are developed in depth during the academic year through the study of related topics. The topics are explored in correlation with vocabulary development, as it is an essential component of the English program and a key factor in receptive and productive language development. A comprehensive and extensive list of vocabulary words has been designed for each level. The words are extracted from the Common European Framework Report B1-C1 vocabulary lists, the IELTS vocabulary lists, and from the selected reading.

Sample of a one-week syllabus shown below for level 2 is self-explanatory:

Figure 1. Sample weekly pacing guide for level 2 of English at the ELI-UJ

A post-curriculum survey which includes the detailed opinion statements was distributed to all the teaching staff (with varying response rates for each question) exploring their perceptions and opinion of the newly developed curriculum and most importantly how much autonomy and sense of decentralization the new curriculum has given. While 38% of the participants weren't aware of the autonomy afforded through the new curriculum, 61.4% of instructors believe that this newly adopted curriculum has given them freedom and autonomy. Another inquiry targeted the ways in which they think the new curriculum is different from other curricula. 37.68% think that the open resources have really decentralized their instructional practices where more teacher-created resources are permitted instead of the controlled curriculum (textbooks) which limited their creativity. 23.19% believe that the liberty to teach in their preferred styles distinguished the new curriculum the most. The following tables summarize all the results of the survey.

Table 24. In what ways do you think the new curriculum is different from other curricula?

Answer choice	Responses
Class size	5.56%
Levels	15.28%
Teaching methods	13.89%
Resources	38.89%
Teacher's autonomy	22.22%
Other	4.17%

Table 25. Teachers' opinion on the new curriculum

Statements	1	2	3	4	Total	Weighted Average
Clarity & attainability of the main SLOs	11.29%	27.42%	41.94%	19.35%	62	2.69
Clarity & attainability of specific SLOs for grammar.	22.58%	35.48%	27.42%	14.52%	62	2.34
Clarity & attainability of specific SLOs for vocabulary.	24.19%	20.97%	25.81%	29.03%	62	2.6
Clarity & attainability of specific SLOs for listening.	22.58%	27.42%	27.42%	22.58%	62	2.5
Clarity & attainability of specific SLOs for reading.	12.90%	22.58%	40.32%	24.19%	62	2.76
Clarity & attainability of specific SLOs for speaking.	6.45%	19.35%	40.32%	33.87%	62	3.02
Clarity & attainability of specific SLOs for writing	30.65%	29.03%	20.97%	19.35%	62	2.29
Sequence of writing tasks "easy to difficult"	35.48%	27.42%	24.19%	12.90%	62	2.15
Sequence of topics "simple to complex".	25.81%	22.58%	35.48%	16.13%	62	2.42
Suitability of topics.	22.58%	29.03%	33.87%	14.52%	62	2.4
Relevance of Grammatical patterns to topic-writing and speaking tasks.	22.58%	38.71%	25.81%	12.90%	62	2.29
Layout "face" of weekly quizzes.	32.79%	22.95%	22.95%	21.31%	61	2.33
Number of quiz items.	26.23%	11.48%	26.23%	36.07%	61	2.72
Allotted time per quiz.	18.03%	9.84%	22.95%	49.18%	61	3.03
Assigned content (every 2 weeks)	11.48%	18.03%	24.59%	45.90%	61	3.05
Assigned skills (Grammar & Vocabulary only)	13.11%	11.48%	29.51%	45.90%	61	3.08

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Question Type (fill-in-blanks, multiple choice, matching).	9.84%	19.67%	27.87%	42.62%	61	3.03
Contextualization of quiz items "within a text, sentences"	13.11%	27.87%	22.95%	36.07%	61	2.82
Weekly Sequence of skills and sub-skills.	21.31%	21.31%	36.07%	21.31%	61	2.57
Number of weeks	24.59%	22.95%	29.51%	22.95%	61	2.51
Starting with level profile in weekly pacing guides	16.67%	16.67%	31.67%	35.00%	60	2.85
Adding thinking and study skills in weekly pacing guides.	15.00%	6.67%	40.00%	38.33%	60	3.02
List of Vocabulary in weekly pacing guides.	26.67%	15.00%	30.00%	28.33%	60	2.6
Pictures in weekly pacing guides.	18.33%	18.33%	28.33%	35.00%	60	2.8
Student's pacing guide	16.67%	15.00%	31.67%	36.67%	60	2.88
Using one inventory for all resources.	18.97%	18.97%	36.21%	25.86%	58	2.69
Creating a supplementary booklet for multiple weeks	18.64%	15.25%	27.12%	38.98%	59	2.86
Using Google Drive for resources	27.12%	5.08%	25.42%	42.37%	59	2.83
Finding extra resources.	20.34%	15.25%	27.12%	37.29%	59	2.81
Practicality and relevance of existing lesson plans.	27.12%	23.73%	33.90%	15.25%	59	2.37
Themes of video clips	39.66%	29.31%	18.97%	12.07%	58	2.03
Length of video clips	56.90%	25.86%	10.34%	6.90%	58	1.67
Date of introducing the project to students	46.55%	20.69%	20.69%	12.07%	58	1.98
Length of required students' presentation	17.24%	15.52%	39.66%	27.59%	58	2.78
Length of report required by students.	18.97%	22.41%	32.76%	25.86%	58	2.66
Rubrics of scoring students' report.	24.14%	18.97%	32.76%	24.14%	58	2.57
Rubrics for scoring students' presentations.	17.24%	15.52%	39.66%	27.59%	58	2.78
Components of the report.	31.03%	18.97%	31.03%	18.97%	58	2.38

Table 26. Teachers' perspective on their anatomy with the new curriculum

Statement	0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
What percentage of Freedom and Autonomy has the new curriculum	8.62 %	10.34 %	18.97 %	41.38 %	17.24 %	3.45 %

given to you?

Open-ended questions were also an integral part of the survey showing interesting results. One of the pertinent questions raised in the survey was related to "Why, in your opinion, are changes deemed necessary in the first place?" An interesting response is reflected in one participant's response: "*When a new service or product is introduced, changes are considered to meet the customer's need (in our case the student). Any change that an institution undergoes must have a valid reason to take place. Once it is decided that changes are needed, all the teams would be expected to support the changes through various phases: 1- Understanding the reason(s) for change 2- Understanding the positive things in the vision 3- Working towards achieving the goal 4- Giving a feedback on how things worked or didn't work with the intention and desire to achieve a continuous improvement. Changes were needed as 1- Teachers were not challenged with a new curriculum 2- The ELI couldn't determine who would be able among the teachers to author new materials 3- The ELI faculty did not work collaboratively earlier. With the new changes, teachers started, to a great extent, to work as a team 4- Students who repeatedly failed, were bored and needed something new to learn 5- Changes over the years can allow the university to publish its own books and even sell them. 6- The teachers were more aware of their potential and their shortcomings.*" Another thoughtful feedback has been worded by one participant indicating that for the institute to have its own identity and to suit the goals of teaching English in Saudi Arabia, it needed to develop this semi-decentralized curriculum Similarly, another participant mentioned in his feedback: "*to leave some space for teachers to create their own material which in turn boosts their autonomy in the classroom and to introduce students to using technology and have more students-centered classes by activating more group work*". A third participant responded: "*to diversify resources and enable teachers to bring their skills into daily classroom practice*". A more direct response from one participant says, "*I believe the ELI has implemented the new curriculum in order to enhance the quality of teaching; give students autonomy in learning and engage them actively; stop us from being "slaves' of the books and incorporate technology in learning*".

When the same group of participants was asked about the reasons for not involving themselves in the Curriculum Development Committee, one participant reported that on the contrary, all the teachers are indirectly involved in the development of this new curriculum especially in the areas of preparing and developing the teaching materials. Another interesting response was: "The administration gave a chance to the newly recruited staff to showcase their abilities".

An indirect approach to gain feedback of the participants' perception of decentralization was by asking them what positive influence the new curriculum was having on their teaching performance. This question drew the following feedback:

"It has helped me to think on my feet and learn how to improvise";

"It has helped me to be more involved in the active selection of materials";

"The new curriculum has had a very positive influence on my teaching performance. It has, opened the door for investigating and finding the best materials to utilize and the best way to teach those materials";

"Teachers got more freedom and confidence";

"It paved the way for me, at least, to not teach for the test but teach to help students build the necessary academic and social skills";

"Well, for one I have tried to incorporate it in a class of students who in the initial phase were really pessimistic. The curriculum didn't really change them, but it encouraged me as a teacher to try to unlock their limited potential and introduce them to the methods for optimal success and positive outcomes irrespective of the workload! The students can speak for themselves in this regard";

"Teaching performance is more dynamic and independent";

"The most positive aspect is that as a teacher I am free to develop the material freely according to my students' requirements and level";

"As this was a new curriculum, this made me more self-reflective of my teaching methods, resources used etc. as I needed to determine what was working and what needed to be improved for the next cycle".

5. Conclusion

Carnoy (2000) states that decentralization proposals and plans are being strongly considered and advocated by several respected institutions whether locally or internationally including the World Bank. Another indication Simon (2011) claims that there had been many theories such as those of Isaac Kandel concerning the uncertainty about centralization-decentralization in the United Kingdom as an example in the early 1950s. Simon quoted Kandel's comparative studies in education when he presented his argument that internal conduct in the classroom can probably be decentralized whereas external issues such as school structure and administration may have to remain centralized.

One of the pertinent issues of the internal conduct of the classroom is the curriculum which has attracted the attention of many educators across the world for so many years and has been deliberated in their work and educational research and philosophy. The greater portions of the research and thinking underlines the significance of decentralization in the curriculum and its components. More confirmation is described by Onyeme (2018) indicating that the move from centralized to decentralized and more democratic models of curricula is gaining more eminence and progress as this move promotes a more contextualized and locally tailored curriculum which addresses encourages local needs more authentically.

A decentralized curriculum works positively and constructively towards two advantages. First, as mentioned by Akpan & Apologu (2015), that local needs and priorities are more respected leading to a more effective teaching and learning experience and more harmonization with students' needs. Educational interventions are likely to take local contexts into consideration, making them more effective. Second, resources and materials used in any decentralized curriculum support and consolidate the role of any educational institution in fulfilling the needs of the student community and promotes more collaboration between a school and the surrounding environment.

To this end, educational systems are now heading for more decentralized curricula minimizing centralized models which have been constantly blocking whole educational

communities from participating in decision making. Decentralized approaches foster and reinforce these whole communities to share the development of the teaching and learning management and processes. Consequently, curricula are designed and tailored in alignment with the needs of the students and relevant local contexts, starting from curriculum aims to curriculum evaluation.

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