Application of Global ELT Practices in Saudi Arabia
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Message from the Guest Editor

This special edition is the culmination of an extended cooperative initiative involving the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University and the Arab World English Journal (AWEJ). The edition’s overall theme, “Application of Global ELT Practices in Saudi Arabia,” serves to collate a significant collection of ELI faculty research papers to produce one of the most critical and authoritative investigations into the state of English language education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia published to date.

This collection includes topics ranging from classroom observation for professional development purposes to the role and impact of a variety of current technologies in classroom pedagogical practices. Additional topics explore teacher and learner attitudes, assessment instrument impact and effectiveness, the role of motivation and social interdependence, and the use of the mother tongue as a classroom mediation tool. The volume contains thirteen research papers and is intended to serve an international audience of scholars interested in better understanding English language learning in Saudi Arabia.

By producing a body of work that can aid in the application of an increasingly dynamic, effective and responsive practice of English language education in universities and schools nation-wide, this endeavor aligns with ELI’s vision of regional leadership and directs and hones the Institute’s targeted drive toward fulfillment of its mission of achieving excellence in English language teaching and learning, academic research, and community service.

The publication further supports ELI’s continuing efforts to embody the themes and goals of the Kingdom’s Vision 2030 and its ambitious benchmarks for development in all fields. It is hoped that the ideas, theories, and practices presented herein will positively impact pedagogy both regionally and globally, thereby serving to inspire further research in this exciting and ever-developing field.

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Exploring English Language Needs: Business Students' and Teachers' Perspectives in a Saudi Undergraduate Context

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Abstract
The main purpose of this study was to explore the English language needs of business major students at the undergraduate level. The impetus for the research was therefore the need to explore ways of identifying the students’ English language needs for academic purposes as viewed by the students, their language teachers and business lecturers. In particular, the author was interested in conducting what various researchers Al-Khatib (2005), Al Mamun and Rahman (2017) and Forey (2004) indicated that bridging the gap between the objectives of educational institutions and English language skills required in the academia will prepare students to meet their real-world needs and expectations. It should be noted that, it is a requirement in Saudi Arabia that students who wish to participate fully in the business environment require greater control of the English language for their future careers. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving both quantitative and qualitative (naturalistic) data and data analysis. Participants included business students (n = 254), language teachers (n = 20), and business lecturers (n = 3). Analysis of data from numerous sources (questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) indicated differences among the participants about perceptions of English language needs for academic purposes, but in general it was clear that the English language programme in its current form is not meeting the students’ language needs.

Keywords: English for specific purposes (ESP), Needs analysis (NA), Present situation analysis (PSA), Saudi undergraduate context, Target situation analysis (TSA)

1. Introduction

Needs analysis was used as early as the 1920s in India by Michael West (Brown, 2001). In the 1960s, the demand for language programmes, especially ESP programmes grew. As a result, applied linguists in particular began to employ needs analysis procedures in their language teaching processes. In the 1980s, needs analysis emerged in various aspects of language teaching with respect to ESP and vocationally-related programmes. The beginning of the conceptualization and application of communicative language teaching (CLT) had already taken place in the 1970s. This, in turn, played a significant role regarding providing a new chapter in needs analysis in English teaching contexts around the world. Needs analysis can be conducted to evaluate an existing programme for the purposes of accountability (Long, 2005; Richards, 2001). Therefore, the current study aims to explore whether there is a need to modify English language teaching objectives in line to the business English courses based on the results of this study.

1.1 Research Problem and Rationale

As English is a global language, the contemporary labor market - more specifically the business world in Saudi Arabia - is both in need of a sizeable workforce and reliant on those who are proficient in English. However, in Saudi Arabia in most university departments for instance, business management and computer science, English is used as a medium of instruction (Al-Seghayer, 2012). Despite this, the type of English still being taught at some of these departments is English for general purposes (EGP), rather than English for specific purposes (ESP). Therefore, the language skills of the students are often underdeveloped, and they need to learn business English skills to understand their specialist subject (Akar et al., 2016; Al-Roomy, 2017; Alharbi, 2015; Fadel & Rajab, 2017). This study has sought to accomplish two objectives: (a) to recognize the students’ and instructors’ perceptions toward the reasons for studying English at the university level; (b) to identify the students’ academic English language needs as perceived by English language instructors, business lecturers, and their students.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is also known as needs assessment and refers to the gathering and interpreting of information on course design, materials development and assessment (Bacha & Bahous, 2008; Brown, 2016; Graves, 1996; Munby, 1981; Richards, 2001). Richards (2001) describes needs analysis as: “a procedure used to collect information about learners’ needs” (p. 51). According to Brown (2001), needs analysis is: “the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to satisfy the language learning requirements of the students within the context of the particular institutions involved in the learning situation” (p. 21). Thus, information should not only be gathered but also analyzed, and both should be done systematically (Kondo-Brown & Brown, 2017). Furthermore, Richards (2001) points out that needs analysis constitutes part of the evaluation procedure. It is a device used to evaluate specific parts of a programme, for example, the programme stakeholders and the features of the programme to be evaluated. Programme evaluation precedes and follows a needs analysis. Needs analysis also described as a specific process designed for a particular situation to meet the objectives of the evaluation project (Graves, 1996).
2.2 Purpose of Needs Analysis

(Richards, 2001) points out that the first step in conducting a needs analysis is to: “decide exactly what its purpose or purposes are” (p. 52). Robinson (1991) suggests that the purpose of a needs analysis, particularly in an ELT programme, is to determine the specific reasons for learning the language. In more formal terms, a needs analysis is: “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities” (Richard, Platt, & Platt, 1992, p. 242). Needs analysis can also be conducted to evaluate an existing programme for the purposes of accountability (Long, 2005; Richards, 2001).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Approaches to needs analysis have been discussed by some authors from different perspectives. Researchers have identified diverse approaches to the analysis of language learners’ needs, including target situation analysis (TSA), present situation analysis (PSA) and environmental analysis (EA) (Hyland, 2006; Kim, 2006; West, 1994).

2.3.1 Present Situation Analysis

The process of PSA involves establishing students’ knowledge of English at the beginning of the course and determining their strengths and weaknesses to aid decisions regarding students’ language learning needs in that specific context. Thus, PSA is focused on the language-learning context (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). However, in the case of this study, the needs determined in PSA relate to the competencies students need for their academic studies, which are in turn linked to the requirements of the workplace. Johns (1981) argues that if language institutes and service courses are to prepare students for their university studies, they must concentrate on those skills which are considered most important in academic settings.

2.3.2 Target Situation Analysis

Both PSA and TSA complement each other and are used in conjunction in order to establish and give priority to learning objectives. Thus, needs analysis is seen as a combination of PSA and TSA (Al-Husseini, 2004). Moreover, TSA is the analysis of the learners’ language needs in the target context. Related to this, Dudley-Evans, St John, and Saint John (1998) outlined the concept of needs analysis in ESP by listing the type of information which needs to be gathered to be used as a procedure which consists of parameters, which can be phrased as questions, for analyzing language learners’ needs. These procedures are: professional and personal information of the learners, learners' English language proficiency, the gap between the learner professional and language proficiency, knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situation, identifying the needs of the course and information on the environment in which the course will be conducted.

2.3.3 Related Studies on Needs Analysis

In the Arab world, Al-Khatib (2005) investigated English language communication needs in the fields of tourism and banking in Jordan, identifying employees’ attitudes towards English and its use in the workplace. Data collection procedures include questionnaire, interviews and the analysis of workplace texts. The results showed that English communication skills were considered crucial for all of the participants of the study. Furthermore, positive attitudes emerged amongst almost all of the respondents with regard to the use of English to achieve multiple purposes. According to
Al-Khatib (2005), it is very important prior to designing ESP courses to consider the workers or business students’ communication needs at the target situation.

In the Greek’s Context, Chostelidou (2011) recently carried out needs analysis in order to identify the needs of a target group of learners and introduce a needs-based course design. The data were gathered using a questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions administered to 395 students and also semi-structured interviews with 35 students. Some recommendations were made as a result of the findings. The study stressed the need for specific ESP language courses with a clear focus on the target discipline. The provision of ESP training was designed to attend to the learners’ immediate needs as students and their long-term needs as professionals. In the Saudi Arabian context, Almulhim (2002) conducted a study to investigate the English language needs of employees in 101 companies in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia which represent different business sectors. The investigation measured the levels of proficiency required in the four English skills. Three hundred eight employees and managers completed a questionnaire distributed to various companies. The results show that English language knowledge is a requirement for employment by most companies, but that the level of proficiency needed varied amongst the various companies. Concerning language skills, managers and employees rated listening as the most important skill, followed by speaking, reading and writing. The author concluded that while English is needed in the private sector, an intermediate level of proficiency is generally sufficient. Another study by Basturkmen (1998) conducted to identify the communicative language needs of the petroleum and Engineering students at the Kuwaiti university. Data were gathered on perceptions through interviews with faculty, teaching assistants and students and from the observation of classes to determine types of English language tasks. The results showed the importance of English for engineering students’ academic needs.

2.4 English for Specific Purposes (ESP)
What distinguishes ESP from other branches of applied linguistics and language teaching areas is the process of studying language discourses, the contexts of use and student needs in the broadest sense and the application of these findings to educational practices (Gatehouse, 2001).

2.4.1 Definitions and characteristics of ESP
With regard to definitions of ESP, Robinson (1991) suggests that the concept of ESP is based on specific criteria and characteristics. In particular, ESP is “normally goal-directed and ESP courses develop from a needs analysis, which aims to specify as closely as possible what it is exactly that students have to go through the medium of English” (Robinson, 1991, p. 3). Furthermore, ESP courses are generally undertaken within a limited time period (Robinson, 1991). According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology; rather, it is an approach to language learning in which the content and methods are based on the learners’ particular needs in learning the language. Munby (1981) defines ESP courses as: “those where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner” (p. 2). Thus, the focus is on the purpose of learning the language. Classroom methodology can be a cause of disagreement amongst ESP scholars. Widdowson (1983) contended that language teaching methodology had generally been neglected in ESP, the emphasis being on needs analysis and content. A little later, Munby (1981) presented the concept of communication in his definition, nonetheless Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that: “ESP is first and foremost
a learning process, and it is not possible to have a communicative approach in ESP unless ESP is seen as primarily an educational matter” (p. 112). However, Smoak (2003) considers that a communicative approach can be incorporated, for example by introducing real-life tasks, emphasizing that: “ESP is English instruction based on actual and immediate needs of learners who have to successfully perform real-life tasks unrelated to merely passing an English class or examination. ESP is needs based and task oriented” (p.27). Consistent with the above, it should be noted that the definitions do not specify the types of tasks that should be employed, such as social or vocational tasks, as the learners’ needs determine these. Furthermore, Dudley-Evans et al. (1998) clarify what they mean by methodology in ESP classes, stating that the definition of ESP should reflect the fact that teaching methodology in ESP differs from that used in EGP, especially when it is used to teach language skills related to a specific profession or discipline. In other words, they stress that their definition of ESP is based on two key points: (a) all ESP teaching should reflect the methodology of the discipline and professions it serves; (b) the nature of the interaction between the teachers and learners may be very different from that in a general English language teaching class. The role of the teacher in more specific ESP classes is described as that of a language consultant enjoying equal status with learners who have their own knowledge of the subject matter (Dudley-Evans et al., 1998). Furthermore, Kim (2006) states that: “adult language learners have more compelling and specific needs to learn a foreign language” (p. 1).

2.4.2 Types of ESP
According to Dudley-Evans et al. (1998) ESP includes (a) English for academic purposes (EAP) and; (b) English for occupational purposes (EOP). According to Flowerdew and Peacock (2001), EAP is: “designed to help language learners in an educational context” (p. 8), whereas EOP relates to students’ work or professions for which they require a certain level of English language proficiency to perform a specific work-related task (Kim, 2006). These purposes according to Dudley-Evans (2001) are the starting points for determining the language which needs to be taught. With regard to the key stages in the design of ESP teaching, Dudley-Evans et al. (1998) present the following steps: needs analysis, determining the goals and purposes of the course, the details of the course, materials design, and assessment and evaluation. These stages are not separate but overlap and are interdependent. The most important focus in these stages is on practical outcomes and preparing learners to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their study or work situations. Thus, ESP is to be viewed as the teaching of language whereby students’ needs can be specified within academic or professional settings. In this study, ESP refers to the teaching – and learning – of business English at university, involving adult learners who will require specific English language skills in their immediate academic settings.

3. Methodology
3.1 Research Questions
This study aims to address the following two research questions:

1. To what extent is the importance of studying English for business major students at university level?
2. What are the students’ academic English language needs based on the students, English language and business instructors’ perspectives?
In this study, a mixed-methods approach was employed, involving both quantitative and qualitative (naturalistic) data and data analysis. Participants included business students (n = 254), language teachers (n = 20), and business lecturers (n = 3).

3.2 Research Design
3.2.1 Research Participants
In this study, a random sampling which takes a small number of participants from business and language department was employed (Tarone, Yule, & Yule, 1989). The participants in the study include business major students (n = 254) from the Faculty of Economics and Administration, enrolled as full-time students at a Saudi university, who were asked to complete questionnaires. Questionnaires were also given to English language instructors (n = 20) business lecturers (n = 5). In addition, to obtain more in-depth data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students (n = 12), English language instructors (n = 6), business lecturers (n = 3).

3.3 Data Collection
This section addresses the collection of data from the participants. Questionnaires and interviews were used with a sample of Saudi business major students, language instructors and business lecturers.

3.3.1 Structure of the Questionnaire
The structure of the questionnaire is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: The three sections of the structure of the questionnaire:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section 1</td>
<td>Collecting personal information of the research participants (i.e., Age, Qualification, Nationality, and Teaching experience).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2</td>
<td>Likert-scale (7 items): Rating the need to sub-skills and English language in general in their academic and professional settings. Participants specified the extent to which the sub-skills and language-based activities are important to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>Likert-scale (1 item). The participants’ views towards business related skills as a whole were measured using a 4-point Likert type attitude scale.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition, participants were asked to add their comments as an answer to the open-ended question to help the researcher to triangulate the respondents’ answers.

3.3.2 Structure of the Interviews
Narcy-Combes (2008) emphasizes that interviews can be characterized in terms of their degree of structure in the process, and explains four types of interviews as illustrated in table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Interview</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single or multiple sessions</td>
<td>In which the researcher administers one or a sequence of interviews with the same participant to acquire sufficient depth and breadth information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured interviews</td>
<td>In which the agenda is totally predetermined by the researcher who works through a set of question in a predetermined order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstructured interviews</td>
<td>In which the researchers are guided by the interviewee's responses and the researcher's ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>This structure can be applied when the participants have a general idea of where they want to go and what should come out of it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews. Also, interviews’ questions will be determined in advance to meet up with the study’s research questions (Zoltán, 2007).

4 Results and Discussion
The needs analysis involved gathering information from a variety of sources, including business major students, English language teachers and business lecturers. In the following section, data are analyzed and discussed according to the two research questions. Each question provides the qualitative and quantitative findings collectively in an organized manner. The process and purpose of the needs analysis conducted for this study is determined as discussed in the literature review.

4.1 Research Question One: To what extent it's important studying English for business major students at university level?

4.1.1 Students’ Responses
Students were first asked to explain their reasons for studying English at university. Figure 1 below illustrates the results obtained from the students with regard to the research question one.
Figure 1 Students’ responses on the reasons for studying English for business at university level (N= 254) presented the following result.

According to Figure 1, 81.1% of the students believe that studying English is important, whereas 7.5% of the students consider this to be only somewhat important. The following response emerged from the interviews:

“English is what we need to develop. In other words, we need English language in order to understand various business-related English texts in our field of study” (ST1).

Another student added the following comment:

“The world around us communicates in English. Therefore, we need to understand English in order to communicate with others” (ST3).

The students are clearly aware of the importance of learning English. They recognize the significance of English as an essential means of understanding the world around them and it is also seen as an important tool for grasping essential business terms, reading business texts and ultimately gaining an appropriate job in the future.

Most participants say that they need English for a number of reasons. They perceive English, for instance, as an essential skill to the business world in enabling them to comprehend the specialized texts they have to read and study. English is identified as the most important subject students need for success in their academic settings.
4.1.2 Teachers’ Responses
Twenty English language teachers were asked to explain the importance of studying English at university. In the teachers’ questionnaire, Q5 asked “Is it necessary to learn English at university? The following figure summarizes the results obtained from the teachers’ responses to this question.

![Figure 2: Summary of teachers’ responses regarding the importance of studying English at university (N=20)](image)

As can be seen from Figure 2, the majority of English language teachers (85%) strongly agree that English language is necessary at university, with a further 10% saying they agree and only 5% disagreeing. Moreover, it can be noted from both the figures given above that 85% of teachers and 81% of students respectively share the opinion that English is necessary at university; none considered it “not important”, which indicates that they are very aware of the importance of studying English at university. Most teachers state that English is necessary as it enables their students to develop their linguistic capacity to understand various business English foundations in their subject matter field. Students acknowledge that the majority of the teaching resources, particularly in the business school, are in English and students need to grasp these subjects properly.

A common quote is:

“As far as language courses are concerned, we think English is a great help to students at university. It is the language of many books and students must be interested in learning English because they need to read these books and they want to communicate with both native and non-native speakers of English” (LT 4.2.5).

4.2 Research Question two: What are the students’ academic English language needs based on the students, English language and business instructors’ perspectives?
4.2.1 Students’ Responses
The students were asked to indicate their opinions concerning the importance of the four English language skills, including vocabulary and grammar, which relate to their academic studies on a scale of 1=most important, 2=important, 3=somewhat important and 4=least important. Table 3 below presents the data obtained, showing frequencies and percentages of the students’ responses to this question.

Table 3 *Summary of students’ responses with regard the four English language skills to the academic studies (N=254)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English language Skills</th>
<th>Most important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Least important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that the students rate the importance of speaking, writing, grammar and listening skills as “most important” with percentages of 76%, 53.1%, 50.8% and 50% respectively. However, their perceptions of reading and vocabulary are different with reading being evaluated as “least important” by 47.2% and vocabulary considered “least important” by 46.1%. Furthermore, in the interviews, students expressed the view that not only reading and vocabulary, but all English language skills would improve if teachers paid more attention to them. This could be achieved, in their opinion, by proper use of classroom time, creating opportunities to practice different types of language skills and allowing student–student as well as teacher–student interaction. In addition, students perceived a discrepancy between what they learn in the English language classroom and what is actually required in their subject area (business, economics and finance). For instance, students in Y3 and Y4 stated that business terms were very important in their subject areas, with one student saying that:

“Due to our poor knowledge of business terms we cannot understand most of the statements in some of our advanced international business courses. Teachers prefer using Arabic to deliver the meaning” (ST 2, 3).

Another student added

“What we have studied at the English Language Institute does not help us to follow and comprehend most business-related terms. We need specific courses for business major students” (ST 4, 5).

Furthermore, when asked about the importance of other English language skills, one student responded:

“I believe reading business texts are important to some extent because I need to participate and be able to understand what teachers are talking about in class...

However, writing and speaking are also very important in our field. Therefore, English
language courses should focus on what business students need during their academic studies” (ST1).

4.2.2 Teachers’ Responses

English language teachers were asked to rate the importance of the four English language skills with regard to the students’ academic studies. Table 4 shows the results obtained from the teachers’ responses to this question.

Table 4 Teachers’ views of the importance of English language skills as regards their students’ academic studies (N=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English language Skills</th>
<th>Most important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Least important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>10 (40%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>9 (45%)</td>
<td>7 (35%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>7 (35%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Overall, a clear majority of English language teachers consider all four English skills to be “most important” or “important” for business major students. Speaking is seen as a vital skill and receives the highest percentage, with 50% of teachers selecting the “most important” response, followed by 45% of teachers choosing writing as “most important”. The importance of all English language skills for the students is emphasized in the interviews by the teachers. One teacher stated that

“Our students have different language needs depending on the use that is going to be made of them in the future. Therefore, each skill needs to be given equal weight and students also needed to pay attention to how to use these skills effectively” (LT3).

During the interviews, some teachers suggested that there is a discrepancy in terms of what needs to be learned in order to fulfil the students' target needs. Participants stated that currently the students' language needs are not identified for various reasons. As one of the teachers said,

“It is obvious that there is an absence of any type of coordination between the two departments (ELI and Business School) in terms of identifying, analyzing and understanding our students’ academic as well as professional language needs. I believe analyzing students’ language needs would help them to improve and would also provide solutions to most current language teaching problems” (BT2).

Despite the perceived importance of English, teachers believe that the current programme does not provide language students with all the necessary skills they require for their academic and future settings. In this regard, one of the business teachers argued that programme leaders or curriculum designers at the ELI should work together with the Business School to identify the various types
of activities and business-related terms which need to be included in the English language courses before business students start their academic studies.

One of the teachers declared:

“Both departments need to work together to identify business students’ English language needs. We must meet regularly if it is necessary for our students to improve their academic and professional language skills” (BT1).

5. Limitations of the Study
The results of this paper do have some limitations. Multiple sources were employed, and a mixed methods approach was adopted. However, the results would have be augmented had it been possible to undertake participant observations in workplace settings (to establish actual use of English and consequently, needs).

6. Conclusions and Recommendations
The findings of the needs analysis reveal that this process – a major step in any language programme design (Richards, 2001) – has been neglected. This has had an impact on planning the programme objectives, such as they are. From analysis of the teachers’ and students’ interview data, it appears that programme objectives have loosely been determined based on some pre-identified expectations of the programme administrators, but nowhere is it clearly articulated what these are. Moreover, in developing any goals, the views of the teachers and students with respect to the students’ academic and target language needs have been disregarded. The three groups of university participants (language teachers, business lecturers and students) declared that they are quite aware that English is necessary for business students. The English language teachers’ perceptions of the goals of the English courses were mainly to meet the students’ academic needs (rather than professional) but the students’ expectations are not being met and nor do the teachers consider their needs are being met. Furthermore, the needs analysis procedure used in this paper could be expanded to allow for the addition of more data sources. One of the most important sources for future expansion of the procedure is the inclusion of more input by observing business workplaces. This applies in particular to the collection and analysis of language samples and language-based data from actual situations (e.g. bank, hospital, or company) in which communication in English takes place on a daily basis. There is also the possibility of expanding the use of the needs analysis framework in the same institute at the university, or eventually to other Saudi universities, the idea being to work towards developing a second cyclical turn for the needs analysis process once the current findings have been implemented.

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Motivation, Investment and Social-Interdependence of Second Language Learners

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Abstract
This qualitative case study aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of Saudi adult learners of English as a second language (ESL) about what motivates them to learn English at a language school in the United Kingdom (UK). Motivation is widely considered to be an influential factor in second language acquisition (SLA), and it still draws increasing attention from theorists and practitioners. Despite significant contributions from psychological, sociopsychological and recent trends of process-oriented research there is still a marked lack of knowledge about the complexity of the context of learning and its impact on motivating students to learn English. Building on a tripartite theoretical lens grounded in Gardner’s (1981) socio-educational model, Norton’s (2001) concept of investment and social interdependence theory, this research study aimed to bridge this gap and contribute more broadly to deepening our understanding about the socially constructed nature of motivation to learn a second language (L2). The findings revealed four interrelated factors that shape learners’ motivation to learn English in an L2 context. These are the second language learner, the school community, the social milieu, and other macro-context factors. Implications for language learners and language schools in the UK and elsewhere and future motivation research were explored.

Keywords: Motivation, integrativeness, investment, social-interdependence

1.0 Introduction

Motivation is widely considered to be an essential factor that influences second language acquisition and achievement (e.g. Al-Hoorie, 2017; Dornyie, 2009; Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972; Gardner, 2007; Goodridge, 2017; MacIntyre, 2002; McGroarty, 2001; Noels et al., 1999). A broad definition of motivation underscores common factors such as drive, instinct and goal setting which merely explain reasons for human action (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006). However, the concept defies simple definition which reflects the complex trajectory of its evolution. Ostensibly such complexity reflects notable advances in theoretical traditions in the field represented by, as Droney and Ushioda (2011) indicate, four phases: the social psychological period (1959-1990), the cognitive-situated period (1990’s), the process-oriented period (2000), and the sociodynamic period. However, due to space limits, this paper does not aim to provide a comprehensive literature review but instead a complexity view of motivation is presented to bring into consideration the concept of motivation not as prescribed term but as one born out of the context in which it is implemented. This context specific investigation is crucial in understanding as Kim (2010) indicates the: "uniqueness found in each L2 learner" (p. 88). As he also highlights, previous research on motivation reflects simplistic and reductionist views of the term rooted in quantitative measures of what motivation looks like such as Gardners' (1985) Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). As Norton (2010, p.10) also states, past conceptualizations of motivation “do not capture the complex relationship between power, identity and language learning” and hence suggests that investment provides a useful lens to the understanding of such complex picture.

A remarkable shift in motivation research at the turn of the new millennium reflects the emergence of the process-oriented approach to motivation in response to L2 psychological and social psychological motivational research. For Dörnyei (2003), the process-oriented approach examines learners' motivation to learn an L2 deployed within a temporal variation spanning preactional, actional, and postactional stages. This approach examines motivation as an ongoing change process and as Goodridge (2017) notes it can be seen as: "dynamic and fluctuating within a semester and a lifetime” (p. 81). Unlike Gardners' (1985) integrative motivation, which highlights affective orientation to L2 and its community as determinant of learning, an important contribution of the process-oriented reconceptualization of motivation is that it focuses on classroom contexts and as suggested by Dörnyei (2007) it: “created a fertile ground for educational implications directly relevant to classroom practice” (p. 111). As he also indicates that motivation as a dynamic process is in part reflected by the L2 Motivational self-system theory. As Dorneyi et al., (2002) proposed that the ideal-self drives the learner to possess the attributes of a specific person or society, and the ought-to-self motivates the learner to be more proficient in the target language. In the same vein and drawing on discussions of identity in globalized and postmodern world, Lamb (2004) has stressed that motivation to learn English can partly be shaped by the pursuit of a dual national and global identity ‘without any sense of contradiction’.

However, the increasing focus of motivation research on formal classroom practices may undermine a broader view of contexts and its impact on L2 learners' motivation. An important underrepresented dimension of such a versatile and complex context is the learners' identity and the meso-micro- and macro-contextual influential factors and actors in its development. At the
heart of this is teachers’ influential roles in de/motivating L2 learners (Crookes, 1997), learners’ language learning history (Harrison, 2008), and homestays (Juveland, 2011) to mention a few. Ushioda, (2011) views motivation as a process of identity development and construction within complex and various contexts. As she explains this conceptualization of identity:

brings into sharp relief the socially mediated nature of motivation as emergent through the complex interactions of social, individual and contextual processes, and reflects a more widespread shift from individual-cognitive to social-interactive perspectives on motivation in the literature at large (p. 229).

To conclude, while the process-oriented view of motivation provides useful insights into how L2 motivation can be approached, it tends to undermine the complexity of the context of learning and the implicit power relations among language learners and significant others in their lives specifically when learners live within the second language community. Motivation understood this way places the burden of motivation to learn an L2 on the learner and blames his/her personality traits, identity and affective factors for underachievement at the expense of a more complex set factors at play (Norton, 2010).

2- Theoretical framework

The tripartite theoretical framework underpinning this research study highlights that language learning in the micro-context of the classroom cannot be fully understood without taking into account macro-intergroup settings and that these are to be understood as intertwined components in second language acquisition. Building on Gardner’s conceptualization of integrative motivation (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993), the attitudinal orientations of students towards second language community can be explored to uncover the extent to which attitudinal and affective variables help L2 learners progress through language learning journey in a second language context.

At a more practical level, the impetus for adopting Gardner's 'integrativeness' concept as a theoretical lens pertains to, as Macintyre (2004) explains, “its uniqueness and emphasis that integrative motives for second language learning were predictive of success” (cited in Macintyre et. al., 2009, p. 40). It is also adopted to fit the bilingual context of this research study where the participants joined a language program at a language school in the UK and lived in homestays, and hence the chances of formal and informal language learning within the second language community are prevalent.

In discussing the roles of learners’ attitudes towards L2 community, this study considers research findings that highlight that there is strong evidence in support of reliability of Gardner’s’ integrative motivation theory (e.g., Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).
While the researcher partially agrees with Dorneyi (1990) that results driven from second language motivation research in bilingual contexts do not necessarily apply to foreign language context, it is important that for other reasons to be discussed further below, the author retains Gardenrs’ (1985) integrative orientation in exploring the factors that influence L2 learners language development. However, despite its influential role, motivation research in the social psychological period has focused on macro-contexts but somewhat failed to take into account the meso- and micro-context factors including language learners' themselves. That is, the extent to which language learners’ opinions and views about what influences their motivation to learn an L2 inside classroom context is understated. As Dornyei (2005, pp. 74-75) points outa situated analysis of motivation as it operates in actual learning situations is required. In addition, Norton (2010) maintains that theories of motivation did not pay sufficient attention to unequal relations of power between language learners and target language community members.

Therefore, it is important that motivation, as indicated above, should be explained in light of the concept of investment discussed by Norton (2000; 2010). As Norton (2010, p.352) mentions, this can be achieved by way of appreciating the complexity of motivation through understanding the “actions and investments of human agents” and uncovering the power differentials among learners and second language community and how these works to operate to enable or constrain human actions. Unlike conceptions of motivation introduced by theorists in the social psychological period, the cognitive-situated period and process-oriented period which as Norton (2010) indicates that: “often conceives of language learners as having unitary and ahistorical personality, the concept of investment conceives of the language learner as having a complex identity, changing across time and space and reproduced in social interactions” (p. 353). Norton (2010) further explains that motivation to learn a second language does not necessarily translate into investment. Investment means a commitment on the part of the learner and the
community of practice both within and beyond the classroom. This community can comprise “public professionals and local homemakers’ but learners have greater chances of investment with the very people who represent or provide access to the imagined community” (p.355). As she also highlights, the important outcome of this relationship is the extent to which such investment is productive for learners' engagement in both the classroom and the wider target community” (p.356). In this sense, despite the motivational intensity of the learner, learning a language within members of the community who for some reason do not facilitate communication and interaction with language learners can be challenging to learners’ investment. As Duff (2002 cited in Norton, 2010) points out learners’ disengagement in classroom activities can be perceived as lack of investment by the target community rather than learners: “lack of initiative, agency, or desire to improve one’s English” (p. 356). Such negative perceptions about language learners can be counter-conducive to language learning and as Norton (2013) also explains that “despite being highly motivated, a learner could be excluded from the language practices of a classroom, and in time positioned as a “poor” or unmotivated language learner” (p.6). For this reason, the author tends to emphasize the importance of the concept of investment to account for imbalances in power relations between language learners and target language community. Moreover, it may enable researchers and learners to acknowledge the complexity of motivation and the context in which it is enacted. However, investment on its own does not seem to fully capture the complexity of relationships among language learners and involved parties in an L2 learning context (Kim, 2010). Therefore, Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson & Johnson. 2003) can provide a third lens to complement the theoretical framework for understanding the social dimension of motivation and how socialization with the target language community reflects an important dimension of motivated individuals. It also reflects the key roles significant others in the lives of L2 learners play in motivating them to learn a second language. Thus, social interdependence exists when learners share common goals and that each individual’s goals attainment is affected by the actions of others such as those with whom they mingle and communicate. Johnson et al. (2014) conclude that positive interdependence results in greater motivation and achievement than negative or no interdependence. As they explain positive interdependence occurs when “individuals tend to seek outcomes that are beneficial to all those with whom their goals are positively linked” (p.622). While this principle sounds similar to Gardner's’ (1985) integrative motivation, the positive interdependence differs in highlight the dual roles L2 community members in formal and informal contexts paly in the lives of L2 learners. That is, while learners' orientations to L2 community are assigned as a key determinant of motivating L2 learners, social interdependence theory emphasizes equal significance to L2 community members orientations to L2 learners. It thus emphasizes how learning is socially co-constructed by the parties involved in a specific context rather than taking a simplistic view of unidirectional orientations towards the L2 community by L2 learners. As Norton and Toohey (2011) highlight that:

language learning theory and research needs to address how power in the social world affects learners’ access to the target language community, and thus to opportunities to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing, widely acknowledged as central to the SLA process (p. 414).

No goal interdependence occurs when learners believe that they can learn the language without reference to significant others in the community. As Johnson and Johnson (2003) put it, negative
goal interdependence: “exists when individuals perceive that they can reach their goal regardless of whether other individuals attain or do not attain their goals” (p. 263). This view, however, seems to be similar to Gardner’s instrumental motivation whereby instrumental goals are considered to be driving students’ motivation to learn a language. This model provides key insights into how to understand the complex nature of motivation and how to motivate learners of English as a second language. It covers the attitudinal dimensions, intergroup relationships and actions and investment of human agents which all make up the aggregate meaning of motivation. This model is not however immune to criticism. Echoing earlier criticism of Gardner’s (1985) integrative orientation the complexity view does not necessarily apply to contexts where English is learned as a foreign language context since this study was conducted in a second language context. Nonetheless, this model can be beneficial to language schools both in foreign and second language contexts. As Dorneyi (2005) explains that the sociocultural dimensions can be included in the school’s syllabus by enhancing learners’ integrative and instrumental values.

3.0 Methodology

This study is informed by the interpretive paradigm, and case study design was implemented. A purposive sampling approach (Creswell, 2013) was used, and the respondents were four Saudi students enrolled in a language school in the UK. The impetus for choosing the participants was that the respondents were considered as motivated language learners by their language school. In addition, since all of the respondents lived in homestays, it was considered quite pertinent to investigating motivation in formal and informal settings. The second reason is more practical and relates to how can motivation research help the high influx of Saudi scholarship holders pursuing their undergraduate and postgraduate studies abroad (the UK, The US, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand) to find better ways to enhance their language learning. Their informed consent was obtained, and Pseudonyms were used in order to protect their identities. This study utilized semi-structured interviews as well as progress reports as data collection methods which helped depict the motivational aspects of Saudi students (Wallen & Fraenkle, 2001). The interviews were conducted in English, but the participants were also informed about their freedom to use their mother tongue (Arabic) if needed. An interview schedule was prepared based on the three-model framework explained above as an interview guide, and a 30-minute interview with each participant was conducted, tape-recorded, transcribed and thematically analyzed.

4.0 Findings
The findings of this study revealed three major themes which reflect the complexity view of motivation discussed above. It highlights that motivation is complexly situated in the meso, micro- and macro-contexts of learning. The community of second language speakers, and the school community respectively represent the macro- and micro-contexts of second language motivation. The third dimension of the context is the meso-context which reflects practices related to classroom settings. These different contexts explain how learners’ motivation to learn an L2 in a second language context socially constructed phenomenon subject to specific contexts. Thus, motivation can be considered as a wicked and complex phenomenon in the sense that each influencing factor resonates with a complex interrelated web of factors which uniquely reflect certain actors within certain contexts.
4.1 Communication with Second Language Community

A highly recurring theme expressed by all interviewees was about their orientations to communicate with the second language community as a motivating factor to learn English in the UK. Students were more inclined to utilize what they learn in the classroom to be practiced in their daily encounters with the British and to a lesser extent other non-Arab speaking community be it in the city center, cafes, restaurants, buses, supermarkets, airports, streets or with their host families. Advances in language learning can be attributed to L2 learners’ willingness to speak the language with its community members. The participants expressed the significance of such daily encounters in enriching the linguistic input they receive in language schools and in promoting their fluency and proficiency. Fadi confirms this when he said that:

*I have the curiosity to speak and practice what I learned. I like to understand the British people, I want to communicate with them (#Fadi).*

The participants squarely described learning a second language as a process where informal language learning in informal contexts complements formal language learning in language schools. Fadi adds that “formal learning is not enough to be native-like”. For second language learners to be proficient, they have to look for informal settings, and to quote Norton’s (2010) concept, ‘invest’ in every opportunity available to them to communicate with second language community even in school settings. Fadi, for example, invests his break time to communicate with the language school staff in an attempt to practice speaking English and learn about the British culture:

*I am kind of involved with language teachers, in the break time, I always go to the reception area, try to talk with them(#Fadi)
With my host family, I always talk with them, talk about our cultures, watch TV programs, discuss ask and they answer my questions (#Fadi)*

It seems that Fadi’s moves to communicate with the British community and know more about the British culture are informed by his belief that English language learners must invest in every opportunity to practice the language both formally and informally. He described the relationship between language and learners as one of obligation and commitment, and the outcome of this process was perceived to result in the successful acquisition of the language. Fadi reiterates that:

successful language learners don’t go to the language, rather, if they are diligent, it will come to them (#Fadi)

It seems that this learner has developed strategies to invest in learning English within predominantly native speakers’ community. His investment initiatives were also in line with his integrative orientations towards native speakers by enjoying learning and expending efforts through findings ways to talk and communicate with native speakers whenever possible. This transition from expressing reasons of learning English through a willingness to communicate with native speakers to truly mingling, speaking and communicating with second language community is at the heart of Gardners’s (1985) integrativeness component explained above. It stresses that having positive attitudes to the L2 community as well as expanding efforts will bear on students’
success (Gardner, 2005). Taking into consideration positive social interdependence principle, the student seemed to be happy about how second language community both in formal and informal settings helped him grow as a language learner through acceptance and inclusion by the community he lives with. This was expressed when Fadi said that his language teachers in the language school and his host family undertake what Norton calls “investment” in the learning process through discussion and sharing ideas and thoughts about the Saudi and British cultures.

Hadi expressed similar views and reported that studying the language in a formal setting and gaining a bachelor qualification was not the main reason for him to study English in the UK. Rather, for Hadi being within a native language community gave him the chance to communicate with them to reinforce formal language learning and enhance using it in real-life situations with real people who speak the target language:

*English has become a global language. However, I am not here to just study the language and get my bachelor degree, I want to communicate, take the best of the cultural aspects of the British people (#Hadi)*

He further added that:
*the best way is, first, mingling with the British. I and my British friend in my host family, we walk and talk together most of the time (#Hadi)*.

This seems to be another confirmation of the integrativeness principle as a motivator in enhancing success in language learning. The significant factor these students shared was living in a host family as their best way to learn the language. As mentioned by Gardner (2005) that: "…….. an individual who has a high degree of integrativeness, has a favorable evaluation of the language learning situation, and is highly motivated to learn the language can be said to be integratively motivated" (p. 250).

When participants in this study were asked about their plans to achieve their language learning goals, their commitment to pursue their goals varied. For example, three students reported their persistence to meet their goals, but their efforts varied according to their attitudes and clarity of the goals (integrative or instrumental). Fadi, who was very particular about his integrative goals and has positive attitudes toward the British people, devoted his time equally to learning in formal and informal settings. In the former, he spends time in the classroom and at home studying English, reading and writing assignments which takes about three hours. In this regard, he reported a number of activities such as:

*Talk and think deeply about what you say...besides, make spread charts or lists of new vocabularies (#Fadi).*

In the latter, he exerts every effort possible to speak with British people at the language school. In the host family he mentioned:
*I spend most of my time talking with my host family lady……..we watch T.V. programmes, listen to the news, ask her about what I do not understand, talk about our cultures (#Fadi).*
Even on his way to the school, he mentioned how he invests his time to listen to the native people and learn their culture though his smartphone.

*I plug my headphone and listen to BBC4 radio all the way to the language institute (#Fadi)*

Moreover, Fadi's integrative motivation seems to drive him to interact and communicate with the British staff working in the language school:

*In the break time, I always go to the reception area, try to talk with them” and” participate in class activities (#Fadi).*

The other two students, Hadi and Radi, reported the same procedure except they were less punctual on their commitment to their goals than Fadi. Besides, the critical incidents of bad experiences with the British people negatively influenced their motivation to learn English. For example, Hadi concluded that “the British people are not friendly, anyhow”. Fadi was even hesitant about his best British friend in the host family and reluctantly described him as:

"excellent,…well..not excellent, but not too bad (#Hadi).

### 4.2 Socially Constructed Investment

Taking into account the complexity view informing this study, and to assess investment and positive interdependence of both learners and significant others in their learning endeavor, learners’ reported experiences of these were examined as well. With regards to the principle of investment, learners seemed to have invested their full potential to learn the language. Radi’s approach to investment when communicating with native speakers in his host family was through collecting as many numbers of vocabularies as possible besides understanding how to use them. He said that:

*I listen to them [native speakers], take vocabulary and leave accents and pronunciation as my last concern…. Only if pronunciation changes the meaning of words, then you can care about it (#Radi).*

Radi’s investment approach is probably different from the other two participants, Hadi and Fadi, in the sense that he was more pragmatic rather than perfectionist:

*Sure, or why else we are studying in the UK? Of course, through friendship one wants to communicate with British people so that he can gets by (#Hadi)

If one wants to study only for the purpose of passing exams, of course he would, but not as effective as talking with them [British people] (#Shadi)*

A key emergent theme from the interviews was the extent to which significant others in the lives of the learners shared learners’ investment and social interdependence. These were reflected in showing friendliness, openness, and investment by four types of community members. These are their host family members, language teachers and school staff, language learners in the school, and others in the life of the language learners. The themes seem to indicate the roles sympathy with language learners by significant others play in the development of L2 learners’ proficiency.
Fadi described the friendly talk with his host family lady as a critical component of learning a second language:

*I and my host family lady talked recently about the what was going on in Saudi Arabia and UK, it is important to talk* (#Fadi).

This quote highlights that sympathy may not only be an emotional reaction by native speakers, but an informed action grounded in Norton’s principle of investment. That is, native speakers’ initiatives to talk and communicate with language learners to allow for the increased opportunity for L2 learners to acquire language through purposeful communication. In line with this, Fadi described the British people as
cool, friendly” and "they don’t mind talking with us" (#Fadi).

Hadi, also expressed his positive experiences about the British community:
*especially because they appreciate the Saudi culture...they love talking about our culture* (#Hadi)

### 4.3 Teachers’ Openness

A recurring theme highlighted the roles language school community’s play in enhancing learning the English language. These pertained to teachers, administrative staff, and learners. The participants appeared to have mixed feelings about the extent to which each category of the community members extends efforts to communicate with L2 learners. With regards to language school teachers and staff members, one participant described the abundance of opportunities to chat with them even in their break time. As Shadi said:

*I am kind of involved with them, in the break time, I always go to the reception area, try to talk with them* (#Shadi).

An important reflection of teachers' contribution to the enhancement of the learning process related to the pedagogical approaches that teachers implement to make lessons quite appealing and motivating to language learners. As Fadi said “*some teachers introduce activities that make you participate and make the classroom active and interesting. Some teachers don’t. It depends on the teacher, either he either makes you participate or discourages you*”. On another note, the language module might be a source of de/motivation. Radi mentioned that Academic English classes were both motivating and demotivating. As he said:

*IELTS classes are killing a little because of the academic vocabularies and are making the class boring. However, I am not disappointed whatsoever. Rather, I feel this is motivating for me to solve the problems I face That is why I sometimes I ask my British friend in my host family about this* (#Radi).

Despite the reported positive experiences about teachers’ roles in enhancing learners' motivation to learn a second language, 50% of the participants considered teachers’ awareness of the educational background of the learners to play a critical role in boosting students’ motivation to
learn. Reflecting on his curiosity to learn more about language through asking questions, Shadi felt that this was annoying to some teachers. As he said, “there are some problems with some teachers when you ask them, they don’t say that they are annoyed but his reactions tell you he is bothered” (Shadi). Radi also expressed negative attitudes towards some teachers regarding openness to students about questioning and their styles of teaching. He reported that:

there are some problems with some teachers when you ask them, they don’t say that they are annoyed, but his reactions tell you he is bothered (#Radi).

With regards to the third category of the school’s community and its impact on students’ motivation to learn English, 50% of the participants considered learning a second language to be more motivating when it occurs within a blend of different ethnicities. For those cohort’s heterogeneity of language learners is considered a crucial element in enhancing and maintaining speaking in the target language as an attempt to strengthen and promote linguistic and communicative development. As Fadi said about learning English with homogenous groups of learners whose mother tongue is Arabic:

It is impossible to maintain speaking in the English language because we are Arabs and it is normal, we speak in Arabic as well (#Fadi).

Students’ willingness to maintain communication in the English language with their classmates can be a reflection of their integrative orientation towards and purposeful investment in classroom community to enhance language learning. It seems that the heterogeneity of classroom students is a principle that participants in this study perceived to be conducive to successful language learning. Being within such linguistically heterogonous learners seems to provide language learners with opportunities for learning and language usage. As Hadi said:

I wish language schools recruit not only Arab learners but multicultural students such as Europeans and Asians because in the break time I would love to practice English with them. I can’t speak in Arabic because they will not understand me. I have to communicate with them in English. This is good (#Hadi).

A recurring theme also concerns surrounding society’s investment in and positive interdependence with language learners and the roles these play in promoting learners’ motivation to learn a second language. A negative experience reported by one participant concerns the lack of investment by significant others in the target language community. According to Norton’s (2001) investment principle, those with direct contact to students’ learning such as those inside or outside of language school must exert scaffolding to help learners progress in their language learning endeavor. If this does not happen, then it can be perceived to be demotivating to language learners and may slow or impede the progress of L2 learning. One expressed theme in this regard was the role friendliness of target community members, or lack of it, plays in promoting/impeding learner’s integrative motivation and willingness to speak with them. For Hadi, unlike the friendliness of schools’ community expressed above, lack of friendliness by target language community members outside of school may play a major role in demotivating him to communicate with others in English.
Once I was lost in London, and I stopped a British passerby to help find my way. To my surprise, he said he was busy and went away. That was awful! I was so disappointed that I decided not to ask anyone any more (#Hadi).

While this situation might seem reasonable in a busy city like London, the experience itself highlights how based on the investment and positive interdependence principles, the shared vision of learning English through communication between native speakers and second language learners may increase learners’ self-morale and better their language learning. The negative experience depicted by this incident can also lead to the conclusion that significant others’ failure to cooperate with second language learners for any reason might be negatively perceived and can impeded learners’ investment as was the case with Hadi when decided to avoid communicating with native speakers. This situation also highlights that motivation cannot and should not be interpreted quite simplistically as learners’ having orientations to communicate with native speakers. A complex picture would pinpoint the principles of investment and positive interdependence as well. These highlight the shared consciousness and mutual efforts to be expended by all parties involved in formal and informal learning situations. This means that for a second language learner to be motivated, it takes more than having positive attitudes towards native speakers’ community. The likelihood of the impact of mutual respect, relatedness and more importantly target community’s attitudes towards L2 students could be considered to have equal importance. This understanding promotes students’ sense of belonging and acts as a confirmation for their orientation to communicate with speakers of the target community. As Klem and Connell (2004, p.24) mention relational engagement, like positive interdependence, means the extent to which speakers of the target language care about second language learners’ emotions and feelings outside of the classroom settings. The findings of this study also shed light on the positive experiences and instances of negative experiences resulting from the presence and lack of relational/emotional engagement, investment and positive interdependence. Attending to these factors is important as it enhances students’ motivation to learn and promotes their linguistic proficiency. As Martin and Dowson (2009) explain, satisfactions of students needs for relatedness is essential to meet the cognitive and affective demands of school.

4.4 Space for Learning

In order to explore the findings related to this theme, a background description of the school (context of the study) is provided. The language school operates both an academic (AP) and a social program (SP) of study. The AP offers four course-based types of programs: Authentic English program (28 lesson per week), the Core (Main) program (20 lessons per week) Examination programs (28 lessons per week) and specialist courses program (28 lesson per week). The SP offers four classes is optional and subsidize by the school and aims to engage students in the English culture. It offers excursions and trips to local and landmarks and cultural places. There are other sorts of social activities such as cooking, board games, table tennis competitions, parties, evening-outs. The school also provides fully equipped classrooms with modern technology such as WIFI, television, projectors, DVD players. Self-access center also offers rooms with listening centre, computers and television. The sports and leisure room house things like board games, table tennis, and table football and other sports and leisure activities. The students in the case study joined the AP- the core program and the Examination program and
participated in school-based social activities such as the leisure and sports activities. For the AP, the students were placed in the upper-intermediate general English in the morning classes, and intermediate Examination program to be prepared for IELS exam.

4.4.1 Formal Space for Learning

This theme presents findings about participants’ experiences with the formal space for learning. The respondents were asked about their experiences with the core curriculum aspects such as the classroom, teachers, curriculum and learning resources provided by their language school. With few exceptions, the respondents reported positive experiences about the school, curriculum and the approaches teachers use educate language learners. Other respondents mentioned that the teaching approaches that teachers use to introduce new lessons as well the type of the lesson itself play major roles in motivating or discouraging students. With regards to the teaching approach, Hadi reported that the types of activities teachers utilize in class determine how motivated a student is to participate in a lesson. As he said:

    some teachers introduce activities that make you participate and make the classroom very active. Other teachers don’t (#Hadi).

The extent to which teachers engage students in interesting language learning activities was also reiterated by Radi who said that:

    It depends on the teacher, he/she either makes you participate or discourages you from taking part in learning (#Radi).

The second factor that pertains to the impact of the physical learning context on students’ motivation to learning a second language concerns the type of lesson to be learned. The participants found academic English classes boring compared to general English classes. As Fadi Said:

    IELTS classes are killing me a little because of the academic vocabularies and are making the class boring (Fadi)

For Shadi however academic classes were seen as a source of motivation because these lessons encourage him to learn problem solving skills. As he Said:

    I am not disappointed whatsoever. Rather, I feel this is motivating for me to solve the problems I face (#Shadi)

For the third participant, however, the academic English classes were considered to be motivating as these help learners to use new vocabularies and expressions when communicating with members of the target language community. As Hadi also mentioned that:

    academic English make me confident; I use it even in informal situations and if I find any difficulty, I sometimes ask my British friend in my host family (#Hadi).
4.4.2 Social Space for Learning

With regards to the third component of the learning context, the participants had different views, but the overall impression seems to be positive experiences about the learning space both inside and outside the classroom. While the participants talked about learning resources such as CD players, flashcards, dictionaries, and PC suites, they referred to these in passing, and therefore these were not considered recurring themes. The participants seemed to be more interested in telling their experiences with the resources that make social space for language learning through interactions and face to face communication. As mentioned above, these include but are not limited to the leisure activity room located on the ground floor and the back garden. Such space was perceived to be important in encouraging socialization among language learners from different parts of the world. As Radi said:

*in the break time, I like to talk with students from Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East, we sit in the garden and talk* (#Radi)

This social space also encourages students to purposefully recall aspects of the lessons learned during the week and throws it to open space for learning by talking. As Hadi also mentioned:

*when we sit on the benches on the back garden of the school, I plan to use the vocabulary and grammar we learned in class with my friends. Sometimes this is funny, we forget vocabulary, but it is a lot of fun we just sit and talk in English* (#Hadi)

The leisure activity room also provided another dynamic milieu for communication among language learners. Mingling with learners from different backgrounds was perceived to be encouraging and motivating to students to speak and communicate in English. Radi and Shadi expressed similar experiences. As Radi said:

*we meet in the lounge and play table football with friends. We speak English as we play, it is interesting and also we laugh* (#Radi)

Shadi also mentioned that even with learners from the same background, he insists on using English language:

*I love the break time because we meet and talk with friends from China, Turkey and also the Arabs. I speak in English to be better and learn more. I tell my friends to speak in English. Even the school also tells us to speak in English*. Agreeing with Shadi, Fadi sees the break time as an opportunity to practice real life English and was very cynical about students who speak with friends in their mother tongue. “why are we here? We are here to use the language and when we meet for playing table football, I speak a lot. But I don’t like it when I hear my friends use Arabic language, it is upsetting” (#Shadi).

5.0 Conclusion

This research study explored the experiences and perceptions of Saudi adult learners of English as a second language about what motivates them to learn English at a language school in the United Kingdom. The study adopted a tripartite theoretical framework and the findings
showed that Saudi students were highly motivated to learn English as a second language in a second language context and their motivation was attributed to three main factors reflecting the complexity of the term. These factors concern students’ integrative orientation towards the second language community, their shared investment in formal and informal learning and positive social interdependence among language learners and the target language group. The findings of this study suggest that motivation is a dynamic and complex construct which is co-constructed by several actors and factors in the context in which it is enacted. Despite shortcomings related to its design, this qualitative research study has significant implications to learners of English as a second and foreign language, language institutes and curriculum designers.

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Foreign Culture in English Curriculum in Saudi Arabia: A Teacher’s Voice

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Abstract
The education system plays crucial roles in the development of nations and societies. Curriculum development is a key component of the education process which involves alignment with the goals and objectives of teaching English as a foreign or second language in a particular context. The present article provides a personal narrative about the experience of developing an English language curriculum in the school-based Saudi Arabian context. The narrative represents a teacher’s voice during a curriculum development process, and also examines the discussion of different voices represented by teachers and decision makers during several workshops held to discuss the integration of cultural aspects into English textbooks. The narrative points out that the majority of teachers and decision makers were reluctant to incorporate foreign culture for several reasons, such as geopolitically sensitive contexts of the foreign culture. Other teachers were afraid of the impact of foreign culture on their own. The narrative calls for better inclusion of appropriate cultural aspects in order to enhance the students’ cultural competence so that they can interact effectively with people of different cultures.

Keywords: Curriculum development, foreign culture, Saudi Arabia, teacher’s voice,

1. Introduction
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has placed excessive efforts on education to prepare future generations who are the "nation’s true fortune" (Al-Mousa, 2010). Education in Saudi Arabia has been going through a reform since 2001. During this period, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has updated all curricula elements, including religion, sciences, and Arabic and English languages. Indeed, several motives have led the Saudi government to take this significant step in the educational system, including that we live in an age characterized by globalization, in which the world has become a small village. In 2016, the Saudi government launched the Saudi Vision 2030 which represents the government’s efforts to reform and improve all aspects of the population’s wellbeing and development. Vision 2030 states several goals pertaining to the development and advancement of the education system. Among these goals is developing modern educational curricula. In fact, the MOE has realized that in order to be comparable to the developed countries around the globe, reforming curricula is the initial step.

The educational reform in Saudi Arabia, similar to other countries worldwide, has undergone several stages or change. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) examined, what they called, the three “ways of change” that have defined educational policy and have been practiced globally from the 1960s to the present. The authors then offered a fourth way as a new path to reform student learning and achievement. These ways are as follows:

- The First Way of state support and professional freedom; of innovation but also of inconsistency,
- The Second Way of market competition and educational standardization in which professional autonomy is lost,
- The Third Way that tries to navigate between and beyond the market and the state and balance professional autonomy with accountability,
- The Fourth Way pushes beyond the features of Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) (i.e. standardization, data-driven decision making and target-obsessed interactions), to forge an equal and interactive partnership between government, the profession and the people (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012).

According to Alnahdi (2014), the Saudi educational reform is best seen nowadays in the Second Way. In the late 1980s, the Second Way started in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland with the launch of a prescriptive National Curriculum (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). In this period, governments centralized and standardized educational goals and tests. This situation is similar to what is taking place in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, along with the standardization of the curricula.

2. The Teacher’s Voice
Having presented a glimpse of the educational reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a lower voice attempted to play a significant role in this change and that is, the teacher's voice. Having been a high school teacher of the English language for more than four years, the author has taught old and new curricula of the English language. Throughout these years, the author has noticed that he was teaching the English language by using Saudi culture. In other words, the majority of the content focused on the Saudi and Islamic culture. Indeed, the MOE needed students to learn the English language in light of Saudi culture.
However, this would cause several unexpected problems for Saudi students who may not be able to comprehend the language as it is related to its original culture (authentic materials) and realia. Liton (2012), for instance, stated that one of the obvious failings of Saudi students caused by the curriculum is lack of coordination with the sociocultural spirit of the target language.

With this in mind, several studies have shown that language is connected to culture in multiple and complex ways; knowing about second or foreign culture is important to help learn a second (L2) or foreign language (FL) (Alsamani, 2014; Byram, 2012; Cheng, 2012). These studies also confirm that a foreign language cannot be learned successfully without having knowledge of its cultural background and aspects (Alsamani, 2014; Byram, 2012; Cheng, 2012). For instance, if learners are not well accustomed to the context of the target culture, they should at least, make an effort to learn those cultural aspects necessary to communicate with native and non-native speakers of the target language. If this situation does not happen, the learner then would learn and might become fluent in the target language. The learner, however, would become “inaccurate” in manipulating the language in real-life situations (Alsamani, 2014).

Hence, I would argue that learning a foreign language in isolation of its cultural aspects prevents a learner from becoming socialized when it comes to using the target language, either in its context, or in the learner’s context. Cultural competence is necessary, as well as linguistic competence to allow the learner to function appropriately in political, educational, religious, and social situations. Therefore, the cultural content of the target language (i.e. English) in language teaching materials is essential to help students understand the target culture. This kind of content further raises students’ awareness of their own culture, and permits comparisons and contrasts among various cultures, in a way that leads to differentiating between what is considered appropriate and inappropriate in those cultures. Lastly, such content enhances learner’s communicative competence (Chiu, Wu, Hsieh, Cheng, & Huang, 2013).

A question might be raised relating to the position of English and Arabic languages in Saudi Arabia: “Are English and Arabic perceived as equal in terms of power and prestige?” The answer is that English is perceived and considered a more prestigious and powerful language in the community as well as in the public and private sectors. Furthermore, a person who speaks English and Arabic is favored over others in the job market. Therefore, this perception has become a motive to learn the English language, and this motive needs to be supplemented with powerful cultural content in the curriculum.

2.1 The Appropriateness of Cultural Aspects
One might argue which culture is appropriate to include in teaching materials. Unquestionably, this argument is very widespread, and this question was heard frequently when the issue was discussed with colleagues and teachers. Simply put, the answer would be that the inclusion of the foreign culture in the curriculum does not mean that curriculum developers have to incorporate every single aspect of a culture or country. As a matter of fact, the term culture has several definitions and encompasses several aspects. According to the National Center for Cultural Competence (2001), culture refers to:
An integrated pattern of human behavior which includes but is not limited to—thought, communication, languages, beliefs, values, practices, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting, roles, relationships, and expected behaviors of an ethnic group or social groups whose members are uniquely identifiable by that pattern of human behavior (para. 6).

Regardless of the diversity of cultures around the globe, such as Western, Eastern, and Latin, curriculum designers should not be confused about what to comprise in the curriculum. Instead, they need to select a list of *appropriate* customs, social habits, morals, arts, cuisines, and traditions about the target language. This is by no mean an attempt to be judgmental when it comes to appropriateness and inappropriateness of others’ customs and traditions. Indeed, each culture has its own norms and traditions, and these must be respected. However, what is meant by appropriate and inappropriate content is that the content which does not religiously, politically, and culturally contradict with the Saudi culture. For example, talking about wine drinking habits or having a boyfriend or girlfriend are religiously and culturally prohibited in Saudi culture.

The inclusion and exclusion of foreign cultures in English textbooks rely on understanding how people of a particular culture (e.g. Western culture) behave, communicate, and deal with each other and with people from different cultures. Surely enough, people from Western cultures share some ordinary appropriate and inappropriate norms and traditions, and these appropriate norms and traditions deserve to be included in English language textbooks. These traditions include eating and shopping habits, respecting time, obeying rules and policies, various manners needed when talking to people from different cultures, to name a few.

3. The Voices of Others
The motive to write about integrating the culture of the target language into a curriculum is related to the author’s teaching experience. When the author was a teacher, as stated earlier, he was a member of a committee to adopt and develop a new English language curriculum for high schools. The central mission of the committee was to select textbooks provided by different publishers in the market. During this process, several workshops were held to thoroughly revise and edit these textbooks. Also, the teachers were asked to adapt the content of these textbooks based on Saudi culture. Here, a teacher’s voice raised up; he had a different point of view. That is, he did not support the notion of teaching a foreign language (i.e. English) and culture based on students’ culture. Plentiful reasons were stated earlier to support the advantages of this. The issue was raised and opened to the floor to discuss it in the first workshop, and only a few out of forty teachers agreed with the position of this paper. The majority of the teachers, as well as advisers, were reluctant to discuss this matter.

Certainly, the teachers’ unwillingness to incorporate foreign culture into the Saudi curriculum had various reasons. One of the primary reasons relied on geopolitically sensitive contexts of the foreign culture. The acts of aggression against Muslim and Arab countries following the dramatic events of September 11th, 2001 have clearly emphasized the sense that West and Anglo-American cultures are threatening Muslim and Arabic countries (Karmani, 2005). Consequently, the place of foreign culture in English as a foreign language (EFL) education in some Arabic/Islamic countries has become subject to various negative perceptions.
A number of voices who refused the inclusion of foreign culture were afraid of the impact of the foreign culture on their own culture. In other words, those voices assumed that foreign culture would replace their traditions and values once it is included in the curriculum. In addition, other voices argued that their culture should be taught because, from their points of view, their culture is ‘better’ than foreign ones due to perhaps religious beliefs.

Frankly speaking, when the author first skimmed these textbooks – the original versions – and found out that the content represented different cultural aspects, it was assumed that the decision makers would thoroughly reform English textbooks. The author also assumed that the decision makers had realized that teaching foreign language based on Saudi culture was not helpful for students. On the first day, teachers received a booklet that had goals and objectives of teaching English in Saudi Arabia, and guidelines for analyzing these textbooks. One of the elements of the guidelines stated that the content should reflect Saudi culture. Immediately, the author felt disappointed and frustrated because the expectations to have the English curricula completely reformed had vanished. Based on the guidelines, each workshop had missions to accomplish, such as teachers needed first to skim textbooks to check for the complexity of the content. Then teachers had to remove and eliminate inappropriate content from the textbooks, such as religious sensitive pictures and information. Teachers had to replace the content of the foreign culture with the Saudi culture. When the author discussed with supervisors the issue of replacing foreign culture with Saudi culture, they decided to postpone the discussion to another workshop dedicated to addressing cultural issues in the textbooks.

On that day, although the author was sure that the suggestion would not convince the teachers and decision makers, he decided to strengthen the argument by analyzing the goals and objectives of teaching English in Saudi Arabia established by the Ministry of Education. For the sake of this article, the focus is going to be on the cultural goals as follows:

1. “To develop student’s awareness about the cultural, economic, religion and social issues of his [Saudi] society and prepare him to participate in their solutions.
2. To develop the linguistic competence that enables the student, in future, to present and explain Islamic concept and issues, and to participate in spreading Islam.
3. To enable student linguistically to benefit from English speaking nations, that would enhance the concepts of international co-operation that would develop understanding and respect of cultural differences between nations” (ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013, p. 114).

As for the analysis of these objectives, the author discussed these goals in the workshop designated to address cultural content. In brief, several questions were asked to the teachers by the researcher and decision makers about which objectives fit better with either Saudi or foreign cultural content. Such questions include; How could students understand a foreign culture if they are not exposed to it? What is the teachers’ knowledge about the traditions of foreign cultures in order to supplement students with information about the target culture? How could students talk about Islam and related topics if they do not know what is happening around the world? What are various ways that students could implement cultural aspects of different nations if those students do not have ideas about people of the foreign cultures? Unfortunately, straightforward answers
to these questions were not given. Further, the educators in the workshop tried to avoid answering these questions. Instead, the author was blamed by a couple of teachers for being an ‘advocate’ for the foreign culture.

The workshop ended up placing the effort of teaching foreign culture on teachers, where a new issue would arise around teachers’ education. That is, what is the teachers’ readiness to compare and contrast between their cultures and foreign ones in terms of traditions, beliefs, and values? Also, the educators and decision makers agreed on including foreign culture in the textbooks in a way that presents only similar traditions between both cultures, which was not the point of view expressed by the author. For example, there was a particular lesson titled ‘Cultural Differences’ in one of the textbooks which presents a number of differences among cultures in terms of particular customs and traditions, such as respecting the time and bringing a small gift when visiting a host.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations
The reason behind advocating for the inclusion of foreign culture in the English curriculum in high schools in Saudi Arabia is twofold. First, a teacher should aspire to see Saudi students not only practice the English language in daily life situations, but also function appropriately in a foreign culture context. Second, the government of Saudi Arabia has begun three giant projects with an allocated budget of billions of dollars to reform and enhance the education system in the country. These projects include King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Public Education Development Project established in 2010 (KAAPEDP), King Abdullah Scholarships Program (KASP) in 2005 "to prepare distinguished generations for knowledge society built upon a knowledge-based economy" (MOH, n.d.), and lately the Saudi Vision 2030 which was launched in 2016. With these projects, educators and decision makers should work hand in hand to supplement students with knowledge and cultural background. Doing so would protect students from encountering difficulties when they travel abroad for various purposes. Since the educational reform is underway, there is an excellent opportunity to integrate foreign culture in the English curriculum.

Practically speaking, the inclusion of foreign cultures in the English curriculum in Saudi Arabia could be done through different approaches. Again, it is important to state that some cultural aspects that teachers or course designers elect to implement in the teaching material might be a double-edged sword. In other words, course developers have to choose customs and traditions to incorporate into the textbooks in a way that these customs do not contradict with the ones in the local culture. The content of the textbooks has to reflect what is appropriate and beneficial in the target culture to apply in the local culture. Indeed, it seems difficult to select what is appropriate and inappropriate because the local culture plays a pivotal role in this process. However, a number of shared norms among various cultures are worth included in the curriculum such as eating and shopping habits, whereas norms such as eating pork are prohibited in Islam.

The notion of teaching English through the culture of that language, no matter how many people in these cultures speak that target language, merits more advocacy and support from teachers and the community. In the words of J. D. Brown (2001): “a language is a part of a culture, and culture is a part of a language. The two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture” (p. 165).
In conclusion, teachers’ voices who support integrating foreign culture in the curriculum, though they are not loud enough, have to keep optimistic toward the future of this hope. Since the doors are still open and the educational reform is still ongoing, there is always a light at the end of the tunnel!

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Using Verbal Reports to Explore Reading Test-Taking Strategies of Saudi, EFL University Students

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Abstract
Reading test-taking strategies (RTTS) play a central role in test-takers’ performance. Identifying these strategies and understanding their appropriate use is crucial for improving the test-takers accomplishment. Thus the present study attempts to further our understanding of EFL reading test-taking strategies (RTTS) by attempting to explore qualitatively the reading test-taking strategies (RTTS) of Saudi, EFL female students while completing a multiple choice reading comprehension test. The participants are 26 level-three, foundation-year students at a big Saudi University. The study uses think-aloud techniques, retrospective interviews, observations, and test protocols to deduce the participants’ reading test-taking strategies (RTTS). The data were analysed inductively using some elements of grounded theory to explore the participants’ strategy use. The result of the study is a list of 127 reading test-taking strategies (RTTS) classified under seven main categories and 21 subcategories. The classification of the strategies follows a narrative order that mirrors the test-takers’ experience while completing the test.

Keywords: reading test-taking strategies, retrospective interviews, Saudi EFL students, think-aloud protocols, verbal report

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1.0 Introduction

English as a second/foreign language has become widely spread all over the world. Thus, attaining a certain level of English language proficiency has become a requirement in many contexts, such as university entrance, or employment requirement. This level of proficiency is usually measured through tests (e.g. standardized exams such as IELTS or TOEFL, local entrance exams, end of programmers’ exams etc...). Hence, the results of these tests are vital for many people. Among the factors that influence individuals’ performance in these tests is their capability of strategy use. According to Oxford and Ehrman (1995) and Oxford (2010), a positive relationship exists between the use of appropriate learners’ strategies and proficiency. Likewise, they maintained that “conscious use of appropriate learning strategies typifies good language learners” (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989, p. 1). Thus, it seems crucial to deepen our understanding of EFL/ESL learners’ use of test-taking strategies in different content areas of exams (i.e. reading, writing, speaking, or listening), particularly because learners use of strategies differ based on many factors among which is the nature of the task under demand. According to White, Schramm, and Chamot (2007) “strategy use is not a fixed attribute of individuals, but changes according to the task, the learning conditions, and the available time” (p. 93). Despite its importance, the area of test-taking strategies particularly that is related to a specific content area (i.e. reading, writing, speaking, or listening) with relation to a specific type of questions is still under researched particularly qualitatively. Thus, the present study will attempt to qualitatively find out Saudi, EFL learners of English reading test-taking strategies on a multiple-choice reading comprehension test. Then it will attempt to analyse and categorise them in a way that best describes their use in an MCQs’ reading comprehension test situation. Hopefully, this will help to further our understanding of EFL learners’ RTTS use in such tests.

2.0 Literature Review

Test-taking strategies are “the consciously-selected processes that the respondents used for dealing with both the language issues and the item-response demands in the test-taking tasks at hand” (Cohen, 2011, p. 305). Though strategies are described as “consciously-selected” in this definition, many researchers believe that strategies may vary in their degree of consciousness (Al Fraidan & Al-Khalaf, 2012; Purpura, 1999). According to Cohen and Upton (2006) and Cohen (2011), any language test involved three types of strategies: language learner strategies, test management strategies, and test-wiseness strategies. Methods used to investigate test-taking strategies are the same as those used to investigate language use strategies in general as the former is a special area of the latter (Cohen, 2011; Phakiti, 2003). In fact, language learning/use strategies are generally mentalistic (internal), thus investigating them adequately is a rather challenging task (Cohen, 2011; Cohen & Scott, 1996; Macaro, 2001; White et al., 2007). Methods used to assess language learning/use strategies have been reviewed by many researchers (Cohen, 2011; Cohen & Scott, 1996; Macaro, 2001; Mackey & Gass, 2005; Oxford, 2010; White et al., 2007). One of the prominent reviews is Oxford (2010) who listed nine approaches: 1) observations; 2) actual-task verbal reports; 3) individual interviews for strategy assessment (not based on immediate tasks); 4) learner portfolios that include task-related strategy assessment; 5) colour-coding of actual-task strategies; 6) group strategy assessment interviews or discussions; 7) strategy questionnaires; 8) narratives (e.g., learner diaries and histories); and finally, 9) discourse analysis for strategy assessment. To Cohen (2011), “every assessment method offers unique advantages as well as disadvantages. The challenge for researchers is to choose an assessment method that
will provide the desired type of information for the given study” (p. 95). Among these methods, actual-task verbal report methods have become a major tool for investigating test-taking strategies (Cohen, 1992, 1997). This method “involves reporting the strategies for an authentic task, e.g., reading a passage in the L2. The learner identifies strategies he or she is using (or has finished using) to accomplish the L2 task” (Oxford, 2010, p. 143). The merit of using this method is that it “provides data on cognitive processes and learner responses that otherwise would have to be investigated only indirectly. Furthermore, verbal report has at times provided access to the reasoning processes underlying cognition, response, and decision making” (Cohen, 2011, p. 98). Many studies in the literature have investigated the reading test-taking strategies of EFL/ESL students. An early example is Nevo (1989) who explored: a) the possibility of immediate feedback from participants’ use of strategy on an item-by-item basis; b) the frequency of strategy role to correct and incorrect answers in L1 and L2 MCQs reading comprehension test; c) the degree of contributory and noncontributory strategy transfer from L1 to L2 while completing a test; d) and the effect of the response format (multiple-choice) and the stimulus formation of the test (text and questions) on the selection of the test-taking strategies. The participants were 42 Hebrew grade-ten students studying French as L2. They were asked to complete a reading comprehension test on four reading texts (two in Hebrew and two in French with varying levels of difficulty). Each text was followed by five multiple-choice comprehension items and open-ended questions regarding the participants’ evaluation of the test items. After each item, the participants were asked to introspectively fill in a checklist of specific strategies use. They were also asked, at the end of the test, to retrospectively complete a questionnaire about the more general strategies they used on the entire test. The results confirmed the possibility of taking immediate, item by item feedback on participants’ strategy. They also assert the role of contributory strategies in achieving correct answers in both languages with students using more non-contributory strategies in the target language than in the first one. Likewise, strategy transfer from L1 to L2, and the role of both the stimulus formation of the test and the response format on the choice of strategy use were confirmed. Another example of studies that used a questionnaire to collect test-taking strategies is (Purpura, 1997, 1999). He examined the relationship between test takers reported cognitive and metacognitive strategy use and their performance on L2 tests. He asked 1,382 participants to complete a 70-item standardised language test and an 80-item cognitive and metacognitive strategy questionnaire. The questionnaire was about what the participant usually used, not what they actually did in the test. Other studies used verbal reports to investigate test-taking strategies. For instance, Phakiti (2003) combined the use of a questionnaire and verbal reports to look into EFL students’ test-taking strategies. In line with (Purpura, 1997), he examined the cognitive and metacognitive strategies used by 384 Thai students. The participants were asked to complete a reading comprehension test, followed by a cognitive and metacognitive strategy questionnaire to measure their use of strategy in the test. This was triangulated by retrospective interviews of a subset of four highly successful and four unsuccessful test-takers. Phakiti (2003) concluded that “the findings in the study suggest that cognitive and metacognitive use of strategy could explain variation on language test performance. The use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies across the achievement groups (highly successful, moderately successful and unsuccessful groups) differed quantitatively and qualitatively” (p. 50).
Another example of studies that examined RTTS using verbal reports is Anderson (1991). He explored: strategies used on a standardised reading comprehension test and academic reading tasks, the individual differences in strategy use in these two contexts, and differences between good and poor comprehension. The participants were 28 Spanish students enrolled in a university-level intensive ESL program. He used immediate retrospections and think-aloud protocols to gather the types of strategies used to complete the test and tasks. Anderson (1991) analysed the data both qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative analysis resulted in a list of 47 strategies under five categories: supervising, support, paraphrase, establishing coherence in the text, and test-taking. The quantitative analysis resulted in a mixture of relationships between the strategy use, the test scores, language proficiency level, and the type of the task.

In line with Anderson (1991) Rupp, Ferne, and Choi (2006) explored ESL students’ RTTS qualitatively via verbal reports. The study looked into the unconscious skills and conscious strategies test-takers use when completing MCQs on reading comprehension tests, and how the characteristics of both the questions and the text influence such usages. Ten ESL students were requested to complete a reading comprehension test which consists of three texts with MCQs. The first text was used as a preparatory phase and used for observation purposes. The second text was followed by retrospective questions related to students’ strategy use and questions’ difficulty rating. The last text was concurrent with think-aloud protocols and followed by the same retrospective questions. On completing the test, the students were asked to fill in a profiling questionnaire. Several interesting results emerged from this study, among which is the authors’ taxonomy of test-taking strategies. They divided the participants’ test-taking strategies into two groups: macro and micro strategies. They defined the macro strategies as strategies that are “concerned with general approaches that test-takers chose to employ, either consciously or subconsciously, when they are given a MC reading comprehension test” (Rupp et al., 2006, p. 460). This category was then subdivided into unconditional and conditional strategies. The unconditional strategies are usually used for MC reading comprehension test, while conditional ones are selected according to perceived characteristics (difficulty and length) of the text and the questions. Whereas, the micro-strategies are used with individual items.

In agreement with Anderson (1991) and Rupp et al. (2006), Cohen and Upton (2006, 2007) used verbal reports to explore participant test-taking strategies. The aim of their study was to explore the reading and test-taking strategies used to complete the reading tasks in the LanguEdge Courseware (2000) materials, and the variation in the types of strategies used to answer different types of reading questions. The participants were thirty-two high intermediate to advanced L2 learners of English. The data were analysed qualitatively for strategies use and the found strategies were classified under two main categories: reading strategies (28 strategies), and test-taking strategies which were subdivided into: test-management (28 strategies) and test-wiseness (3 strategies). The data were further analysed quantitatively to find that: the aim of the test-takers was to answer the questions and not to gain anything else from reading the texts; the three item types (basic comprehension, reading to learn, and inferencing) required and assessed academic-like approaches to reading in a similar way; and the new format (selected-response multiple-selection multiple-choice formats) is not more difficult than the traditional single-selection multiple-choice formats. Unlike the above literature, (Jamil, Aziz, & Razak, 2010) attempted to explore the students’ RTTS on open-ended questions rather than different types of
multiple-choice questions format. They looked into the RTTS of ten tertiary-level Malaysian female students completing an open-ended reading comprehension test. The aim of their study was to compare the RTTS used by high proficiency (HP) and low proficiency (LP) students. They used retrospective protocols and playback session to elect the participants’ RTTS. The result showed that HP students used 24 test taking strategies compared to the 22 strategies used by LP students. The researchers also attempted to find the commonly used strategies among the two groups and the variation of strategy use between them. Finally, they concluded that LP participants favour strategies that did not involve deductive reasoning or inference, whereas HP participants use strategies that involve more analytical thinking. They also found that the number and type of strategies used by both groups are fairly the same (repertoire). It seems that the way participants utilise the strategies is more important than the type or the number of strategies they apply.

To conclude, verbal reports are widely used in strategy research in general and in test-taking strategies in specific (e.g. Anderson, 1991; Cohen & Upton, 2006, 2007; Jamil et al., 2010; Rupp et al., 2006). Using verbal reports, many researchers have attempted to identify and classify their participants’ RTTS (e.g. Anderson, 1991; Cohen & Upton, 2007; Rupp et al., 2006). However, these efforts are not sufficient, and there is still a need for further research in this area to help us better understand students’ reading test-taking strategy use. Thus, the current study will attempt to help further our understanding of this topic.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Participants
The participants are 26 Saudi, female, EFL foundation-year students at a big Saudi University. Their age ranges between 19 and 21 years. All the participants are volunteers.

3.2 Methods
The study uses think-aloud technique, retrospective interviews, the researcher’s observation, and the participants’ test protocols to qualitatively explore the participants’ RTTS on an MCQs reading comprehension test. However, as many of learners’ strategies are “mentalistic and not behaviorist” (Cohen, 2011, p. 73) the think-aloud technique and retrospective interviews are considered the main instruments, whereas the researcher’s observation and participants’ test protocols are used to support and validate the findings from the other two methods. The think-aloud is used because, besides its popularity in strategy research, it is “introspective and nonmentalistic in nature, and is seen as most accurately reflecting learners’ cognitive processes” (Cohen, 2011, p. 80). Similarly, the retrospective interviews are selected because they “provide an opportunity for investigators to ask directed questions to gain clarification of what was done” (Cohen, 2011, pp. 80-81).

3.3 Materials
The materials for the current study consist of verbal reports instructions, a model task, two warm-up tasks, and the actual reading comprehension task. The sample verbal reports instructions provided by (Green, 1998, pp. 46-47) were translated into Arabic and slightly adopted to incorporate the specification of the language of the protocol (either Arabic L1 or English L2 as preferred by the participants) (Bowles, 2010; Dörnyei, 2007; White et al., 2007). Then it was
provided both verbally (recorded) and visually (written). The model task was a translation of Green’s (1998, pp. 47-48) task where the participants are asked to first think aloud and then retrospectively report what they are thinking as they are adding up all the windows in their houses. Both the instruction for the task and the actual verbal reports (think-aloud and retrospection) were performed and recorded to ensure uniformity in modelling the task to all participants. The warm-up tasks are a non-verbal and a verbal task. The first is an arithmetic task where students are asked to multiply 16 by 25. The second is an anagram where students are asked to rearrange the anagram word “OMTEHR”. The actual task was an authentic reading test (a progress test). The time specified on the test sheet was 30 minutes. The test consisted of a comprehension passage followed by ten multiple-choice questions. The comprehension passage was a narrative text from the biography of J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series books. It is an authentic text that has been adopted from http://www.celebsa-z.com/bios/jk_rowling.htm. The passage is divided into five paragraphs and consist of 524 words. The Flesch-Kincaid grade level for the passage is 10 and the Flesch-Kincaid readability ease score is 52. This was calculated via the readability index calculator at http://www.standards-schmandards.com/exhibits/rix/index.php. The test included ten multiple-choice comprehension questions. Each question consists of a stem and four response options. The first question is about providing a suitable title for the passage. The second question is about the main idea of a paragraph. The third question is a reference question (pronoun reference). The fourth and fifth questions are about guessing the meaning of a word from context. The sixth and seventh questions are about specific information. The last three questions are reasoning questions.

3.4 Data collection
The data was collected by inviting the participants to attend individually for a single think-aloud and retrospective interview session. The session was divided into several, successive parts. The first part is an introductory part where the participants were given a detailed information about the session structure and content, and where her consent is taken. The second part is a modelling part where the recorded instructions and the model task are played and the participant inquiries, if any, are answered. The third part is a training part where the participant is given the arithmetic and anagram tasks consecutively. This part is used to solve any problem or difficulty the participant may have with the think aloud and retrospection. The fourth part is the actual think-aloud of the participant while doing the reading comprehension test. Two things are emphasized at this stage: the importance of treating the test as a real one and the freedom of reading or not reading the passage aloud as this is not a requirement of the task. Once the student starts the test, the researcher starts her note taking. The fifth and final part is the retrospective interview. On the completion of the test, the student is asked to give a summary of what she did in details by going over the questions one by one, of course, the test protocol was kept in front of the student to help her remember the information. Then the session is ended.

3.5 Data analysis
The previous data collection stage results in three types of data: audiotapes of the think-aloud protocols and immediate retrospective interview; the researcher’s observation notes; and the participants’ test protocols. First, the audiotapes were transcribed. Then it was combined with other types of data in one document, for each participant, to facilitate data retrieval, evaluation and decision making during the analysis. The document was designed to account for the fact that
the think-aloud protocols and the immediate retrospection are the main types of data and that the other data are there to support and provide insights into the evidence found in the protocols and retrospections. After that, all the files were uploaded into Nvivo 10 (a qualitative data analysis software) for analysis.

The current study adopted an inductive data analysis approach using some aspects of the grounded theory. The codes were developed from the data itself. The analysis took several phases. The first phase was for reviewing and exploring the data which is important for preparing the researcher for more informed decisions in the next phases of the analysis. The second phase is the first cycle of coding. The purpose of this phase was to examine all the data for possible codes and generate a complete list of them, define these codes, and resolve any challenges might arise. The third phase of the analysis was a review of the resulted list of codes from the first cycle. The review included the content of the codes, the length of the list, the names of the categories, and the relevance of the codes to their categories. The fourth phase of the analysis was the second cycle of coding using the reviewed list of codes generated in the previous stage. The fifth and last phase of the analysis was a second review of the list of codes (strategies) after the second cycle of coding. The purpose of this phase was to refine the list of codes: check the spelling, names of the codes, repetition and/or overlap between the codes, sequence of presenting the codes and the definitions of the codes. The reliability of the encoded data was measured using intra-coder reliability method (i.e. the probability that the same individual might code the whole set of protocols or part of it, usually 10-25 %, twice using the same categories (Green, 1998)). In this type of reliability, the percentage of agreement between the two coding is calculated. Fifteen percent of the protocols were recorded and their percentage of agreement with the original coding was 92.98 % which is a fairly high degree of agreement. In relation to the validity of the encoded data, several steps were taken to increase the validity. First, the list of codes was a result of a thoughtful analysis which took place over several phases. Second, the list of codes has been reviewed by an expert in strategy research. Third, the list of codes was a result of triangulating data coming from different resources (think-aloud protocols, retrospective interviews, the researcher’s observation and the test protocols). Finally, the list of codes was checked, after the first cycle of coding, against Nevo (1989) and Cohen and Upton (2006) lists of RTTS to increase the validity of the encoded data.

3.5.1 Results
The result of the current study is 127 RTTS categorized under seven main categories and 21 subcategories. These strategies are not a representation of all possible variations of strategy use, rather they are a representation of what the participants in the present study actually used. They mirror the logical flow of events while taking a test.

3.5.1.1 Starting the Reading Test
01. Starting the reading test by reading the title
02. Starting the reading test by reading the instructions
03. Starting the reading test by previewing the test
04. Starting the reading test by reading the questions
   A. Starting the reading test by reading the first question
      a. Starting the reading test by reading the first question stem only
b. Starting the reading test by reading the first question stem and some of the options

c. Starting the reading test by reading the first question stem and all options

B. Starting the reading test by reading some of the questions

05. Starting the reading test by reading the passage

A. Starting the reading test by reading parts of the passage

B. Starting the reading test by reading all of the passage

a. Starting the reading test by reading all of the passage superficially

b. Starting the reading test by reading all of the passage thoroughly

3.5.1.2 Reading the Question

01. Reading the stem

02. Reading the stem and one option

03. Reading the stem and some of the options

04. Reading the stem and all of the options

05. Reading the stem and scanning the options

06. Reading the stem and skimming the options

07. Scanning the options

08. Skimming the options

09. Reading an option

10. Reading some of the options

11. Reading all of the options

12. Previewing the question/s

13. Going back to the question

14. Paying attention to the response format of the question

3.5.1.3 Going to the Text (Text Reference)

01. Going back to read the title

02. Visualising the passage

03. Scanning for a highlighted word

04. Scanning

05. Continue scanning

06. Rescanning

07. Skimming

08. Continue skimming

09. Re-skimming

10. Reading a portion of the text

11. Continue reading the following portion of the text

12. Identifying and reading the portion of the passage related to the highlighted word

13. Identifying and reading the portion of the passage related to the question

14. Identifying the determinate word in the text

15. Going back to the passage

16. Going back to read the passage

A. Going back to read all of the passage superficially

B. Going back to read all of the passage thoroughly

3.5.1.4 Cognitively Pre-Choosing an Answer Elaboration Strategies

01. Paraphrasing
A. Paraphrasing in L1
   a. Paraphrasing the stem or part of the stem in L1
   b. Paraphrasing an option or part of an option in L1
   c. Paraphrasing a portion of the passage in L1
B. Paraphrasing in L2
   a. Paraphrasing the stem or part of the stem in L2
   b. Paraphrasing a portion of the passage in L2

02. Interpreting in L1 or L2
   A. Interpreting a word in L1 or L2
   B. Interpreting the stem in L1 or L2
   C. Interpreting a portion of the passage in L1 or L2

03. Translating

04. Rereading
   A. Rereading a keyword
      a. Rereading a keyword in the stem
      b. Rereading a keyword in an option
      c. Rereading a keyword in the text
   B. Rereading a difficult word
      a. Rereading a difficult word in the stem
      b. Rereading a difficult word in an option
   C. Rereading the stem or part of the stem
   D. Rereading the options
      a. Rereading one option
      b. Rereading some of the options
      c. Rereading all the options
   E. Rereading the stem and options
      a. Rereading the stem and one option
      b. Rereading the stem and some of the options
      c. Rereading the stem and all options
   F. Rereading a phrase, sentence, or a paragraph

05. Rehearsing
   A. Rehearsing a key word in the stem
   B. Rehearsing a key word in the option
   C. Rehearsing a key word or phrase in the text
   D. Rehearsing the stem
   E. Rehearsing the suggested answer

06. Summarising
   A. Summarising in L1 the main ideas of the paragraph
   B. Summarising in L2 the main ideas of the paragraph
   C. Summarising in L1 the main ideas related to the question from memory

07. Reasoning

08. Inferencing

09. Using a pen, pencil, or finger to follow along with the reading

10. Marking the questions or the text
   A. Underlining
B. Underlining and circling
11. Using visual aids
12. Using the passage structure to locate the answer

3.5.1.5 V. Answering the Question

01. Evaluating an option
   A. Evaluating an option by examining the details of the option
   B. Evaluating an option by re-examining the details of an excluded or previously considered option
   C. Evaluating an option by ceasing to look for the option in the passage
   D. Evaluating an option by using the option to fill in the blank in the stem
   E. Evaluating an option by using the option to replace the word in the text
   F. Evaluating an option by limiting the options to two
   G. Evaluating an option by considering the options and wrestling with the option meaning (Adopted from Cohen and Upton (2006)).
   H. Evaluating an option by eliminating some of the options while reading them

02. Excluding an option
   A. Excluding an option based on thinking it was not mentioned in the passage
   B. Excluding an option based on its containing wrong information
   C. Excluding an option based on background information
   D. Excluding an option based on not knowing the meaning of the option
   E. Excluding an option based on the sound of the word
   F. Excluding an option based on feeling
   G. Excluding an option based on containing irrelevant information
   H. Excluding an option based on finding more evidence that supports another option

03. Nominating an option

04. Suggesting an answer

05. Selecting a preliminary answer
   A. Selecting a preliminary answer based on a word repetition in the options
   B. Selecting a preliminary answer based on matching a word in the option with a word in the text
   C. Selecting a preliminary answer based on memory
   D. Selecting a preliminary answer based on guessing

06. Selecting a second preliminary answer

07. Re-choosing a crossed-out answer

08. Giving an oral account of the answer

09. Choosing an answer
   A. Choosing an answer based on background knowledge
   B. Choosing an answer based on clues in the passage (inferencing)
   C. Choosing an answer based on feeling
   D. Choosing an answer based on guessing
   E. Choosing an answer based on literal matching of a word in the option with a word in the text
   F. Choosing an answer based on matching a word in the stem with a word in the option
G. Choosing an answer based on process of elimination  
H. Choosing an answer based on visual aids  
I. Choosing an answer based on memory of the text  
J. Choosing an answer based on matching a number in the option with a number in the text  
K. Choosing an answer based on understanding the option  
L. Choosing an answer based on a word repetition in the options  
M. Choosing an answer based on relating a word in the option with a word in the text  
N. Choosing an answer based on a previous question  
O. Choosing an answer based on the sound of the word  
P. Choosing an answer based on “I do not know”  

3.5.1.6 Reviewing the Answer/s  
01. Checking the answer to a question  
A. Checking the answer immediately as it is chosen or nominated  
B. Checking the answer for a previous question while answering another question  
02. Checking the answer for a group of questions  
A. Checking that all of the questions have been completed  
B. Checking only some of the answers at the end of the test  
C. Checking all of the answers at the end of the test  

3.5.1.7 Order of Answering the Questions  
01. Following the order as written  
02. Starting with the easy questions  
03. Deciding to leave a question and returning to it later  

4.0 Discussion  
4.1 Representation of the found RTTS in the literature  
Many of the strategies and subcategories of our RTTS have been embodied in various places in the literature. For example, representations of most of the strategies and subcategories in the first category I. Starting the reading test can be seen in studies like Anderson (1991), Cohen and Upton (2007), Phakiti (2003), and Rupp et al. (2006). However, this category developed as an effort to more clearly define this stage of taking a test and to give some order to the strategies and subcategories that constitute it. Likewise, Anderson (1991), Cohen and Upton (2007), and Phakiti (2003) have varying extent of representing many of the strategies available in our second, third, and fourth categories. For example, representations of the 14 strategies in our second category II. Reading the question is limited to a strategy or two that are broader in content and may integrate the different variations that we coded separately. Similarly, our third category III. Going to the text (text reference), which contains 16 strategies, is mainly represented in the form of two strategies: skimming and scanning. Anderson (1991) has also a representation of the second strategy in this group 02. Visualising the passage. Although this strategy occurred only once; it has been coded. The reason for coding this strategy has two folds: first: it was clearly stated in a participant’s retrospective interview, and second: its rare representation in the literature of RTTS. However, our fourth category IV. Cognitively pre-choosing an answer elaboration strategy (i.e. cognitive strategies used when deeply engaged in processing the text or the questions) has a larger representation in these studies. Many of the strategies in the fifth category V. Answering the question (i.e. strategies which describe: how the students evaluate the options, exclude some of
them, and come up with a decision about the answer) can be found in Anderson (1991), Cohen and Upton (2007), and Rupp et al. (2006). Also, some of the strategies in the sixth category VI. Reviewing the answers (i.e. strategies used to check the correctness of the answers and/or the completion of the questions) appear in Cohen and Upton (2007), and Phakiti (2003). Finally, the last category in our taxonomy of strategies VII. Order of answering the question is denoted in Anderson (1991), Cohen and Upton (2007), and Jamil et al. (2010).

4.1 Other issues
This section focusses on three points. First, the number of strategies extracted in the current study (127 RTTS) in light of the number of strategies in other studies in the literature (Anderson, 1991; Cohen & Upton, 2006; Nevo, 1989; Phakiti, 2003; Purpura, 1999; Rupp et al., 2006). Second, the content/type of these strategies. Lastly, the taxonomy of these strategies.

First, in relation to the number of strategies, studies on RTTS show diversity in the length of their strategy lists. For instance, Nevo (1989) checklist included 15 strategies. Purpura’s (1997, 1999) cognitive and metacognitive strategy questionnaire contained 70 items. On the other hand, Phakiti (2003) cognitive and metacognitive questionnaire consisted of merely 35 items. Researchers who used verbal reports to explore their participants’ RTTS found an array of lists that numbered 47 strategies (Anderson, 1991), 59 strategies (Cohen & Upton, 2006), and 24 strategies (Jamil et al., 2010). Several factors may explain the variation in the number of strategies found in the literature of RTTS. One of these factors is the instrument used to collect the data. The number of strategies in studies based on questionnaires is limited to the number of items in those questionnaires (e.g. Nevo, 1989; Phakiti, 2003; Purpura, 1997, 1999). On the other hand, the number of strategies found in studies based on verbal reports (e.g. Anderson, 1991; Cohen & Upton, 2006; Jamil et al., 2010) varies depending on the interaction of numerous variables, such as the test-taker variables (e.g. age, gender, L2 proficiency level, nationality, verbal fluency, cognitive style, and experience with test-taking), the reading test facets (e.g. the topic, length, type and difficulty of the text; and the type, purpose, length, and difficulty of the questions), the verbal report instructions, and the coding system used. Other factors that may also affect the number of RTTS are the definition of RTTS adopted and the aim of the study. The length of the RTTS list in the current study is larger than any other studies in the existing literature, to the best of the author knowledge. The large number of strategies in the present study is due to the fact that the present study accounts for all detailed subtypes of what is broadly the same strategy in other studies. For example, Anderson’s strategy number 23. The reader rereads is further represented, in the present study, by 13 sub-strategies (all of IV. 04.) which represent what is being reread and where it is considered; for instance, IV. 04. A.: a. Rereading a keyword in the stem, b. Rereading a keyword in an option, and c. Rereading a keyword in the text. It is important here to emphasise that the variations of a strategy in the present study represent what the study’s participants actually used and not all possible variations.

Second, the content/type of strategies extracted in the present study is quite different from other studies in the literature. There are several factors that may account for this difference. One of these factors is the difference in the aims of the studies, which can usually be noticed in the type of instructions given to the participants during the data collection. For example, Anderson (1991) and Cohen and Upton (2006) ask their participants to report two things: the “strategies
used while reading and understanding the passage and to report the strategies used in answering the comprehension questions at the end of the passage” (Anderson, 1991, p. 462). This led to strategy lists that contain some purely reading strategies which are not presented in the current study. In fact, the present study and Nevo (1989) focus on whatever strategies used to answer multiple-choice questions in a reading test, including some reading comprehension strategies which occur unavoidably when students read questions or go to the text to look for answers. Other factors that may affect the content/type of strategies found in any study include the time limit, the length of the texts, the type of skills measured, and the type of the task. For instance, Anderson (1991) used both an academic reading task (untimed) and a reading test (timed) as the basis for the verbal report, compared to a timed test in the present study. Another example can be found in Cohen and Upton (2006) who used different types of reading questions as the stimulus for the self-report, compared to one type of questions (multiple choice question) in the present study.

Lastly, the taxonomies of the RTTS in the present study is different. Earlier studies based their RTTS taxonomies on different considerations. For instance, Anderson’s (1991) 47 strategies are divided into five categories based on their function or role, mostly in general reading, which has a stronger presence in his study than in ours. His categories include: supervising strategies, support strategies, paraphrase strategies, strategies for establishing coherence in the text, and test-taking strategies. Rupp et al. (2006), on the other hand, classified their strategies based on the scope of their use (macro and micro level strategies). The macro-level strategies in Rupp et al. (2006) could represent our I. Starting the reading test category, and their micro-level strategies may represent all the other categories. Similarly, Cohen and Upton (2006, 2007) distinguished between reading strategies and test-taking strategies (test-management and test-wiseness). They based their distinction on the skill area of reading and test-taking which reflect the focus of their study. On the other hand, the present study classifies the strategies into seven categories based on the logical sequence of events that take place while completing a test.

As can be deduced from the above discussion, earlier classifications of RTTS in the literature were more based on thematic approaches rather than a narrative approach like the present study. Thus, the sequence of events that happen during a test has not been discussed in the literature and this gives us no room for comparison. In fact, the existing study attempts to come up with a classification that mirrors the students’ experience. In one word, the resulted RTTS taxonomy in the current study is a distinctive example that demonstrates some similarities and differences with the existing taxonomies in the literature. Its differences centre around three themes: the length of the list of strategies, the content/type of these strategies, and their classification.

Conclusion
The current study provides us with an emerging, descriptive taxonomy of what the test-takers do while completing a multiple-choice reading comprehension test. The new list of strategies is more detailed than any of the examples available in the literature and hopefully will help deepen our understanding of the RTTS and their use in MCQs tests’ situations. There is still a need to use this list with different groups of EFL learners while completing different MCQs reading comprehension test to further validate and improve the list and its categories.
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Classroom Observation for Professional Development: Views of EFL Teachers and Observers

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Abstract
This study interviewed nine English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and seven EFL observers to explore their perceptions towards classroom observation. Results showed nine main themes relating to two categories of classroom observation and post-observation feedback. The findings highlight the significance of both classroom observation and post-observation feedback as a positive influence on teaching practices. Teaching experience appears to be a key factor that influence participants’ views about classroom observation and post-observation feedback. In addition, the results reflect some limitations of classroom observation as a possible source of teachers’ negative emotions and the fact that it does not necessarily reflect everyday teaching practice. A comprehensive training programme for observers could enhance observers’ skills and contribute to enhancing the quality of observations, which will lead to a better experience for teachers.

Keywords: Classroom observation, EFL observers, EFL teachers, post-observation feedback, professional development

1.0 Introduction

Classroom observation is commonly used to measure the quality of teaching (Borg, 2018) and classroom processes, including teaching practices, instruction aspects and teacher-student interactions (Hinchey, 2010; Richards & Farrell, 2011). It is regarded one of the major teacher assessment methods mainly because it offers rich information about teachers’ actual classroom performance, which can then be used for summative and formative purposes (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). Formative assessment helps teachers to improve or expand their abilities (Hinchey, 2010), while summative assessment is used to make decisions regarding salary or status (Borg, 2018). The significance of the formative perspective is highlighted by recent research. For example, Darling-Hammond (2013) states that evaluation should be followed by useful feedback and should relate to professional development to help teachers to achieve their goals and improve their teaching. Marzano and Toth (2013) note that “an effective evaluation system should help teachers teach better” (p.14). The importance of formative teacher evaluation does not reduce the importance of its counterpart: the summative form. According to Isoré (2009), “In its summative form, evaluation firstly responds to the needs of assuring that teaching is directed towards student achievement. It also provides opportunities for the social recognition of teachers’ skills and commitment to work” (p.7).

There are many issues related to classroom observation, for example, observer reliability, announced and unannounced classroom observations, and observing novice and expert teachers. In terms of observer reliability, it is an essential element in effective classroom observation. However, Bell et al. (2014) point out that there are variations when different observers rate the same lesson. Comprehensive training of observers can improve classroom observations and a teacher’s class can be observed more than once by different observers (Ho & Kane, 2013). Another observation issue is whether to conduct announced or unannounced classroom observations. Borg (2018) states that what teachers do during announced observations may not be true representation of everyday classroom. Therefore, unannounced classroom visits might provide a typical view of actual class. Bruns and Luque (2015) indicate one of the most critical factors in teacher evaluation is conducting unannounced classroom visits. However, Pennington and Young (1989) oppose this idea as “unannounced classroom visits are … not only disruptive of the classroom process, but also represent a kind of invasion of privacy” (p. 635). To successfully use a strategy of teacher evaluation, such as classroom observation, it should account for many factors related to teachers. One of these factors is professional development throughout a teacher's career (Freeman, 2001). Teachers might have different professional interests and concerns based on their experience and prior knowledge, such as the needs of novice (with less than three years of teaching experience) and expert teachers (with five or more years of teaching experience) (Freeman, 2001). Novice teachers tend to be concerned about their teaching image, classroom management, and control (Berliner, 1986); therefore, it would be better to focus their professional development in these areas. Similarly, expert teachers tend to be concerned about teaching objectives and how they can achieve them. Therefore, their teacher evaluation should focus on development strategies, such as reflection and self-assessment (Freeman, 2001).

Classroom observation usually consists of three main stages: a pre-observation conference, a class visit, and a post-observation feedback (Bailey, 2006; Richards & Farrell, 2011). During the pre-observation meeting, the lesson plan and the focus of the visit are discussed (Richards & Farrell,
In the class visit, observers systematically record the teaching events using a coding system or open-ended field notes. During the post-observation feedback, the observer provides teachers with information about the observed lesson. This should be a dialogue between an observer and a teacher during which an interpretation of the teaching events takes place (Bailey, 2006). Murdoch (2000) highlights that, during post-observation feedback, observers should discuss specific teaching events rather than their impressions. He (2000) also suggests that supervisors should reinforce, with positive comments, the successful aspects of the performance and identify a small number of weaknesses as too much criticism has a negative effect on teachers’ development. Post-observation feedback is considered the most important stage in the observation process, because new ideas are suggested by the observer regarding the observed teaching events. Additionally, feedback increases awareness which enables teachers to change their teaching behaviour (Bailey, 2006). However, post-observation feedback might cause significant stress on both the observer and the observee because of the challenges linked to being objective and non-judgemental during the feedback session (William, 1989). Professional training should be provided for observers that aims to help them to be objective and systematic when collecting and discussing teaching events.

Although observation is a fundamental strategy of teacher evaluation, it has been criticised by many researchers. Richards and Farrell (2011) note that it is limited by its inability to observe all aspects of a lesson that might occur simultaneously, because teaching is a dynamic and complicated process. King (2015) indicates teachers find the observation process threatening. Observers may lack professional training to judge teachers appropriately (Bailey, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Sheal, 1989). Furthermore, prior knowledge with teachers might influence observer judgements (Bell et al., 2014). Observations tend to concentrate on summative rather than formative purposes (Marzano & Toth, 2013). Observation does not give an accurate representation of what teachers can do in the classroom (Campbell et al., 2004; O’Leary, 2016a). To address this issue, it is recommended that several sources of evidence are used during teacher evaluation to effectively capture the complexity of classroom teaching, improve reliability and reduce bias in comparison to using one measure (Grissom & Youngs, 2016). Methods for collecting evidence related to teacher quality include classroom observation, student outcomes, student evaluations of teaching, self-evaluation, and peer evaluation (Borg, 2018). O’Leary (2016b) suggests using a ‘walk-through’ as an alternative form of classroom observation. It is a short and focused form of observation, during which notes and checklists are not needed; it is more concerned with the formative purposes of classroom observation (Stevens, 2016). Notes can be written after the walk-through for use during the follow-up reflection discussion with the teacher. This kind of observation allows the collection of evidence about teacher quality, which can then be used for teacher evaluation, teacher reflection, and professional development (Stevens, 2016).

1.1 The Context of the Study
Within the context of the study, teachers are evaluated on a scale of one to five, one being the lowest. The classroom observation outcomes are used in annual faculty evaluations. At the same time, the institution in which the study take place also views evaluation as developmental rather than evaluative. At the time of the research, the process cycle of classroom observation includes a pre-observation conference, a class visit, and a feedback session. The main aim of the pre-observation conference is to address teachers’ questions and concerns. This can be conducted by email, telephone, or in person. It allows teachers to discuss any significant information about their
During this stage, teachers are well-informed about classroom observation criteria and evaluation ratings and guidelines. Teachers are given the option to choose the date and time of their observation and to discuss the lesson. During the class-visit stage, teachers’ instructional skills are assessed using a box-ticking rubric. The rubric consists of 13 items covering four teaching categories: planning, classroom environment and management, lesson delivery, and language proficiency. The observers also take detailed notes of what occurs in the classroom. These notes are used as a basis for the feedback session given later, and for compiling the observation report. During the feedback session, interaction takes place between observers and teachers. The primary aims of this stage are to give teachers the opportunity to reflect on their observed lesson and to give them feedback on their positive areas and the weak areas that require improvement. If a teacher is not satisfied with the observation process, he or she can ask in writing for a review through an appeal process (English Language Institute Faculty Handbook, 2016).

1.2 The Present Study
Although there have been few research studies conducted in the Saudi context, the existing research findings show the perceived shortcomings of classroom observation (Shah & Al Harthi, 2014), the views of EFL teachers about post-observation feedback (Abdul Rehman & Al-Bargi, 2014), and EFL teachers’ opinions about teacher evaluation in general (Hakim, 2015). Nevertheless, the current study examines the perceptions of both EFL teachers and EFL observers regarding classroom observation. It is valuable to explore both observers’ and teachers’ understanding of classroom observation. This could indicate their views regarding different aspects of classroom observation, such as its main purpose, who should be the target of such process (expert or novice teachers), essential observers’ qualifications, and teachers’ feelings and attitudes towards classroom observation. Teachers might have a unique rationale for classroom observation due to their role in the teaching process. Examining both observers’ and teachers’ perceptions could highlight discrepancies or similarities in their views, due to their differing roles in the institution. This might help to improve the classroom observation process, which eventually might improve teachers’ opportunities for professional development. Therefore, the present study is qualitative research that aims to examine EFL teachers’ and observers’ perceptions of the classroom observation used in their context.

2. Method
2.1. Participants
A sample of nine EFL teachers and seven observers, who are also expert EFL teachers, voluntarily participated in this study. They were all female teachers as the study was conducted in a Women’s section of a University in Saudi Arabia, and their teaching experience ranged from six to more than 20 years (see Table 1). The university is one of the biggest in the country and has an English Language Institute (ELI), which aims to improve students’ English proficiency, supporting them in their undergraduate studies and future careers. EFL teachers participating in this study are from various nationalities including Egyptian, Pakistani, and Saudi (see Table 1). This study uses maximum variation sampling to capture the central themes of the examined setting (Patton, 2002). Prior to data collection, all the research protocols were prepared, including consent forms and an interview guide. Moreover, the author obtained ethical approval from the Research Unit in the context of the study. An email was sent to all the teachers in the ELI to ask them to voluntary participate in the study, explaining the purpose and instrument of the study. At the beginning of the
interviews, the researcher explained to the interviewees the issues of anonymity and confidentiality in data handling and gained their written consent to voluntary participation.

Table 1: Participants’ information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Teaching experience</th>
<th>Teaching qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observer J</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer K</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>11–15 years</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer L</td>
<td>Saudi</td>
<td>6–10 years</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer M</td>
<td>Tunisian</td>
<td>6–10 years</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer N</td>
<td>Saudi</td>
<td>6–10 years</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer O</td>
<td>Saudi</td>
<td>6–10 years</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer P</td>
<td>Saudi</td>
<td>6–10 years</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Saudi</td>
<td>6–10 years</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>16–20 years</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Saudi</td>
<td>6–10 years</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>16–20 years</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>Syrian</td>
<td>16–20 years</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher F</td>
<td>South African</td>
<td>6–10 years</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher G</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>6–10 years</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher H</td>
<td>Saudi</td>
<td>6–10 years</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher I</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>6–10 years</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. Instruments

A semi-structured interview guide was used to examine the interviewees' perceptions of the significance of classroom observation for EFL teachers and whether it affects developing teaching practices. The same set of interview guidelines was used for both teachers and observers. The following are examples of the questions used:

- In your opinion, what is the significance of classroom observation?
- Can you describe how classroom observation affects teaching practices?
- What effect did the post-observation feedback have on teaching practices?

The participants were invited to speak about their own experiences to illustrate their views. The semi-structured interview questions were piloted with one EFL teacher to ensure the clarity of the questions. The researchers in English then conducted face-to-face interviews at a time and place convenient for the participants (the Arabic speaker interviewees were given the chance to speak in
their mother tongue if they preferred, but they all preferred to do the interviews in English). The length of the interviews ranged from 7:29 minutes to 28:27 minutes. With the interviewees' prior consent, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

2.3. Data Analysis
NVivo 11 was used to organise and examine the data, which was thematically analysed. Thematic analysis allows a full understanding of the examined research topic (Marks & Yardley, 2004) and concentrates on identifying both implicit and explicit ideas in the data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). The adequacy of themes was checked by the researcher to ensure their internal validation. The themes were then checked by a colleague who was a well-qualified researcher and EFL teacher. The main aim of this step was to avoid researcher bias and build the reliability of codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3. Results
Based on the data from the interviews, nine dominant themes were identified relating to two categories: classroom observation and post-observation feedback. The themes are presented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Themes and subthemes](image-url)
3.1. Classroom Observation

In this section, classroom observation themes are presented: significance, teaching experience, stress, areas for improvement. The views of both observers and teachers are presented collectively to present the findings of the themes.

3.1.1. Significance

Teachers reported that classroom observation is a significant tool for their professional development as it motivates teachers to update their teaching practices regularly. For example, Teacher C revealed, “As far as I am concerned, I think observations should be an avenue for growth; an avenue, through discussion of course, between the teacher and observer. Because sometimes we do not see our problems in teaching and, when we have another person evaluating or seeing our problems, they can help us to enhance or to avoid such problems later on”. Teacher F indicated that classroom observation “motivate teachers to improve professionally because, as teachers, you can't stagnate, you know…things are changing”. Teacher G agreed and emphasised that classroom observation is highly significant for teachers “because as teachers we need to develop and learn, and, in education, new things are coming up all the time. We need to learn new technologies, new techniques, new strategies, and with that we need to change our teaching style”.

Furthermore, all the interviewed observers talked extensively about the significance of classroom observation. For example, four observers highlighted that classroom observation is used as a key tool to measure and improve the quality of teaching. Observer L explained “When it first started, it was with the intention of evaluating teachers' methods of teaching, whether they are good enough for our university students or not, which is of course the ultimate goal of any observation programme around the world”. Observer O added that the quality of teaching has a close relationship with students’ achievement, and, for this reason, classroom observations are conducted.

3.1.2. Teaching Experience

A divide appeared in the teachers’ views when they talked about who should be observed: new teachers or both new and expert teachers. Some teachers argued that observation should be conducted for specific cases, including new teachers and teachers about whom students have reported complaints regarding their teaching practices. For example, Teacher H said “so, for the teachers, I believe observation is very important, especially for new teachers joining the field. It’s important for them first to gain experience, to learn from their mistakes, and to improve them”. Teacher I added, “the only people who should be observed are the teachers who are faltering and, whether it's because the students are coming through and saying, you know, we've a problem with this teacher or it's the test scores that are low”. She explained that classroom observation has no effect on the teaching practices of expert teachers “to be observed when you've been teaching that long, I don't think is fruitful because … I'll change for that day but I'm not going to change the way I teach”. In contrast, Teacher G stressed that a teacher, whether new or expert, was not a good judge for her own teaching and classroom observation should be done regularly for all teachers. In her view, observation is conducted “to get a fresh perspective on my teaching, so like getting a second opinion on how things or how am I doing in my classroom, to see whether I need to let go of some old practices or start something new”. Teacher C further explained “Experience is good but experience doesn't mean that we are doing the best thing all the time. Sometimes we need refreshment of whatever we are doing, maybe something new in the field because, in the field of
English language or EFL teaching, there is always change or something new”.

Some observers also reported the significance of classroom observation for professional development, especially for new teachers. Observer N noted classroom observation is highly important to develop the teaching skill of new teachers “to improve teachers' teaching skills and help new instructors who are newly hired at the university to develop their teaching skills”. She continued “because if they don't know what the problem is in their class, they won't be able to improve themselves”. Observer O indicated classroom observation is beneficial for all teachers as “It gives you an overview of what's going on in your institute and, for development and progress, I think it's beneficial”.

3.1.3. Stress
Some teachers mentioned that they felt judged when they were observed, which is stressful. Teacher F said “you feel judged. The thing that you thought you're doing right is seen by someone else – a professional – as not effective or it's not working, and you have to change it … it's really nerve-racking”. Teacher G added that teachers felt extremely nervous prior to observation because they need to show their best in the 50 minutes, which is the observation time. She described, “You get really nervous. No matter how experienced you are, before an observation it's, oh my god, what if things go wrong? One thing I don't like is, because we teach for the whole year and our teaching is being, like, evaluated or observed based on 1 hour or 50 minutes. I don't think that's a fair judgment of my teaching; that's not a fair depiction of how I teach every day or for the rest of the year”.

Teacher C mentioned that observations should not be part of annual evaluation because “you will find that it is threatening to some extent, especially when we hear from the head administrators that observations are taken as the number one specification of teachers who are qualified to stay in the ELI or not. So, for every teacher, observation means to be or not to be”. Observer O also noted that teachers usually did not like to be observed and it was viewed as a ‘threatening’ experience. Observer J indicated teachers perceived classroom observations as an evaluative tool that affected their contract renewal. This could explain why teachers viewed observation as a threat and felt stressed. Observer K pointed out that after observations, teachers really cared about their observation score rather than the feedback. She stated that could be reduced if the observation score was not included in the teachers’ annual evaluation.

3.1.4. Areas for Improvement
Teachers and observers reported some limitations regarding the classroom observations conducted in their context and suggested some procedures to improve it. For example, many teachers suggested that observers should walk in classes randomly to see what happens in a normal everyday classroom. Teacher B stated that classroom observation should not be announced and pre-scheduled because by doing so observers cannot see what really happen in the classroom. Teacher I agreed that an announced classroom observation does not truly reflect what happen in the classroom, and she gives an example about herself, “I know, for myself, I teach one way in my everyday class and when I know I'm being observed I teach in another way”. Teacher F further explained “we all do the lights, camera, and action for that specific observation slot, so we do take out things that we don't generally use … we put on a show because we want to impress the observer and get the best out of the grade”. Observer K acknowledged that what happens during classroom observations is
'just a one-day show’ and does not necessary reflect actual classroom practice, as teachers tend to show their best teaching practices.

Moreover, Teacher B stressed that observers should focus on the delivery of the lesson and the students' engagement rather than on using the latest methodologies and technologies in teaching. Teacher C discussed another point: observers’ qualifications. She indicated observers should have essential requirements that should be higher than the observed teachers including teaching experience and educational qualification. She further indicated observers’ feedback should be based on the grounds of teaching methodologies rather than personal preferences.

3.2. Post-Observation Feedback
Based on the data from the interviews, five salient themes related to post-observation were emerged including significance, teachers’ attitudes, teacher experience, feedback strategies, and feedback quality and form. The following analysis reports the perceptions of both EFL teachers and observers regarding each theme.

3.2.1. Significance
Most observers and teachers believed that post-observation feedback is the most important step in the observation cycle because, as reported by Observer K, this is when both parties discuss their views about lesson planning and delivery and when observers highlighted the areas that teachers needed to improve. Teacher B indicated she would definitely work on areas suggested by her observer. Teacher F agreed and added that “it can be quite constructive in that you can, as a teacher, reflect on the feedback or from the feedback and then implement changes”. Teacher G reflected that she had always benefited from observers’ feedback, whether it was highlighting strengths or weaknesses. She explained that positive feedback “works as a positive reinforcement, so we know what we're doing right in the class and we can continue and even develop it further”. Then, she described that when her observers pointed out some areas for improvement such as ‘reducing teacher talking time’, she started paying attention to this aspect and improved. Observer M recounted her experience with a teacher who she observed twice during two consecutive years. She noticed impressive progress in her teaching practice.

Seven interviewed participants (four observers and three teachers) reported that post-observation feedback help teachers to improve their teaching practices relating to lesson planning and delivery (e.g. pace of the lesson, grouping students, and presenting activities). For example, Teacher E recounted, “I remember one time I got a note about timing the exercises with the students, to show them the clock, and I did it and I haven’t done it before … I applied it and it was effective”. Teacher G agreed and added that feedback sessions during which the observer pointed to strengths and weaknesses of teachers was really beneficial for her professional development. She worked on the weak areas mentioned by her observer (e.g. reducing teacher talking time) and her teaching practices significantly improved. Teacher A also pointed out that she started using different types of activities (controlled, semi-controlled, and free activities) as suggested by her observer. Observer J recalled that, before she became an observer, she changed her way of conducting ‘paired work’ activities as recommended by her observer. She asserted, “when my observer pointed out the weakness I started to change”. Observer K, M, and O strongly believe that teachers’ teaching practices improved significantly as a result of classroom observation, and specifically ‘post-
observation feedback’.

3.2.2. Teachers’ Attitudes
Teacher’s attitudes towards post-observation feedback was reported by three observers and two teachers. They revealed that some teachers took feedback positively and others took it negatively; this could be due to teachers’ personality. Observer J stated, “it depends on the personality ... it depends how much you want to learn, how much you view yourself as a teacher”. Furthermore, Teacher D stated, “If she is taking it for her improvement, it's definitely going to work for her. The next time, she will try to avoid those things. But there are some hypersensitive people as well. They usually take the feedback the opposite way [negatively], so we should not neglect that side as well”. Teacher B supported the idea that teachers’ personalities affected their attitudes towards post-observation feedback. Observer O indicated observers should be really careful and thought about a good way when giving the feedback to influence teachers positively. Observers could tell when teachers did not take feedback seriously from the teachers’ attitudes during post-observation feedback. Some teachers were like “I know what I'm doing and I know everything”, as reported by Observer M.

3.2.3. Teaching experience
Many participants reported that teaching experience has a major effect on the post-observation feedback’s impact on teachers’ professional development. Five interviewed participants (two observers and three teachers) revealed that classroom observation has less influence on expert teachers. For example, Observer N stated that expert teachers reject observers’ feedback “because they think they are so good and they don't need this”. Observer L also believed that classroom observation did not have a major influence on expert teachers because their teaching practices ‘fossilised’ in some way; they might find it difficult to update their teaching practices as they get used to their own ways for a long time. Additionally, Teachers D and F gave more reasons to explain why experts rejected post-observation feedback. According to them, this could be because they did not want to change their effective teaching practices (in their opinion), and the observers were younger and had less teaching experience and qualifications. Teacher I added as an experienced teacher, “I know what I'm good at and what I'm not good at, but I compensate with what I am good at, but you're not going to see that in a classroom observation”.

On the other hand, Observer P highlighted that only few expert teachers rejected feedback and were unwilling to change. Teacher C thought that experienced teachers needed to be updated in their teaching practices and accept willingly their observers’ feedback. Teacher G believed that expert teachers get used to their teaching practices and for this particular reason they need an observer to tell them “this is working, or this is not working”.

There was a high agreement in the participants’ views about novice teachers’ attitudes towards classroom observation. Four observers and three teachers reported that novice teachers are more willing to receive observers’ feedback. This is for several reasons, including their willingness to change and improve professionally. Observer L explained that “novice teachers are still in the field of experimenting with everything until they feel comfortable with the method that they think is going to work for their students”.
3.2.4. Feedback Strategies
Some participants (two observers and two teachers) talked about strategies that observers should use when giving feedback, such as putting teachers at ease at the beginning, being polite, and using direct and indirect ways when pointing to areas for improvement. Observer M stated that she tried to make teachers comfortable during the feedback session and was cautious, especially with expert teachers, who tended to discuss the feedback points. Teacher F suggested that observers needed to provide constructive feedback to remind teachers that the observation goal was mainly for professional development rather than evaluation. This might promote teachers’ positive attitudes in accepting feedback and improving their teaching practices accordingly. Teacher D listed some techniques that should be followed by observers when giving feedback, saying “when observers are giving feedback, they should be very polite and use indirect or direct methods. Observer K also added that observers should pay attention to their word choice and tone when giving feedback. They should start the feedback session by pointing to teachers’ strengths and then discuss areas for improvements in an indirect way. Observers also need to allow teachers to reflect on their own teaching. Moreover, Observer M indicated the need for enough time for the feedback session to allow sufficient time to discuss and reflect upon the teaching practices used during the observation session.

3.2.5. Feedback Quality and Form
Many teachers suggested points that related to the feedback quality and form. For instance, Teacher C indicated observers’ feedback needed to be based on methodological grounds and should include specific suggestions to help teachers improve on their weaknesses in teaching. Teacher I pointed out that observers should have a wide knowledge about teacher training in different contexts, and this knowledge should be reflected during the feedback. Observers need not impose a specific method on teachers if there are other options. Teacher I, who is American, explained what happened with her when her observer asked her to follow CELTA, which is a British style, in her lesson planning “it made me so nervous that I gave a bad lesson because I was trying to follow a lesson plan that I wasn't familiar with”. Teacher E stated that she would like to receive a detailed written form of the feedback, so the points discussed during the feedback session were not forgotten.

4. Discussion
The main study’s aim was to investigate the perceptions of both EFL teachers and observers about classroom observation. The results indicate that the interviewed teachers and observers primarily believe that classroom observation in general and post-observation feedback in particular are highly significant and teachers’ practices improve accordingly. Teachers reveal that classroom observation is important for their ongoing professional development, while observers believe that it is significant for measuring and improving the teaching quality that affects student achievement in addition to teachers’ professional development. The study’s findings demonstrate that observers lean towards the summative purposes of classroom observation, which aims to assure that teaching leads to students’ achievements for recognition of teachers’ skills (Isore, 2009). At the same time, teachers tend to favour the formative purpose of classroom observation. Formative purpose significance is highlighted by recent research as it focuses on helping teachers to improve their teaching abilities (Hinchey, 2010; Marzano & Toth, 2013). In this context, it appears that observations focus on summative rather than formative purposes and this is in line with Marzano and Toth’s findings (2013). Moreover, the participants think post-observation feedback is the most
important stage of the observation process because it is where the discussion between teachers and observers takes place. It also has a positive influence on improving teachers’ instructional skills that relate to lesson planning and delivery, such as the pace of the lesson and presenting activities. Teachers tend to change their practices after feedback is given as it appears that feedback increases awareness, enabling teachers to change their teaching behaviours, as noted by Bailey (2006).

Furthermore, the results show that there is a relationship between the teaching experience duration and two observation aspects: deciding who should be observed (novice or expert teachers), and post-observation feedback impact on teachers. Some participants think that post-observation feedback has less impact on expert teachers while novice teachers are more willing to receive observers’ feedback. This finding shows that teachers’ prior knowledge and experience is a main factor that needs to be considered during classroom observation (Freeman, 2001), because teachers with different teaching experience might have different professional needs and concerns. For example, novice teachers (with less than three years’ experience) usually need support in the areas of building their teaching image, classroom management, and classroom control (Berliner, 1986). Meanwhile, expert teachers focus on achieving their teaching objectives (Freeman, 2001). Therefore, teacher evaluation of novice teachers should focus on improving their teaching practices, including teaching methods and classroom management, while expert teachers should concentrate on improving development strategies, including reflection and self-assessment. In some cases such as with expert teachers, it might be beneficial to use alternative forms of classroom observation like walk-through and peer-observation (Hakim, 2015; O’Leary, 2016b).

The study also reveals that teachers sometimes felt stressed when they are observed because they feel judged on a 50-minute occasion, during which they need to show their best teaching skills. Furthermore, their attitudes towards post-observation feedback varies according to teachers’ personality. Some teachers react positively to post-observation feedback and others do not accept feedback. Their stress might lead them to view classroom observation as a threatening experience which is pointed out in previous studies (King, 2015; Shah & Al Harthi, 2014). William (1989) notes that post-observation feedback might cause stress, not only for teachers, but also for observers due to the difficulty of being non-judgemental during the feedback session. Murdoch (2000) suggests that observers should identify just a small number of weaknesses, since a lot of criticism might have a negative impact on teachers’ development. This might reduce teachers’ stress and improve their attitudes towards the process of classroom observation.

In support of previous research, such as those of Borg (2013), Campbell et al. (2004), and O’Leary (2016a), the present study shows that classroom observation does not reflect actual classroom practice as teachers tend to show their best teaching skills during scheduled announced observations. Therefore, teachers suggest conducting unannounced observations. Borg (2013) and Bruns and Luque (2015) state that unannounced observations might provide a true representation of everyday classroom practice. Nevertheless, Pennington and Young (1989) oppose this practice because it disturbs the classroom process and invades privacy.

In this study, teachers indicate observers’ feedback should be based on ELT methodological grounds rather than personal preferences. Abdul Rehman and Al-Bargi (2014) added that observers should not only suggest basic techniques, they should justify their feedback. In addition, teachers
reveal that there should be specific criteria to select observers, including good teaching experience and a high educational qualification. Previous research in the same context highlights concerns about observers’ training and qualifications (Abdul Rehman & Al-Bargi, 2014; Hakim, 2015; Shah & Al Harthi, 2014). Observers might not judge teachers appropriately due to their lack of professional training (Bailey, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Sheal, 1989). Therefore, systematic training of observers can improve classroom observation (Ho & Kane, 2013).

There were limitations to this study. First, the sample size was small and thus the findings’ representativeness should be viewed with caution. Second, the participants are expert teachers with more than five years’ experience; this is because the teachers’ selection was randomly from a teachers’ sample who showed their willingness to participate. Future studies could use purposeful selection to choose novice and expert teachers as participants to examine teacher experience as a factor influencing their views regarding classroom observation.

5. Conclusion
The present qualitative findings reveal the perceptions of both EFL observers and teachers towards classroom observations. While previous studies conducted in the Saudi context examine EFL teachers’ views regarding classroom observation (Abdul Rehman & Al-Bargi, 2014; Hakim, 2015; Shah & Al Harthi, 2014), the present findings further illustrate a general agreement in the views of both EFL observers and teachers about different aspects relating to classroom observation. However, a marked discrepancy is shown in their views regarding classroom observation rationale. Observers mostly believe that the significance of classroom observation lies in summative purposes, e.g. assuring the teaching quality. Teachers, on the other hand, mainly prefer the formative purpose of classroom observation, including professional development.

Moreover, teaching experience appears to be a vital factor influencing participants’ views about two areas: who should be the observation focus (novice or expert teachers), and post-observation feedback impact on teachers (novice teachers are more willing to receive observers’ feedback than experts). The present study also shows that teachers become stressed because they feel judged during observations, when they need to show their best teaching practices. Due to their personalities, some teachers react positively to post-observation feedback, while others respond negatively. Moreover, results indicate there should be strict criteria to select observers, including good teaching experience and a high academic qualification. Observers should also justify their feedback basing on ELT methodological grounds. Therefore, these findings have significant implications for teacher education. First, formative purposes of observation should be emphasised in the classroom observation process. Second, teachers with different teaching experience might have different professional needs and concerns. Consequently, observation programmes should account for this. For example, classroom observations can have multiple routes rather than one guideline that applies to all teachers with different teaching experiences. Additionally, it could be useful to introduce different observation kinds such as walk-through and peer-observation to address several teachers’ needs. Third, observers need to undergo a comprehensive training course to prepare them to observe appropriately and give constructive feedback. The availability of qualified observers might reduce teachers’ stress, improve teachers’ attitudes towards observation, and increase the outcomes of the observation process in general.
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Exploring Teachers' Beliefs and Practices on the Use of the Mother Tongue as a Mediational Tool in a Saudi EFL Classroom

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Abstract
This study reports the findings of a qualitative study of non-native English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers’ beliefs about the role of the first language (L1) as a mediating tool in a Saudi EFL classroom at a university level. As such, this research was conducted with the aim of answering the main research question which seeks a better understanding and deeper insights into the beliefs that directly affect the teachers’ use of the L1 in the classroom as a mediating tool. The sample consisted of twenty (twelve male and eight female) EFL teachers who answered an open-ended question in an online survey. Four teachers (two male and two female) participated voluntarily in semi-structured interviews. Analysis of the data produced several themes. Those findings revealed that despite all the literature acknowledging the benefits of using the mother tongue in the classroom, many English Language Institute (ELI) teachers still believe in limiting its use as a mediating tool in the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom as much as possible. In addition, it appeared that the lower the level of students' English proficiency, the more the teacher is likely to use L1 in the classroom. These findings have implications for classroom practice and could be employed to emphasise the value of teachers' beliefs about the role of L1 as a mediational tool in the ELT classroom.

Keywords: First language (L1), EFL, mother tongue (MT), mediational tool, Saudi context

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1. Introduction
The aims of the current study are threefold: exploring teachers’ beliefs about the use of L1 as a mediational tool in the EFL classroom; explaining teachers’ practices with a particular emphasis on their use of L1 in the classroom and finally, delving deep into the reasons behind those beliefs and practices.

2. Literature Review
The pertinent literature on sociocultural theory and language as a mediational tool will be presented. Additionally, some light will be shed on the history of L1 in the EFL classroom supported by some research studies that advocate the role played by in the EFL classroom as well as some arguments against its use.

2.1 Sociocultural Theory and L1 as a Mediational Tool
This study is informed by the sociocultural theory; therefore, reviewing the pertinent literature on the sociocultural theory and mediation showing how language and L1 are interrelated is important. Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman (2015) believe that the sociocultural theory is a solid basis to research and explain the use of strategies in English language teaching. They added that mediation is an important variable in the development of strategic learning. However, Izadi, Khoshshima, Nourmohammadi, and Yarahmadzehi (2017) stress that this is regulated and controlled only by developed learners who mastered this control of their first language through their culture and being part of their society. Masuda and Arnett (2015) further clarify that sociocultural theory views speaking and thinking to be in a “dialectal relationship” where speaking acts as an outcome of initiated thoughts. This suggests that L2 learners are mostly thinking in L1 and producing the outcome in second language (L2). This denotes that controlling and mediating L2, learners should have mastered L1. This is also supported by other researchers who indicated that only adult learners who have mastered their L1 are capable of using L1 to better understand L2 (Artemeva & Myles, 2015; Nakatsukasa & Loewen, 2015). Therefore, if the learner is not completely competent in his/her L1, this might suggest that using L1 will not affect his/her L2 learning. In harmony with this, Marsden, Mitchell, and Myles (2013) explain that the social interaction that takes place in the target language is not only a source of input for the learner, but it has its central and important role in learning as well. Another important aspect of sociocultural theory related to this study is the notion of accumulating shared knowledge within a joint activity where new understanding takes place by the use of mediational tools (Hakkarainen et al., 2015; K. E. Johnson & Golombek, 2016). This accumulation of shared knowledge takes place when the learners interact with others allowing this learning to be transferred across “minds, persons, and the symbolic and physical environments, both natural and artificial” (Pea, 1993, p. 47).

Recent research has been in favor of the utilization of L1 in the ELT classroom instead of total abandonment. Researchers believe that the role of L1 in L2 learning is language transfer (L. Jin & Cortazzi, 2018; Lin, 2015; Miri, Alibakhshi, & Mostafaei-Alaei, 2017). In other words, L1 is viewed as a positive source of cross linguistic influence, but still many researchers and teachers choose to avoid the use of L1 as much as possible (Nation, 2003). This disagreement gives room for Vygotsky’s (1978) understanding of language as a cognitive tool and according to Lantolf, Thorne, and Poehner (2015), any language has a
mediational function that serves as a higher function in human's mental life. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory states that learners use language to communicate with their more capable peers which helps in the social development of their higher mental functioning and thinking.

Mediation, be it physical or symbolic, is understood as "the introduction of an auxiliary device into an activity that then links humans to the world of objects or to the world of mental behaviour” (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994, p. 418). In this study, this device is L1, as it allows the learner to organise, alter and control his/her mental abilities and learning of L2.

### 2.3 Controversies over the Use of L1 in the L2 Classroom

Researchers supporting the use of L2 in the EFL classroom argue that if teachers are allowed to use students’ L1, this will hinder their students’ learning of the target language. The literature provides many justifications for this belief which mainly evolve around the following three claims: First, learning L2 is like learning L1; hence the need for maximizing the learner’s exposure to L2 (Krashen’s theory). Second, success in L2 learning requires a clear distinction and separation between L1 and L2. Finally, the continuous use of L2 will help learners recognize its importance (Tavares, 2015).

With regards to the first point, it is argued that maximizing students' exposure to L2 is one of the important factors in its learning (Brandeker & Thordardottir, 2017; Sung, 2016). This is compared to the learner's acquisition of a first language; thereby, listening and copying the language they hear, and this exposure also helps the learners' continuous language development. In reference to the second point, it is supported by Pacek (2003) who claims that translating L1 into L2 can have detrimental effects on the learners as assuming that every meaning in L2 has an equivalent in L1 is not always the case. The third claim stresses that the exclusive use of L2 in the classroom will make students recognize its importance. In advocacy of this, C. G. Polio and Duff (1994) argue that using L1 in the English classroom is against second language acquisition theories, where “negotiation of meaning in L2” and “modified input in L2” are importantly encouraged and proven to be successful. However, other researchers argue against this saying that learning could also be accomplished by a mixture of L1 and L2 (Airey, 2017). He explains that this is more beneficial for the learner and could happen either between the learners themselves or between the learner and their L2 teacher. Finally, some researchers admit that ELT teachers know and acknowledge importance of teaching in L2, but still do use L1 on specific occasions in classroom (Duff and Polio, 1990; Polio & Duff 1994; Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002; Edstrom, 2006). In the same vein, Martinez & Olivera (2003) argue that a right balance of L1 and L2 use is recommended taking into account learners' needs, age and level. They add that learners should not try to be native-like, but they should aim to be successful bilinguals.

As can be seen, supporters of using L2 in the classroom argue that the learners need to be exposed as much as possible to L2, but while many writers agree that exposure to the target language is critical to acquire the language, some writers see it otherwise. For example, Shahnaz (2016), believes that most students' input in an English-only classroom is
not comprehensible. According to the literature, there is no solid evidence maximising the L2 exposure will benefit learners (Cook, 2016).

2.4 Teachers' Beliefs
With reference to teachers’ beliefs, researchers seem to view them differently in the literature. However, they all agree on a general view where beliefs are regarded as a mental state that can be held consciously or unconsciously (Schussler, Jennings, Sharp, & Frank, 2016). They also agree that beliefs play an important role in informing teacher's practices (K. M. Scott, 2016; Zohar & Alboher Agmon, 2018). J.C. Richards and Schmidt (2013) define teachers' beliefs as “ideas and theories that teachers hold about themselves, teaching, language, learning and their students” (p.586). Studying these ideas will allow educators to try to understand the effects they have on teachers’ practices. In this sense, teachers' beliefs play a crucial role in determining if teachers will use L1 and how they will use it. For example, two research studies pinpointed that the majority of teachers believe in the maximization of L2 use in the classroom (Bruhlmann, 2012). By holding such beliefs, teachers are going to consciously or unconsciously try to reflect that into their practice and limit the use of L1 as much as possible. While in another study done by Goodwin, August, and Calderon (2015) found that L1 is altering the interaction between the learner and L2; therefore, teachers could select to use it as a tool for L2 teaching.

3. Methodology & Research Design
This paper is based on the interpretive research paradigm, where teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to their use of L1 in L2 classrooms are explored. The methodology of the current study is of an exploratory nature. This provides insights into Saudi EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about the role of L1 as a mediational tool in their L2 classrooms. This research used open-ended questions as well as semi-structured interviews.

3.1 Research Questions
This study attempted to address the following research questions:

1. What are the Saudi EFL teachers’ beliefs regarding the use of L1 in the EFL classroom as a mediational tool?
2. What are Saudi EFL teachers' current practices regarding their use of L1 as a mediational tool in the EFL classroom?
3. What reasons do participants offer for their beliefs and practices with regards to L1 use in the classroom?

3.2 Research Participants
Participants of the current study consisted of 20 Saudi EFL teachers working at the ELI (12 male and 8 female) who answered an open-ended online survey. As it is a small-scale study, four teachers (2 male and 2 female) who participated voluntarily in a semi-structured interview out of the ten participants who were willing to be interviewed, were selected. I used purposive sampling which according to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), is one kind of “non-probability sampling” where the researcher chooses the sample based on specific...
criteria to meet the purpose of the study. The sample was selected based on both purposiveness and availability (Daniel, 2011). All participants were Saudi EFL teachers who taught the Preparatory Year Program (PYP) at the ELI, and Arabic was their first language.

3.3 Data Collection
Two of the interviews were face-to-face and the remaining two were over the telephone for cultural and religious reasons as female teachers cannot work in a male-inhabited campus. All four interviews were in English, recorded digitally and lasted for around 30 minutes each. After the interviews were saved securely, they were transcribed and then all the participants were e-mailed a copy of the transcription in order to validate what has been said in the interviews. The researcher requested the participants to correct, add or delete any part of the transcription which they do not think that they have said.

4. Data Analysis & Results
Both, the interviews and questionnaires produced a vast amount of data. The following Table (1), shows the themes used in the data analysis.

Table 1. Data Analysis Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Analysis Themes</th>
<th>1. Teachers’ Beliefs Regarding L1 Use</th>
<th>2. Teachers’ Current Practices Regarding L1 Use</th>
<th>3. Sources of Teachers’ Beliefs Regarding L1 Use</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Negative attitudes</td>
<td>• Students’ low proficiency level</td>
<td>• Teacher training</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Obligation to use it</td>
<td>• Time saver</td>
<td>• Teachers’ personal knowledge and experience</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Limited use as a tool</td>
<td>• To facilitate teaching when students do not understand</td>
<td>• Higher ELI administrative issues/instructions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Language skill areas:</td>
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<td>o Vocabulary</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• For group work and task-based instruction</td>
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As shown in Table 1, three categories drawn from the research questions were created and applied to the data from the interviews and the open-ended survey responses. The first category applied to the data was 'Teachers' Attitudes & Beliefs Regarding L1 Use' eliciting
how they thought about the L1 in the classroom and their attitudes towards its possible uses. The second category was 'Teachers' Current Practices Regarding L1 Use', which looked for reasons for when and why they use L1 in the classroom. The third and final category looked at the 'Sources of Teachers' Beliefs Regarding L1 Use' as a mediational tool in the EFL classroom. Those three pre-determined categories allowed themes to emerge as evident from the table presented above.

4.1 Teachers' Beliefs about L1 Use

The data analysis process revealed that teachers tend to first try to explain in English once or twice and when they fail, they would consider the use of L1 as a tool that enables them to reach low level students and help them understand. However, their statements clearly present the teachers' resentment to using L1 as a mediating tool for learning vocabulary for example. They used expressions like “understandable”, “bad need” and “when there is no way to...” indicating that they believe they should be using L2 only to explain vocabulary, but as they have no other choice, they are using L1 as the last resort. Analysis of the data revealed that the overall responses of the participants indicated that they had a sense of negative belief towards their students speaking in L1 during group work and pair work in classroom. The following extracts revealed a tone of dissatisfaction with their students' behaviour thus:

“I tell them [students] not to speak in Arabic... Although I know that they will speak in Arabic ... But I will not be very strict in that area... I will tell them that you know... Just try and speak in English as it is better for you” (T2).

When asked about group work and pair work, one teacher said:

“I remember trying that [asking them to speak only in English] for a long time but no one would listen, and they would end up speaking in Arabic anyway... Therefore, nowadays I do not insist that they speak in English” (T3).

The above examples reflect that although the ELI teachers allow students to use L1 in classroom to mediate their learning, they are not happy about that, indicating that they do not believe that L1 will assist them in learning L2 and that they allow it because students do it anyway.

4.2 Teachers' Current Practices Regarding L1 Use

4.2.1. Using L1 with Low Level Students

The most recurring theme that appeared in the first category was that teachers do not choose, but they are rather forced to use Arabic with low level students. This was evident from both the interviews and open-ended surveys. According to the data, the amount of L1 used as a mediational tool would differ according to students’ level in English. The lower the level of students is, the more L1 is used in the EFL classroom. The following quotes demonstrate this finding:

“I will first say it in English once or twice, if I feel they didn’t get it, I might at the end deliver [the intended point] in Arabic... If their level [in English] is very low” (T1).
“The lower level they are, the more Arabic I am forced to use in classroom” (T3).
This denotes that teachers resort to Arabic due to students' poor proficiency level in English. In other words, there is a correlation between the use of Arabic in the EFL classroom and students' low proficiency level.

4.2.2. Using L1 as a Time-Saver
Teachers' use of L1 in the classroom in order to save time has been repeated in many of the teachers’ interviews and questionnaires. For example, T1 states that if his students are struggling to understand a simple issue in English for more than 3-5 minutes, he would then:

“Use Arabic to save time and facilitate the learning” (T1 states).
This was supported by the responses written by teachers in the open-ended questionnaire:
“Using the mother tongue may save us precious time” (TQ7).
The data revealed that majority of the participants indicated that one of the factors behind the teachers' use of L1 is not having enough time in the classroom.

4.2.3. Using the L1 to Maintain Students’ Attention
Within the second category, many of the teachers stated that using L1 sometimes is the only way for them to get their students attention when they are absent-minded or disoriented in class. For example, one teacher commented on this issue thus:

“When students are absent-minded and wonder where we stopped? What’s happening? ... this is a situation I feel obliged to use it [L1]” (T2).
Similarly, another teacher gave another reason for using Arabic in the EFL classroom as follows:

“They do make me speak Arabic... Because sometimes I feel if I use Arabic... They will get this... While if I keep teaching in English, we will get nowhere” (T4).
On this occasion, teachers use L1 to get students back on track in the classroom if they feel they are not getting what is being explained.

4.2.4. Using L1 for New Vocabulary and Grammar
Teachers mentioned many reasons and conditions that make them use L1 in their classrooms, three of which were repeated more than the others. All of the teachers mentioned that when it comes to vocabulary, they all feel the need to use L1 while explaining the new vocabulary. An example of this is represented in the words of the following teachers:

“The resort to the MT can be understandable in very limited situations... mostly as a concept checking strategy; namely, the teaching of vocabulary” (TQ6).
"I use L1 if there is a bad need for a certain word" (TQ9).
“I use mostly English but when there is no way to explain the new vocabulary, after giving examples, putting the new word in sentences, giving synonyms, antonyms, I tend to use Arabic as the last resort” (TQ8).

Data also revealed that the second most common reason teachers gave for the use of L1 in the classroom was to help teach grammar rules. The following extracts clarify this:

“Sometimes, it is easier for students to grasp an idea once it is compared to a previously mastered concept in MT such as the order of adjective and nouns in English which is reversed in Arabic” (TQ5).

“For example, the present perfect is very difficult to explain just in English... And grammar is an abstract thing... There are some similarities and some differences with the Arabic language... So I think grammar is one of the main areas when I use Arabic in teaching... In order to facilitate and explain... The rules for the students to make it easier for them to understand...” (T1).

Other participants also held similar attitudes towards using L1 and teaching English grammar. However, T2 was completely against the use of L1 in teaching grammar as he commented thus:

“Never ... never ... especially in grammar... Because even in teaching grammar, I wouldn’t use the Arabic language ... But I’ll try my best to endorse English... Because language is not only for communication, but it is also for students to try and understand in English. It is better for them ... so that’s why” (T2).

T2 continues to clarify that if he simply translates into L1 for students, they will “get lazy” and would not listen to his explanation in English and just wait for the Arabic version. However, it should be noted that by doing this, T2 is running the risk of students especially the low-level ones of not understanding at all.

4.3 Source(s) of Teachers' Beliefs Regarding L1 Use
The third and final pre-determined category applied to the data was the sources of teachers’ beliefs regarding the use of L1 as a mediational tool. Within this theme, the following three sub-themes emerged: teacher’s training as English language teachers, teachers’ personal knowledge and experience, and finally higher ELI administrative issues. In response to the question: ‘Where do you think your beliefs on the use of L1 in the classroom came from? T2 responded by saying:

“When we were being trained to become English language teachers, I remember the instructors told us how important it was to only speak English to the students ... Because after all this is an English language classroom” (T2).

Interestingly, T1 had a completely different experience in his training as an English language teacher:
“However when I did my MA degree ... I read some articles and we talked about the use of L1 ... And my lecturer and the articles both drew my attention to noticing that the mother tongue should not be avoided in the classroom” (T1).

However, T3 answered by saying:
“I think it is mainly education. I have grown up with the idea that if you use Arabic in the classroom, then this is negative or not good” (T3).

Although both T1 and T3 obtained their degrees from the United Kingdom, they have different experiences with regard to using L1 in the classroom. T1, T2 and T4 all agree that when they were trained, L1 was to be avoided and the whole classroom should be taught in L2, while this did not seem to be the case for T3. The second emerging theme was related to teachers’ use of their personal experiences as L2 learners. The data showed that three of the teachers acknowledged that they are reluctant to use L1 because when they were students, their best L2 teachers did not speak any Arabic at all in the classroom. The following extracts will clarify this point:

“For me it’s something we grew up with since we were at school; the good teacher was the one that didn’t use any Arabic even at school” (T3).
“When I was a learner, I used to look down on the teachers who use Arabic language most of the time” (T2).

The above quotes highlight that teachers’ beliefs have been greatly influenced by their own experiences as second language learners. T2 even admits having a lack of respect towards his teachers who used L1 in the classroom, which indicates how strongly he believes in the total abandonment of L1 in the classroom. This leads us to conclude that among the non-native English language teachers in the ELI, there is this notion that using L1 in the classroom is something negative and should be avoided. Most teachers admit that they have to use it whether according to the different situations in which they find themselves or as required by their students. The third emerging theme in this category indicated that the administration in the ELI interferes in teachers’ practices inside the classroom by discouraging L1’s use. The following extracts pinpoint this view:

"[the ELI administration] is against the use of L1 in the classroom” and that I heard a verbal threat from one of the higher officials [administrative staff he didn’t want to name him or his position] in the institute that “if you use Arabic you might have to think about leaving the institution” (T1).

T3 also confirmed this interference by stating that teachers were instructed:
“to try to only use strictly English as much as possible”.

However, T2 had a slightly different attitude where he added that even if the institution did not openly discourage L1 use, he felt it was his responsibility to maximize the use of L2 in the classroom. He illustrated his view thus:
“The teacher knows what’s best for his students and what’s best for them is that he uses English all the time, and only allows Arabic when there is no other way to make the
5. Discussion of Findings

Analysis of the open-ended questionnaire data revealed that the overall responses of the participants indicated they had a sense of negative attitude towards their students speaking in L1, especially during group work and pair work in the classroom. Although the research found that allowing students to use L1 in the classroom to mediate their learning, they are not happy about that indicating that they do not believe that L1 will actually assist the students in learning L2. On the other hand, research has proven that L1 plays an important role as a mediational tool especially in collaborative activities among learners (Machaal; Song & Samimy, 2015; Z. Wang, 2017).

The argument presented here is that teachers’ awareness of the ELI needs to be raised to include the beneficial factors of L1 use as a mediational tool in the EFL classroom. In addition, all four interviewed teachers also showed negative attitudes towards their use of L1 in the English language classroom, although they were aware of its useful role in their classes. The participants in the surveys also mention further words of caution against L1 use. Therefore, this paper argues that teachers find it difficult to control the use of Arabic. Similarly, Atkinson (1993) integrates communicative methodology with selective and limited use of L1 and notes that "It is impossible to talk of a ‘right balance’ or a perfect model for using L1—it’s not that simple. L1 can be a valuable resource if it is used at appropriate times and inappropriate ways" (p.2). Thus, a balanced approach is needed which regards the role of L1 as a mediational tool, but also recognizes the importance of maximizing L2 use in the classroom. Similarly, results of questionnaires reveal that the majority of teachers think that Arabic is sometimes necessary to explain complex grammar points, to define new vocabulary items, and to change the atmosphere of the class. This reflects what Tavares (2015) elaborates on the situations in which MT is necessary to be used. The data further suggests that the lower the students are, the more L1 teachers are forced to use. This notion of using L1 more with low level students is in line with Pea (1993) and (Wilson, 2016) studies whose results showed that using L1 was one of the significant factors used by teachers with lower level students. It could be argued that exposing low level learners to a vast amount of L2 in order to understand a simple point is not the best approach. The literature revealed that this approach was rejected by Burden (2000) and Cianflone (2009) as they state that the quantity of the exposure to L2 is not as important as the quality of the text materials, the training of teachers and the methodology adopted in teaching. Burden (2000) also states that “increasing the amount of L2 instead of perhaps a simple explanation in the L1 is likely to have a negative effect and simply adds to students' frustration” (p.6). As evident in the data, most participants try as much as possible to avoid using L1 as a mediating tool with low level students, which is also what the administration in the institute encourages. It is suggested that this view of L1 as the last resort needs to be changed and teachers need to be encouraged to resort to L1 when needed especially with low level students. This paper is not advocating that teachers should immediately start explaining in L1, but rather it suggests they acknowledge the fact that L1 could be a valuable tool here if used appropriately whenever and wherever needed. According to the literature, resorting to L1 is a natural phenomenon and should not be avoided (Atkinson, 1987; Harbord, 1992; Nation, 2003). The previous finding also seems to be consistent with
Yildiz and Yesilyurt (2017) findings, which suggests that the use of L1 could save time and allow for more time for practicing L2 in the classroom as students' understanding is more rapidly achieved. Although this is not an exclusive or comprehensive solution to the problem of not having enough time to cover the whole syllabus, it could slightly contribute to solving the problem. Using L1 to ensure getting students’ maximum attention is also supported by Nakatsukasa and Loewen (2015) who found that after careful observation of ESL classes, teachers tend to use L1 when they need to maintain students’ attention and guarantee they are not drifting away.

However, it could be argued that other methods are more effective in maintaining students’ attention. For example, Dörnyei (1994) argues that the teacher needs to introduce "unexpected, novel, unfamiliar, and even paradoxical events; not allowing lessons to settle into too regular a routine; periodically breaking the static character of the classes by changing the interaction pattern and the seating formation and by making students get up and move from time to time” (p.281). This paper argues that in the ELI, the use of L1 to maintain students’ attention is not sufficient on its own to achieve that goal. However, teachers need to be introduced to additional different techniques, such as the ones offered by Dörnyei (1994) to help keep students fully motivated and engaged in the classroom. This could be introduced for teachers in professional development courses and workshops provided by the ELI for its staff. This implies that if the teacher willingly uses L1 for vocabulary learning, it is likely to teach students better than if the teacher was forced to use it or was using it as the last resort without believing in its effectiveness as a called-for mediation and vocabulary understanding. In order to do this, teachers in the ELI need to expand their awareness of L1 and its use in the classroom (Lin, 2015).

This change is in line with Al-Hadhrami and Region (2008) and Al-Shidhani and Region (2009) whose research findings indicated that Saudi EFL teachers and students believe in the effectiveness of L1 use in the English classroom for teaching and explaining vocabulary. Moreover, the notion of explaining difficult points in grammar using L1 is also supported by Duff and Polio (1990) who conducted a study to investigate the amount of L2 used in the foreign language classroom. In their study, 13 teachers were interviewed after being observed in their classrooms. Their study revealed that the majority of teachers favoured using L1 for many reasons including explaining grammar. Atkinson (1987) also supports the use of L1 to teach grammar and states that it is the preferred strategy for most L2 learners. With regards to sources of teachers' beliefs about L1 and its use in the EFL classroom, it could be argued that in the ELI, this is one of the contributing factors why teachers try to avoid the use of L1 as much as possible mainly because of this is how they were trained as English language teachers. It should be noted that Freeman (1989) argues that teacher training programmes sometimes can fall into the trap of having a “fragmented view” on teaching (p.40). For example, in the training of teachers T1, T2 and T4, it could be assumed that the training programme they undertook adopted Krashen (1982’s) view of language learning in that the more comprehensible exposure learners get to L2, the better learners they will become. While the exposure to different materials and literature where L1 was not considered a threat to L2 classroom during his degree in the UK made T1 different in this respect (Macaro, 2005). Therefore, it could be argued that enriching the teacher training
programmes in Saudi Arabia with research results and available data on the benefits of L1 in the classroom will lead to a better understanding of the role played by L1 in the classroom. This could also be implemented in the teacher continuous professional development programmes in the ELI.

The final finding indicated that teachers' role in deciding how to use L1 in the classroom is marginalized, which gives a good example of a typical top-down approach in the context of the study. Adopting this approach indicates that the teachers may not have a strong saying in deciding whether they need to use L1 or not. As a result, this will lead to some negative effects on the teachers' practices in the classroom. For example, some of the students' needs cannot be identified by the administration and as discussed earlier low-level students need to be taught sometimes by using L1. This typically indicates what Crandall (2000) warns about institutions falling into the trap of regarding teachers as passive recipients of transmitted knowledge instead of active participants in the construction of meaning. This paper argues that the teacher needs to be involved as a primary source for what tools should be included in the classroom and what should not (K. E. Johnson & Golombek, 2016; Rymes, 2015). This shift to a sociocultural perspective view of learning in the classroom will help in making use of all the mediational tools available including the use of L1.

6. Conclusion
This present study is in favour of mediated learning and argues that L1 can be a useful tool for students with a low proficiency level in communicating with and learning from their non-native teachers in an EFL setting. This type of interaction between the learner and the teacher creates an opportunity for building new knowledge. Therefore, the use of L1 serves as a mediating tool helping the learners to better understand L2. This means that language in general and L1 in specific is most likely to be a mediational tool in the classroom in all forms of higher thinking in the human brain.

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Dr. Mazin Mansory joined the English Language Institution (formerly the ELC) at King Abdulaziz University in 2008 after receiving his MA degree in English Language Teaching from Nottingham Trent University, UK. In the ELC, he contributed to the teaching and development of the General English and English for Science programmes. As part of his Doctorate thesis at Exeter University, completed in October 2016, he carried out research on teachers’ roles in English Language Assessment, which remains a focal point of his research interests. Mazin is now an Assistant Professor teaching in the MA in TESOL programme in addition to being the Head of Academic Students’ Affairs Unit at the ELI.

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Exploring Teachers' Beliefs and Practices on the Use of the Mother Tongue


Assessing the Writing Assessment
The Perception of Saudi Graduate EFL Learners: A Case Study

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Abstract
This research study followed a qualitatively based research design utilizing semi-structured interviews to investigate the perception and beliefs of Saudi graduate students registered on a Master of Arts (M.A) Applied Linguistics program at a major Saudi government university with regards to the writing assessment practices at the graduate level. The participants who volunteered to take part in this study, were ten male, Saudi MA Applied Linguistics students in their first year of the two-year MA Applied Linguistics course. The collected data, in the form of audio recordings of the participants’ interviews, were transcribed verbatim and thematically analyzed. The analysis of the gathered primary data led to the emergence of four overall themes pertaining to the perceptions of the students of the writing assessments in the M.A. Applied Linguistics course. The study concludes with some pedagogical implications for the EFL graduate context. It also offers some recommendations for current EFL assessment practices and several directions for future research.

Keywords: postgraduate EFL learners, qualitative analysis, Saudi EFL context, writing assessment

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1.0 Background

Writing assessment is rarely a topic of agreement among theorists, practitioners, instructors, and even students in both first (L1) and second (L2) or foreign language (FL) graduate classes (Crusan, Plakans, & Gebril, 2016; Lam, 2018; Polio & Shea, 2014). Writing assessment in a foreign language has the same purpose as in first language classrooms. However, the context of a foreign language provides a completely different platform for writing assessment (Schoonen et al., 2003). One of the reasons why this topic is greatly debated in applied linguistics and second language acquisition research studies, is the fact that it involves so many elements and issues related to it. This is in addition to the fact that it involves a wide spectrum of perceptions and opinions of researchers as well as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL), practitioners.

1.1 Does Assessment Matter?

Writing assessment is rarely a topic of agreement among theorists, practitioners, instructors, and even students (Obeid, 2017). As educators, we are always questioning the best writing assessment methods for our students. We, too, question how and if we can come to a consensus about writing assessment practices. There are persistent questions that all instructors implementing writing assessments seek to answer: What are we trying to accomplish with writing assessments? Which method or methods should we choose? Multiple-choice tests, timed essays, portfolios, standardized tests, research papers, or no assessment at all? Ultimately, the decision of choosing the most appropriate assessment should align with the goals and the visions of the program (Smith, Howarth, & Lynch, 2016); everything must be contextualized to obtain meaningful consequences of our decisions. Moore, O'Neill, and Huot (2009) state that: “Context informs the decision we make as teachers. We consider not only what teaching methods are available but how they coincide with the mission of the school whether they support the goals of a particular program or a course” (p. 59). White (1995) supports this argument, mentioning, “No assessment device is good or bad in itself but only in context” (p. 34). Writing assessments take many shapes, all of which present their own advantages and disadvantages, most specifically in relation to the context in which they are given. However, the purpose of each approach to writing assessment remains the same: to improve the teaching and learning of writing (Crusan, 2010). A writing assessment that uses its local context (specific course outcomes, an actual budget, departmental needs, etc.) to appropriately measure the aptitude of students, and in turn is used to implement further or new pedagogical practices, is certainly the most useful approach to the assessment. As writing is a social activity (Bazerman, 2009; K. Hyland, 2016), it is crucial for those choosing assessment methods to acknowledge this truth to produce effective, reliable, and valid results (K. Hyland, 2016; Thompson & Wittek, 2016).

Recognizing this idea promotes assessments that are based on specific course outcomes, engages students in meaningful writings, and is assessed by another human. Together, these elements produce assessments that are well rounded, positioned to create the most helpful results for all parties involved: the students, the instructors, the department, and the university (Inoue et al., 2016; Pearson, 2017). Writing assessments in the second language (L2) classrooms have the same purpose as in the first language (L1) classrooms, which is a pertinent fact regarding this study. L2 writing assessment theories and practices are entirely borrowed from L1 theories and practices (Brown, 2001, 2003; Paul Kei Matsuda, 2001; Silva & Matsuda, 2012), yet the context of the L2 classroom provides an entirely different platform for an assessment.
As L2 writing students are required to write in the academic and social context of the L2, they come across challenges in writing to which native students are not attuned. This makes an assessment of L2 writing students much more difficult, as they are not writing from the same innate context that native students are capable of (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

1.2 EFL Graduate Level Writing Assessment
The EFL graduate context is immensely complex, as L2 students are asked to write lengthier, more intricate pieces in many genres (Rakedzon & Baram-Tsabari, 2017). Not only are the assignments more difficult, but also the assessments often match, as instructors begin to expect more growth and stronger writing from their students (Fujioka, 2018). However, little research has been conducted regarding L1 graduate student writing, and currently, no research exists in the area of L2 graduate student writing. As writing assessment should be greatly influenced by the context in which it is presented, it is crucial to research this untouched area of study, the L2 graduate student writing context. Though each study about writing assessment will be situated in its specific context, any study at the L2 graduate level will be groundbreaking and advantageous for the area of L2 writing assessments and graduate student writing assessments. As L2 writing assessment poses many challenges (Hamp-Lyons, 2008), and as writing is greatly emphasized in graduate studies (Kamler & Thomson, 2006; Wiggins, 1993), as well as assessments, for the most part, are an integral part of enhancing students’ learning (Hamp-Lyons & Kroll, 1996; Leki, 2006; Weigle, 2002), these initiated the rationale for conducting this research study on a broader spectrum.

Although writing assessment in higher education, namely in Applied Linguistics programs, is greatly controversial and varies from one context to the next, there is a consensus on certain methods of assessment in most Applied Linguistics or Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programs offered in North American, British, and Australian (NABA) English contexts. These Western perspectives of particular writing assessment methods translate into non-Western contexts such as the Saudi context, especially Applied Linguistics master’s programs that focus on preparing EFL students to demonstrate scholarly work through writing for publications, research projects, writing in blogs, reflections, and presentations. The problem here is the contextual differences of popular writing assessment methods that impact non-Western master’s Applied Linguistics programs differently. Though writing assessments aim to help students perfect and polish their academic writing (Mcarthur, 2014), it is significant to realize that not all assessment methods are created equally, and thus, may prove less effective than other methods available (Jin, Warrener, Alhassan, & Jones, 2017). In Applied Linguistics master’s programs, students are required to compose myriad written texts to improve their academic writing skills. Here, the teachers are responsible for assessing their students’ writing and commenting on their assignments, and students should be aware of their teachers’ writing assessment practices because students are the primary and direct affectees of this complicated process.

When it comes to writing assessment at an advanced level, little research has been conducted in the Western context. There are a few studies lightly related to this topic: assessing writing abilities for social work master’s students (Alter & Adkins, 2006); what tasks professors ask graduate students to write across disciplines (Cooper & Bikowski, 2007); analyzing English
as a second language (ESL) students’ interaction with their professors about writing assignments (Fujioka, 2014); how L2 graduate students respond to discipline-based feedback (Kim, 2015); how doctoral students develop their writing abilities using different sources of feedback (Ondrusek, 2012); and examining the writing and response in a graduate course seminar (Cislaru, 2015; Prior, 2013). However, these studies were not able to examine the whole writing assessment practices, and their contexts, of a specific master’s program. To the best of the knowledge of the researcher, as for the EFL graduate context, the teachers’ writing assessment practices remain unexplored and uninvestigated. Thus, the current study aims to investigate this remote area of research (an M.A. Applied Linguistics program in Saudi Arabia) by investigating students’ perceptions of writing assessments at the graduate level in an EFL and non-Western context.

1.3 Writing Assessment for the MA TESOL Applied Linguistics Course
The Applied Linguistics master’s program was chosen for this study for two main reasons. First, this program stresses writing, requiring students to write in English for nearly all assignments, and indeed all writing assessments. It was important to choose a program centered around writing as this study focuses solely on the writing of graduate students. Second, one of the main forms of learning for these students is through their writing assessments, which provides a great platform for collecting data.

Using the opportunity to dissect the writing assessments, and students’ perceptions of these writing assessments that are present in this program, it provided an incredible chance to understand the strengths and weaknesses of certain assessments in this program’s—and specific courses’—contexts. More specifically, this study, therefore, explored the perceptions of Saudi, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) graduate students regarding writing assessment practices in the Saudi context.

1.4 Purpose of the Study
The rationale of this study stems from the hope that this study will illuminate the writing assessment practices at the graduate level in the Saudi context. Additionally, as the study of writing assessment is growing rapidly, it is significant to research the writing assessment of EFL students, especially at the graduate level where the skill of polished academic writing is crucial. Furthermore, as this study aims to assess the writing assessment practices used in a particular non-Western Applied Linguistics master’s program from the students’ point of view, it is significant to acknowledge that evaluating a writing assessment practice provides insight into the positives and negatives of the particular method in use. As such, this can then be used to improve upon the current assessment method or a new method can be implemented in its place.

1.5 Research Questions
This research study is guided by the following main research question:

1. How do students perceive the writing assessment practices at the graduate level in the Saudi context?
1.0 Theoretical Framework
The theoretical framework for a given study should serve the research, aiming to highlight the study’s significance and emphasize its purpose. This understanding coupled with the purpose of this study—looking into how teachers assess graduate students’ writing in the M.A. Applied Linguistics program in the Saudi context—has informed this research by the constructivism research paradigm. The constructivist lens, as it builds the process of meaning making, aided in exploring the individuals’ experiences and perspectives and learn from their points of view about their teachers’ assessment practices. As Clarke (2018) states: “This methodology [social constructivism] considers psychological, sociological, and cultural aspects of our lives as interdependent, and, as such, each has an influence on the other in the way in which we construct social life through relationships, feelings, and action” (p. 5). The latter, together with Vygotsky (1978) activity theory that was developed by Engeström (2001) and Bakhtin (1981) dialogic approach to learning, create a complete theoretical framework for this study, from data collection to data analysis.

2.0 Review of the Literature
Writing is generally regarded as both a “socially situated practice” (Angove, 2016; Buchholz, 2015), formed by disciplinary discourse communities (Işık-Taş, 2018; Tran, 2014) or communities of practice (Matthews, Marquis, & Healey, 2017), and as a “socio-cognitive perspective” (Johnson, Constantinou, & Crisp, 2017; Wang, 2014), which is a practice that cognizant writers use to interact within a socially constructed and mediated world (Elola & Oskoz, 2017; Wells, Lyons, & Auld, 2016) while participating in discourses (Pare, 2017), all with the intention to write and continue learning how to write. We analyze the writing instructions and the writing assessment practices in a given context, the components of the context should be scrutinized.

2.1 Activity Theory and Writing Assessment
As such, the constructivism paradigm, as well as the activity theory, are the main theoretical frameworks of this study. The role of activity theory is to ensure the dialogue between the multiple perspectives within a system. This is where the dialogic approach to learning comes into play because of its nature that provides the communication between activity theory components (Kuutti, 1996). The activity theory is an excellent tool for understanding how writing assessments work within a given context. As there are numerous writing assessment approaches and methods, it can be challenging to choose the most advantageous assessment.

Perhaps the most critical element to consider is the context in which the assessment is given, which is where activity theory comes into play. Without understanding and catering to context, an assessment could be ineffectual (O'Neill, Moore, & Huot, 2009). Using activity theory to situate an assessment certainly raises the opportunity for fruitful assessments, for both students and instructors. Figure 1 illustrates the different elements an activity theory.
2.2 Writing Assessment as a Social and Cultural Practice

Looking through activity theory as a lens illuminates just how social and cultural assessment practices are (MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2008). Assessments require involvement from multiple areas: instructors, students, the curriculum, the institution, and so forth. For an assessment to be successful, all elements must be considered (Newton et al., 2018). This means recognizing that assessments are socially and culturally situated, and thus rely heavily on the dynamic communication among all elements involved (Jeffery & Wilcox, 2014). The activity theory allows for a greater understanding of social and cultural practices in relation to writing assessments. Elmberger, Björck, Liljedahl, Nieminen, and Bolander Laksov (2018) reasoned that this theory could be used as a framework for implementing innovations. In the same line, Sannino and Nocon (2008) believe it provides “analytical tools for understanding constraints and barriers to innovations in schools as well as possible new means to overcome them and to support sustainable, innovative change efforts” (p. 326). Using activity theory to understand better social and cultural practices and how they affect assessments can further the knowledge of, and better educate our choices for, assessments in the future. It is essential to situate activity theory and the dialogic approach within this study, as they lend a higher hand to understanding the larger picture. Figure 2 demonstrates the six main components of activity theory situated within this study. It also highlights the areas in which the dialogic approach could most likely play a role, the areas in which student–teacher interaction would be most prominent (the lighter lines).
Assessing the Writing Assessment

2.3 The Saudi Writing Context
The Saudi writing context is a difficult one, with many factors impacting the EFL learning process, including student L1 abilities, teaching habits, and the educational system (Al-Seghayer, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2018). All of these variables have created a difficult context in which students must learn EFL, and instructors must teach EFL. Variables such as these can be easily uncovered in studies focusing on Saudi EFL students by implementing activity theory, exposing many hidden factors that greatly impact an outcome. With the knowledge presented in many research studies (in the Saudi context) using elements of activity theory, it is not absurd to believe the Saudi writing context may have a large impact on the state of EFL writing assessments, further continuing the cycle of poor Saudi EFL writing skills (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Obeid, 2017; Rajab, Khan, & Elyas, 2016). The state of EFL in Saudi Arabia is lacking, affecting students’ abilities to develop strong writing skills and positive habits. One might draw a connection between poor writing and writing assessments: do poor student writing abilities lead to poor writing assessments from teachers? As students lie stagnant in their EFL writing abilities, teachers may lower their writing assessment outcomes, demanding less and less improvement from their students, ultimately challenging students less and less.

2.4 Writing Practices at the Graduate Level
Writing at the graduate level is significantly different than the undergraduate level for several reasons (Bailey, 2014). A common expectation of students from their instructors is the sheer amount of writing required, and the breadth of that writing. Students may be required to write several types of papers, such as literature reviews, article and book critiques, position papers, essays, manuscripts, articles, reports, proposals, theses, and dissertations (Paltridge, 2014) — several types of papers that students might not have written during their undergraduate education. Learning a new document style in a short period is a daunting task, especially achieving this success in a second language. Graduate-level writing requires a wide knowledge of document styles and a strong understanding of how to adopt a proper writing style per document. (Kamler & Thomson, 2014) found that the humanities and social science fields ranked the importance of writing skills higher than the science and technology fields. This research suggests that adequate academic writing skills are much more important in fields of study that require much more writing.
of their students. For Saudi students studying EFL at the graduate level, this is highly significant, as the bar rises regarding their writing abilities as they enter the graduate-level EFL program.

2.5 L2 Graduate Students’ Writing

Writing at the academic level for second language writing (SLW) students is one of the most challenging tasks for students, as it requires them to call upon academic literacies, build upon those literacies, while adapting to L2 social and academic cultures, also respecting and taking into account the goals of instructors, yet still maintaining personal goals (Chang, 2016; F. Hyland, 2016; Langum & Sullivan, 2017). The task of academic SLW is indeed more complicated than most instructors, students, and even researchers understand. Though many instructors expect writing at the graduate level to be innate and solitary, the reality is that many students need guidance, especially SLW students. Writing assessment lends a hand to these students who are in need of further guidance. Al-Zubaidi (2012) discusses the difficulties of Arab students writing in the English academic context at the graduate level, maintaining that attaining a correct academic style is one of the most difficult things for nonnative students to achieve. Using elements of activity theory, he found that one reason for this particular difficulty is that most English academic writing courses ignore the fact that Arab students have a markedly different background in academic literacy than that of English. This problem then places Arab students with the sole responsibility of learning new academic literacies before being able to write research papers, theses, and dissertations successfully. The weight of this difficulty for Arab students translates into negative attitudes that often reflect in writing assignments. This study proves the significant challenge SLW students have when writing for graduate courses.

2.6 Writing Assessment Practices

Writing at the graduate level is vastly different than writing at the undergraduate level, as writing is the main form of communication between students and teachers, as well as the main opportunity for grading. It is fair to say that the educational career of graduate students greatly hinges on their ability to write and communicate effectively through their writing. In this section, let me introduce the types of writing assessment that are usually implemented at the graduate level and how the related studies discussed them.

There are several different types of writing assessments such as quizzes, exams, portfolios, short writing assignments, and lengthier essay assignments. Though each assessment has one main goal, to measure a student’s writing ability, the kind of assessment chosen measures this ability differently. Placement assessments aim to measure a student’s performance at the beginning of a course (D. R. Ferris, Evans, & Kurzer, 2017). Diagnostic assessments determine problems that consistently occur during a student’s learning process, aiming to resolve these issues and continue forward (Knoch, 2009). Formative assessments gauge a student’s progress during the progression of the course (Huhta, 2008). Lastly, summative assessments measure whether the goals set at the beginning of the course were obtained by the student.

3.0 Methodology

This study is conducted by using a qualitative methodology that describes and discusses specific phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Silverman (2016) recommended using qualitative methods when the intended data is verbal, expressing opinions, attitudes, and beliefs.
3.1 Participants
For the purpose of this study, I chose to implement purposeful selection in recruiting the participants of this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As Yin (2009) indicated, proper selection of participants is significant for credible case studies. The purposeful selection was convenient in allowing the careful selection of the best group of participants who surely informed this study. Due to the cultural restrictions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) where gender mixing in education is not permitted at government educational institutions, only male participants took part in this study.

3.2 Data Collection
The gathering of the primary data was carried out utilizing semi-structured interviews which lasted between 45 – 60 minutes each. The recorded audio of each interview was transcribed verbatim and digitally saved into a password secured files on the researcher’s laptop.

4.0 Data Analysis
Informed by the grounded theory in social constructivism which assumes that relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings (Charmaz, 2014), the gathered data from the interviews were coded and thematically analyzed for emerging themes (Saldaña, 2015). While conducting this study, trustworthiness criteria which entails categorizing four areas—credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability—to establish a foundation of trust within the study, was followed (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013).

5.0 Discussion and Conclusions
One main coding scheme resulted from the data analysis procedure, and under this coding scheme, four subcategories emerged accordingly. This coding scheme addressed the students’ perceptions of the writing assessment practices.

5.1 Saudi Graduate Students’ Perceptions toward the Writing Assessment Tools
There four subcategories that reflected the students’ perceptions regarding the chosen assessment methods, in each of their courses, are:

5.1.1 Reliance on Tests
The examination is a means to measure a student’s performance in a given area of study. Evidence obtained from this study revealed that there was too much focus on examination, which became a detriment to the teaching and learning processes. As shown in Table 6, all participants expressed their reluctance to rely on exams as the main form of assessment in their M.A. Applied Linguistics program. For example, the following excerpts provided insight into how these students (pseudonyms) prefer to learn, and how they perceived the heavy emphasis on exams as unprofitable regarding improving and sculpting their research-writing skills:

"It’s all about what we do in exams. We actually prefer to write papers because they are more beneficial and less stressful." (Basim)
Yeah, I don’t feel prepared, I don’t practice doing research. I don’t practice on this. Instead, when I went through this course, as I was reading, I only prepare myself for the exam. (Ahmed)

I don’t want exams. I want something that can help me improve my research skills and critical thinking. Depending only on exams is actually bad for our program outcomes. (Khalid).

As shown above, each student commented that the examinations do not make them feel prepared for research writing. Without an emphasis in assessments on honing their research-writing skills, these students feel at a loss, even stating that focusing so heavily on exams is “bad for our program outcomes” (Basim). These perceptions portray a difficult assessment style for these students and a longing for an assessment method that would improve the skills for which they came to this program.

### 5.1.2 Lack of Research Writing Experience

This subcategory highlights how the institution paid little attention to the purpose of research-related writing activities, and instead placed more focus on examinations and final scores. The majority of the students felt that building proper research skills was an afterthought in this MA program. There are many reasons why students in an M.A. program should be encouraged and taught how to develop and mold their research-writing skills. Below, Anas and Ahmed (pseudonyms) touch on these reasons:

*We didn’t have to write a lot of research assignments; it’s all small assignments. I think it might be difficult for us to write long research papers, but it will be helpful too especially when it’s the time to start writing our Masters thesis... As a graduate student, I need more research papers because I need more preparation to conduct research and this will help me to write good thesis at the end of the program.* (Anas)

*How do you expect me to write and then defend my thesis if you just focus on exams? I don’t think any student will be able to write good thesis if there is no attention on research papers in courses.* (Ahmed)

### 5.1.3. Required Research Topics

According to the reported data, all students must write about the same research topics assigned by the teacher, which are listed in the course syllabus. Around 70% of students showed unsatisfactory opinions about the preselected research topics. The following interview excerpts are examples of students’ responses to this issue:

*All the assignment topics or questions were chosen by teachers, we didn’t have the opportunity to choose our research topics. All topics are imposed on us, and we all write about the same thing.* (Khalid)

*We want to be free to choose our research topic. We want to select a good idea because we are going to learn new idea, new style of learning, new way to gain the information. I think this is a traditional way of assessment.* (Basim)

*I had the chance to study English in UK in a summer program. We were from different ages and different nationalities in ESL class, but the teacher asked us to write about anything we
want. Here, we are graduate students and we don’t choose our research topics. It’s quite unacceptable. (Faisal)

Illustrated in the excerpts above, graduate students showed different interests towards research. They wanted to have the freedom to choose their own research topic when their teachers asked them to write a research paper. Khalid expressed this concern clearly when he said, “All topics are imposed on us and we all write about the same thing”. In line with Khalid’s perception, Basim mentioned that students should have the chance to write about what they like. As for Faisal, he had the opportunity to study some ESL classes in the UK. He experienced the difference between given a chance to write about whatever students like and what teachers like. Faisal described imposed research topic as “unacceptable”.

5.1.4 Same Assessment Practices in Either Semester
Another important theme that emerged was the stagnation in assessment practices. The majority of the students reported that the assessment methods were fixed, providing zero change or variance between the two academic semesters of this study. The students believed this was a downfall, especially in relation to the improvement (or lack thereof) of their learning experiences and overall knowledge and practice of the course material.

Below, Hassan, Kareem, and Fahad explained their point of view, each noting something different:

Nothing has changed in the second semester. It’s all the same imposed assessment tools on teachers by the institution. And the amount of feedback on papers is still less and less. (Hassan)
We came to the second semester hoping that there will be a change in the evaluation, but we were wrong. It actually remained the same and we don’t blame teachers for that. We know they can’t do anything about it. (Kareem)
Exams are following us, the amount of the research papers and other assignment might be the same, but mostly I didn’t notice any changes. These are my writing samples look at them and tell me if you notice any changes in feedback or types of assignment. (Fahad)

Hassan, along with many other students in this study, remarked blatantly that the assessment methods did not change in the slightest, but even worse that the students received less feedback than before. Kareem pointed out that he understands the lack of change in assessments was not necessarily the teachers’ fault. Also, Fahad commented that not only did the assessment methods not change, but neither did his writing skills.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications
Gathering and working to understand students’ perceptions about writing assessments might be crucial for some programs, particularly SLW programs where writing assessments might be key to furthering students’ abilities and their grasp of writing academically in the L2. The goal of gathering and understanding the students’ perceptions is not to mold writing assessments to their needs and likings, but rather to understand the assessment through their eyes. This opportunity allows teachers and students alike to understand what works best for them, perhaps what each was expecting to get
out of the assessment, and ideas for how to improve the assessment in the future. Understanding an assessment through the students’ eyes—the participants—could expand its purpose, further reach the students, and even the teachers, persuading them to grow and develop their writing skills quicker, more efficiently, and most important, effectively. As per the data gathered in this study and from the students’ perspectives, it is suggested that stakeholders and decision makers of graduate level courses have an overall view of what the needs are of the students as well as a comprehensive evaluation of the writing assessment followed in such courses. As such, teachers, as well as the students, can have their say and voice their concerns regarding any element of the assessment process.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research
This study was conducted with ten male participants at a major university in Saudi Arabia. It would be greatly recommended to include a much wider base with more participants from several universities as well as exploring different graduate courses’ writing assessment process as perceived by the learners and the teachers. Additionally, since the researcher only managed to include male participants in this study, a study that will include female participants will be an added value and an opportunity to explore more opinions and beliefs about the writing assessment process at the graduate level.

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An Optimality Approach to Saudi Learners’ Production of Regular English Past Tense Verbs

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Abstract
This study provides an Optimality Theory (OT) analysis of morphological variability in Arabic coda productions of second language (L2) English. Previous studies show that L2 learners of English sometimes produce the verb with proper past tense inflectional morphology as in help[t] and sometimes repair the cluster, as in helpø or hel[pø]. Complicating matters, these studies focused on L2 learners whose native languages disallowed codas or had very restricted codas. Thus, it is difficult to tell whether any problems in producing past tense morphology are due to L1-transferred coda constraints. To rule out native language syllable structure interference, this paper examines the production of the English regular past tense verb by Saudi learners, a language that allows complex codas. The analysis is done within and OT framework because OT allows possible outputs to be generated by the grammar based on the constraint ranking which one is the optimal candidate. The data come from 22 ESL students at three levels of proficiency. The task was a sentence list eliciting target clusters in past tense contexts fricative + stop ([st], [ft]) vs. stop + stop ([pt], [kt]). Results show that first language (L1) Arabic speakers have difficulty in producing past tense morphology, even though their L1 allows complex codas. The results show that L2 learners in this study do not begin with their native language constraint ranking because lower level learners delete a consonant from the coda cluster. However, the results do show that as the learners progress in the acquisition process, the constraints are re-ranked to reach target productions.

Keywords: English past tense morphology, Optimality Theory, Saudi learner, variable production

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1. Introduction

The variability in the production of inflectional morphology by second language learners has been a well-studied issue in L2 research. Second language learners of English show an inconsistency in marking the regular past tense verb with proper inflection. For example, an L2 learner might produce *I help[t] my sister last night* with proper past tense marking. At other times, the learner might produce *I skipø school yesterday* with missing tense marking on the verb. Other times second language learners modify the cluster by adding an epenthetic vowel *I hel[pad] John*. Various studies propose different reasons behind the variability of inflectional morphology (Goad, White & Steele, 2003; Lardiere, 1998, 2017; Prapobaratanakul & Pongpairoj, 2016; Prevost & White, 2000; Solt et al., 2004; Whatley, 2013). However, not many attempts at explaining the reason behind morphological variability in the second language have been done within an OT framework. Thus, this paper aims to investigate the production of the English regular past tense morpheme by L2 learners. The study examines these productions within an Optimality Theory framework (Prince & Smolensky 1993, McCarthy & Prince 1993). Optimality theory provides us with a set of possible grammars. It shows how these grammars can be learned through constraint re-ranking (Broselow & Xu, 2004). In addition, OT allows possible outputs to be generated by the grammar based on the constraint ranking which one is the optimal candidate (Hancin-Bhatt, 2000). These sets of constraints are presumed to be universal, but the rankings are language specific.

2. Literature Review

Many studies in L2 phonology done in an OT framework have been able to account for structures that have been observed by second language learners. For example, Hancin-Bhatt (2000) examines Thai second language learners’ production of English codas within an OT framework. She studies 11 native speakers of Thai enrolled in an intensive English program in the United States. She chose Thai native speakers because Thai codas are restricted than English. Thai only allows simple codas and not any segment is permitted. The possible codas in Thai are voiceless stops, the three nasals in their inventory (m, n, ŋ) and glides. In addition, Thai has a constraint called CODA-AC which states that it is more harmonious to have nasals, glides and simple stops (non-aspirated, voiceless no co-articulated points of articulation) in coda position than fricatives and /l/. Thai does not allow complex codas as well. In summary, Thai codas have the following ranking, (taken from Hancin-Bhatt, 2000):

*Complex, CODA-AC >> DEP-IO >> MAX-IO >> IDENT-IO

Hancin – Bhatt (2000) assumes FA/FT proposed by Schwarz and Sprouse (1996). She claims that Thai second language learners of English will transfer their Thai constraint ranking into English at the initial stage. She also states that since these constraints are part of UG, learners will have access to additional constraints. She hypothesizes that for Thai speakers to produce English codas, they must re-rank their native Thai constraints. They must demote *Complex to produce English complex clusters. They must also re-rank the constraints within CODA-AC to allow a greater range of segments in the coda. Hancin-Bhatt (2000) tests 72 monosyllabic nonsense English words. She conducts two tasks: a coda identification task and a production task (divided between simple and complex codas). The results of the production of the simple codas show that the participants produce nasals close to 100% accuracy, fricatives reach 89% accuracy, and voiceless stops reach 67% accuracy only. These results show that nasals are the easiest to
produce in coda position. If compared with CODA-AC constraint in Thai, learners have already started to re-rank the constraints within CODA-AC. Another observation in the simple coda production is the type of errors produced. The participants preferred to substitute rather than delete or epenthesize. This suggests that these L2 learners are transferring their highly ranked faithfulness constraints into the L2 grammar. They prefer not to violate MAX-IO and DEP-IO similar to Thai. The complex coda production shows that error rates on complex codas are higher than simple codas. Liquid + stop clusters have a 61% accuracy rate, liquid + fricative are 73% and liquid + nasal have a 55% accuracy rate. These percentages suggest that these L2 learners have demoted *Complex below faithfulness in order to produce complex codas, but this constraint re-ranking is not stable yet. The major findings of the study suggest that Thai learners of English use their native ranking in parsing English syllables. The stages of development are as follows: Stage0 (initial stage) *Complex and Coda-AC are ranked higher than FAITH constraints (Thai constraint ranking transferred). Stage1 represents the re-ranking of constraints within CODA-AC. Stage2 shows demotion of *Complex below FAITH. However, these learners do not show any re-ranking within faithfulness constraints. In conclusion, OT provides for an explicit definition of the stages of L2 phonological development. Another study that uses Optimality theory in their analysis was conducted by Broselow et al. (1998). Their data comes from Wang’s (1995) study done on native Mandarin speakers learning English as a second language. The study that Wang (1995) conducted tested ten native Mandarin speakers that learned English in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context for an average of 6-7 years and had been in an English-speaking country for less than a year. Mainly, the focus of the study was on coda production. Mandarin is highly restrictive in their codas. It only allows glides and nasals (n, ñ) in coda position and no obstruents. Broselow et al. (1998) looked at the production of English voiceless stops /p,t,k/ and voiced stops /b,d,ɡ/ in coda position. Broselow et al. (1998) claim that Mandarin speakers begin with their native Mandarin ranking of codas: NO OBS CODA >> MAX (C) >> DEP (V). These Mandarin L2 speakers of English will not violate the highly ranked markedness constraint NO OBS CODA when producing English codas. The choice then becomes either violating MAX (C) or DEP (V). The data shows that there is variation in which constraint to violate entailing that there is a variation in the simplification strategy (epentheses vs. deletion) chosen. Based on the data, these learners prefer bi-syllabic forms. Therefore, the constraint WD BIN (words should consist of two syllables) was added to the analysis. The way this constraint plays into the grammar is if the learner is faced with an input that contained a word-final voiced stop coda, the learner cannot violate the highly ranked NO OBS CODA. Therefore, the learner has a choice to violate either MAX (C) or DEP (V). When faced with which constraint to violate, the learner then chooses the form that satisfies the constraint WD BIN (i.e. bi-syllabic). Broselow et al (1998) also examined the devoicing of coda obstruents in these learners’ productions. Mandarin does not do allow either voiced or voiceless obstruents, but English allows them. In spite of this, some participants choose to devoice the obstruent (a process that does not occur in English). As a result, Broselow et al. (1998) argue that this is a clear case of the emergence of the unmarked. They propose a new ranking of constraints for Mandarin: NO CODA OBS, NO VOICED OBS CODA >> MAX (C), DEP (V), IDENT (VOI). Participants who devoice their obstruent codas have demoted the constraint NO OBS CODA below the faithfulness constraints, but NO VOICED OBS CODA is still highly ranked. This interlanguage grammar is different from both the native language and target language. Broselow et al. (1998) conclude that the interlanguage of a second language learner does not necessarily have to show structures from the native language or the
target language. The Mandarin speakers in Wang’s (1995) demonstrated that many of the forms are dependent on their native and target languages. In addition, the results support that constraints are always present in the grammar, but learners must induce the re-ranking of these constraints and not the constraints themselves. Alves (2004) examines the acquisition of English “ed” morpheme by Brazilian Portuguese speakers within and OT framework. The data were collected from seven undergraduate Brazilian Portuguese (BP ) speakers learning English as a second language. BP allows a restrictive set of segments in a single coda (/n, s, r, l/) and the only complex coda is /rs/. Alves (2004) tested target forms such as: [pt], [kt], [ft], [bd], [vd], [nd], [md], [st], [ld], [rd] which were divided into two groups (A and B). Group A verbs contained a complex coda whose penultimate consonant is not allowed in a single coda position by BP ex: lived, watched and stopped. Group B verbs contained a complex coda whose penultimate consonant is allowed in a single coda position by BP ex: missed, passed, traveled and remembered. Alves (2004) claims that learners do not begin with BP syllabic constraint ranking: MAX >> CodaCond >> DEP >> Contig >> NoCoda >> NoComplex. Alves (2004) has shown that the learners’ interlanguage goes through various processes of constraint re-ranking. In addition, the results have shown not just constraint demotion, but the acquisition of new underlying structure as seen in ([lɪvɪd] and [mɪstɪd]). The above studies have been able to provide a clear picture of the developmental stages L2 learners go through in order to reach target productions in the second language. However, the participants in the study all had restricted codas in their native language. Therefore, one can assume that these learners begin with the constraint rankings from their native language. On the other hand, if L2 learners’ native language does allow similar codas as the target language, shall we expect them to transfer the constraint ranking as well? The goal of this study is to look at the production of the regular English past tense by native Arabic learners, specifically from Saudi Arabia. Will these learners simply begin with their native language constraints on codas? This study will also explain the various stages that second language learners go through in order to achieve target-like productions in regular English past verbs.

3. Methodology

The data is from 22 native Arabic speakers from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia who are enrolled in ESL classes in the United States. The participants were tested on the production of the regular English past tense verb. They all speak one dialect: Hijazi Arabic (spoken in the Western province of Saudi Arabia). The participants were divided into three groups according to their proficiency level (low, n= 7, intermediate, n= 9, and high, n= 6). Their placement in the three proficiency levels was based on their level placement in the English Language Institute at George Mason University. For the low proficiency group, they were enrolled in mid-beginning classes. For the intermediate proficiency group, they were enrolled in high intermediate classes and for the high proficiency group they were enrolled in high advanced classes. In addition, nine native speakers of English were used as a control group.

3.1 Experiment

An elicited production task was used to obtain target clusters in English. The participants were asked to read sentences that consisted of regular past tense verbs. In order to rule out orthographic interference, the participants were asked to place the verb in parentheses in the past tense. Examples of test sentences are shown below in sentences 1 and 2 (for the complete list, refer to appendix A).
(1) John ______ (stop) his speech  
(2) Bill and Mary ______ (use) her exam

A total of 26 regular past tense verbs were tested. The selected verbs targeted certain types of codas formed (Obs + /t/ or /d/) and (Obs + /əd/). They were either an obstruent plus the allomorph /t/ or /d/ or an obstruent plus the allomorph /əd/. The selected verbs either matched in manner such as stop + /t,d/ or it did not, such as fricative + /t,d/. Table 1 below shows a complete list of the targeted past tense verbs and the clusters formed. Each participant was audio-recorded using a digital recorder in a soundproof lab, and each recording was transcribed by the experimenter.

Table 1. Past tense verbs used in the production task divided by allomorph

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past tense morpheme</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Cluster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[t]</td>
<td>stopped, dropped, locked, baked</td>
<td>[pt]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kissed, missed, laughed, bluffed</td>
<td>[kt]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>washed, crashed, watched</td>
<td>[st]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[d]</td>
<td>described, bribed, mugged, hugged</td>
<td>[bd]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>advise, use, clothe, bathe, judge, damage</td>
<td>[zd]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[əd]</td>
<td>knit, land, head</td>
<td>No cluster</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that the addition of the English past tense morpheme results in either stop + stop cluster ‘sto[pt]’ or fricative + stop clusters ki[st]. An important note here is that all the participants in the study speak Hijazi Arabic. This dialect allows word-final clusters of stop + stop and fricative + stop. Hijazi Arabic has words like kata[pt] ‘I wrote’, ra[pt] ‘to tie’, ge[st] ‘I tried on’. Some that are morphological and others are not. Table 2 shows the syllable structure in Standard Arabic.

Table 2. Standard Arabic syllable structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllable type</th>
<th>Arabic example</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CV</td>
<td>[la]</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>The most common syllable structure in Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVV</td>
<td>[let.sa]</td>
<td>not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVC</td>
<td>[ka.tab]</td>
<td>He wrote</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVVC</td>
<td>[kaf.taean]</td>
<td>A type of material</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVCC</td>
<td>[ka.taean]</td>
<td>I wrote - past</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on this fact, one can expects that Saudi second language learners of English will transfer the syllable structure from their L1 to the L2 regardless of proficiency level.
3.2 Results
The production task elicited a total of 572 tokens of regular past tense verb productions from the L2 participants. 176 tokens were stop + /t,d/ clusters, 330 tokens were fricative + /t,d/ clusters and 66 were [əd] allomorph. Table 3 shows the classification of the cluster types analyzed in the study.

Table 3. Classification of cluster types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type A</td>
<td>Stop + stop</td>
<td>The addition of the regular past tense will result in a cluster of stop + stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type B</td>
<td>Fricative + stop</td>
<td>The addition of the regular past tense will result in a cluster of fricative + stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type C</td>
<td>Syllabic</td>
<td>The addition of the regular past tense will result in no cluster, but an addition of a syllable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis in this paper does not include type C verbs. The addition of the morpheme in type C does not result in a cluster. The scope of this paper is only the production of past tense verbs that result in a word-final coda cluster. The results were coded according to learners’ production to see whether they produced the correct form or repaired the cluster (epenthesis or deletion). However, the analysis only included where the participants showed deletion. The reason why the analysis only included deletion and not epenthesis is that only four tokens were epenthesized so they were discarded from the analysis. In addition, the analysis included the effect of proficiency level and cluster type (where the cluster formed matches in manner or not) on their production. Table 4 summarizes the percentage of deletion by proficiency level and cluster type.

Table 4. Percentage of deletion by proficiency level and cluster type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Native</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a= stop+/t,d/</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td>40.27</td>
<td>22.91</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b= fricative+/t,d/</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C=syllabic</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>18.51</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A more detailed analysis into the data shows that overall deletion across the three different verb groups is highest in low proficiency speakers (35%). Deletion decreases when the proficiency level is higher (intermediate= 18.37%, high = 14.74%). Finally, the native control group showed 0% deletion. Figure 1 below summarizes the percentage of overall deletion by proficiency level.
In addition to the proficiency level, the type of cluster affects the percent of deletion. Type A clusters (stops + /t,d/) show a higher percentage of deletion than Type B cluster (fricatives + /t,d/). Figure 2 shows the percentage of deletion in each cluster type.

A look at the results in figure 2 indicates that there is an overall tendency to repair clusters from type A (stop + /t,d/) than types B (fricative + /t,d/) and C (syllabic) regardless of proficiency level. In addition, low proficiency learners tend to repair clusters at a higher rate than the intermediate and high groups.
4. Analysis of the data

This section focuses on the analysis of the data within an OT framework. Before attempting to do so, an analysis of Arabic’s coda constraints are presented. Arabic allows a coda consisting of CC in a word-final position such as the word ‘kata[pt] – I wrote’. The cluster [pt] is morphological, and it is in the past tense. Based on this, I can propose the following constraints for word-final codas in Arabic:

*ComplexCoda: Complex codas prohibited  
OCP[cont]: No adjacent consonants that agree in continuancy  
Align[R,stem]: the right edge of the stem must align with the right edge of the word  
*Max: every segment of the input has a correspondent in the output (no phonological deletion).

Based on what Arabic allows, the constraint Max is highly ranked. Therefore, deletion is not allowed. The constraint *ComplexCoda is ranked low to allow coda clusters. The constraint ALIGN(R,stem) is also ranked low, but this constraint determines which segment is deleted if deletion occurs. Finally, OCP[cont] disallows adjacent sounds that match in continuancy. However, there is no evidence of the ranking between OCP[cont] and *ComplexCoda. Tableau (1) below shows how these constraints interact in native Arabic for the verb ‘kata[pt]’.

Tableau (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>kata/pt</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>OCP[cont]</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCODA</th>
<th>ALIGN(R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a kata[p]</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b kata[t]</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c kata[pt]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Tableau (1), the following constraint ranking is purposed for Arabic:

MAX >> OCP[cont] , *ComplexCoda >> ALIGN(R,stem)

Looking at the native Arabic constraint ranking, Arabic second language learners of English should simply transfer their native constraints to English. They should have no trouble producing coda clusters in the target language. Yet, when looking at the results of the study, this is not the case. The analysis begins by looking at low proficiency learners and the production of stop+stop and fricative+stop clusters. The verbs ‘stop’ and ‘bribe’ are used to represent all voiceless and voiced word-final coda clusters containing of a stop + stop. The verbs ‘kiss’ and ‘move’ are used to represent all the voiceless and voiced word-final coda clusters containing of a fricative + stop.
4.1 Low Proficiency Learners Analysis

Looking at the production of this group, we find that these learners delete the [t] or [d] that results from the clusters. An example of their production of stop+stop clusters: sto[pt] is produced as sto[p] and bri[bd] is produced as bri[bd]. Therefore, the initial ranking of the constraints cannot be their native language ranking. Tableaus (2) and (3) show how they rank their constraints.

Tableau (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sto/pt/</th>
<th>OCP[cont]</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCOD</th>
<th>MA X</th>
<th>ALIGN( R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⇡ sto[p]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sto[t]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sto[pt]</td>
<td>!</td>
<td>!</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tableau (3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bri/bd/</th>
<th>OCP[cont]</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCOD</th>
<th>MA X</th>
<th>ALIGN( R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⇡ bri[b]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bri[d]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bri[bd]</td>
<td>!</td>
<td>!</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order for bri[b] and sto[p] to be the optimal output, the learners rank OCP[cont] and *ComplexCoda the highest. They demote the constraint MAX so deletion is permitted. The constraint ALIGN(R,stem) is ranked similar to Arabic. The function of this constraint is to guarantee that learners will not delete a segment that is part of the root. They will only delete the morphology to repair the cluster. The same phenomenon can be observed with fricative+stop clusters. The actual productions from these learners for ki[st] and mo[vd] is ki[s] and mo[v] (represented in tables (3) and (4). Learners delete the morphology to repair the clusters.

Tableau (4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ki/st /</th>
<th>OCP[cont]</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCOD</th>
<th>MA X</th>
<th>ALIGN(R , stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a ⇡ ki[s]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ki[t]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
<td>!</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ki[st]</td>
<td>!</td>
<td>!</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tableaus 2 – 5 above show that these learners at this level treat all clusters similarly where they delete the morphology. It is clear that the markedness constraints dominate the ranking and faithfulness constraints are demoted. In summary, the constraint ranking for low proficiency learners is:

OCP[cont], *ComplexCoda >> MAX >> ALIGN(R,stem)

### 4.2 Intermediate Proficiency Learners Analysis

The production of intermediate proficiency speakers for stop+stop clusters is similar to low proficiency learners. The tableaus below show that markedness constraints are highly ranked. They prefer to delete than be faithful to the input.

Tableau (6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sto/pt /</th>
<th>OCP[cont]</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCODA</th>
<th>MA X</th>
<th>ALIGN(R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>!</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Tableau (7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bri/bd/</th>
<th>OCP[cont]</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCODA</th>
<th>MA X</th>
<th>ALIGN(R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
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<td>*!</td>
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<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>!</td>
<td>*</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the other hand, fricative+stop clusters are treated differently. The intermediate proficiency learners do not delete the final segment. They produce ki[st] and mo[vd] as ki[st] and mo[vd]. Therefore, learners have re-ranked the constraints at this stage. Tableaus (8) and (9) show how they re-ranked the constraints.

Tableau (8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OCP[con]</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCOD</th>
<th>ALIGN(R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ki/st/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>ki[s]</td>
<td></td>
<td>*!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>ki[t]</td>
<td></td>
<td>*!</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>≡ ki[s t]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tableau (9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OCP[con]</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCOD</th>
<th>ALIGN(R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mo/vd/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>mo[v]</td>
<td></td>
<td>*!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>mo[d]</td>
<td></td>
<td>*!</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>≡ mo[v d]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the production of fricative+stop clusters, the learners at this stage have demoted *ComplexCoda below MAX. This suggests that they are already re-ranking their constraints to reach target-like constraint ranking. To reach a uniform analysis for intermediate learners in general, Tableaus (6) and (7) do not represent the correct constraint ranking. Therefore, the proposed ranking for stop+stop clusters is represented in Tableaus (10) and (11).

Tableau (10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OCP[con]</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCOD</th>
<th>ALIGN(R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sto/pt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>sto[p]</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>sto[t]</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>sto[pt ]</td>
<td></td>
<td>*!</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tableau (11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OCP[con]</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCOD</th>
<th>ALIGN(R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bri/bd</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>bri[b]</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
For intermediate language learners, the constraint ranking for word-final coda clusters are as follows:
OCP[cont] >> MAX >> *ComplexCoda >> ALIGN(R,stem)

4.3 High Proficiency Learners Analysis

High proficiency speakers’ production is similar to target productions. They treat all clusters similarly. They do not show any deletion of a consonant from the cluster. They produce sto[pt] as sto[pt] and ki[st] as ki[st]. There is no distinction between the types of clusters. The tableaus below represent these learners’ constraint ranking at this level of proficiency. Tableaus (12) and (13) represent stop+stop clusters and tableaus (14) and (15) represent fricative+stop cluster.

Tableau (12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>OCP[cont]</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCoda</th>
<th>ALIGN(R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sto/pt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td>!</td>
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<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td>!</td>
<td></td>
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<td>!</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Tableau (13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>OCP[cont]</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCoda</th>
<th>ALIGN(R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bri/bd/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td>!</td>
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<tr>
<td>c</td>
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<td>!</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tableau (14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>OCP[cont]</th>
<th>*COMPLEXCoda</th>
<th>ALIGN(R, stem)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ki/st/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td>!</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Based on the ranking of constraints in the tableaus above, it is clear that high proficiency learners have demoted OCP[cont] (i.e. all markedness constraints). The highest-ranking constraint is MAX, which is similar to adult grammars where the output is faithful to the input. At this level of proficiency, learners are able to produce regular English past tense verbs in a target-like manner.

5. Discussion

Looking at the results of the data and the constraint rankings of the three proficiency levels, learners do not start with their native language constraint ranking, contrary to Hancin-Bhatt (2000). There is no evidence of Full Transfer from Arabic into the target language. If that were the case, learners will always be able to produce word-final coda clusters in English. In addition, the data of low proficiency learners implies that they treat all types of clusters similarly. These learners prefer to delete a segment then produce a cluster. This suggests that learners at this stage rank markedness constraints really high on the scale. On the other hand, intermediate learners show a different pattern. They distinguish between stop+stop clusters and fricative+stop clusters. Deletion occurs when the cluster is a stop+stop, but not when it is a fricative+stop. At this stage, these learners are re-ranking their constraints; however, these rankings are not the finalized state. At this level, the interlanguage grammar is dynamic and constraint rankings will change. We have seen that intermediate learners demoted *ComplexCoda below MAX to able to produce fricative+stop clusters. OCP[cont] is still highly ranked to guarantee that the optimal candidate will not violate continuity. Since OCP[cont] is ranked highly, the candidates sto[pt] and bri[bd] will never be the optimal output. Finally, high proficiency learners have demoted OCP[cont] and *ComplexCoda below MAX in order to guarantee that the optimal output is faithful to the input. Based on the analysis above, constraint ranking, and re-ranking gives us a clear picture of these L2ers developmental stages. I suggest the following stages of coda development in L2 English from native Arabic speakers:

- Stage 0: OCP[cont], *ComplexCoda >>Max>> Align (R,stem)
- Stage 1: OCP[cont], >>Max>> *ComplexCoda >> Align (R,stem)
- Stage 2: MAX >> OCP[cont], *ComplexCoda>>Align (R,stem)
Stage0 is the initial stage of these L2 learners of English. It suggests that these learners do not start with their native language ranking where they have already re-ranked markedness constraints higher than faithfulness constraints, similar to the patterns observed in Portuguese speakers learning English as an L2 (Alves, 2004). In addition, the participants in this study show patterns similar to Mandarin speakers acquiring English as an L2 (Browselow et al., 1998) where some patterns emerged that are neither part of the native nor the target language. Stage1 shows that learners start demoting some markedness constraints to able to reach to the final stage of development. Finally, stage2 is the final stage of development. It shows that learners have reached the proper re-ranking of constraints to produce target-like clusters in English.

6. Conclusion
The analysis in this paper has added to the sufficiency of Optimality Theory to handle morphological variability in second language acquisition. OT has been able to explain the various stages that language learners go through in order to achieve target-like productions. In addition, OT has been able to provide us with evidence that it is not always the case that second language learners begin with their native constraint ranking. In this paper, it was clear that transfer played no role at all. In addition, the analysis has shown that at a certain stage of development, not all cluster types are treated equally (stop+stop vs. fricative+stop clusters). Finally, further research is needed in monomorphemic testing words like ‘past’ and ‘ask’ to determine if they are treated differently than words with morphological endings. This comparison will determine if the process of coda modification is purely phonological or morphology plays a role.

About the Author
Baraa Rajab (PhD) is an assistant professor of linguistics at the English Language Institute, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. She teaches courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Her research interests are second language acquisition of morpho-syntax, L2 phonology, L2 morphology and the acquisition of L2 gender.

ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4124-7283

References


**Appendix A: List of Test Sentences**

1. John ______ (stop) his speech.
2. Mary ______ (drop) her phone.
3. Bill’s grandmother ______ (describe) him.
4. He ______ (bribe) him.
5. Sally ______ (knit) her sweater.
6. Sally ______ (lock) her room.
7. She ______ (bake) her cake.
8. She ______ (land) her job.
9. I ______ (head) her way.
10. I ______ (hug) her hard.
11. They ______ (mug) him.
12. I ______ (kiss) her hand.
13. Mary ______ (miss) her.
14. Her parents ______ (advise) her.
15. Bill and Mary ______ (use) her exam.
16. She ______ (bathe) her baby.
17. She ______ (clothe) her baby.
18. They ______ (laugh) him out.
19. He ______ (bluff) his way.
20. John ______ (save) her life.
21. The movie ______ (move) her feelings.
22. He ______ (wash) his cat.
23. She ______ (crash) her car.
24. He ______ (watch) his sister.
25. He ______ (judge) his contestants.
26. He ______ (damage) his fridge.
Investigating Translanguaging Practices and Attitudes of International Students in Higher Education at an American University

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Abstract
Using all linguistic repertories is an advantage for bilinguals. Students have different attitudes towards using their first language (L1) in a second language (L2) instructional setting. This explanatory sequential mixed-methods research paper investigated the students’ perception with regards to the use of their L1 to facilitate their writing in the L2 (English) and examine its influence on the quality of their writing. For this study, the participants were seven learners in tertiary level education from different social sciences majors who voluntarily agreed to participate in the survey and the semi-structured interviews. The researcher analyzed seven writing samples collected from the participants. The findings of this study indicate that most participants believe the use of first language has a negative impact on the second language (English) improvement. However, four of the participants who stated that they usually use their first language at the composing stage had a different perception; they perceived their L1 as a supportive element to writing in L2. Additionally, this study concluded that the use of first language is a helpful strategy that helps students generate ideas, understand the content and get deeper in a topic. Furthermore, the use of first language does not weaken the quality of the learners’ writing in most cases.

Keywords: Bilingualism, first language (L1), second language (L2), translanguaging

1 Introduction
A number of studies of bilingual writing explored and concentrated on interference, the negative transfer from the first language (L1) to the second language (L2). Some researchers reveal that developing a bilingual’s writing can be negatively affected by the linguistic characteristics of their L1. Therefore, L2 learners are discouraged by their teachers from using L1 in the writing process to avoid the occurrence of such interference. Instead, teachers require them to “think in English” or follow good writing models (Matsuda, Cox, Jordan, & Ortmeier-Hooper, 2010). The research study conducted by Karim and Nassaji (2013) conclude that the use of L1 for the incipient bilingual may not be appropriate or helpful because, at this stage, the use of L1 as a “composing strategy” can cause a negative transfer between the mother language and the target language. Also, literal translation may inevitably occur (Samingan, 2017). Alhawary (2018) states that:

The influence of the learner's first language plays a role in all levels of the acquisition and learning of the L2. This influence is known as “transfer.” The interference of L1 in the process of second language learning is regarded as negative (p.114).

However, other researchers suggested that advanced L2 learners are better users of their L1 sources while preparing, planning, brainstorming and thinking about a topic to write for in L2 (Scott & Fuente, 2008). The use of L1 to write in L2 may include translation which Kobayashi and Rinnert (2013) argue, does not improve L2 writing and impedes writing fluency. Additionally, translation causes syntactical issues and inappropriate word choices (Lai & Chen, 2015). However, translanguaging, allowing students to use their L1 as a first step to write about a topic in L2, will allow them to use their experience, knowledge, and resources in their L1. As a result, they will be able to generate new ideas, so using L1 promotes “cognitive fluency.” As such, this study stems from previous research that claims that translanguaging is helpful for advanced users in their second language. It focuses on exploring the practices of international tertiary level learners who speak English as their second language, their attitudes and usage of translanguaging and its influence on the quality of their writing.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Bilingualism and Bilingual Education
According to Verplaetse and Schmitt (2010), the term bilingual is defined as: “a speaker's ability to use two languages for communication. Due to the complexity of its nature, the study of bilingualism relies on several fields within linguistics, anthropology, psychology, neuroscience, and education” (p. 355). Vidal, Juan-Garau, and Gaya (2008) define a bilingual learner as: “someone who is fully competent in two languages” (p.19). Grosjean (1989) believes that a bilingual can use and switch between the two languages based on the situations (as cited in Bialystok, 2001). Thus, bilingualism means the ability to use two languages spontaneously.

Bilingual education has been evoking a strong debate (Karayayla & Schmid, 2018; Macedo, Dendrinos, & Gounari, 2015). It has existed in the American education landscape in one form or another since 1974, when the federal 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Portales v. Serna allowed bilingual education for children with low proficiency in English (Spolsky, 2017). For example, in traditional bilingual education, students received separated bilingual instruction.
There was a particular part of the day when students were taught in their L1, and the rest of the day, the medium of the instruction, however, was English. The goal from this system was to facilitate the learning process using L1 and then move gradually to the target language (English only) instruction. In fact, the percentage of bilinguals is a large part of the world’s population. The number of bilingual students is increasing every day. Therefore, issues specific to bilinguals have been addressed in linguistic research for a long time (Porter, 2017).

2.2 Translanguaging
The idea of translanguaging emerges from Welsh literary traditions (García & Lin, 2017). The use of Welsh language decreased in Wales, especially at schools. This is due to the fact, since English is the dominant language, most Welsh speaking students are taught in English. Baker (1995) argues that only a few number of the students are literate in both English and Welsh (as cited in Hornberger, 2003). A number of instructors in Wales recognize the importance of ‘transliteration”. In 1996, the educator, Cen William, coined the translanguaging theory (trawsieithlu in Welsh), which implies the ability of biliterate students to use both languages effectively to better understand the content and improve both languages (García & Wei, 2014). To illustrate, a teacher may require Welsh students to read in English and write Welsh and vice versa (Baker, 2006). Velasco and García (2014) state that:

The term [translanguaging] stresses the flexible and meaningful actions through which bilinguals select features in their linguistic repertoire in order to communicate appropriately. From this perspective, the language practices being learned by emergent bilinguals are in functional interrelationship with other language practices and form an integrated system (p. 7).

Thus, translanguaging allows the student to have input with a language and produce an output with another language. Baker (2011), who translated the term translanguaging, explains it as: “the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages” (p. 288). Thus, translanguaging is a strategy that bilinguals use to enhance learning and knowledge by using the sources in both languages. According to translanguaging theory, the bilingual individual does not have two systems of languages. Instead he/she has one complex and dynamic system (García & Wei, 2014).

2.3 Translanguaging and Writing
Writers who practice translanguaging try to express themselves and communicate their ideas clearly in a meaningful way (García & Leiva, 2014). Translanguaging makes a connection between the two languages. It gives the bilingual a chance to not only develop the L2, but also develop the L1 (Lust et al., 2016). According to Cummins (1979)’s Interdependence theory, the level of proficiency and competence in L2 is a result of the level of development of L1. Therefore, Cummins’s Interdependence Theory influences the translanguaging approach (García & Wei, 2014). Despite the fact that, for bilingual teachers, the term interference is still a concern, Edelsky (1982)’s research on Spanish-speaking children's writing in English revealed that their knowledge in Spanish helped in learning English. He looked at 500 writings from first, second, and third grade at a semi-rural, migrant school. He found that students wrote only in English in spite of using their Spanish sources (García & Wei, 2014). Those children used their own strategy,
connecting what they know in their home language to the target language, to produce a piece of writing.

3. Methodology
This research study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed study design (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The first phase involved a short questionnaire (quantitative data) and the second phase utilized semi-structured interviews (qualitative data). The semi-structured interviews were conducted on campus and audio recorded and at a later stage, transcribed verbatim to facilitate thematic coding of the transcribed texts.

3.1 Participants:
The number of participants in this study was seven learners at tertiary level education. These participants were all international learners and were registered at Arkansas Tech University. They studied different majors, such as Emergency Management, Multimedia & Journalism, Psychology and English and were all of the same proficiency level. Participants are from different countries: China, Brazil and Saudi Arabia who, respectively, spoke Chinese (Mandarin), Portuguese and Arabic as their first language.

3.2 Method of Data Collection:
The data collection instruments used in this study were: a custom designed questionnaire, semi-structured interviews as well as samples of writing scripts from the learners. The questionnaire and the interview questions were written in English since it was the second language for all participants. The participants were given the questionnaire that had five close-ended questions. The questionnaire mainly aimed at investigating the frequency of using the first language before beginning the writing process (See Appendix A). Thus, the interviews later examined the learners’ attitude towards using their first language at the composing stage and their strategies. Samples of participants’ writings were collected to compare the level of influence of the strategies they used on the quality of their writing.

3.3 Method of Data Analysis
The simple statistical analysis method used was conducted to analyze the primary data collected from the questionnaires. All the participants fully completed the questionnaires, which were each checked manually in order to learn the frequency the learners used the first language to prepare for writing in the second language.

4.0 Findings and Discussion
4.1 Findings from the Questionnaire

Figure 1. How often do you brainstorm before you start writing?
As can be seen from the figure 1, the number of participants who brainstorm before they start writing is the same in the three frequency markers - always, sometimes, and rarely. In general, the chart indicates that most participants do the brainstorming as a basic step in the writing process.

Figure 2. How often do you use your first language while brainstorming?

Figure 2 shows that the majority of the participants routinely use their first language while they are brainstorming; whereas the other two do not use the first language in brainstorming very often.

Figure 3. I think using the first language is helpful in planning for writing in the second language.

Figure 3 illustrates the controversy of using the first language and its impact on second language writing. Half of the participants agree with the statement that the first language is helpful in the composing state of writing. On the other hand, the other half of the participants disagree with the statement.

Figure 4. I use the first language in doing Google search about the topic.
Most participants use their first language in carrying out Google research, but two of them do not support the idea of using first language for Google research.

*Figure 5.* I think using the first language has a negative impact on improving the writing skill.

Also, most of the participants believe that using the first language has a negative effect on writing in the second language.

4.2 Findings from the Interviews

The first question in the interview aimed at investigating the different strategies that students used before they started writing. The thematic data analysis revealed a number of different strategies that the participants used in their L2 writing. For example, a number of learners started with gathering information and looking for sources online. Some of the participants started with brainstorming using their first language. Also, there was one participant who mentioned that he started by creating an outline, writing a rough draft, or asking his classmates. One of the interviewees stated: “I just start writing to put the sentences in order as I go to make sense”. The second question in the interview was about the learners’ attitude towards using the first language while they are planning to write in the second language or if they read articles in the first language. Participants’ responses were varied. Three of the participants believed that it was helpful to use the first language at this stage. For example, one of the participants answered, “I think using my first language when I plan to write any paper or assignment is a very helpful tool to enhance my writing and get deeper in the research...”. On the other hand, there were four participants who argued that using the first language is not helpful, and it impedes improving the second language. This is highlighted in one of the participant’s account who stated: “I do not think it is helpful as much as you immerse yourself in English the better”. Another participant’s answer was “I did that one time when I was in the ELI. I was not satisfied with what I wrote.” Also, there is a participant who uses the first language only when he does not know the word in English. For the third question in the interview that asked participants about the different strategies they use other than using their first language, most participants responses include reading about the topic in the second language, brainstorming and creating an outline. Two of the participants use their first language every time they write.

4.3 Findings Related to the Writing Sample

After reading the writing samples of the participants, some observations have emerged. In general, since those writings are for advanced English learners, their writings, as graded by their teachers, are in the advanced level, but there are number of minor writing issues in most of their writings, as observed by the researcher and other EFL teacher colleagues. All participants used
the three types of sentences: simple, compound and complex. Simple sentences were the least type used. The level of the complexity of the vocabulary that is used by the participants varies based on the topic they wrote about. However, most participants used high level academic vocabulary in their writings.

There were three participants who used their first language before they wrote this sample. The use of the first language is shown in some areas of their writing, such as using expressions that are commonly used in their first language. For example, “Saudi Arabia is the heart of Arab peoples and the belief of Islam”. This first participant used the same expression that has been written and said for a long time in Arabic culture. Also, this participant used the passive voice many times in her writing. The use of the first language in the writing of the second participant was not clear. There is no indication that the first language was used. However, in the writing of the third participant, the use of the first language was obvious in her writing - “we have four of techniques.” It is clear that this participant translated her ideas from Arabic to English because it is in the same order as Arabic writing. This example illustrates Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992)’s point of view mentioned earlier, which claims translation can cause syntactical issues. For those participants, the use of L1 did not affect the complexity of the structure of the sentences they wrote. The rest of the four participants did not use the first language and they do not support the use of it. Their writings have some of the minor writing issues that the first group has. Also, the Chinese participant used the passive voice as often as the first Arabic participant did. There are two participants whose writing is very advanced and has no mistakes. They did not sound like second language learners in their writings.

5. Discussion of the Findings
It is clear from the percentile and thematic data analyses above that most participants do the brainstorming before they start writing. One of the suggested reasons for carrying out the brainstorming is that all participants are second language (English) learners, so they were enrolled in an English language program before they are enrolled at the university. In these programs, they were taught to brainstorm before they started writing. The importance of brainstorming is usually stressed in most programs. Additionally, the gathered data from the interviews indicated that different strategies, other than brainstorming, which the learners used before they started writing, such as looking at different sources, writing a rough draft, and creating an outline, especially for a long paper. For the second question in the questionnaire, the data frequency data analysis indicated that most participants use their first language to a varying degree. The reason behind using the first language is usually explained in some participants’ responses for the second question in the interview. They use the first language because they feel it helps them to generate more ideas. This is supported by the frequency calculations revealed in the third statement in the survey. One of the participants indicated that when she said: “I think using my first language... is a very helpful tool to enhance my writing and get deeper in the research…” For the same reason, they use the first language when they do Google research. They will get more details about the topic associated with their knowledge, so they can produce more ideas and details. That proves the usefulness of using L1 for advanced second language users (Karim & Nassaji, 2013). However, for those who rarely use their first language or do not use it at all, they believe that using the first language will have a negative impact on their second language, and that would impede their improvement in English. That attitude is clearly shown in the last statement in the
questionnaire. Most participants think that the use of their first language would have a negative impact on their second language because most ESL teachers discouraged their students from using their first language and told them the use of the first language would weaken their writing. This was evident in one of the participant’s accounts who stated in the interview that: “When I first learned English, I was recommended to not use Arabic as much as possible because it may slow the improvement of my English”. Therefore, there are some learners who are concerned that using the first language would affect the improvement they have reached in their second language. However, there is a participant who stated that “I could not stop the use of Arabic totally and my English has improved anyway”. She keeps using the first language because it helps her to better understand the content, as she explained: “I use Arabic too while searching for high level academic words for the paper”. That is what Nimmrichter and Hornberger (2013) explained about the importance of using L1 to understand the content. On the other hand, there was one participant who used the L1 to write an essay in L2 when she was in the English Language Institution, and the result was weak writing with which she was not satisfied. That is because what she did is a literal translation for the ideas. As a result, there were wrong word choices and incorrect grammatical structure. This is exactly what ESL teachers try to avoid. To avoid the literal translation, they ask their student to think, research and write in English only to minimize the mistakes that result from the interference.

The writing sample of the participants show the quality of the writing for those who use the first language is very similar to the quality of participants who do not use L1. The use of the L1 did not have a negative impact on most of the writings, but there was wrong use of prepositions as a result of the influence of L1. Also, thinking in L1 affects the style of the writing. For example, in Arabic writing, Arabic speakers usually use emotional and figurative language more than in English. One of the participants uses the same style of Arabic in writing in English and uses the word “heart” as a symbol to indicate the importance and the location of Saudi Arabia. In fact, she translated this common thought from Arabic to English, but it was not wrong, and it makes sense in English. Additionally, there was excessive use for the passive voice in the writing of one of the Arab writers who practices translanguaging. This is likely due to the effect of the passive voice in Arabic. In Arabic language, the use of the passive voice shows the eloquence and the academic power of the writer. However, there was the same amount of passive voice usage in the writing of a Chinese student who does not use the L1 to write in L2. That means it can be just the personal style of both students and not necessarily the influence of L1.

5.1. Summary of the findings
Thus, from the data collected, it was evident that the new practice of translanguaging has been used by some students. They transform their knowledge and the sources in their L1 to their L2. As a result, translanguaging allows them to generate more ideas and write about a topic thoroughly. The use of translanguaging shows part of their identities and culture in their writing. The use of L1 does not weaken the writing in most cases; instead, it is a powerful tool that helps participants to improve their writing. Also, the level of the writing of those who do not use L1 is not higher than those who do.
6. Conclusion
This research study explored the use of translanguaging and the participants’ attitude towards using it at an American University. The study concluded that the use of L1 is beneficial and can help improve the writing of those at a suitable level of English proficiency. Also, the study supports the previous research that claims the use of L1 at an early stage of learning a second language is not appropriate. Moreover, the use of translanguaging can add new features to the English writing style. Finally, it can be said that this research study reveals the support of integrated bilingual education instead of isolating the two languages completely. The latter can be an important factor to consider in the certain contexts, such as the Saudi context, where the students might initially struggle with learning English and the use of translanguaging might help them overcome certain obstacles when learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

7. Limitations
Due to the time constraints, this study was done with only seven participants from different higher education programs. Participants are not at the same level of English proficiency, so that makes a difference in the attitude and the use of L1. Also, the collected writing samples are assignments that were already submitted to their professors. Therefore, some editing might have been done to those samples.

8. Recommendations for Future Research
Translanguaging in writing is a new strategy that deserves more attention and research to help students use all the knowledge and the linguistic sources they have and to learn how one linguistic repertoire can serve to improve the other one. ESL, as well as EFL teachers should think of applying translanguaging with their students at the appropriate level with caution for literal translation.

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References


APPENDIX A
Survey Questions

1- How often do you brainstorm before you start writing?
   Always  Usually  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

2- How often do you use your first language while brainstorming?
   Always  Usually  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

3- I think using the first language is helpful in planning for writing in the second language
   Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

4- I use the first language in doing Google research about a topic.
   Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

5- I think using the first language has a negative impact on improving the writing skill.
   Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX B
Interview Questions

1. How do you often plan for your writing assignment?

2. What do you think of using the first language in the planning stage to write in the second language? When researching, do you use articles in your first language?

3. If you do not use your first language in planning, what strategies do you use?
Students’ Opinions on the Functions and Usefulness of Communication on WhatsApp in the EFL Higher Education Context

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Abstract

In a preparatory English as a foreign language (EFL) context at a Saudi University, the WhatsApp application is observed as being one the fastest growing social media platforms, and one with a massive potential of being used in communication for academic as well as social purposes. This study seeks to explore students’ opinions and perceptions on the usage and functions of WhatsApp communication within the EFL context. Findings from a descriptive survey analysis have shown that WhatsApp is a popular communication platform amongst the students, and therefore possibly has the potential of facilitating language learning in this EFL context. However, WhatsApp is currently mostly utilized as a platform for inquiries and announcements with minimum preset language learning goals. The present study aims to inform feasible recommendations regarding the presence and functionality of the WhatsApp platform, owing to the need to utilize such popular and readily used program in making EFL learning processes efficient and effective.

Keywords: EFL, Higher Education, social media, WhatsApp

1 Introduction

Emerging social media platforms play an important role in shaping and changing human interactions. Their role in providing a learning environment can never be underestimated. In the context of this study, the WhatsApp application (WhatsApp) is observed as being one of the fastest growing social media platforms, and one with a massive potential of being used in academic communication. The study takes place within an academic context of a Saudi university preparatory year’s English as a foreign language (EFL) program, at the university’s English language institute (ELI). The students have been observed to excessively use WhatsApp on a daily basis, for communication with other classmates and teachers. To us as language educators, however, little is known about what the students exactly include in their WhatsApp messages and with whom they communicate the most.

We argue that by exploring student’s opinions about the actual use and functions of WhatsApp, both in the current context and in similar contexts reported in the relevant literature, we can evoke positive changes in the EFL learning approaches, whereby knowledge acquisition and information transfer can be enhanced by this popular and readily accessed social media platform. Through the powerful features that can support learning in and out of a class context, WhatsApp use in facilitating EFL learning remains highly feasible. Therefore, we aim to investigate the current range of WhatsApp’s functions in this higher education EFL environment by exploring: (1) the extent to which students use WhatsApp in their academic communication; and (2) the range of uses and functions of this platform in the EFL academic context.

2. Literature Review

For most instructors, teaching English as a second Language is very challenging. The internet is a global network and is, therefore, a great provider of highly beneficial network-based teaching environments for language teachers across the globe (Bansal & Joshi, 2014). Using such environments, language teachers can efficiently create helpful and meaningful language skill practice tasks for further practice and more significant benefit of their language learners (Barhoumi, 2015).

This network-based environment also enables language teachers to utilize an array of materials designed to enhance language learning within the classroom. With valuable learning tools such as WhatsApp, the effectiveness of language learning has improved greatly (Alfaki & Alharthy, 2014). That is because it poses a tremendous amount of information that is extremely beneficial for English as a second language, as it is a powerful way to engage learners by offering them authentic and real-life experiences that relate to their cultural backgrounds.

With WhatsApp, it is now easier for language instructors to share educational resources with their learners, and post assignments that can, in return, be sent back for assessment and grading. In all, WhatsApp is useful for those who are in the process of language learning, as it makes it easier to practice skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening (Bansal & Joshi, 2014; Alsaleem, 2013).

With the ever-changing learning environment and learners’ preference for various pedagogy methods, adoption of the social media platform for learning remains not only a tool for present-day teaching, but also a highly potent platform in the future for the revolutionary
development of the language of instruction and the language learning process among other similar learning processes (Salem, 2013). Since the conception, the large-scale acceptability and the use of various social media platforms, some software has stood out to be more relevant to the process of developing learning instructions and encouraging learning. Apart from WhatsApp, the social media applications deeply integrated into the present-day learning process include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Skype, and Blogs (Cavus & Ibrahim, 2008).

Though it is one of the most recent instant messaging social platforms used across the globe, WhatsApp is one of the most commonly downloaded and used apps worldwide (Calvo, Arbiol & Iglesias, 2014). The original intention underlying the development of this application was the need to create a short messages system free from excess advertisement, so typical of the existing social media platforms (AbdAlfattah, 2015). Apart from texting, WhatsApp is also embedded with some functions and features that facilitate the ease of usability. It allows for sending of audios, videos, files, various web links and even provides for the making of video calls. Added to its benefits is the ability to make groups that enable members to communicate freely and safely within its boundaries. Statistically, instant messaging through WhatsApp has handled up to ten billion messages per day as of August 2012 (Amry, 2014). The quantity of messages increased to more than double that number by 2013, totaling approximately 27 billion messages every 24 hours. More than 450 million active users were also reported on the app by 2013 with as many as 700 million photos shared by users. WhatsApp allows for unlimited sharing of text messages over the 4G, 3G and even EDGE networks (Barhoumi, 2015).

With the great convenience associated with WhatsApp instant messaging, EFL students can enhance their interaction, learning, and collaboration (Salem, 2013). Of the different collaborative features in WhatsApp, students in higher education mostly use the text-based and short message modes of sending information. With the increased use of these platforms, numerous institutions of higher education across the globe have adjusted and adapted to the use of these technologies in the learning process.

Of the numerous present benefits noted from the use of WhatsApp in different institutions, is the creation of a discussion forum. Creation of these platforms leads to an endless discussion between the students and the instructor, and also amongst the students themselves. This leads to the creation and development of teaching communities that are the core support of the learning process, especially the traditional learning process (Doering et al., 2008).

Providing different levels of communications, either formal or informal, synchronous or asynchronous, the communication taking place on these social platforms are beneficial to the learning process as it deviates from the traditional method of learning, especially learning second languages which were potentially unattractive to young learners (Plana et al. 2013).

In the context of EFL, the use of WhatsApp creates a reliable platform that allows for both informal and formal interactions (Calvo et al. 2014). Unlike other subjects, the success in learning a language depends partly on the ability of the learner to express themselves. Through extensive interaction especially with peers, WhatsApp provides a rare avenue where students can interact continuously and seek due clarification, raise concerns and engage in other learning…
activities both formally and informally (Salem, 2013). These develop positive social interactions between the students themselves and between the students and the instructors. Hence, the ability to solve learning difficulties as they emerge is made easier in the learning process through smartphones (Plana et al. 2013).

WhatsApp has contributed to the emergence of new trends in EFL. It is expanding the new era of learning that is fast changing the traditional approach of learning languages (Amry, 2014). It encourages learning outside of the class in an unprecedented way and is quickly changing the perception and attitude of students towards learning in a way which was otherwise predominated with class work, with no involvement of social network. With the continued use of these social platforms, especially WhatsApp, learning can increasingly become social, highly interactive and most importantly, more interactive than traditionally perceived. These changes are part of the greater technological revolution that is fast shaping the society in the 21st century (Barhoumi, 2015). These sets of attributes position WhatsApp as one of the greatest revolutionary social media platforms in the learning context. The usability and the potential significance of WhatsApp are supported by the well-defined impact of the use of instant messaging (IM) in the classroom context (Amry, 2014). IM use in the classroom context is associated with an array of positive developments in the learning process. It leads to a higher potential for learning (AbdAlfattah, 2015). It also increases the likelihood of learners remaining substantially active during the learning process and creating positive interactions between the student and their faculties both regarding particular content, as well as their personal issues that may adversely affect their learning (Plana et al. 2013). These systems also create some sense of belonging to relevant communities in schools, which results in students showing tendencies to take their assignments quite seriously in the presence of their peers. Moreover, “online synchronous or asynchronous discussion among students on social networks have a cognitive added value that provides them with the opportunity to construct and share knowledge and then attain good results on achievement tests (Amry, 2014, p. 132)”.

The smartphone revolution remains one of the forces behind the increased use of WhatsApp among students. Indeed, smartphones operating on Android or other applications have become readily available among students, due to the significant reduction in the cost of acquiring a standard smartphone (Plana et al. 2013). As noted from the preceding section, WhatsApp is one of the fastest growing applications. Hence most students can be found on this platform (Calvo et al. 2014).

Teachers can thus form a class WhatsApp group as an easy communication platform. The micro-social network consists only of the intended class members and teachers, who can communicate to the entire class simultaneously and effectively. In the process, students can learn among themselves and also benefit from their interactions with their teachers. However, it will be inaccurate to claim that these platforms are devoid of significant consequences, especially if they are mismanaged in the learning and development of learning instructions. The most notable impact is the non-academic form of discourse that is associated with WhatsApp and other IM platforms (Doering et al., 2008). This may lead to problems with grammar and punctuation, as these two aspects are not taken into consideration when using various IM platforms. Furthermore, students may tend to focus more on their social interactions...
at the expense of investing time in other learning activities. Another concern reported by (Doering et al., 2008) about using IM platforms was their potential for affecting formality between teachers and students. Teachers “feared that sharing their knowledge of IM conventions with students (e.g., informal exchanges, emoticons, “IM speak,” abbreviations, shortcut misspellings, and acronyms) would brand them as more of a friend than a teacher” (Doering et al., 2008, p. 10).

However, the potential and current benefit of using WhatsApp in the language learning classroom outweighs these adverse impacts (Amry, 2014). With due control, it can be optimized to match the classroom expectations and reduce the associated negative impacts. In principle, it encourages collaboration, time-saving as well as learning in any place that seems to be of convenience to the learner.

3. Research Methods and participants

In this study we explore the purpose and functions of WhatsApp communication in the EFL environment of ELI at a Saudi university through a descriptive survey. The questionnaire, which was translated into Arabic (the participants’ mother tongue) and sent through Google, mainly had a focus on WhatsApp use in the EFL environment. The participants were 144 randomly selected students. Because of the era that we live in, and the age of the participants, it was presumed that they had at least a basic proficiency in the use of the examined technology, and furthermore would have undoubtedly undertaken a larger capacity of tasks demanded than the use of WhatsApp.

4. Findings

Since WhatsApp is an IM application that is mostly associated with smartphones, we first asked the students about the types of devices used by them to access the internet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Devices</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smart phone</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desktop PC and Smartphone</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iPad and Smartphone</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop, Desktop PC, and Smartphone</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop, Desktop PC and iPad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop, iPad, and Smartphone</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desktop PC and Smartphone</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ responses show that different devices are used to access the internet. Devices such as smartphones, laptops, Desktop PC, iPad, and tablet PCs are among the devices used by the students.
to access the internet. Among all the students, 53.5% of the students use smartphones. Those using Laptops, Desktop PCs and iPad were lowest in ratio with 0.7% and a frequency of 1 (Table 1). It can be concluded that increasing trend of using smartphones has resulted in the decreased use of these larger sized electronic devices such as desktop PCs and laptops.

Our next inquiry concerned the use of social media networking. This was put forth with various networking sites out of which WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook were in question. Table 2 shows that the highest percentage of the students (20.8%) were found using WhatsApp only while those with Instagram and Facebook users were lesser in number. The students using WhatsApp and Facebook at the same time were also fewer in number. Only 1.4% of participants were engaged in using both at the same time. The students using Instagram and WhatsApp were the highest (64.6%). Only two out of the 144 students did not report using WhatsApp at all.

Table 2 Social networking accounts subscribe by the students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram and WhatsApp</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp and Facebook</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire then became more specific, questioning the activities and functions performed for general educational purposes through WhatsApp communication.

Table 3 The type of educational activities undertaken on WhatsApp

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WhatsApp uses and Activities</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussing course content and answers to assignments</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving announcements or instructions from the instructor</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction (greetings and social topics)</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing of learning resources (e.g. files, model texts, summaries)</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To stay in touch with the teacher</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To stay in touch with classmates</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 shows that the WhatsApp was used most for discussing course content and answers to assignments, followed by receiving some instructions or announcements. Social interaction (greetings and social topics) came next in the order of the WhatsApp activities and scored frequencies close to those of staying in touch with the teacher and staying in touch with the classmates. The least frequent activity was Sharing knowledge and ideas through group discussion.

The query relating to the EFL-specific functions and benefits of WhatsApp communication is a central element in this questionnaire. Table 4 provides a summary of the students’ responses to the functions and usefulness of WhatsApp in the EFL context.

Table 4 *Perceived functions and usefulness of WhatsApp in the EFL context*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WhatsApp EFL-specific benefits</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (% )</th>
<th>Disagree (% )</th>
<th>Agree (% )</th>
<th>Strongly agree (% )</th>
<th>Total frequency (% )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp is useful in improving reading in English.</td>
<td>6 (4.2)</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>6 (4.7)</td>
<td>5 (4.1)</td>
<td>1 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp is useful in improved English grammar skills.</td>
<td>9 (6.6)</td>
<td>4 (2.9)</td>
<td>5 (4.1)</td>
<td>3 (1.0)</td>
<td>1 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>同意</td>
<td>强烈同意</td>
<td>赞同</td>
<td>保持中立</td>
<td>反对</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp is useful in enhancing written communication in English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp is useful in achieving educational goals and success in the EFL course</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp is useful in sharing ideas and knowledge in English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using WhatsApp is useful continued learning of English language outside the classroom.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in course-related WhatsApp saves time and effort</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp is a pleasant idea in education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questions regarding the role of WhatsApp in improving reading in English was asked in gradual levels of agreement. Most of the respondents either agreed (47.9%) or strongly agree.
(41%) with the opinion that using WhatsApp could be useful in improving reading in English. English language grammar could also be improved by using WhatsApp. The question contained the scores in the form of agree and disagree for the said purpose. 40.3% of respondents agreed and 23.6% strongly agreed, while 29.8% respondents disagreed and 6.3% strongly disagreed that WhatsApp could be helpful in improving English grammar.

The use of WhatsApp in enhancing written communication in English was addressed as well. Among the respondents, 51.4% students strongly agree and 45.8% agreed that use of WhatsApp enhanced their written communication in English. Only 1.4% of all respondents disagreed with the opinion and 1.4% strongly disagreed.

To proceed with the questionnaire, there were also questions which aimed at testing the importance of WhatsApp in achieving educational goals, its contribution to success in the EFL course, its role in sharing ideas and knowledge in English, and its role in continued learning of English language outside the classroom. Other questions probed if WhatsApp is considered a pleasant idea in education and if it saves time and effort.

On asking if WhatsApp could also be useful in achieving educational goals and success in the EFL course for the students, 50.7% of students agreed that it could be important, while 40.3% strongly agree that using WhatsApp is really useful and important in achieving educational goals and success. Only a few of the respondents strongly disagreed (2.8%) and disagreed (6.3%) with the opinion. The next question addressed the usefulness of WhatsApp in sharing ideas and knowledge in English. Only 2.1% of the respondent strongly disagreed while 59.7% of respondents strongly agreed and 38.2% agreed that it was helpful for them for the said purpose. The role of WhatsApp in continued learning of English language outside the classroom was also evaluated using this questionnaire. Most of the students strongly agreed (34%) or agreed (53.5%) that WhatsApp could be helpful for continued learning of English language outside the classroom. Few students (9.7%) were of the opinion that WhatsApp was not as useful in continuing learning outside the classroom and only 2.8% students were of the opinion that WhatsApp was of no use at all in this regard (Table 4). Table 4 also shows that 52.1% of students agreed and 34.7% strongly agreed that it could be effort and time saving to be in a course-related WhatsApp group.

Finally, 29.2% of the respondents strongly agreed and 41.7% agreed with the opinion that WhatsApp is a pleasant and important idea in an educational environment. Less than a third of the students disagreed and strongly disagreed (19.4% and 9.7%) with this.

5. Discussion
The study was carried out to depict the feasibility and potential of WhatsApp platform in facilitating EFL learning in a university preparatory year context by determining the perception and attitudes among the students. In this case, a quantitative descriptive approach was used to make sound, evidence-based inferences to address the key research queries: (1) The extent to which students use the WhatsApp mobile application in their academic communication; and (2) The range of functions and benefits of this platform in the EFL academic context. As the study involved 144 students, it is considered a sufficient sample size for informing research conclusions. The collected data were
subjected to quantification to synthesize relevant information addressing the perceptions and attitudes of the students regarding the presence and utility of WhatsApp in an EFL learning setting.

According to the information compiled for Table 1, there is generally an increasing trend in utility for the respondents who use small-sized technology gadgets such as the iPad and Smartphones. This reflects the social appreciation for convenience and portability of the technology devices. As WhatsApp is almost exclusively used on mobile phones, it can be expected to have a positive impact on the majority of the EFL learners who are bound to turn to effective Internet-based communication platforms that guarantee easy access to learning materials and inter-stakeholder networking to open up a wide range of learning opportunities. With more than 53% of the respondent students reporting access to smartphone devices as the only device for logging on to the Internet, it is prudent to infer that WhatsApp is one of the current and trending communication technologies that can create room for better learning when put into practical use (Ta’amneh, 2017). Technically, increased use of smartphone devices makes it feasible to promote EFL learning via the Internet-based technology, which is deemed effective for networking with the imperative stakeholders in the education sector making it possible to foster positive change and system improvements. As most of the smartphone users are expected to use WhatsApp for social communication, it is generally an appreciated piece of technology in educational settings creating a notion of effective adoption and infusion into the EFL learning processes and procedures.

Furthermore, Table 2 indicates the popularity of the social media platforms in the respondent population. WhatsApp, is associated with about 20% popularity used alone and 93% when combined with Instagram regarding the user preference and frequency among the study respondents. This is a tentative indication of how the tertiary level students, perceive the presence and functioning of WhatsApp in the learning environment. As a result, the popularity of this social media platform among the educational research respondents makes it a feasible teaching technique that could be used to better the learning experience for the EFL learners. These attitudes also pave the way for the informed formulation of the educational system strategies that guarantee successful learning and goal achievement for this group of students who are considered yearning to master the technique of communicating via fluent English, despite their non-native cultural backgrounds (Young, 2016).

Considering the fact that learning in an EFL environment should be sustained above specific performance standards to ensure goal achievement, there is a call to ensure the adoption of effective learning processes that are aligned with the overall educational system goals and objectives. In this case, the perceptions of the students in a higher education EFL context manifest an anticipated reception of these core stakeholders in the educational system towards the presence and functioning of WhatsApp in the learning environment. In this case, it is key to prioritize the betterment of learning the English language (Darmi & Albion, 2014). The preferences of the respondents towards the various kinds of the existing uses of WhatsApp in the EFL context. The responses show processes that involve sharing educational resources, social interaction, receiving announcements and instructions from the instructor, sharing knowledge and ideas through group discussion, and educational services and assignments. Technically, using WhatsApp for communication is capable of successfully fostering these educational functions in the EFL learning environment. Therefore, it is generally expected that WhatsApp can improve learning and knowledge acquisition in an EFL environment, owing to the ability to induce interactive learning among the learners and core
educational practitioners like teachers and curriculum managers. This is a critical factor to consider while designing a technology infusion approach that aims to improve learning (Balakrishnan & Gan, 2016).

In addition, the study revealed that WhatsApp could be optimized to bring positive change in the EFL learning systems whereby knowledge acquisition and information transfer can be enhanced. This is according to the general reception of people towards this communication technology. This is echoed in the literature, which combatively attributes WhatsApp to positive attitude and perception from the teaching and learning stakeholders within the higher education EFL environments (e.g. Al Shekaili, 2016).

The research further found out that the students perceive WhatsApp communication as useful in a wide range of EFL-related activities and learning processes. This was an essential indication of the perceived impact of this social media platform in the higher education EFL environment. The majority of the respondents reported an improvement in the core English skills such as reading, writing, and grammar, as well as the capacity to help communication in English and continued learning outside the classrooms. More importantly, they do perceive WhatsApp communication as an asset in achieving educational goals and success in the EFL course and believe it is a pleasant idea in education. Technically, this indicates that WhatsApp can be effective for improving English language learning and social networking skills among the EFL learners who are more likely to face difficulties in reading and writing via English (Gooch et al., 2016). The number of respondents whose preferred use for WhatsApp is attributed to enhancing a working rapport with the teacher also shows the perceived interactive importance of the technology among the representative stakeholders of this higher education EFL institution. This is core to facilitating better learning and educational systems for the EFL students who are in dire need of effective learning to improve knowledge and skill acquisition as proposed for subsequent studies. It is critical to bring to light the relevance of WhatsApp prior to its introduction in the EFL learning environment.

The current perceptions and attitudes of these survey respondents portray the actual situation within other EFL learning environments (Alfauzan & Hussain, 2017). Most of the respondents perceive WhatsApp as a useful tool to improve language skills. On the other hand, very few respondents (11%) are reported to disagree with the notion that WhatsApp leads to the development of language skills in an EFL higher education environment. It is critical to promote learning among EFL students owing to their language acquisition difficulties in the second language (English) compared to the native-English speaking learners in the same higher education system. Generally, this prolifically contributes to the perceived impact of WhatsApp in the EFL knowledge transfer environment (Khrisat & Mahmoud, 2013).

Further, the perceptions of the student respondents regarding the applicability of WhatsApp in grammar improvement advocate WhatsApp as a social media platform that can enable the sharing of learning materials and interactive learning between learners and their teacher, opening up more learning opportunity and making it easy to acquire the knowledge and skills learned. This social media technology has been perceived effective for improving the majority of the students’ grammatical fluency in English (Alnujaïdi, 2016). It is necessary, though, to consider the overall perceptions of all EFL educational system stakeholders regarding how WhatsApp could function in
the environment while addressing the language learning outcomes and core goals. This makes it one of the considerable factors that could guarantee successful teaching based on the receptivity of the learners and teachers towards the technology, which is expected to open up adoption chances for the betterment of the entire learning system (Ta’amneh, 2017).

The majority of the student respondents agree with the fact that WhatsApp makes it possible to create a rapport between these essential EFL learning stakeholders, whose dedication and commitment towards the educational system facilitates goal achievement. In this higher education context, most of the respondents revealed a high likeability to the use of the WhatsApp social media to run pertinent learning activities and goals. In one of the survey questions, 91% of the student respondents found WhatsApp necessary for the achievements of the set educational goals and objectives. This implies an anticipated positive impact of mobile technology on the effectiveness of language learning, especially in an EFL teaching and skill development context (Begum, 2011). On the contrary, 9% of the student respondents generally disagreed with the postulate that WhatsApp could be put to practical use regarding the perfection of grammar while using the English language for the written and spoken communication. It goes entirely without saying that it can be challenging to foster programs and initiatives that are designed to make communication better through learning for EFL students (Wilson & Stacey 2004).

Moreover, a majority of the survey student respondents (97.9%) testify to the use of WhatsApp as an effective English-medium information sharing platform compared to the 2.1% that were reluctant to the use of WhatsApp, owing to the variations in the credibility of the technology’s effectiveness in the EFL learning context. With these attitudes among the learners, it is entirely possible to tap the capacities of these learners with an aim to ensure positive changes in the EFL educational system (Alfauzan & Hussain, 2017). This makes WhatsApp a viable device for improving the acquisition of EFL-specific knowledge and the development of language skills in English among these foreign learners whose learning capacities do not necessarily compare with the native-English speakers. There is a dire need to improve learning for the individual learners based on the deemed effectiveness of WhatsApp for interactive learning, the perfection of communication techniques as sharing information, and opening channels for social interactions across the stakeholders levels in the EFL learning environment.

According to the survey question reviewing the impact of WhatsApp in an EFL learning environment based on its influence on continued out-of-class learning, it is evident that the majority of the respondents (more than 87%) generally have a sound perception of the mobile technology regarding its presence and function in this EFL learning environment. This is a critical and a significant contributor to the perceptions of the students and teachers regarding the application of this technology in learning exercises (Alnujaidi, 2016). On the other hand, less than 13% of the respondents associate WhatsApp with improper transformations among the users that are not aligned with the EFL learning outcomes and educational goals. According to Shvidko (2018), the outside-class learning activities provide a unique learner experience making it easy and possible for foreign learners to master and comprehend the concepts and language skills taught. Also, it makes learning more memorable and effective in regards to the achievement of the set goals and objectives for individuals and group-based EFLs. From the perceived importance of WhatsApp, it is indubitably
true that educational practitioners ought to consider putting the perceptual trends among the teachers and students to positive use.

Also, as an educational idea, WhatsApp is generally perceived as useful and effective for information sharing and knowledge acquisition for the higher education EFL students. This is based on the premise that the social media platform is associated with the capacity to emancipate and inform the success-driving stakeholders within the EFL educational context (Lee et al., 2015). With a majority (70.9%) of the student respondents supporting the opinion that this mobile communication technology could be effectively used in learning, it is advisable to harness the positive feedback for improving EFL learning in the future. According to this review question, WhatsApp is by far deemed the most relevant social media platform that could be harnessed as an English language teaching platform for the EFL learners whose learning capacities are unique and expected to face difficulties acquiring skills and knowledge in the foreign language. As an attitude indicator, it shows that technology can be received as a system improvement if the stakeholders are making up the driving force of the educational goal achievement. This is technically an improvement measure that can be adopted and formulated as a strategy to ensure successful EFL in this higher education context and similar contexts. We assume that the role played by these stakeholder attitudes and perceptions of the WhatsApp mobile communication technology is significant for improving the entire educational system performance. This review is based on the fact that the presence and functioning of WhatsApp in this EFL context can either be a better or worse educational idea depending on the perceived impact on learning progress.

The last question for the student respondents related to the time management impact of using WhatsApp in the higher education EFL context. This was aimed to review the productivity impact of this mobile internet-based communication that is deemed necessary for revamping the attitudes and inflexibility of the imperative stakeholders in the educational system that determines the success of the adopted curricula. Should the research indicate a positive perception of WhatsApp in this higher education EFL context, it is feasible to make productive use of the technology as a major improvement for the learning processes for the English language among the group of the EFL students. In this case, 86.8% of the student respondent’s manifest concurrence with the assumption that this communication technology is bound to open up better learning opportunities in the higher EFL learning context. This can be optimized with an aim to guarantee a desirable learning experience for these language skills and knowledge seekers, making it possible for them to master the essential communication rules and principles such as grammar. Most students view WhatsApp as a time-saving technology owing to the efficiency of information sharing and knowledge transfer. This is an indication of the perceived positive impact of this platform in an EFL higher education environment, making it a feasibly applicable technique in teaching and knowledge relaying between the critical parties in the entire learning system (Nassuora, 2012).

6. Conclusions
The students perceive WhatsApp communication as useful in a wide range of language learning processes. However, the perceived impact of this social media platform in the higher education EFL context is more vivid in activities and strategies pertaining to communication, and course and course-material management. Despite this realization of the usefulness of WhatsApp in the logistics’ aspect of the learning process, the students believe in the potential this platform has in learning language skills.
Therefore, it is imperative for educational practitioners to understand the prevalent attitudes and perceptions of the teaching staff and students towards the presence and functionality of WhatsApp in the higher EFL learning system, to guarantee better knowledge and skill acquisition and to spearhead successful communication via English as a foreign language. This is a clear indication of the positive reception attributed towards the technology in the EFL higher education environment as it is expected to make it possible to foster learning through this application based on the proposed future research information. However, the current perceptions and attitudes of these survey respondents portray the actual situation within other EFL learning environments (Alfauzan & Hussain, 2017).

It is critical for the curriculum designers and practitioners to consider learners’ opinions while seeking to leverage the impact caused by the presence and functioning of the WhatsApp mobile communication technology in an EFL learning environment. In particular, there is a need to consider its potential in promoting proficiency skill acquisition in reading and writing the English language.

Finally, the consensus amongst the students that they find WhatsApp a pleasant idea in education yields further support to our call for considering approaches in EFL learning whereby knowledge acquisition and information transfer can be enhanced by this popular and readily accessed social media platform. Through the powerful features that can support learning in and out of a class context, the application of WhatsApp use in facilitating EFL learning remains highly feasible.

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The Role of the iPad as Instructional Tool in Optimizing Young Learners' Achievement in EFL Classes in the Saudi Context

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Abstract
The iPad tablets have been introduced into various educational sectors to facilitate learning and engage students in the classroom. However, little is known about the empirical evidence with regard to iPad usage in enhancing language achievement. This study set out to examine the effects of integrating iPad tablets as an instructional tool into the second language (L2) curricula to enhance young learner’s academic achievement in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. It further endeavored to uncover the limitations that affect the utilization of the iPad in the classroom. To this end, forty Arabic first language (L1) young EFL learners enrolled in a middle school, were assigned as either an experimental group where they were exposed to study via iPad or a control group where they were taught in a traditional printed text across five weeks period. Language achievements were assessed through reading and vocabulary tests which were administered before the intervention and immediately after the intervention. To gauge the students’ engagements during the intended task, their behaviors were assessed in both scenarios. Findings from quantitative and qualitative data revealed that the students who were exposed to iPad were found much engaged and significantly outsored their counterparts in language achievements in the post-tests. Furthermore, technical problems were found to be predominant impediments to the integration of the iPad usage followed by unfamiliarity with the application, and student distraction. These findings provide EFL teachers and policy makers with insight on how to better integrate the iPad into the EFL environment. Further pedagogical recommendations and research directions are also highlighted at the end of the article.

Keywords: Academic Achievement, iPad in education, mobile Learning, reading, vocabulary

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1.0 Introduction

There has been a tremendous shift of new technological development from bulky desktop computers to handheld devices where mobile assisted language learning (MALL) approach which has induced the second language (L2) instructors and pedagogues to incorporate them into a curriculum to foster learning in general and language learning in particular.

Children are almost literary born with handheld devices, and most of them learn to use tablets before they even utter their first words. It is clear that this generation of “Digital Natives” needs a revolutionary, digitalized approach to teaching that matches their preferences and expectations (Prensky, 2001).

It is important to note that the spread of technology in the realm of education is not confined to a specific context, region or level of education. Technologies are being used in kindergartens all the way to tertiary level classrooms throughout the world. In the EFL context today, several technologies are used to enhance the way language is taught. Few studies have examined the impact of these technologies on language development (Brown, Castellano, Hughes and Worth, 2012; Itayem, 2014). However, little is known about the integration of iPad in L2 curricula in the middle school to foster language development in EFL context. Meeting the needs and different learning styles of EFL learners requires adopting a new and innovative teaching approach. With this in mind, the current study aims to shed light on the utilization of iPads in EFL classrooms to improve students' achievement.

2.0 Literature Review

The iPad is a handheld device that was first presented to the market by Apple in 2010. This revolutionary device offered the flexibility of surfing the web freely as well as ample use of applications, without the need for a desktop or laptop computer. The iPad was not initially intended for educational purposes. It has been, however, successfully integrated into several educational settings and as a result many educational applications (apps) have been launched to serve the needs of learners. The emergence of the iPad has ignited interest among educational researchers to explore its effectiveness in the classroom (Jain & Luaran, 2016), and revealed promising results. However, little is known about the integration of the iPad for young EFL learners in a middle school.

The iPad apps for vocabulary instruction have provided both L2 instructors and students with easy access to language inputs and have thus helped students build their vocabulary effectively (Park, 2013). Utilizing a case study research design, Park (2013) investigated the effect of iPad integration on enhancing the level of engagement in vocabulary learning of a third grade student. Prior to using the iPads, the student reported having no interest in reading and his score level in terms of vocabulary learning was below grade level. Park utilized five apps (Popplet, iBook, ShowME, Quizlet, Pictello) to help the student improve his vocabulary. Findings from the pre-post vocabulary tests, observation, and a pre-post attitude survey revealed that the intervention of the iPad aided student learning in terms of vocabulary gains and fostered his level of engagement while learning. In a similar case, Hilton and Canciello (2013) asserted that many students found it easier to read class material on an iPad rather than the traditional textbooks. The reason that lies behind it is that the digital text allowed them to immediately search for information in ways that were not accessible with a traditional printed text. For instance, the
hypertext tools presented in the *iBook* app provided students with different features that have enhanced their comprehension such as the opportunity to highlight unknown words and clicking on ‘define’ for the definition of words. Users could also click on the ‘search’ button to search for further information on the web. In addition, students found it easier to use the *iBook* than looking up the meaning of the words in a printed dictionary. Overall, these studies confirm the significance of using digital texts in the classroom.

2.1 iPad in EFL Teaching and Learning

There has been a paucity of research to implement iPad devices into language learning in middle school. Though the topic of technology in the classroom has been widely treated, lack of research on the iPad may be due to the novelty of the device (Itayem, 2014). However, the empirical studies that have been conducted in the field of EFL have concluded optimal results about the success of implementing iPads in the classroom.

For example, at an EFL department of a Japanese university, Brown, Castellano, Hughes, and Worth (2012) explore the integration of the iPad devices in an English language course to complete language learning tasks. They were used mainly as presentation tools, for browsing the web, as transcription recorders, for digital handouts, and as media playback tools. The case study findings comprised of both teachers and students’ perspectives. The results indicated that iPads use was most feasible in collaborative tasks, which allowed students to embed their presentations with audio, photographs, and video in a faster and more convenient way in comparison to laptops and computer PCs. Due to the mobility and the screen size of the iPad device, it was found to facilitate group work among students. In a similar setting, at a Taiwanese university, Wang, Teng, and Chen (2015) carried out a research study with two groups, experimental and control, to look at the use of iPads to enhance English vocabulary acquisition among freshman English students. The *Learn British English WordPower* app was used to teach English vocabulary with the experimental group, while applying the traditional semantic map method when teaching the control group. The results showed that the experimental group scored higher in their post-test results. In addition, the survey results indicated that students’ learning motivation as well as their perception of learning English vocabulary was heightened in the experimental group. Likewise, Wang (2017) investigated how EFL learners who were exposed to mobile apps presented in iPad helped learners improve reading comprehension and to examine how well they satisfy from exposure to learning through MALL. Learners' improvement in reading comprehension were significantly higher than those learned traditionally, and they showed greater satisfaction towards instruction via iPad than learning in traditional teaching methods.

The iPad has also been used in EFL classes to promote students’ autonomy. Recently, Albadry (2015) conducted a mixed-methods case study at a Saudi university to explore how the use of the iPad devices can foster EFL learners’ autonomous learning. Based on a questionnaire, learners’ diaries, and group interviews, the findings reported that the iPad device could foster some learners’ autonomy by providing opportunities for collaboration and communication inside and outside the classroom. Learners communicated and collaborated through different apps such as *Ask3* and *Voice thread* apps. Albadry (2015) reported that using the apps motivated learners and had a positive influence on changing their attitudes toward learning English. Although her study lacks empirical evidence, Demski (2011) report on the experience of two schools (middle
and high school) using the iPad and iPod Touch with English Language Learners (ELL). The most used apps were a dictionary, translation apps, iBooks, and Kindle. Use of these apps provided instant interactivity to students. As Demski (2011) reports, the students found it easier to look for the meaning of words through the iPad instead of a paper dictionary. The students also reportedly watched videos and English language movies and browsed the web at school and off school, thus, providing a wider range of input for practicing speaking and listening.

2.2 The Limitations of Using the iPad in Education

Although the iPad tablet holds the promise of being a game changer in education and researchers have enthusiastically reported positive findings, there are still many challenges to integrating the iPad in classrooms that might hinder the learning and teaching process. One of the reoccurring issues with the iPad’s is the issue of distraction or students’ inability to stay on task while using the iPad. The source of distraction is referred to in terms of using the device for unrelated activities such as browsing the web, playing games, and visiting social networking websites (Geist, 2011; Henderson & Yeow 2012; Hoffman, 2013). Another barrier brought up by Brown, Castellano, Hughes & Worth (2012) is institutional technological infrastructure, mainly the availability of robust Wi-Fi support. A slow Internet connection impedes the effectiveness of the device and affects students’ learning experience. One related point, which accompanies the use of any technology in class, is device limitations. This includes: the relatively limited size of the screen, lack of flash or Java plug-ins which restrict the use of many educational websites, and the absence of USB ports or CD readers (Jain & Luaran ,2015; Pegrum, Howitt, & Striepe, 2013). The cost of the iPad also raises concerns. As Henderson and Yeow (2012) contend, the high cost of the iPad may make it difficult to be provided to each student in schools given school budgetary restrictions. Cost also is evident in terms of maintenance of the devices and purchasing additional educational apps, as not all apps are free.

Generally, the limitations of using the iPad can be grouped in two categories: first and second order barriers. First-order barriers include issues such as technical problems, lack of applications that are directly relevant to the curriculum, and device limitations such as the relatively small size of the screen and the absence of a keyboard (Crompton, & Keane, 2012; Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Sadik, Sendurur, & Sendurur, 2012; Pamuk, Çakır, Ergun, Yılmaz, & Ayas, 2013; Pegrum, et al., 2013). Second order barriers become more apparent in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards technology integration, lack of time, lack of technical knowledge and teacher's anxiety that students might be occupied with the device rather than listening or engaging in the lesson (Geist, 2011; Pamuk, et al., 2013; Pegrum, et al., 2013; Ertmer, et al., 2012).

2.3 The Gaps in the Literature

The current study is anticipated to address several gaps in the literature. First, due to the novelty of the device, the majority of previous studies were conducted on a whole school scale and around different content areas. Special focus on EFL teaching and learning at schools is relatively limited and therefore, more studies are needed to develop a thicker description. Second, most of the studies report findings only on the use of iPad at school without fully integrating the tool into the curriculum nor having a pedagogical plan on how to integrate it. Therefore, it is hoped that the current study will fill this gap by integrating the iPad into the existing English curriculum at a
private school, particularly within reading classes, supported by a clear pedagogical plan for implementation. The pedagogical plan adopted in this study is based on one source: namely, the Bloom’s Taxonomy. Thus, selection of the iPad apps and the design of classroom activities were targeted toward activating all levels of thinking. Third, most of past studies were employed in the context of elementary education and higher education, while the area of middle school teaching still needs to be addressed. Fourth, the gap in research amplifies when considering the Saudi context since there is a dearth of studies that explore the utility of the iPad in middle schools in an EFL setting, with exception of Albadry’s (2015) study that focuses on the realm of higher education. Alzannan’s study (2015) was in the field of kindergarten education while Alsulami’s (2016) study was deployed at the primary school level, and both studies were carried out without any specification to EFL/ESL. iPad usage in middle schools, and in particular, middle school EFL classes remains a relatively unexplored territory that needs further research. For these reasons, this study aims to integrate the iPad within a curriculum-based setting to explore the potential impact of the iPad use on students’ achievement. Therefore, this study attempts to address the following questions:

1. How can the utilization of iPads as instructional tools in the Saudi EFL classes enhance young learners’ academic achievement in reading skills and vocabulary?
2. What are the limitations of using iPads as instructional tools in the EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia?

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Study Design

The study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the research questions. The quantitative data comprises of pre-post-test design to determine the impact of the iPad on students’ achievement. The qualitative data is obtained to pinpoint the possible challenges of using the iPad in the EFL classes.

3.2 The Choice of Apps

The choice of apps was determined in the pre-experimental phase. The process for looking for, selecting and testing the apps that aimed to promote students’ thinking skills. Three main categories were used to group the apps; the first category was to locate apps that would promote at least one level of thinking according to Bloom’s Taxonomy. To achieve this criterion, the Evaluation Rubric: Assessing the value of iPad applications for teaching and learning © Department of Education, WA (2012) was utilized. Two main categories were included from the rubric namely; cognitive opportunities and student motivation. Other categories in the rubric were excluded, as they were not relevant to the study goals.

The second criterion was to find apps that could be reshaped and integrated into the curriculum. Therefore, apps that presented content without the option for reshaping its content to match curriculum objectives were excluded. The third criterion was to locate free apps. Paid apps were disregarded because the participants, young learners at the middle school would not have the income to purchase apps. To reduce any financial burdens and to ensure that the selection of the apps would not hamper the experiment, it was essential to select only apps that were free to use. See figure 1.
Five apps were chosen: Quizzlet, iBook + iBook Author, Popplet Lite, Polleverywhere, and Pixton Comic Maker. In an effort to clarify how the chosen app relates to the levels of thinking outlined in Bloom’s taxonomy the following infographic (Appendix) was made.

The setting of this study was one private school for girls located in the city of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. All classes were equipped with desktop computers, smart boards, and overhead projectors. The school did not provide each student with an iPad; however, each student was encouraged to bring her own personal iPad to school. Therefore, the students were familiar with the different features of the iPad. Some teachers at the school had used the iPad with their students during class instruction. However, there had been no manipulation of iPads in EFL teaching so far.

3.3 Participants and Sampling
The participants were a cohort of young learners at a private middle school for girls (aged 12-13). The sampling strategy adopted in the study was a convenience sampling strategy where “the researcher select[ed] participants because they [were] willing and available to be studied” (Creswell, 2012, p.145). The two sample groups that were selected, were: a control group and experimental group. Both groups were students enrolled in middle school (grade seven). The experimental group consisted of 20 students and the number of students in the control group was also 20. The two sample groups were chosen to compare the means of the pre-test and post-test scores and further, to quantify any improvement in the experiment group due to the use of the iPad.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments
Two data collection tools were utilized to answer the research questions. The data collection tools were Pre-test –post-test, and classroom observation.
3.4.1 Pre-test –post-test
The first method of collecting the data was a pre-test –post-test, design which was conducted with both the experimental group and the control group. To obtain the content validity of the test, it was adopted and compiled from the school’s questions bank and aligned with the Ministry of Education rubric for testing reading skill. Further, it was also inspected by two associate professors (experts in the field of TESOL) and one expert teacher from the participant's school. The expert teacher was the coordinator’s assistant and was responsible for testing administration and design in the English department of the private school. Based on her recommendations, modifications were made to the test. The distribution of the marks was based on the Ministry of Education rubric for reading tests.

3.4.2 Test Administration
After consulting with the class teacher, both the pre-test and the post-test took place during reading class. The same test was administrated twice as a pre-test and post-test within an interval of five weeks with the same students, at the same place.

3.4.3 Classroom Observation
The researcher (the second co-author) adopted the role of both an outside observer and an inside observer (participant observer). The role of the outsider observer occurred prior to the integration of the iPad in the class. The rational being that an outside observer is to have insight on the way the teacher conducts the lessons without the use of the iPad tablet. Field notes were taken to describe the teacher’s instructions.

The researcher then adopted the role of a participant observer in which she acted as both the teacher and the observer at the same time. As Creswell (2012) states, a participant observer actively “take[s] part in activities in the setting they observe” (p. 627).

Students were informed that the researcher would be their teacher during the experiment only and the experiment would not affect their grades. Since observation is an extensive procedure that is time consuming (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013), an observation sheet was developed and was validated by an expert in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The observation sheet contained three main sections related to the research questions, the type of the activity used with the iPad, the limitations faced while integrating the app in class, and teacher reflection.

To ensure that observation would not affect teaching practice during the class, the observational data was recorded after the class. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013), observation notes should be written during or immediately after the observation to reduce the effect of “selective or faulty memory” (p. 410). For this reason, the observation sheet was filled in on the same day in a Microsoft Word® document to guarantee that important findings and details would not be jeopardized by the effect of memory fading.

3.5 Procedure
This experiment was conducted within five weeks during regular school hours. Two periods a week were allocated for reading class according to school policies. Each period lasted approximately 40 minutes.
3.5.1 Prior to the Intervention
A chapter has been selected first after consultation with the students' instructor. Then, the selected reading passage was converted into an electronic version via using the app iBook Author. The electronic version of the student reading passage was embedded with interactive images, photos and videos to aid student comprehension (see Figure 2). To control the prior knowledge, the pre-test has been administered to both groups (No. 20 each) during reading classes on the same day. After that the apps were introduced to the students to the experimental group where the iPad apps were introduced and explained. Students were quite familiar with the use of the iPad in general because they had been using them in classes other than English.

![Figure 2. iBook version of the student reading passage](image)

3.5.2 During the Intervention
The class teacher provided the researcher with the PowerPoint presentation she made for the chapter being taught. The slides began by identifying the objective of the chapter. The focus of the reading chapter was to read a persuasive article. Modifications of the teacher’s PowerPoint presentation were made to include the iPad activities. It is important to mention that the students’ workbook exercises were also completed alongside the iPad activities. Students in the experimental group were exposed to the electronic version of the reading passage. Meanwhile, students in the control group received the reading instruction in class through their teacher’s presentation, reading from the printed textbook, and doing workbook exercises.

The lesson for the experimental group started with a pre-reading activity to introduce the concept of “persuasion” and to activate student schemata. The reading instruction revolved around a pre-reading activity, a while reading activity, and a post reading activity. The vocabulary words were presented to the students before the reading passage since the words were quite advanced.
3.5.3 Post-Intervention of the iPad
After the completion of the teaching session allocated for teaching the reading chapter according to the teacher Distribution of Syllabus (DOS), both the experimental and control groups received the post-test. The post-test was collected and graded.

3.6 Ethical Considerations
As the participants under the age of 14, a consent form was sent to the participants’ parents to ensure that they were voluntarily willing to participate in the study. A promise of anonymity was granted to all the participants. As such, due to issues of confidentiality, the identity of the participants and the school will remain undisclosed.

3.7 Data Analysis
Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data were performed. The pre-test and the post-test of both the control group and the experimental group were collected, graded and compiled. The data was then entered the IBM Statistical Programme for Social Science (SPSS® ver. 24). An independent sample t-test was performed to quantify the mean of both the experimental and the control group in the two tests as well as to measure if there were any significant differences in achievement for both groups.

4.0 Results
4.1 Quantitative Data Analysis
To identify the appropriate statistical analysis to test the hypothesis of the pre-test and post-test, the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was performed. The results of Shapiro-Wilk test as set out in Table 1 verifies the normal distribution of the population of each group. As is demonstrated, the scores in both groups’ pre-test and post-tests are $p=.549, .112, and .145, .076$ respectively, in both tests, the values are greater than the significance level of 0.05 ($p>0.05$). Thus, this suggests that conduct parametric analysis such as a t-test is deemed to be an appropriate test to employ in comparing the results of both groups.

Table 1. Shapiro-Wilk test of normality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov$^a$</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This is a lower bound of the true significance.
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction
4.1.1 Results of the Pre-Tests
An independent t-test was employed to check the homogeneity of both groups prior to the intervention of the iPad. Findings indicate that there were no significant differences between the mean of both groups; control group ($M=4.45$, $SD=1.35$, $N=20$), and experimental group ($M=5.26$, $SD=1.71$, $N=20$), $t(38)=-1.66$, $p=0.10$. On this basis, the population sample used in this study for comparability is harmoniously justified (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Independent Sample t-test for the Pre-Achievement Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances</td>
<td>1.861</td>
<td>.181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Post-test
The independent sample t-test was again employed to determine if there is statistically significant evidence that the mean of both groups was different in the post-test. As is illustrated in tables 3 and 4, the results reveal that there is a significant difference between the mean score of the post-test for the experimental group ($M=7.56$, $SD=2.00$, $N=20$) and the control group ($M=6.08$, $SD=2.48$, $N=20$), $t(38)=-2.06$, $p = 0.046$, $d= .65$ respectively.

These results suggest the intervention of the iPad did indeed enhance students’ achievement in reading skill and vocabulary when it was compared to non-iPad intervention as the case of the control group.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistic for the Independent Sample t-test in the Post-Achievement Test*
Table 4. Independent Sample t-test for the Post-Achievement Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>.326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>-2.068</td>
<td>36.352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Qualitative Data Results
The qualitative data in this study was gathered through the use of observation sheets during the iPad activities, taking into consideration the remarks of the observer, who acted as a participant observer. Consequently, the results are primarily a descriptive narrative of self-reported data from classroom observations. The experimental group consisting of seventh grade students (N=20) was observed by the researcher during a period of five weeks with the goal of exploring any limitations or the barriers to using the iPad in the classroom.

4.2.1 Pre-Implementation of the iPad
The researcher observed two lessons prior to the implementation of the iPad as an outside observer. One lesson was observed with the experimental group and the other was observed with the control group, to gain insight to how classes are conducted without the use of the iPad. Generally, what was observed was that classes were carried out following a traditional teaching approach in that the teacher was the holder and transmitter of knowledge. Thereupon, students were tentatively listening to the teacher’s instructions as she presented the material via a PowerPoint presentation. The classes were mostly divided into two main segments: following the Distribution of the syllabus (DOS) and completing the workbook activities.

4.2.2 Limitations/Barriers of Using the iPad in the Classroom
The barriers reported during the period of implementation of the iPad in the reading class are structured around allocated themes and were further divided into subthemes, based on research from the current body of literature.

4.2.3 Technical Issues
The major constraints for implementing the iPad in the classroom primarily revolved around the theme of technical problems, which is generally expected when integrating any form of technology in the classroom. These technical problems stemmed from three main aspects: Internet connection, iPad formatting and uncharged devices.

4.2.3.1 Internet Connection
Given that the school provided an external Wi-Fi router during the experiment, the problem of the Internet connection occurred in different forms while incorporating the iPad in class. For
example, problems arose either because of the slow Internet connection, or a changed Wi-Fi password, both issues acting as impediments to the use of the iPad in class.

4.2.3.2 Unformatted iPad and the Sudden Shutdown of the Device/Chargers
In addition to issues surrounding the infrastructure of the facility, issues related to the iPad itself also came to light, such as unformatted or uncharged devices. Some students forgot to charge their iPad prior to the class, while in few cases others forgot to bring their chargers. In one case, a student approached me and indicated that she lost all the applications she downloaded while updating her iPad’s operating system. As a result, all this student’s work and the downloaded applications were lost.

4.2.3.3 Unfamiliarity with the Applications
Having first-hand familiarity with the iPad before the experiment, students did not exhibit any difficulties with the interface and the operating system of the device. However, unfamiliarity with the applications was one limitation that was clearly observed on several occasions. Though the students were given an orientation session on how to run and use the applications, many students were still uncertain on how to open each application and to adjust to their different features. For instance, during the researcher’s teaching practice and observation it was noted that whenever students were directed to start the application Quizlet®, and to join the class set that the researcher has created earlier, many would still ask about the procedure of joining the class set. Thus, some students required more time to become fully accustomed to using the features of each application. This issue once students became more familiar with the feature of each application, they would be able to immediately open the applications before any further instruction was provided.

4.2.3.4 Distraction
During the course of the implementation, it was observed that most of the students appeared to be focusing on the task at hand and did not open irrelevant applications or websites during class time. However, the theme of distraction should be mentioned. In few instances, some students (two or three) were observed opening other applications and playing with them instead of focusing on the class activity. Due to the small number of students engaged in these actions, however, these events did not impede the flow of the overall classroom activity.

5.0 Discussion
This study attempted to investigate the efficacy of integrating iPad apps into language learning in EFL environment. It is important to note that while much has been conducted in terms of how iPad can be utilized in schools and universities, its implementation in the EFL classroom at the school level (middle school) is still an area that is not widely explored. In this section, we will discuss our findings considering the previous studies findings and to see how our findings go in line or contradict them. Here are the two research questions followed by the results we obtained and discussed in relation to previous literature.

Q.1. How can the utilization of iPads as instructional tools in EFL classes in Saudi Arabia enhance young learners’ academic achievement in reading skills and vocabulary?
Despite the growing body of research within the field of iPad’s use in education, its impact on students’ actual achievement (grades) is still debatable. Supported with statistical evidence
yielded from independent sample t-tests (pre-test and post-test), the current study found that students in the experimental group significantly outscored their counterparts in the achievement tests. This indicates that the use of the iPad as an instructional tool in EFL classes, particularly reading and vocabulary is deemed beneficial in enhancing students’ learning and achievement when compared to conventional teaching paradigms. The results corroborate the findings of Wang, et al., (2015) in which they reported that the iPad did significantly impact students’ achievement in English vocabulary learning in the post-tests.

The findings of this study found that the use of the iPad during EFL reading and vocabulary class provided student with visual and interactive presentation of the reading text. As Greenfield (2012) explains “Multimodal text offers pictures, sound, animation, etc. that helps create a ‘picture’ for students that have difficulties with visualization” (p.14). Digital texts allow students to immediately search for information in ways that are not accessible in traditional printed text. For instance, the hypertext tools presented in the iBook provide the students with different features that enhance their comprehension such as the opportunity to highlight unknown words, find definitions and listen to the pronunciation of words (Hilton & Canciello, 2013). Thus, the iPad’s functionality provides students with the opportunity to enhance their learning outcomes. The current results are significant, especially to the Saudi context where the dilemma of unsatisfactory performance is a major concern.

Q2. What are the limitations of using iPads as instructional tools in EFL classes in Saudi Arabia?

This study has attempted to uncover the limitations or barriers that might accompany the use of the iPad in educational contexts, paying special attention to the Saudi EFL context. Based on the observational data gathered, the primary limitation faced were the technical issues. These challenges were apparent in slow Internet connection, and unformatted/updated and uncharged devices. These limitations were expected since technical issues are a common occurrence associated with technology integration. The results are in accordance with many other studies’ findings, specifically regarding the issue of Wi-Fi connection (Brown, et al., 2012; Pegrum, et al., 2013).

In addition, student unfamiliarity with the iPad was one issue, which came to light during the experiment. A justifiable explanation for this was that students only used the iPad apps two periods a week (assigned for reading and vocabulary class). Therefore, they were not exposed to the apps on a daily basis. Secondly, five apps were used in this experiment, and each app required some time for students to adjust to the different features. This was evident when students became more comfortable with the operation of each app over time, without the need for any further guidance. These results were echoed by Tingerthal (2011) in which he posits that unfamiliarity with technology disappears with time after the students and instructor establish a routine awareness of how the technology operates. As the observational data gathered in this study showed, the issue of the unfamiliarity with the apps were surmounted with continual usage of the iPad apps.

Lastly, the theme of distraction occurred minimally in this study, despite being among the most notable issues in literature concerning the integration of the iPad (Geist, 2011; Hoffman, 2013; Henderson & Yeow 2012). For instance, Hoffman (2013) points out that students’ off task
behaviour is clearly observed when they used social media such as Twitter, Snapchat and iMessage. However, in the current study, because the school restricted the use of social networking websites through the setting of each students’ iPad, the issue of the distraction minimized. It is worth that the results could be attributed to the simple fact that the number of students in the class was 20 students. Thus, it was more manageable to monitor each student in comparison to a larger class of 30 students or more. From these findings, it can be suggested that the issue of distraction when using the iPad depends to a large extent on the teacher’s classroom management skills and on the institutional support. Thus, teachers can create unique solutions suited to their classroom as part of their class management routine. Teachers can set up a system of accountability by defining parameters when using the iPad to enable them to manage their classes the same way they do when the iPad is not in use. This is in line with Henderson and Yeow (2012), who suggest that solutions to distraction occur in class when the teachers place strict rules on use such as students who use the iPad to browse the net will not be allowed to touch their iPad for a week, for instance.

5.1 Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications
The integration of the iPad in schools will undoubtedly expand within the coming years. In light of this, stakeholders and policy makers ought to develop a well-crafted plan for the implementation of the iPad into the curriculum. It is crucial for educators and practitioners to acknowledge the benefits and be aware of the impediments that the iPad offers in their classroom setting. In this study, the limitations of the iPad were not dilemmas that overrode the potential value it brought to the EFL classroom. Consequently, stakeholders in general and the context of the current study must evaluate institution readiness to implement these resourceful devices in their educational settings and should be well prepared to surmount technical issues that they may face when using the iPad in the classroom. It is of a paramount importance, for example, to evaluate the Internet infrastructure of the school before reaching any decisions on implementation. A well-constructed infrastructure for Internet access is required to capitalize on the benefits offered by the utilization of the iPad in the classroom.

In addition to this, teachers should have basic technical knowledge to enable them to cope with routine technical issues that arise in the classroom. More preferably, schools should provide a supportive technical team to deal with technical problems, thereby creating less anxiety for teachers with little technical experience, especially during the early stages of implementation.

Pedagogically, teachers should have a clear pedagogical goal when integrating iPad into their classroom activities. This requires teachers to adopt the role of a facilitator and abandon the role of ‘conduit of knowledge’. As Gosper & Ifenthaler (2013) point out “technologies do not work in isolation of the broader curriculum and where technologies have been bolted on, rather than integrated in a holistic way, students are in danger of an inferior learning experience” (p. v).

5.2 Implications of the Study
The current study presents many implications to teachers, schools, institution, and policy makers who seek to incorporate the iPad in their educational spheres in relation to EFL context. This study sheds light on the benefit of the iPad in enhancing student achievement. It also proposes five empirically tested apps to be used in EFL classes that align with the tenants of Bloom’s Taxonomy.
Furthermore, the study provides much needed information regarding the limitations or challenges that teachers or schools alike, may face when using the iPad in class.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Although this study is anticipated to have an academic value in filling a gap in the literature, particularly that of the usage of iPads in EFL context, there are certain limitations that might affect the generalizability of its findings to other academic settings. First, the sample size of participants in the study consists of a small convenience sample of young learners from a specific school. Furthermore, the number of the participants in the study is relatively small, indicating that the generalization of the findings will be relatively limited.

Second, the context of the study is one private school (middle school, 7th grade) in the city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Thus, applying the same study in a public-school setting that has its own unique profile might obtain novel results. For example, the number of students in a public-school classroom is approximately 40 students per class. Thus, the implementation of the iPad in such a school environment if students are issued a 1:1 ratio of iPads per student might yield different results, as well as the effect other factors may have such as the way the teacher would need to control and monitor students so that the iPads does not become a source of distraction. Third, the focus of this study was on the reading skill and vocabulary learning as a sub-skill and thus, studies exploring other skills such as writing, speaking, and listening may generate other results. Also, the selection of a different group of apps may also result in different findings. Fourth, the duration of the study (i.e., five weeks) was relatively short, which sets boundaries upon its generalization.

5.4 Recommendation for Further Study

Based on the study findings, a number of recommendations can be made. First, it is recommended for further studies to empirically validate the influence of the iPad on other language skills i.e., listening, speaking, writing. Second, it is recommended that future studies should be conducted on a bigger sample size to secure generalisation. A final recommendation lies in calling for a longitudinal study (the length of one academic year) to ascertain the impact of the iPad on students’ long-term achievement.

About the Authors

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References
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### Appendix

**Summary of the iPad Applications Used in the Study Alignment with Bloom’s (1956) Cognitive Levels of Thinking.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Cognitive Opportunity</th>
<th>iPad Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quizlet®</strong></td>
<td>Remembering</td>
<td>(Pair, individual, group) activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Match new vocabulary words with definition or pictures against the clock (game)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Type definition for words and (vice versa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Recognize words by providing definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Listening to the pronunciation of the words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Using the “Test” mode to remember the vocabulary words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>iBook®</strong></td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>(Individual, group) activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Find and search for definition of words in the glossary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Predict answers for the comprehension questions through watching the interactive (embedded) video and pictures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Practice reading orally through the use of the auto reading feature of the text “Jigsaws” activity using iBook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Discuss and explain the answer to the comprehension passage with the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Find answers to a set of comprehension questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Report and defined newly learned vocabulary through the search bottom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Popplet®</strong></td>
<td>Applying</td>
<td>Group activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Applying the concept of facts and opinion and persuasion by expressing their opinion using graphic organizer to show and present their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Popplet®</strong></td>
<td>Analyzing</td>
<td>Group activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Break information into meaningful segments by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poll Everywhere</strong></td>
<td><strong>Evaluating</strong></td>
<td>Identifying the writer’s opinion from the reading passage, classifying reasons and investigate evidence to support reasons through creating graphic organizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Individual activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Vote, choose, express opinions, decide, and view their classmates response through multiple choice, or open answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pixton Comic® Maker®</strong></td>
<td><strong>Creating</strong></td>
<td>Creating scenes in comic strip about the topic of study “persuasion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Design their own characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicate and collaborate in groups to complete a task</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Identifying the writer’s opinion from the reading passage, classifying reasons and investigate evidence to support reasons through creating graphic organizer.
An Investigation into Students’ Views on Blended Learning at the English Language Institute in King Abdulaziz University

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Abstract
Advances in the Internet and online learning technologies are having a tremendous impact on educational systems. Thus, educational systems are combining Internet and digital technologies with traditional classrooms in what is known as blended learning. An established definition of blended learning is combining traditional, face-to-face (f2f) teaching with web-based online technologies; the purpose of blended learning is to provide more benefits over using one single learning delivery medium. In line with an international trend towards blended learning, the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Saudi Arabia has started blending traditional, f2f classrooms with the online learning platform (Blackboard). This study aims at finding out the students’ views on the advantages and challenges that face the implementation of blended learning at the ELI. This study is based on a mixed-methods exploratory sequential design as it starts with a qualitative interview study and is followed-up with a questionnaire survey (QUAL ⇒ quan). The study concludes that blended learning can enhance the EFL learning experience at the ELI as it combines the advantages of both in-class instruction and online learning. However, certain challenges need to be addressed to improve the effectiveness of the blended learning experience. The study ends with recommendations that can enhance the blended learning experience at the ELI.

Keywords: EFL, blended learning, Blackboard, face-to-face (f2f) teaching, online learning, Saudi context

1. Introduction

1.1 What is Blended Learning?

An established definition of blended learning is linking the traditional, f2f classroom teaching with web-based online technologies (Sharma, 2010). Blended learning is associated with combining the traditional, f2f learning systems with e-learning activities especially asynchronous work which is accessed by learners outside time and place constraints (Khan, 2005). Many universities use Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) to deliver the online component of blended learning (Osgerby, 2013). Universities around the world are blending sophisticated e-learning platforms with the traditional, f2f classroom component (Osgerby, 2013). By mixing web-based technologies with the traditional, instructor-led classroom, blended learning aims at exploiting the best of both worlds.

![Blended Learning Figure](image)

**Figure 1.** Blended Learning

1.2 Background of the Study

In keeping with an international trend towards blended learning, the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Saudi Arabia has introduced blended learning. The English Language Institute (ELI) provides English as a foreign language (EFL) courses to first year students in order to improve their English language skills; the four-level EFL course ranges from beginner to intermediate which is equivalent to A1 to B2 on the Common European Framework (CEFR). In 2014, the ELI invested in Blackboard, an online learning platform, to deliver blended learning. The ELI started implementing blended learning by combining the traditional f2f course with the online learning platform, Blackboard. Blackboard is an online learning platform that delivers online learning by including an access system and tools for content display, tasks, exercises, assessment, communication, instant grading and tracking students’ progress. Blackboard also allows teachers to design their own content by adding URL links, uploading files and creating, tasks, discussions and forums. Students can access Blackboard anywhere and anytime using their KAU usernames and passwords. Blackboard is meant to supplement and enhance the regular f2f course, meaning that new material is taught through the f2f course and additional practice is done through blackboard.
1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate how ELI students view and experience blended learning. It also aims to present suggestions that can enhance the blended learning experience at the ELI.

Thus, the research aims are:

- To investigate the students' views on the advantages of blended learning at the ELI.
- To investigate the students' views on the challenges that encounter blended learning at the ELI.
- To come up with suggestions that can enhance the blended learning experience at the ELI.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Why Blend?

There are many reasons for choosing blended learning in education. Graham (2006) identifies the following three reasons for choosing or designing blended learning:
• **Improving Pedagogy:** A major reason for blended learning is offering more meaningful pedagogical practices (Graham, 2006). Teaching and learning in higher education focus on transmissive strategies more than interactive ones (Graham, 2006). On the other hand, distance education provides students with a large amount of information that they have to absorb independently (Waddoups & Howell, cited in Graham, 2006). Blended learning is seen as a compromise that increases collaboration between peers and usage of learner-centered strategies (Graham, 2006). Moreover, students learn in different ways and the traditional approach only is not suitable for all students (Young, 2001).

• **Increasing access/flexibility:** Another major factor is access to learning (Bonk, Olson, Wisher & Orvis, cited in Graham, 2006). Blended learning also offers flexibility and convenience to learners who have other commitments and cannot commit to a fully f2f course (Graham, 2006). Most of the learners want both the convenience offered by blended learning and also social, human interaction in f2f classrooms (Graham, 2006).

• **Increasing cost effectiveness:** A third reason is cost effectiveness. Universities are using technology to reduce costs (Graham, 2006). For example, the University of Central Florida has anticipated cost savings due to the reductions in facilities (Dziuban et al. cited in Graham, 2006). In addition, blended learning environments are needed in higher education to handle issues created by a large number of students (Graham, 2006).

2.2 General Categories for Blended Learning

Graham (2006) provides the following description for two categories on how to blend:

• **Enabling Blends:** It provides the learning experience through different modes: entirely f2f programs, fully online programs and blended learning programs. Learners choose the option that best meets their demands.

• **Enhancing Blends:** It enhances the traditional f2f university setting with online supplementary resources; universities often adopt a Learning Management System as the online component. The enhancing blend which offers supplementary online resources along with the main traditional line is the most common type of blended learning in traditional university settings. It should be noted that the ELI which is the focus of this study adopts an enhancing blend. Enhancing blends are the first step towards transforming blends.

• **Transforming Blends:** In the transforming blend the learning environment is a mixed-format of online and f2f instruction. Both traditional and online learning are main methods of instruction in transforming blends.

2.3 Language Learning Theories Behind Blended Learning

This section of the study focuses on how computer-based and blended learning was influenced by the three major language learning theories. The three major language learning theories are used in instructional environments and they can also be used to examine online learning materials (Ally, 2008).

• **Behaviorist Approach to Computer-Based Learning:** The behaviorist language learning theory influenced the first generation of computer-based learning (Warschauer& Kern, 2000). Behaviorism was limited to stimulus and response and learners were subjected to linguistic stimuli in order to produce automatic, accurate responses; influenced by behaviorism, computers provided drill practice and corrective feedback (Warschauer& Kern, 2000).
Behaviorism was rejected due to its boring drill programs and the second generation of computer-based programs was ushered in (Warschauer & Kern, 2000).

- **Cognitive Approach to Computer-Based Learning**: The second generation of computer-based programs was based on cognitivism which regarded the mind as a computer (Warschauer & Kern, 2000). Thus, the second generation of computer-based programs shifted the role of the computer from a tutor to a provider of language input, resources and inferential tasks; learners chose how to use these tools (Warschauer & Kern, 2000).

- **Constructivist Approach to e-learning and Blended Learning**: The constructivist learning theory appeared as a counteraction to behaviorism and cognitivism; educational practitioners realized that learners could not be limited to stimuli and response and could not be programmed as computers (Harasim, 2012). A constructivist learning theory advocates that learning is a collaborative activity in which learners interact with their teachers, peers and community in order to construct meaning (Harasim, 2012). The constructivist theory emphasizes the role of the learner not the instructor as the learner interacts with events and content, thus gaining an understanding of events or ideas; this way the learner creates his/her own conceptualization and solutions to problems (Mason & Rennie, 2006). It also actively encourages learner autonomy and initiative (Mason & Rennie, 2006). Educational practitioners and researchers indicate that constructivism is the underlying theory behind e-learning and blended learning. Mason & Rennie (2006), indicate that constructivism is the most evident approach in e-learning and blended learning courses. Bangert (2004) also shows that most web courses are influenced by constructivism.

### 2.4 Challenges Facing the Uptake of Blended Learning in EFL Instruction

In spite of the glamour of blended learning, there are some challenges that influence the uptake of a blended learning approach. First, computer-based exercises are criticized as being "stimulus-response" activities as they include gap-fill/mix-and-match and true/false activities; such activities are influenced by a behaviorist learning theory and do not encourage a more communicative approach (Sharma & Barrett, 2007). Second, blending technology into language learning does not always guarantee better students' acquisition skills than in a traditional, f2f classroom; the effect of technology on L2 acquisition depends on what is being taught, the kind of technology used and how it is used (Al-Jarf, 2005). The learners' level is also an influencing factor in the type of technology used and how often it is used (Sharma & Barrett, 2007). The term digital natives refers to someone who grows up using technology like today's learners; whereas digital immigrants refers to an older generation that did not grow-up using technology (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007). In many cases, younger learners are digital natives and teachers are digital immigrants (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007). Teachers can have negative attitudes towards technology due to the lack of training and confidence which results in an inability to view the benefits of technology in their classrooms (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007). Thus, Sharma & Barrett (2007) recommend that teachers acquire a basic knowledge about technology and its incorporation into their courses.

### 2.5 Research on Blended Learning in Saudi Arabia

Studies in Saudi Arabia indicate a positive attitude among students towards blended learning. A study by Mohandes et al. (2006), on blended learning at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Saudi Arabia indicated that 90% of the male students in an electrical engineering
course preferred blended learning instruction over completely online courses. Other studies among Saudi female students also reveal a positive attitude towards blended learning. Alebaikan (2010) conducted a study on the perceptions of Saudi female lecturers and students on blended learning at King Saud University. Blended learning courses were applied at various colleges in the following majors: Arabic, Social studies, English, Law, Business, Accounting, Psychology, Special education and Preschool. The qualitative study concluded that blended learning enriches the learning experience, offers Saudi females the flexibility to pursue their higher education and reduces the routine of the f2f classroom. However, blended learning faced challenges such as shortage of internet labs on campus, poor students' IT skills and e-plagiarism. Another study on blended learning among Saudi females at King Saud University in Riyadh was conducted by Al-Jarf (2005). Unlike the previous two studies, this one focused on using blended learning in EFL classrooms. The aim of the study was to find out if blending the f2f class grammar instruction with online learning can improve the EFL university students' achievements. Al Jarf (2005) concluded that supplementing the in-class grammar instruction with online instruction has the potential to increase students' achievement in grammar, but administrative support is required to make the students take the online course more seriously. Students also believed that the online course which was not allocated a course grade should be used for fun not for serious studying and credit. Finally, the study recommended extending blended learning to other language courses and colleges.

3. Design of the Study

3.1 Mixed Methods Research

This study adopts an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design (QUAL ⇒ quan) as it starts with qualitative data and then gathers quantitative data. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design first gathers qualitative data in order to provide an in-depth exploration of a few participants and then, collects data from a larger number of participants to check the general trends (Dorneyi, 2007). The following steps as mentioned by Creswell (2005), were followed in my exploratory, mixed-methods research:

- **Locating an instrument**: Collecting qualitative data and identifying themes that are used to locate parallel instruments.
- **Developing an instrument**: Using these themes to create items and scales as a questionnaire. Then, testing the instrument with a sample population.

This study starts with qualitative exploration through semi-structured interviews with 10 students and is followed by a second quantitative phase, a questionnaire with 60 students, to check general trends about blended learning at the ELI. The information gathered from the initial qualitative phase was used to identify different categories on blended learning. Themes from the qualitative data were used to design a Likert-type scales and items for the follow-up questionnaire. Thus, the second phase of the research consisted of forming and testing an instrument based on the qualitative data. In the data analysis stage, qualitative data was analyzed and backed by the quantitative data.

The second phase of the exploratory research design includes questionnaires in order to explore the general trends from the interviews. Questionnaires are practical, economical (Sarantakos, 2005), easy to construct and can be used to gather a large amount of information.
(Dorneyi, 2007). In this study, the questionnaire took the form of a Likert scale which is made-up of closed-ended items in which respondents had to choose from a range of choices from strongly agree to strongly disagree and the scores for the items dealing with the same target were averaged. All of the research instruments had to be translated from English to Arabic because the students' English level does not always allow them to express themselves fluently in English. The ELI has two branches at King Abdulaziz University, one in the Men's Campus and another in the Women's Campus as women and men receive instruction in separate campuses in Saudi Arabia. This study took place only in the Women's Campus.

Credibility was accomplished by taking the interview interpretations to the participants and asking them directly whether the findings are plausible. Reliability and validity were ensured by piloting the questionnaires among some ELI students and instructors.

4. Results and discussion

A rich amount of data was gathered. The data analysis of the students' views is presented in two main sections: the advantages and challenges of blended learning. For each theme, the qualitative results are presented first followed by the quantitative results. Data is anonymised through the use of pseudonyms to ensure participants' anonymity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Major Findings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advantages of blended learning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accessibility and flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackboard content and interface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student performance</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges of blended learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reduction in f2f instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student evaluation and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of resource support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of online collaboration</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.1 Students' views on the advantages of blended learning

The majority of the students have expressed positive views on their blended learning experience which reflects the findings of other studies conducted among Saudi undergraduates including (AL-Jarf, 2005; Mohandes et. al 2006; Alebaikan, 2010). Today's learners are digital natives who have grown up with technology, for them technology is a natural and integrated part of their lives (Dudeney&Hockly, 2007). Digital natives expect a language course to provide opportunities to use technology (Sharma & Barrett, 2007). This was evident in the responses of the participating
students on blended learning. According to the students the advantages of blended learning include:

**Table 2. Advantages of blended learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Blended learning offers flexible access to the online resources at any time or place.</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Blended learning improves pedagogy as it combines the traditional classroom with online learning.</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Blackboard content is related to the course's subject matter and the interface is organized and easy to navigate.</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Blended learning improves student performance.</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Accessibility and Flexibility**
  
  A key attribute of blended learning is its ability to enable flexible access to online material (Graham, 2006). Flexible access means accessing and using the online resources at a time, place and pace convenient for the learners. Most of the participating students indicated that supporting the English course with Blackboard gave them more flexibility in both time and place. Students were pleased that they could solve the different Blackboard tasks and exercises at their own convenience. The following excerpt was taken from an interview with Amal:

  *Blended learning is better than traditional learning only because it does not depend on your presence in the class only ...you solve the Blackboard exercises from a laptop, mobile or at home.*

  In addition, Dina confirms this opinion, she said:

  *Blended learning better than learning in the class only because it allows you to learn through the Internet anywhere and anytime.*

  The students' follow-up questionnaires also supported this view with the majority of the students reporting that blended learning offers accessibility and flexibility. This finding is in line with a research on blended learning at Stanford University which indicates that learners enjoyed the flexible learning options offered by blended learning (Singh, 2003).
• **Improving Pedagogy**

  Student interviews indicate that a major advantage of blended learning is improving pedagogy. Students view blended learning as the best of both worlds. Several students indicated that the f2f contact with the teacher is indispensable, but the traditional classroom focuses on transmissive strategies as it includes lecturing when they needed more interactive strategies. A major advantage of using technology in language teaching is the “interactivity” of language exercises (Sharma & Barrett, 2007). Students appreciated that Blackboard provides them with the needed interactivity which appeals to many learners. For example, Rozan said:

  *The Blackboard exercises are more interactive than the paper-based exercises in class. To solve interactive exercises (in Blackboard) is better than being a recipient all the time.*

  In the follow-up questionnaire also, most of the students (77.5%) agreed that blended learning improves pedagogy. This finding is consistent with studies from the University of Tennessee and Stanford University that have indicated that blended learning is better than utilizing the traditional instruction and e-learning separately (Singh, 2003).

• **Blackboard Content and Interface**

  Interface design deals with the integration of content and its organization with interactive and navigational controls (Jones & Farquhar cited in Khan, 2005). The majority emphasized that the content design was related to the course's subject matter. For example, Rozan said:

  *Absolutely and the Blackboard content is presented in a clear and readable way. And the exercises presented new ideas.*

  Again, most of the students indicated that the web pages in Blackboard were organized, easy to navigate, accessible and usable. Rahaf added:

  *I like the graphics and multimedia in Blackboard. I navigate through Blackboard easily and with reasonable speed.*

  The follow-up questionnaires also revealed that the majority of the students agreed that the Blackboard content was related to the course's subject matter and that the interface was organized and easy to navigate. In all 8 items of the questionnaire, satisfaction with the Blackboard content and interface scored the highest agreement percentage (82.5%). This is consistent with Alebaikan (2010) who found out that Saudi university students perceived the online learning platform tools as friendly and helpful.

• **Student Performance**

  The majority of the interviewed students reported that blended learning has improved their performance and consequently increased their GPA. Students stated that Blackboard gave them access to a wealth of ready-made EFL material which made them practise the main language skills. For example, Lojain said,

  *My performance has improved significantly as a result of blended learning which helped me increase my GPA.*

  The student questionnaires also backed up and supported this view with the majority of students reporting that blended learning improves their performance. This is in line with a study conducted
by Al-Jarf (2005) among Saudi EFL university students who found out that blending the in-class grammar instruction with online instruction increases students’ achievement.

4.2 Students’ Views on the Challenges that Encounter Blended Learning

Although most of the students have expressed satisfaction with the blended learning courses, they still expressed challenges that have prevented a more effective blended learning experience. Following are the challenges mentioned by the students.

Table 3 Challenges of blended learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Agree Overall (%)</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (%)</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Neutral (%)</th>
<th>Disagree Overall (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. The duration of the f2f course should be reduced and replaced with Blackboard.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Marks have to be allocated for using Blackboard.</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Students receive enough technological and human based support when using Blackboard.</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Students interact through Blackboard messages, discussions and forums with teacher and other peers.</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **No Reduction in f2f Instruction**

Out of the three categories of blended learning: enabling, enhancing and transformative (Graham, 2006), the ELI adopts an enhancing blend in which the f2f course is supplemented with Blackboard without any reduction of the f2f class hours. The English f2f course is 18 hours per week with Blackboard as an addition that does not reduce the f2f teaching hours. Most of the participating students expressed dissatisfaction as there was no reduction in the f2f instruction time. For example, Lojain said:

*It' better to decrease the in-class hours and replace them with Blackboard to encourage self-studying.*

When asked about replacing some of the f2f hours with Blackboard, another student replied:
Absolutely
The follow-up questionnaire also indicates that the majority of the students (80%) are for replacing part of the f2f course with Blackboard. This percentage was second-highest agreement percentage in the questionnaire. The ELI does not reduce seat time in its blending learning course. However, Graham (2006) asserts that the reduction of seat time allows increased convenience and flexibility for learners.

Student Evaluation and Assessment
Within each module or level at the ELI, students receive marks for an in-class supplementary program. However, no marks are allocated for Blackboard. Many participating students were dissatisfied that their work in Blackboard is not graded. For example, Sara said:

We should be given bonus marks for using Blackboard.

Marks are an important incentive for Saudi students. For example, in a blended EFL course for Saudi undergraduates, students believed that the online course which was not allocated a grade is used for fun not for serious studying (Al-Jarf, 2005).

Lack of Resource Support
Resource support is crucial in successful learning environments and students in online courses should receive both technological and human-based support (Khan, 2005). The student interviews indicated issues related to technological support and the availability of computer labs. When asked about technological support at the ELI, all of the students indicated that they head to their English teachers if they face any technological problems. Regarding the technological problems, Afnan said:

Blackboard exercises that include dragging the answers do not work on iphones. Also, sometimes the screen freezes.

Another issue that was raised during the interviews was the unavailability of computer labs. Several students indicated that they do not have the same opportunity at home when it comes to access to computers, Internet connectivity and speed; this issue was echoed several times in the interviews. Student questionnaires also indicated that technological and human-based support was not sufficient. In the questionnaire, the number of students who are neutral and disagree exceeds the students who agree with a ratio of 1.7 times.

Lack of Online Collaboration
Sharma & Barrett (2007) indicate that a challenge that faces computer-based exercises in EFL instruction is that they are based on "stimulus- response" activities such as gap-fill, true/false and mix-and-match; such activities are informed by behaviorist principles and do not encourage collaboration and interaction between peers. Mason & Rennie (2006) indicate that online courses should be informed by a constructivist language learning theory which views learning as a collaborative activity in which learners communicate with their teacher and peers to construct meaning. In line with constructivism, online courses promote interactive communication through asynchronous and synchronous discussions so that learners can take part in authentic discourse.
communities (Warschauer & Kern, 2000). Although online courses are now informed by constructivism which promotes collaborative learning, Blackboard at the ELI is not. When asked about the type of activities used in Blackboard, students mentioned "stimulus-response" activities such as: true/false, gap-fill and mix-and-match. For example, Rozan said:

*I solve grammar and vocabulary activities. They are fill in the blanks and matching.*

Similarly, Rahaf said:

*We solve fill in the blanks and drag the correct answer exercises.*

One student expressed a need for collaborative learning:

*If there were forums or discussions, then, we can collaborate and if one of us has a problem we can solve it together.*

This item scored the highest disagreement percentage (70%) and the lowest agreement percentage (10%) in all items of the questionnaire giving a strong indication that Blackboard was not used as an online collaboration tool. Unlike the ELI context, many studies indicate that online discussions are of significant value for the students. Miyazoe & Anderson (2010) indicate that EFL university students in Japan used online forums and blogs to communicate with their peers and lecturers which gave them a better opportunity to practise writing in English and express their views with more confidence.

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

Following are the recommendations based on the research findings.

- **Moving towards a transforming blend**
  
The nature of blended learning investigated in this study is identified as an enhancing blend. Enhancing blends refer to a course that is mainly f2f, but includes online supplementary material (Graham, 2006). The ELI provides each of its four levels in 7 weeks of f2f instruction along with the Blackboard supplementary resources. Students receive 18 hours of f2f instruction per week. The majority of participating students indicated that 18 hours of f2f instruction per week along with Blackboard was too much for the English course. They expressed preference for reducing the f2f course and replacing it with Blackboard. My suggestion is moving from an enhancing blend to a transforming blend. Transforming blends utilize both traditional and online learning as main instruction methods (Graham, 2006). Adopting a transformative blend has other advantages other than cutting down the f2f hours. Another advantage for adopting a transformative blend is reducing costs. Reducing costs is a major reason for blended learning in higher education (Graham, 2006). A transforming blend at the ELI will result in reductions in physical infrastructure as fewer classrooms will be utilized.

- **A constructivist approach to Blackboard**
  
Computer-based programs have progressed along with the major language learning theories. The early generation of computer-based programs was influenced by the behaviorist language learning theory as it was based on "stimulus-response" activities such as grammar and vocabulary drills and computers were limited to providing drill practice and instant feedback (Warschauer & Kern, 2000). The constructivist language learning theory appeared as a counteraction to behaviorism which limited learners to stimuli-response activities (Harasim, 2012).
Constructivism indicates that learners construct meanings as they interact with teacher and peers (Harasim, 2012). Constructivism places emphasis on the learner as he/she interacts with events and content to gain a better understanding of events and ideas (Mason & Rennie, 2006). Several educational researchers indicate that constructivism is the language learning theory behind e-learning and blended learning including: Bangert (2004) and Mason & Rennie (2006).

However, interviews and questionnaires with the participating students indicated that constructivism is not the underlying theory behind blended learning at the ELI. Almost all of the participating students indicated that they have never used the Blackboard discussions and forums with the teacher or other peers and that there was no online collaboration among teacher and peers. Actually, the student interviews indicated that most of the Blackboard activities were "stimulus-response" activities such as gap-fill and mix-match. According to Sharma & Barrett (2007), such activities are informed by behaviorist principles.

My recommendation is to be in line with constructivism. Teachers should establish Blackboard as a tool for interactive communication and encourage learners to interact through synchronous (simultaneous) and asynchronous (not simultaneous) discussions. Thus, learners can take part in authentic discourse communities. I also suggest encouraging online writing. Blackboard allows teachers and students to set up forums, blogs and wikis. Online writing and collaboration can be encouraged through forums in which students can hold conversations in the form of posted messages. Students can also interact through wikis, collaborative web space, which consists of a number of pages that can be edited by any student. Teachers can set up the first page of a wiki outlining the topic of the project and the steps learners will need to take in the project. Such activities create an environment in which knowledge is created and sustained as learners interact with each other.

- **Resource Support**

  Although, technological and human based-support is crucial in successful blended learning environments (Khan, 2005), the participating students indicated that there is not enough resource support at the ELI. Students indicated that they presented their technological problems to their teachers and that there was no Blackboard student support unit at the ELI. Students also raised the issue of Internet speed and connectivity which does not give an equal opportunity to all students. I believe that the ELI should establish a Blackboard student support unit which can resolve any technological problems. Another suggestion is giving students access to the computer labs during the university working hours. This could resolve the problem of equal net access and connectivity for all students.

6. **Limitations and Suggestions for further research**

   In conducting this study the researcher faced a number of challenges and limitations, one was excluding the males from this study due to the separate gender campuses in Saudi Arabia. This study was only conducted at the ELI in the Women's Campus. The participation of students from the Men's Campus could have enriched this study.

   Unfortunately, there is a shortage of Arabic resources on blended learning and there is a need for more research in Arab contexts (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010). In the light of this study, there
are a number of possible suggestions for research. This study did not include lecturers, further research that investigates the views of lecturers towards blended learning is recommended. Another suggestion for further research could be on blending online writing (forums, blogs or wikis) with the in-class instruction among Saudi EFL students. Finally, it is hoped that this study will contribute to a more effective blended learning experience at the ELI.

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Exploring EFL Instructors and Students Perceptions of Written Corrective Feedback on Blackboard Platform: A Case Study

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Abstract
This case study examines the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors and students of written corrective feedback (WCF) preferences on the Blackboard platform from the two-way communicators’ prospectors (students and teachers). It also aims to investigate the instructors’ beliefs on feedback given via the Learning Management System (LMS) – Blackboard, along with the students’ understanding of it. Three university-level EFL students and their instructor participated in this case study. As such, this study followed a qualitative data collection and analysis design where the primary data were recorded in semi-structured interviews regarding Think-Aloud-Protocol. The analysis and results showed four main classifications (emerging themes) which are: 1) Instructor’s Beliefs and Mechanisms toward Feedback on Blackboard Writings. 2) Students’ Preferences and Views on Error Correction (ER) on Blackboard 3) Students and Teachers’ Views about Blackboard Usage 4) Obstacles that Faced both of the Language instructors and Students. The study concluded that students’ personal factor significantly relies on their feedback preferences concerning feedback amount, type, and level. The study also revealed a positive attitude towards the LMS Blackboard usage.

Keywords: Blackboard learning, case Study, direct-feedback, EFL writing, indirect-feedback, written corrective-feedback (CF)

1.0 Introduction

Doubtlessly, feedback is “a continuous two-way communication that encourages teaching and learning among educators and students” (Singh, 2016, p. 79). Due to corrective feedback importance in language teaching, many language studies were devoted to understanding the efficiency behind WCF—whether in a long or short term (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Ferris, 2014). As far as many feedback factors were addressed in research projects such as, feedback benefit among language learners, the amount and type that is most efficient in language teaching and what feedback methods would be the most applicable (Nassaji, 2017; Zhang & Hyland, 2018), students and instructors’ feedback preferences and perceptions of WCF in EFL studies (Rajab, Khan, & Elyas, 2016; Storch, 2018). Along with the current and increasing adoption of technology integration within language learning institutions, LMS Blackboard software has been largely and widely applied for language teaching purposes (Hossan & Sarah, 2017; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Blackboard can be defined as: “a learning system software application to facilitate teaching and learning. The system has capabilities of instruction, communication and assessment” (Tawalbeh, 2017). However, researchers have reported some obstacles and challenges regarding Blackboard usage and learning outcomes (Hossain, Akhtar, & Rahman, 2017) and some studied argued that the traditional face-to-face teaching or conferencing might be even more efficient and satisfactory than the implementation of Blackboard (Tichavsky, Hunt, Driscoll, & Jicha, 2015).

Notwithstanding, many researchers consider Blackboard LMS as reliable and plays an effective element in providing corrective feedback to language learners (Ai, 2017; Sauro, 2009). In that regard, this study aims to fill out the gap of the previous studies of corrective feedback along with the implementation of Blackboard LMS as a tool specifically utilized in the Saudi, EFL context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Corrective Feedback on EFL/ESL Writing

Corrective feedback is defined as a type of negative response of learner’s language production (Ellis, 2009). Studies has shown a great deal on the impact of WCF on language learners; as it is mainly regarded to students’ success and might give the English as a second language (ESL). This is in addition to the fact that EFL teachers a clue about the language feature that is needed to be encountered in regard to students’ needs (Ellis, 2009; Yilmaz, 2013) However, other studies focused on the effectiveness of certain feedback types such as the direct, indirect corrective feedback of surface level content, and error coding (Ferris, 2012; Rajab et al., 2016). The direct CF form is perceived as merely editing the learner’s production to be a version free of errors with explicitly mentioning the mistakes (Hartshorn & Evans, 2015). Atmaca (2016) believes that the direct feedback correction stands as “spoon feeding” when the teacher trains students of what is must be written. On the other hand, the indirect feedback correction twists the process over and forces autonomous learning, in which the EFL/ESL instructor provides hints standing as gaps of desired textual form of language learner’s performance (Tang & Liu, 2018).

Corrective feedback has always been a controversial debate in foreign language writing (Bitchener, 2017; Bitchener & Knoch, 2015). The ongoing debate is regarded to its effectiveness...
on language learning under the consideration of other varieties. The problematic part of corrective feedback is aligned with other engaging aspects. Cohen-sayag (2016) proposed, in a study of feedback reflection on learners’ writings, that the effectiveness of feedback is ultimately measured not on behalf of feedback type, but concerning to the type of instruction, feedback receiving, feedback giver, and feedback receiver. To that extend, some research studies claimed that the assembly of different methodologies which are assigned for studies of corrective feedback on writing- results difficulties of proving the feedback effectiveness on ESL/EFL writing (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Another issue to be concerned is the need of feedback correction to reinforce and foster a source of language learning especially within an EFL context (Yilmaz, 2013).

2.2 Blackboard E-Learning Software

Blackboard is one of the e-learning LMS commercial software that has been widely invested by universities and academic institutions worldwide; especially in North America and Europe (Caputi & Garrido, 2015). Blackboard advantages were highlighted in numerous studies within the last decade. For instance, Ioannou, Brown, and Artino (2015) assert that the core contributional aspect of Blackboard falls within the asynchronous collaborative aspect that possesses unlimited access at any time and anywhere. Additionally, Khan, Egbue, Palkie, and Madden (2017) believe that the beneficial feature of Blackboard depends on the accessibility of the course materials at any time along with the freedom of both class time and the expressive edge of discussing and asking.

2.3 Research Questions

The following three research questions guided this study:

1. What is the correlation between students and teachers’ preferences of the amount of corrective feedback that is given on EFL writing topics on Blackboard?
2. What is the correlation between students and teachers’ preferences of style and type of the corrective feedback that is given on EFL writing topics on Blackboard?
3. What are the students’ understanding and beliefs to the given feedback about teachers’ beliefs of feedback on Blackboard?

3.0 Methodology

This paper follows a qualitatively based case study design. Think-Aloud-Protocol was applied in the interviews along with interviewee’s questions. In order to answer the research questions, two main elements that the instructor was asked to apply were:

a) the instructor gives a detailed analysis to one of her Blackboard writing corrections
b) the instructor generally talks about her rationales and methodologies of feedback giving in term of the current integration to Blackboard. On the other hand, students are asked to retrieve one of their writings and think-aloud saying in what way did they understand the correction, and how do they prefer it to be.
3.1 Data Collection

3.1.1. The Pace of English Language Institute Module

This study was conducted in an EFL context at the ELI at KAU university in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The ELI’s program contains four modules that must be achieved within the first preparatory year of the university. In each semester, two modules are accomplished. Thus, it is an intensive fast-track course of seven teaching weeks per module. It is also important to specify that the first teaching module of 101 (beginner’s level) is not counted in the students’ grade point average (GPA) of the preparatory year.

3.1.2 Data Analysis

The instructor was asked to choose three students with different levels of English language skills. Each student stands for her grade whether A, B, or C. For instance, the first student’s grade will be her aliases in this study. Furthermore, the instructor was asked to discuss one of her graded writings during the interview. It is important to specify that students’ interviews were conducted in Arabic Language to ensure that they fully understood the given questions and they were able to express their thoughts during the think-aloud process. The interviews were translated to English and verified by two, translation-specialized, associate professors at KAU.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study were an EFL instructor with three students of her last module section. First, the EFL instructor with Masters of TESOL and over six years of teaching experience at higher education. A female native speaker, from the United States of America, who is working at the ELI at KAU. Second, the student participants of this study were three female preparatory year program (PYP) students, who were majored to be science students studying English Language for Academic Purposes. The students were all female, Saudi and Arabic speaking.

4.0 Analysis and Results

The analysis of this study highlighted four main themes, in which they are explained in depth including their relevant subthemes.

4.1 The Instructor’s Beliefs and Mechanisms toward Feedback on Blackboard Writings

4.1.1 Feedback on Structure Level versus Content Level

The instructor believes that she corrects major errors for students whether these errors are structural or based on the writing content. Though she focuses more on the structure-level correction, as she states:

“Actually, I live Mostly in the mechanics and sentence structure for students. What I do? I may highlight an area where maybe capital letters are not correct or not used properly. I also capitalize or highlight areas where they need punctuation marks. I also highlight how they need to change the order of their sentence or words that are used within the sentence. That’s how I mostly do my correction and how I give feedback”.

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She reiterated the latter by stating: “I correct everything; I look at the mechanics, grammar, structure, meaning... Everything” However, the fewer amount of content level correction might be the result of the given topics on Blackboard; as the instructor explains that there are no writing techniques which are provided to them in term of the topic sentence, the body, and the conclusion. It is important to acknowledge here that Blackboard writing topics are fixed along with each English level, thus, the instructor does not authorise the topics. Nonetheless, the writing topics are about a specific title with its prompts in which the students must write about and include all of them.

4.1.1 Teacher’s Rationales and Beliefs on Correcting Blackboard Writings: Think-Aloud-Protocol

During the processes of the think-aloud-protocol, the teacher explains a very brief writing protocol on Blackboard. She states:

“I highlighted like, were punctuation should’ve been, capitalization should’ve been there like in this one. And she sees her period or her full-stop, that is supposed to be capital (she knows that one, I spoke to her) and so things like that... and then these areas of course maybe need, umm maybe like, um may be punctuation mark or maybe these too far apart or something like that”.

She further states:

“I don’t always just highlight, but I...I highlight were... umm, sometimes I highlight just to let them know where the mistakes are.”

While the teacher was clarifying her methods of assigning the corrective feedback, she added that she tends to use explanatory comments in each writing to illustrate more and make sure that her feedback effectively received. According to the teacher:

“Not just highlighting, but also I tell them where the mistakes are and how they look and find some examples on how to correct”.

She also specified that she does not fix sentences. When demonstrating her rationales, she explicitly agrees that feedback is very effective, though she is hesitant towards the concept of being fully absorbed by language students and this evidence in her statement that:

“I think it’s helpful. Feedback is very helpful. They need that. Do they take it; apply it in the next writing? I don’t know. But I’ve done my job as an instructor to make them know hey, this is what I see, this is what you need to work on, this is what you can do in your next writing assignment. So, the longest they know the longest that I see it”.

More interestingly that though the instructor doubts that students would not be able to apply it next time on their writings, clearly, she believes it is part of the teacher’s image in front of students. She added:
I can tell them the errors and tell them how they do it. They still do it back in their next writing. I don’t know, again they still do it in the next writing! So, I don’t know! To me, again it goes back to having a separate writing class for students. They only do much in the class time... We’ve talked to the management, lots of teachers do.

Part of this, she seems believing that feedback is a tool of building students-teacher rapport. For example, she mentioned that when she corrects, students will acknowledge that their teacher “cares”. According to her:

“Feedback is helpful: it let the students know the instructor dose care. And, it let the students know that the teacher knows what’s going on”.

Thus, the teacher’s rationales about feedback on Blackboard writings are obviously fused on the aspect of correcting the basics of writing, e.g. capitalizations, sentence structure, and punctuation through highlighting and giving comments and examples but not to fix the sentences. She focusses on both content and structure levels in order to ensure that the flow of the writing is in ease, though major errors are the most prior ones.

4.1.2 The Amount of Corrective Feedback

Although the instructor tends to correct all major aspects of the basics of writing (see Table 1), she does not correct every single mistake. As it is mentioned in the previous section of the teacher’s rationales, she focuses on major errors and the fundamentals of writing. For instance, she states: “As teachers, we can’t spend a lot of time on one particular thing”.

In other cases, she mentioned that students might commit same kind of language mistakes: “Well, I would say 99% same issue; capital letter, grammar, sentence structure. Everybody has the same issue pretty much”.

She would then, as a follow-up, at that point dedicate a lesson for it or discuss it in a regular teaching class. During the class discussion of the students’ writing issues, she prefers to discuss extra details or questions- of course if needed during her office hours, as she clearly states:

“Usually address it in the class on a PowerPoint and I tell them about the errors ...and then, that would give them a more than an idea of what they need to look out for their next assignment” - “I would talk about it in the class if they see it or not, if they have any questions, we can talk about it... to set-aside during the office hours”.

Whereas, she assumes that the module pace is quite fast and there is no time to conference students and inform them about their actual level of English. Regardless to the follow-up point, she attempts to correct just what they have covered in the class, as she states:

“I want to let them more focused of what we’ve covered in class time”.
On top of that, she was not able to correct each writing on Blackboard due to time constraints and the number of students in the class. So, she follows:

“picking and choosing” method to solve that issue. According to her,
I try to correct as much as I can... umm, you know, because if I see, um, a lot of mistakes just in one paragraph. Then you know, it doesn’t take that much time. Just to correct a small like this. So, I don’t mind going to the whole thing. I can copy it, I can paste it and show them the highlighted areas for errors like this... So, yea, a small paragraph like this that doesn’t take that much time, I usually go through it.

The teacher is probably concerned about time-consuming aspects the most, especially when the number of students in her class increased to 35 students, which is a huge increase in comparison to her previous one. Explicitly, she notes:
“I try, I try... this module I have a large class. The last module I didn’t have such a large one. So, I was able to do this. Sometimes I just browse through it. Maybe I’ll pick certain ones that really need correcting. It does take time”.

4.1.3 Feedback Style: Direct vs. Indirect

Interestingly, the instructor noted during the interview that she tends to apply the direct type of feedback in her correction. However, when assembling think-aloud-protocol into the use, it turns out that she actually uses the indirect corrective feedback along with explanatory comments and examples. She mentioned that she does not fix her students errors directly, however, she aids them with examples of how the error should be written in that regard. Her usage of the indirect feedback can be considered as the lesser version of the direct one.

4.1.4 Students’ Preferences and Views on Error Correction on Blackboard

During data gathering, it was impressive that Grade A and C students understood all of the given feedback. Grade A student indicated:
“Everything was clear!”

An example of her think-aloud-protocol is as following:

Table 1. The category, type and amount of analysed feedback received from the instructor during the think-aloud process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Feedback Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure Level (Grammar)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5 direct/3 indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure Level (punctuation)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 direct/1 indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Level (Sentence ambiguity)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Level (Sentence Order)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Level (Compound sentence)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Direct</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"The teacher noted that I should add an –s for present simple. I understood what meant by the given example. Also, I had another error. I didn’t leave a space and the period was too close to the word. And, I understood that when the verb ends with (s) or (x), I should add –es for present simple”.

Furthermore, Grade C student specified that she understood the feedback and the teacher gives comments on how to rewrite the errors which were obvious for her. In contrast, Grade B student claims she could not interrupt some areas of the corrective feedback. For instance, it was difficult for the student to comprehend the first, fifth, and final comments.

First comment:
“I didn’t understand her first feedback. The instructor typed (what is A? … They are one). I don’t get what does she didn’t understand from my writing?”

Fifth comment: “She commented the sentence is hard to understand and sentences order aren’t good. Here, I didn’t know what I should write, though I understood her point. But then how can I correct the sentence?!”

The final comment: “In the last comment, I don’t understand where my mistake is until now. I even asked my friends but none of them knows”

As shown in the previous example, the student expected a direct feedback for the fifth comment. She clarifies that she understood her error, however she struggles on fixing it. On her last feedback, she also did not perceive the mistake wishing to have a direct one.

4.1.5 The Importance of Instructor’s Comments

Significantly, all of the three participants indicated that teacher’s comments were effective in a way that shaped their understanding in general. For example, Grade A student specified:

“Everything was clear for me. And there are examples in different colour which helped me to understand!”

Moreover, Grade B Student particularly mentioned that she understood the correction due to the given comments, e.g.:

“When she specified that I need a space and a full-stop in the second comment, I got this one because she gives me a clear example”

When Grade C student was asked about the comments, she replied:
“Yes, I would like to have illustrative comments”

4.1.6 The Preferable Amount and Type of the Given Feedback

Grade B and A students prefer an appropriate amount of correction, but not every single mistake. Grade B student specified her reorganisation of the fact that she will be frustrated if she received a paper that is full of mistakes. Also, she aims to be corrected for structure level. For example, she noted:
“I don’t like to be corrected for every single detail because if I see my writing being full of errors, I will be disappointed. So, I am rather corrected for the major errors.” – “I think simple errors are given by direct feedback, but the major complex ones with the indirect.”

Similarly, Grade A student goes for structure level by stating:
“Just major errors that I’ll be assessed for in the exam”

On the other hand, Grad C believed that she must be corrected on everything. For instance, she said:
“I would like to be corrected for all mistakes”
and she also expressed her wishes to be assessed for both structure and content levels.

With regard to the preferred type, Grade B hoped to have a mixed-methods of correction; direct and indirect. She then explained that minor errors are approachable to find and understand while the major ones are hard for her to guess or to look for. From the given example, she clearly wished to receive a direct feedback as she admits the fact of understanding the error but not knowing how to fix it, e.g. She commented:
“the sentence is hard to understand, and sentences orders aren’t good. Here, I didn’t know what I should write, though I understood her point. But then, how can I correct the sentence?”

Grade A also wishes to have direct feedback whereas Grade C student just wanted to receive the indirect one. Moreover, they all wanted to know the aim of correction and how their writings are going to be assessed.

4.2 Students’ and Teacher’s Views about Blackboard Usage
4.2.1. Blackboard versus Paper-based/ Hand Written Feedback: Teacher’s and Students’ Prospectors

Clearly, the teacher preferences were based on Blackboard. She believes that paper correction means time-consuming, while in Blackboard she can easily adjust the correction such as, copying, pasting, and highlighting. However, she prefers handwriting correction in the way that it possesses privacy and gives her a clear idea of her students’ language level. She indicated that the problematic aspect of Blackboard is that most of the students copy and paste from each other. She states:
“I would say good job, but I know this is not my student’s writing. Therefore, again going back to the issues of Blackboard students can cut and paste or people can see other’s people writings at the time and copy what is written. Even though, when saying good job or excellent” – “the Blackboard give them the chance to cut and paste however the paper gives me a clear idea where their strength and weaknesses are”

Of course, technology aids students with some automatic correction when the paper does not. The instructor believes that students commit such plagiarism due to the limitation of time. She said:
“They wanna finish. They don’t wanna take so much time! They have progress tests, they want to finish too!”
From the opposite prospector, Grade B student prefers the paper-based feedback more than the Blackboard one. She describes the hand-written feedback as being “obvious” and she claims that at the moment of receiving the paper you can ask your teacher of what you did not understood. Clearly, she states:

“\textit{In class feedback was better for me because I had the paper in my hand and it was clear, everything was clear, I can see my mistakes. It was more helpful than Blackboard}.”

Grade C stands for paper-based if it aligns with face-to-face feedback, otherwise she welcomes Blackboard more in a sense of being more “clearer”. For instance, she replies in the following manner:

Interviewee: “\textit{Paper-based because she is going to advise me face-to-face}”
Interviewer: “\textit{Choose one of them without the factor of face to face. Let me re-ask you the question. Do you prefer to receive your feedback on a paper without your teacher or on Blackboard?}”
Interviewee: “\textit{Then I’ll choose Blackboard}”
Interviewer: “\textit{Why?}”
Interviewee: “\textit{It is clearer}”

Whereas, Grade A student is fond of Blackboard. She did not just choose Blackboard over handwriting feedback, but also, she believes that it stands as face-to-face feedback. She also stated:

“I would choose Blackboard conferencing over face-to-face (if they offer it) because it is going to be easier and at any time”.

4.3.2 The Prior Expectations of Blackboard Usage

The teacher’s expectations of students’ writing on Blackboard was not that mush high. She relates that to her experience of teaching English in an EFL context, especially in Saudi Arabia, e.g.:

“My expectation for level one was not that high on writing. They are 101!”

In term of the teacher’s expectations of Blackboard usage, she admits that the whole process was quite “in a rush”. Furthermore, she is learning how to administrate and adjust things on Blackboard until now. She clarified that because she is not trained enough, she still attends Blackboard sessions that are running by the university. She added:

“For the first module... umm, that was just a pilot run. For the first module I think most of the teachers had issues with the Blackboard. Again, it’s just, the Blackboard is just new in this module or in this school semester”.

Despite the fact all three of the students who participated in this study have previously expected Blackboard of being difficult and hard to work on, of course none of them have had a prior experience with Blackboard. Notwithstanding, they then figured out that it is easy and even convenient for them. Grade C student believed that it assists her especially when she sees other
students’ writings. However, this point might be a concerning issue as the teacher noted previously. The student stated:
“I do read my colloquies’ writings and sometimes I use some of their vocab or expressions”.

However, Grade A student noted:
“Blackboard is helpful because I can know my mistakes, not in front of others, not as a class”.

In Addition, Grade B student gives good points in term of Blackboard efficiency and convenience, she said: Blackboard is very convenient: “It makes me connected to the course even though when I’m home”.

She added:
“I like that the teacher can reply, there is time”

Finally, she concluded the benefits of Blackboard by saying:
“We all see our writings, mistakes, we can benefit from each other”

4.3.3 Challenges that Faced both Language Instructor and Students
Some factors negatively affected the learning process during the module. First, the module pace was quite fast and intense. Students believed that there was no time for them to do all of the required tasks. They were required to complete the progress tests along with the writing topics for each unit. They also had two midterms and the final which was about two exams as well as the mid-module ones. On the other hand, the teacher explained that she could not correct weekly all of the writings to thirty-five students. Second, along with pace of the module, the Blackboard section has been assigned to students by the second week. So, students had to write about four writing topics and four progress tests at once. Third, students had mentioned that they were not that much motivated to work on their own language or to take the course seriously. In fact, what mattered to them was just to pass the level as long as it is a required course for the next level in English but not counted in students’ GPA. Fourth, the teacher believed that there is a significant need to writing classes. She indicated that students already received a considerable amount of teaching in the class. Fifth, students were concerned to ask or to get back to their teacher during the teacher office hours because she was a native speaker. One of the participants noted that she felt that her teacher will be unable to understand her points, or she might be unable to understand her teacher due to her (the student) low proficiency level of English. That was why she did not attempt to visit her teacher’s office to ask for help.

5. Discussion and Conclusions
As it is apparent from the data analysis, the three EFL learners’ answers were not generalizable to all EFL language students. However, this study attempts to narrow down the search and abstain a closer view of the students’ feedback understanding about their teachers’ feedback methodologies. Thus, the study highlights several interesting findings and two major conclusions in term of teacher-student relationship of a shared corrective feedback through Blackboard usage.
The first conclusion has been measured with regard to the students’ feedback perceptions and understanding during the think-aloud-protocol. This is because considerable outcome of the teachers’ given feedback was generated. Clearly, the students effectively perceived the corrective feedback as they did due to the application of two important factors, which were: a) illustrative comments, and b) the use of mixed feedback types. In this study, the importance and the need of illustrative comments was mentioned by all of the participants where two of them specified that they understood the corrections because of the given comments. As the Grade B participant noted that she is likely tends to be given feedback and comments and directly guided to her mistakes in complex errors which Glover and Brown (2006) indicated that feedback upon annotation and error correction does not necessarily bring much efficiency. However, explanatory notes must be added especially with particular rules. In that regard, mixed method or type of feedback is most approachable to fill in the gap of the students’ variations and needs of perceiving the feedback in one class and also can be assigned to Glover and Brown (2006) study by giving a direct feedback to rule-based manners, when others minor features can be indirect. This study data shows personal differences of receiving the type of corrective feedback among three EFL learners of one class. However, it has been noted earlier in the literature preview that learners’ preferences of feedback receiving, is dependent on the degree of education of the learner, the learner’s English language performance, and the student’s background (Singh, 2016). In this study, it has been found that there is additional factor which affected students’ feedback preferences and that is the personal factor. In an EFL class, students’ personal variations and skills of learning have been always an issue of language teaching. Thus, personal variations aspect is not just limited in class teaching methods, but also in their way of comprehension and perceiving feedback. This paper found no significant correlation between student’s language skill and preferences on feedback type. That might be resulted due to the limitation relating to the number of participants in this study. The second conclusion relies on the specified preferences that students express during the interview. In this study, students preferred structure/surface-level feedback to the content-level. In particular, the correction must be based on major errors but not every single mistake. Numerous studies explored students’ preferences of surface and content level feedback in second language practices showed a great reaction toward surface-level correction (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Kang and Han (2015) also indicated in their study that error correction must be selective to avoid discouraging learners. In that respect, face-to-face conferencing is found appealing for students, as they believe it keeps them away of being corrected in front of other classmates. A study of Sanz (2018) highlighted the significant role of face-to-face aligned with the written feedback. This study along previous research studies such as Ai (2017) and Vyatkina (2011), highlights the efficacy of utilising Blackboard as a tool for language learning which carries out a great convenience as perceived by EFL students and teachers alike.

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