



Arab Students' Perceptions of Strategies to Reduce Memorization

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Abstract

This paper addresses student perceptions of the effectiveness of strategies that encourage understanding and retention of information, and reduce dependence on memorization. This work is of particular importance in Saudi Arabia where students are taught to memorize information throughout their schooling, beginning in elementary school (Al-Mohanna, 2010; Al-Rashudi, 2002; Rugh, 2002). Inside classrooms that encourage memorization, the teacher's role is quite clear: the teacher dominates, decides what students should learn and is seen as the only source of information. There is no attempt made to engage the student in any interaction with the teacher or other students. To reduce dependence on memorization, students need to actively engage with the material, reflect on it and finally retain the material because it is understood. To achieve this with university students, it has been suggested that teachers should not depend solely on the lecture as the method of instruction (Luckey [in Fasko, 2003]; Underwood & Wald, 1995). Having students read before class, respond to and use effective questioning, and work in groups, helps facilitate student comprehension. These strategies were among the ones used in the classes under study. Research was done in the female section of the English Department at a University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. One hundred fifty-six students were involved in the project in classes conducted over two semesters. Student

perceptions of the effectiveness of strategies are based on an analysis of questionnaire responses and student comments. The paper also addresses the study implications.

Key words: memorization, student interaction, student perceptions, Saudi students