

Developing the English Curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Possibilities and Challenges

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Abstract

The world-wide diffusion of English has led to the development of regional varieties known collectively as World Englishes (WEs) and the need to teach English as an International Language (EIL). In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), although English is now a mandatory component of the curriculum from Grade 4 primary school, current materials and methods of English language teaching reflect Anglo-American cultural and linguistic norms and values, and therefore lack the diverse nature of English today and conflict with the Islamic discourses and values. In addition, there continues to be a marked preference for the standard American English accent. Such focus on standard English along with other linguistic and cultural factors have led to substandard English skills among Saudis. Moreover, English teachers in Saudi Arabia do not know much about EIL paradigm and its benefits on uplifting students' intercultural communicative skills in English, the essential requirement for the newly proposed conceptualisation of English competency. This paper discusses the inadequacy of the English materials used in the KSA schools and universities and argues that an EIL framework should be implemented in English curricula at all levels. The challenges of such change are also highlighted.

Keywords: English as an International Language, English materials, English teaching in Saudi Arabia, English varieties