Comparing the Learning Material and Lesson Plan Designed for Teaching Arabic and English Curriculums and Exploring the Possibility of Conjoining the Textbooks Lesson Themes

Futoon Al-Hozali

English Language Institution (ELI), King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU),

Jeddah, Kingdom Of Saudi Arabia

E-mail: Faishalhozaly@stu.kau.edu.sa

Abstract

This research observes Arabic and English language curriculums adopted in a private school which follows a cooperative and communicative language teaching approach. The research reveals the similarities and differences found in the textbooks and classroom procedures via analyzing the Arabic and English curriculums implemented in a private school. Additionally, the researcher suggests, based on their observation, the possibility of conjoining the topics and themes of both language courses.

Keywords: conjoin, language curriculums, comparing language textbooks, English in Saudi Arabia, classroom procedures, material, private schools

1. Introduction

In the modern world, English has become a medium of communication in professional life as a result of economic globalization, which has led to more than one billion people speaking English. According to Crystal, there is a yearly increase in the number of people who are studying English. Thus, introducing it as a program in schools became fundamental (Crystal, 2012). Moreover, as stated by Garton (2013), the increase in the demand for English accompanied with other factors such as parents and society's belief of the prominent effect of learning English on the success of the individual in the economic aspect has commanded an increase of English as a second language (ESL) programs (Enever & Moon, 2009; Gimenez, 2009).

In Saudi Arabia, the teaching of English in public schools starts in the 4th grade of elementary school. However, recently, the Saudi educational government announced their employment of the English curriculum for early grades starting the year 2021. This change is viewed as a positive step for the Saudi learner in achieving proficiency in the English language and accumulating the vocabulary and grammar to successfully apply the language in the international social setting (Alotaibi, 2014). The Saudi Ministry of Education provides the public school's English course textbook in addition to it being locally produced and created. Thus, it is to be expected that the first-grade book would also follow the same creative source. Currently, International and private schools are the only schools that implement the English courses starting from prep/ first grade. The ministry of education provides Arabic curriculum materials. In contrast, the English curriculum materials sources vary. Moreover, some schools teach science and math in both languages simultaneously, which helps the student to correlate the acquired knowledge in both languages at the same time.

This research aims to discuss the possibility of conjoining learning topics and vocabulary in Arabic and English language textbooks. In addition to observing an existing school program that implements similar courses (Language science and math) in both languages starting from the first elementary year to familiarise the reader with the prospect of coordinating both materials and procedures.

2. Review of Literature

In the past, multiple approaches to teaching language emerged (Rodgers & Richerds, 2001). Pedagogical researchers were creating methods and guidelines to achieve teaching the language efficiently to the learners. In Rodgers and Richerd's (2001) book, different language teaching approaches and methods were collected and discussed periodically. They characterized each approach into three primary items of discussion (approach, design and procedure). Each aspect of characterization is divided into subcategories, However, their book did not reflect the language teaching in foreign non-English speaking countries that teach English, such as Saudi Arabia, as a compulsory subject in the 4th grade of elementary. Nonetheless, it managed to simplify the categorization of the data collected when analyzing curriculum content such as lesson plans and class management rules in various teaching approaches. One of the approaches mentioned was the communicative approach which is

relevant to this research in investigating the favoured approach in the teaching of English curriculums in Saudi private schools.

There are multiple case studies and research papers conducted concerning the previous and current teaching and learning circumstances of English language teaching in Saudi Arabia which shares Nunan (1999) perspective on the development of English language programs in terms of planning, support and monitoring (Alotaibi, 2014; Al Shammari, 2015; Ashraf, 2018). There has been a long discussion in the past to legislate the teaching of English in early education. One of the many proposals in support of this is one done by Alotaibi (2014) in which he emphasizes the importance of Saudi language curriculum planners to be conscious of the foreign culture presented to children in EFL textbooks and argues the diligence in selecting materials to teach the English language to young learners. He discusses the benefits of implementing English language programmes in early education in Saudi public schools and argues the introduction of EFL in the early grades of an elementary school in Saudi Arabia should not bring with it all the cultural aspects of the language.

Another study that relates to the teaching of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia is a study conducted by Ashraf (2018) whose study focuses on the current struggles in teaching English in Saudi Arabia and suggested strategies to overcome them. Similarly to Alotaibi (2014), Ashraf (2018) advocated for incorporating English into early schooling as a means of overcoming English language proficiency difficulties.

In the language teaching field, the focus on appropriate materials is not ignored. McKay's (2002) paper is in support of integrating materials from many cultures around the world in English texts to improve the learners' fluency and confidence in speaking the language. The content of the materials should adhere to the learners' outcome goal and not hinder their language education. Rahman (2013) states in his paper that one of the factors affecting the achievement of EFL teaching is the unsuccessful selection of materials, textbooks, which are used to teach language.

Other scholars agree with Rahman that materials should be tailored to improve students' language literacy and cultural intelligence (Al Shammari, 2015). This is emphasized in Al Shammari's (2015) paper, which addresses the insufficiency of resources offered at Saudi universities' English language courses. She argues the importance of embracing the international culture presented in English as an international language teaching approach (EIL) to prepare English learners for better use of the language in a global setting. Alshammari's solution parallels the current approach of content-based FLES (foreign language in the elementary school) which are applied in private schools English programs. The purpose of content-based FLES in private schools is to expose the students to multiple knowledge sources and cultures as means of finalizing learners with an international culture and knowledge that the English language helps them understand.

As mentioned previously, English as a compulsory curriculum starts at the 4th year of public elementary schools. In contrast, private schools teach English starting informally from KG and formally from first grade ascendingly. Most private schools follow content-based FLES (foreign language in the elementary school) programs. Raman defines content-based FLES

programs as the teaching of other subjects from the school curriculum (mathematics, science, social studies) in the second language (Raman, 2011).

The broad exposure to the second language in school should not be limited to the English classroom materials but also in giving instructions to the learners to help the learners adapt to the second language better. Crandall expresses the benefits of programs that use content-based instruction, CBI, or content and language integrated learning, CLIL as a means of fostering language and thinking skills in an academic setting (Crandall, 2012).

Following the previous studies, there is a clear emphasis on the content of the materials; however, there seems to be a lack of investigating the differences between the material's content and procedures used in L1 and L2 courses which are taught simultaneously in the first grade of elementary school. To better understand the difference between the language materials used to teach 1L and 2L, this research will observe the language textbooks and teacher lesson plan "procedure" of each language.

3. Methodology

This research adopts the qualitative method of observing the English and Arabic language materials, textbooks and lesson plans, taught in a private school (DAR ALROWAD). The school was chosen because the daughters of the researcher used to be students there. Moreover, the school's English program was conjoined with the Oxford language institution, guaranteeing the students an IELTS certificate after graduating from 12th grade. The Oxford institution provides the school with a Saudi version of their textbooks; precisely for this research, the textbooks for the first-year elementary students that will be observed is the KSA edition of the "Family and Friends" book issued by Oxford publisher. As for the Arabic curriculum, the textbooks are provided by the ministry of education, which is adapted in all the kingdom's schools. The researcher will observe the language materials, textbooks and lesson plans of the Arabic and English language course and illustrate the similarity and differences in regards to the content of the textbooks, the class procedure and the lesson objectives. The English curriculum setting would also be analyzed via interviewing the school's English advisor.

3.1 Data Collection

First-grade private school materials will be observed. These materials are graciously provided by the DAR ALROWAD private school, female elementary sector.

1) Phone interview with the English curriculum supervisor of DAR ALROWAD.

2) First grade's Arabic language book "لغتي" first term book (the unites and objective of the unit) First grade and the accompanying lesson plan for the Arabic language course (the activities and procedure).

3) First grade's English language first term book (the units and objective of the unit) and the accompanying lesson plan for the English language course (the activities and procedure).

4. Results

4.1 First Grade's Arabic Language Book "لغتي" First Term Book

The Arabic book taught in private schools, like most Saudi schools, is a book provided by the Saudi ministry of education. The book contains three units, and each unit includes six lessons, and each unit concludes with an end of the unit evaluation exercises. The book is a part of a bundle which contains a class book and a workbook. The units are categorized into three main themes. The first unit's topic is "my family", the second unit's topic is "my school" and Third unit's topic is "my city ". Each unit branches out into six lessons and each lesson introduces new Arabic letters. At the end of each unit, there are evaluating exercises to help learners revise the unit.

The lesson plan procedure of the Arabic course contains mostly interactions in the form of questions and answers between the teacher and the rest of the class and brainstorming. The objectives of each lesson are to train the learners to develop their observational and comparison skills and to recognize and identify objects in their surrounding areas.

4.2 First Grade's English Language Book "Family and Friends" First Term Book

The English book taught in the private school is the KSA edition of the Friends and Family book published by Oxford. The book contains 15 units and is part of a bundle that contains a class book and an activity book. The unit's topics are everyday life themed. There is no apparent relation between each unit theme, but rather, each unit has an independent topic then sub categorized into six lessons starting with lesson one "words", lesson two "Grammar", lesson three "Song", lesson four "phonics" and, lesson five and six are "skill time". After every three units, there is a review that contains exercises of previous lessons. The class procedures of the English language course contain repetition drills, singing songs and interactive question and answer. The objectives of the lessons differ from one lesson to the other. However, they are mostly focused on students' ability to utilize the new information introduced in the lesson such as comprehension of short stories, becoming familiar with the class book characters, the ability to ask a question, or/and recognize new words and numbers.

4.3 Setting Information

To better understand the differences in the learning experience, a detailed view of the school's curriculum settings should be mentioned. The following information is gathered from a phone interview conducted with Dar Alrowad's English language supervisor that was otherwise impossible to do in person due to the Covid-19 pandemic. For the first-year students, there are a total of 4 classes which evenly houses 15 to 20 students. The first-year program teaches Arabic language, Arabic science and math, religion, computer, arts, English language, English science and math. English science and math are given once a week. However, the English language class is given six times a week, with one day featuring two conjoined classes. The instructions for all the English classes are in English. The school follows an active learning and collaborative approach.

5. Discussion

The school follows the FLES (foreign language in the elementary school) program. The purpose of content-based FLES in private schools is to expose the students to multiple knowledge sources and cultures, which is why there are parallels of the Arabic and English curriculums with minor differences found in the Language classes. In the materials, the Arabic subjects are all provided by the ministry of education. As for the English, they are provided by Oxford, which gives the conclusion that there is no relation in selecting the topics which are introduced in each book. Moreover, the number of the units differ from one book to the other, but there is a resemblance in the branching of each unit into lessons. There is also a similarity in the lessons items which focus on the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) found in each unit. Although there are some themes that parallel both books, such as school, family and friends, the order of similar themes in both textbooks are quite different. The procedures implemented in both Arabic and English classes are a mix of different approaches, mainly communicative and Cooperative Language Learning. Rodgers and Richards' (2001) book introduces the communicative approach as the process of acquiring a language through conversing in the targeted language to achieve communicative competence.

Furthermore, they indicate Cooperative Language Learning as interactive learning of the language where learners develop communicative competence in a pedagogical setting. Both materials are everyday themed; thus, the learners in both courses would easily use the language in their day to day lives, after observing the similarity between the topics and procedures in both language courses, the possibility of further exposing students to similar themes in both languages' surfaces.

As Tanzin Ashraf (2018) discussed, the English language learners struggle in practicing their language outside of the classrooms and offered the solution to further expose the learners to language via instructing the parents and government to transform the language of the entertainment media sites the learners use from Arabic to English. Hence, there is a similar proficiency aspect of the first and second languages (Corson, 1999 cited in Alotaibi, 2014).

Another solution would be to parallel the teaching subjects of both English and Arabic textbooks because the ministry of education is implementing the English language in schools starting from the first grade of elementary school. To coordinate materials of both language courses should be possible. For example, both textbooks would contain the same topics in the same arrangement with the same vocabulary and skills. In the English textbook, the brackets contain an example in what the first lesson in the first unit contains (unit 1: Family. Lesson 1: Words. New vocabulary: parents, siblings, relatives. First item on the page is Reading a short story. Second is Listening). As for Arabic, it would contain the same arrangement as its counterpart. The only addition would be the revising of similar words in both classes in the two languages. For instance, after learning the new vocabulary in any of the language classes, the following language class would remind the learners of the words that share a similar meaning to help the students remember the vocabulary. Nonetheless, to reach that level of similarity while maintaining the evident differences found in grammar, the materials need to

be recreated to equip the students with functional language use. As Alshammari (2015) argues in her paper, the materials should include the framework of English as an international language (EIL) to help students integrate their language learning into the authentic setting of the language rather than be excluded from the international discourse.

Following the observation of the private school curriculums, the proposition of implementing materials with conjoining themes and topics in both Arabic and English languages in public schools is feasible. However, the materials should be locally created and produced with the idea of adapting an international view of cultures while maintaining the Saudi identity and pride. Although both materials may cost a fortune to produce, learners would be able to use the language practically rather than just academically (Alshammari, 2015).

6. Conclusion

Numerous case studies and academic publications have been discussing the old and contemporary teaching and learning contexts for English language training in Saudi Arabia (Alotaibi, 2014; Ashraf 2018). This research observed the Arabic and English language curriculum administered in a private school to suggest the implementation of locally created materials that share the same themes and vocabulary in both Arabic and English language courses. However, to achieve that degree of familiarity while retaining the apparent differences in syntax, the materials must be reconstructed to equip students with effective language skills. The materials should also be internationally appropriate and culturally approved to help the student be exposed to the language in a broader spectrum to achieve proficiency in both languages simultaneously. Suggestions for further research in this subject, conducting an experience where students would be offered materials that share the same topics and vocabulary in each language course then test the results of their language acquisition via interview or paper tests at the end of the year.

References

Alhaisoni, E., & Rahman, M. M. U. (2013). Teaching English in Saudi Arabia: Prospects and Challenges. *Academic Research International*, *4*(1), 112−118.

Alotaibi, G. N. (2014). Teaching English as a Foreign Language in the Early Grades of the Saudi Public Elementary Schools: Considering the Proposal. *J. King Saud Univ.*, *26*, 31−36.

Alshammari, A. K. (2015). Developing the English Curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Possibilities and Challenges. *Arab World English Journal* (AWEJ), *6*(December), 365−372. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol6no2.28

Ara Ashraf, T. (2018). Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Saudi Arabia: Struggles and Strategies. *International Journal of English Language Education*, *6*(1), 133. https://doi.org/10.5296/ijele.v6i1.13148

Crandall, J. A. (2012). Content based instruction and content and language integrated learning. In J. Richards & A. Burns (Eds.), *Cambridge guide to pedagogy and practice in second language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009024778.020

Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486999

Garton, S., Copland, F., & Burns, A. (2013). Investigating global practices in teaching English to Young Learners. *British Council ELT Research Papers*, *1*, January, 35−68. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.148

King Fahad National library. (2009). *My Language for the first grade of elementary*. Ministry of Education, Riyadh. Retrieved from https://ktby.net/185/

McKay, S. L. (2002). *Teaching English as an international language: Rethinking goals and approaches*. New York: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1177/0033688217753489

Nunan, D. C. (1999). President's message. *TESOL Matters*, *9*(3), 1−3. Retrieved from http://davidnunan.com/index.php/about-us/interviews?id=142

Richard, J., & Rodgers, T. (1999). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*.

Simmons, N. (2013). *Family and Friends: Level 1* (KSA ed.). OXFORD ISBN: 978-0-19-482087-5.

Copyright Disclaimer