

**IS ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE THE MOST APPROPRIATE VARIETY FOR A SAUDI SECONDARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM? / L'ANGLAIS, EN TANT QUE LANGUE INTERNATIONALE, EST-IL LA VARIETE LA PLUS APPROPRIEE POUR UNE CLASSE D'ECOLE SECONDAIRE SAOUDIENNE? / ESTE LIMBA ENGLEZĂ, CA LIMBĂ INTERNAȚIONALĂ, CEA MAI POTRIVITĂ VARIETATE PENTRU ȘCOLILE GIMNAZIALE DIN ARABIA SAUDITĂ ?<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** *The English language is one of the international languages that spread in all countries of the world, It's for use in business and study, it is one of the means of global and diplomatic communication between the peoples of the world, The English language is distinguished by a set of many characteristics that distinguish it from other international languages, Many people strive to learn the English language greatly, and this has contributed to customize of international special curricula in the English language, and the massive spread of this language led to considered it the first international language in many public matters, Especially the importance of English for students in Saudi Arabia, the varieties about to learn English in Saudi Secondary School classroom, introduce this variety of English into the Saudi Arabian secondary school curriculum and in particular and certain possibilities for this change in curriculum.*

**Keywords:** *English, Language, Secondary School, Saudi Arabia, curriculum, students.*

### **Introduction**

For the majority of people, English language is considered as the most important language in the World. This status is due largely to the benefits which people see in acquiring English as a second language for use in either at businesses, social occasions or an educational institute, with the number of native speakers not increasing enough to account for this growth. As a result, there has been a huge increase in the number of people acquiring English as a second language (McKay, 2003). Therefore, there has been an increase in the number of organizations teaching English across the World.

The social and political landscape of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undergone great change in recent years and as a result with this development, the need for continuing to teach English and modernize current facilities is required to maintain the global standards. This idea is supported by (Al-Nofaie, 2010) in which she further underlines the importance for learning a second language, and in particular English, for the use of transferring knowledge from one community to the other because of the importance for the development of the global community. Along with the transferring of knowledge, people will be able to communicate their regional cultures and traditions more efficiently to a foreign audience.

There are many variations of the English language such as British English, American English or Australasian English (Jenkins, 2009) however I will suggest that the most appropriate version to be taught in Saudi Arabian secondary schools is English as International Language (EIL). As a result of the points mentioned so far, the structure of this paper will be presented by first I will look at how the English language is important for Saudi Arabian secondary school students. I will then give an introduction into the definition of variety in regards to different varieties of English and its relevance to Saudi Arabian secondary schools. Afterwards, I will give an account to what EIL is and what does it mean in this context. I will introduce and discuss why I believe EIL is the form of English that

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should be taught in Saudi Arabian secondary schools. Finally, in my conclusion I will discuss how I would like to introduce this variety of English into the Saudi Arabian secondary school curriculum and in particular I will discuss certain possibilities for this change in curriculum.

### **Importance of English Language for Saudi Students**

In this section I will introduce the importance of English in Saudi Arabia and refer to the varieties which are taught. I will discuss the student's needs as acquired from a number of different surveys reported in different articles and also discuss how Saudi students will potentially be using English as an International Language.

In Saudi Arabia, English taught as a foreign language was made a compulsory subject from grade seven onwards. Unfortunately, there has been a culture of students choosing to learn English as a "gap filler" that is a redundant subject studied for the purpose of advancing onto the forthcoming year. This culture has fortunately been changing for the past few years with more and more students choosing to learn English for academic and employment related purposes. English has been recognized as an important language by many countries including Saudi Arabia and has therefore been embraced as a vital language of its educational planning and as a result has made learning English as a compulsory subject from elementary to university level. There has been a non-stop effort by the government in aid with certain experts to try and provide students with a suitable curriculum depending on their level of development (Mahib ur Rahman 2011). The decision makers for a long time have decided to teach British English and American English in the curriculum (Khan 2011:119).

There has been a study that suggests that the education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is improving rapidly however this is not true for learners of English as a foreign language. As a result, a lot of emphasis has been based on improving the education system to supply a more widespread and efficient method for teaching English as a foreign language. One movement has been to introduce compulsory English language learning from class six onwards to university level with the Ministry of Education further suggesting it may extend this to class four with a hope of encouraging better results (Mahib ur Rahman and Alhaisoni 2013). The expectation on students who learn English as a Foreign Language is to then participate in the sharing of knowledge with colleagues across the globe. This knowledge is expected to take all forms such as technological and scientific or cultural and business (Liton 2012). The importance of finding white color jobs is also a driving force for students learning English as a Foreign language as language skills are moving from being desirable skills to being essential skills in obtaining employment in both public and private sectors (Mahib ur Rahman 2011).

Alqurashi (2011) conducted a survey where he interviewed various students learning English as a foreign language asking them numerous questions on their experience of learning the language. As can be expected, all participants said they had an interest for learning the language which encouraged them. The majority of participants noted that the main reason they wanted to learn English was for communication purposes and this in particular with foreign people all over the World. The points mentioned till now were shared by all participants within the survey however, there was a number of participants who also expressed different personal reasons for wanting to learn English such as; communicating and interacting with peoples from different cultures via reading materials; enjoying the learning experience; for entertainment purposes; for tourism purposes; and for using English at places where Arabic is not spoken. Alqurashi also added with regards to tourism and learning, that there was a willingness for the students to travel aboard for academic, business and tourism purposes. As also suggested by Alqurashi (2011: 3)" All

these communication - based motives to learn English suggest an increased recognition of the significance of learning English and communicating in English".

Mahib ur Rahman and Eid Alhaisoni (2013) support similar ideas as Alqurashi (2011) where they try to outline specifically the way in which the language is perhaps learnt by the student. Some of the ideas supported by these two writers are; the student must be allowed to obtain basic language skills taught via listening, speaking, reading and writing techniques where the student is given an appreciation for the importance of English as a means of international communication. The student must be encouraged to develop a positive attitude towards learning English which in turn will help the student obtain the required linguistic proficiency in different settings such as social or work life, this in turn will help the student in tackling cultural and social issues within their society and being involved in inter-faith discussion groups debating with people from all over the World. Further ideas supported by them are; being linguistically proficient at English to enhance concepts such as international cooperation which in turn would develop the understanding between nations with cultural differences and therefore allow the student to share and transfer scientific and technological information to and from Saudi Arabia for the enhancement of the global community on the whole.

In reference to the global community, Saudi Arabia being the centre of the second largest religion in the World i.e. Islam, there is an added importance for Saudi Arabian secondary school children to acquire English so that they can communicate with the incoming pilgrims both at the time of their childhood but also in the future as business owners. This has an added importance at religious festivals and gatherings where a number of different languages and varieties are spoken therefore children learning English as foreign Language maximize their ability in communicating with as many people as possible.

Further to the point I have already mentioned which is the desire to travel, I would like to include another reason for why I believe English is the language Saudi Arabian students need to learn and that is the necessity of local people to communicate effectively with pilgrims coming from all over the World. This is important both on an economic scale and on a social scale. For the economy, as pilgrims come to Saudi Arabia, local businesses gain in trade via offering quality products to the travelling pilgrims at a fair price. A famous newspaper called Arab News wrote an article illustrated the number of people who coming to Saudi Arabia annually which corroborates my previous idea about the influx of religious tourists to Saudi Arabia. (Al-Mulhim, 2014: 3)

### **What is Variety and Why it is Important**

There are three concentric circles of defining the origins of English, which help in our understanding into who can use English as an EIL. English as an International Language is not restricted to a group of local people or to a single country, it has expanded throughout the globe and is used readily. I will use this section to describe the variety of English and three concentric circle model.

Smith (1976) states that although there is only one English language, there are many varieties of this. For example, in America, a different form of English is used, which is often defined as 'American English'. Although the language is essentially the same, it varies in spelling and vocabulary for certain items. An example of this is the missing letter 'u' in the British English spelling of 'colour' (color for American English). Some vocabulary varies, such as a 'bin' in British English and a 'trash can' in American English. There is also variation in the stress, intonation and grammar in either version of English. Although there may be some difficulty in understanding the language variations between different English (American and British) the language will be understood and communication can still take place. Furthermore, Smith (1976) defines two different types of English and the importance they have on different English speakers. The first is *first*

*language* English which is defined as a language that a country uses as its primary means of communication (Britain, America, Australia). The second is *auxiliary English*; English that it is spoken but not widely used to communicate. Countries such as Japan have auxiliary English as they frequently use English in their lexicon. Words such as 'supermarket' are spoken in English as there is no Japanese equivalent, but English is not used to communicate between one another.

The "three concentric circle" model of English is described by Kachru (1992). Kachru identifies the three models via "the types of spread; the patterns of acquisition, and the functional allocation of English in diverse cultural contexts". The three concentric circles consist of an Inner Circle, Outer Circle and an Expanded Circle. The Inner Circle consists of countries where English is the native language and are the traditional cultural and linguistic bases of English, countries such as the UK, USA and Canada. The Outer Circle consists of countries where English is institutionalized via prior colonization by Inner Circle countries, countries such as Ghana, India and Singapore. The third model, the Expanding Circle, consists of countries wherein English is spoken as a foreign language and the level of English is not well defined, countries such as China, Zimbabwe and Saudi Arabia. One estimate found would suggest that there are over 570 million Inner and Outer circle English users where the number of Expanding Circle English users varies (due to different definitions of competent English use) with numbers being reported between 100 million to 1000 million.

(Kachru 1992) argues that varieties of English have developed over the last few decades even though colonialism spread English in the 1700s and has widely been used as a language of power. (Kachru 1992) states that English was and is learned in education because of the doors it will open. English has become a *lingua franca* it is widely used in commerce, trade, and studied for its heritage. (Kachru 1992) argues that it is because of the wide use of English and the power it holds the wish to use English as a first language has increased. Many people want to learn English so they can access a wider world than their own. This could be attributed to the colonisation of America, a country that has held the position of a global super power for many decades. Because the first language of the country is English, learning the language holds extra gravitas, enabling English as additional language speakers to trade in business and commerce. (Kachru 1992) states that English has changed and developed over the years due to further colonisation, other languages and cultures have an effect on English, changing spellings and pronunciations and incorporating new vocabulary into the lexicon. This is important as English variations can be taught in different countries around the world. Although standard English is often understood to be British English, other varieties can be understood, which allows for a greater number of institutions to teach English and a greater number of students to learn it. Furthermore, with this variety, (Kachru 1992) states that English will continue to be used as an international language with more potential variations that are likely to arise.

### **What is 'English as an International Language'?**

In this section of the paper I will be introducing the idea of what English as an International Language (EIL) is. Further describe the already mentioned three concentric circle model describing the different types of English language. EIL is misunderstood as certain people believe it to be a new form of the English Language however this is not the case. Seidlhofer (2003) in her report commissioned by the Council of Europe defines English as International Language as the type used by native and bilingual English speakers to enable a mixing of cultures via communication.

Linguistic expert Crystal states that for the first time in history, English as a second language users outnumber first language speakers. English has become language that is used globally and so more than ever there is a demand for English to be taught to second language speakers (Crystal 1997). However, Jenkins (2000) argues that there are

variations in the way English is taught as an EIL, some more beneficial and more widely recognized than others. Jenkins (2000) states that English as an international language can be divided into two categories, the 'teachability' and 'learnability'; the way English is taught will fluctuate with who is teaching and who is learning. The variations between who is teaching English will result in what is being taught. For example, a native speaker of the language may teach it in a different way to a fluent second language speaker; they may have different methods of teaching which will ultimately result in a different EIL learned. The accent of the teacher also may affect the pronunciation of the learner, resulting in a variation of the original English. In addition, the outcomes of the language may have different expectations in different facilitators. Some teachers may be satisfied with the student reaching English language skills that allow them to converse, other teachers may want to teach in a more formal, or academic style.

Jenkins (2000) also argues that English teaching is still too prosaic and structured around that is perceived to be the correct way of teaching English. This is something native speakers of English do more often than second language teachers. (Jenkins 2000) attributes this to the prejudices and stereotypes still held against people with regional accents such as Glasgow and Birmingham, resulting in a standard RP (Received Pronunciation) English being taught. Often regional dialects are associated with the working classes and often looked down upon. (Jenkins 2000) states that many native English speakers still teach English as an international language using the RP pronunciations, but argues this may be an out of date teaching style as only the 'inner circle' of the language users consider this acceptable and many other English speakers such as countries in the 'outer circle' only need to use English as a mean of communication and do not hold judgments based on accent and dialect. (Jenkins 2002) states that it is more important to teach intelligibility in English as an international language as well as an appropriate understanding of regional dialect and culture than it is to teach RP (Received Pronunciation) or GA (General American). (Jenkins 2002) argues that it is the teachability of the English that is important rather than the correct way of pronouncing a word. A student must understand the language, enjoy it, understand the cultural relevance and be able to use it how they need to.

#### **Teaching English in Saudi Arabian secondary schools**

In this part, I will discuss why English should be the EIL to be taught in Saudi secondary schools. The increase in bilingualism in Saudi Arabia is due to both internal and external factors. The domestic economy being the driving force for the internal reasons along with industrialization and Saudi Nationalization; and the global economy along with socio-political and economic developments being the external reasons. Firstly I will look at external factors and follow this by internal factors.

Perhaps the biggest external factor which has important internal implications is that the official language of the Information Technology era is English. As a result, there is a need for professional tourists where skilled Saudi Arabian students enter into developed and developing countries transferring information and technology to and from Saudi Arabia and non-Saudi Arabians coming to Saudi Arabia for the same reasons. In this case, I see EIL could be the ideal method of communication between all people due to its importance in cultural communication issues as I mentioned in the EIL definition previously i.e. everybody communicates in the same International language, that is English. There are global changes that are taking place daily in various fields such as technology, politics, and even linguistics which is all urged on by the age of Information Technology and globalization. These changes are affecting Saudi Arabia in an ever increasingly positive way. (Bieswanger 2008) in his paper supports the idea that EIL is the ideal method of international communication and therefore suggests that English is the most important language to the global community as it is used in many sectors such as the economy and tourism or science and technology.

At the same level of importance, but this time at the local level, English is the main language used not only in world trade but also in domestic trade. As previously mentioned, there are pilgrims coming to Saudi Arabia for the religious pilgrimage from over 150 different countries who speak many languages. In times of the pilgrimage, Saudi Arabia truly becomes a global economy within a domestic society in the context of communication. During the pilgrimage there is trade inside the country however as this trade occurs between local Saudi Arabians and representatives of over 150 different countries who bring different English language varieties with them. This is a good chance for Saudi Arabians to work with these pilgrims with maximum English Language varieties and with very little effort to attract this variety. (Alqurashi 2011) supports the idea that Saudi Arabians must continue to develop their English Language skills with the help and encouragement of the government in addition to exploit any opportunity in this regard.

Even though Saudi Arabia's economy is largely supported by oil related products it is still very much affected by global economic changes and as mentioned before as the Information and Technology era's language of communication is English, Saudi Arabians must improve their English Language skills. A trade boost will incur when there is an increased number of people acquiring EIL skills in Saudi Arabia as this gives local Saudi Arabians a platform for communicating with not only incoming religious pilgrims but with incoming skilled professionals. What is described here is a truly inter cross-border trade business where incoming pilgrims, who are trading within Saudi Arabia, are not only purchasing goods from locals but are exchanging goods therefore removing any cross-border trade boundaries. This therefore removes the complex cross-border international trade system where more than one country is involved in selling or manufacturing a product that (Sekhar 2012) has mentioned.

### **Implication**

I can conclude the discussion by mentioning that whether it is trade or travel for education tourism within or outside Saudi Arabia; and among all the different varieties of English, I think the most suitable English language variety for unifying and allowing a platform for communication between people from different countries who speak different languages is EIL. Therefore the implication of the research conducted in this paper would suggest one particular route English could be introduced into Saudi Arabia. The proposed method is via slowly introducing EIL to teachers and students on a step by step basis to slowly ease them into a new system and thus minimizing disruption. This method is supported by Mahib ur Rahman and Eid Alhaisoni (2013) where they mention the importance of a teacher training program in successfully implementing an improved method for teaching English as a Foreign language in Saudi Arabia.

The rapid development of information technology and with it, the Internet, has also allowed for a huge improvement in the number of teaching resources available to teachers of EIL. As a result, the availability of a number of online sources of authentic audio samples for EIL has also increased. This therefore can enable an expansion of useful classroom materials such as to expand student knowledge as students are exposed to a truly international form of EIL. The use of the Internet as such a teaching resource in Saudi Arabia could be an extremely successful one as shown by Baik and Shim (2002). In their 2002 study, the Internet was used in a 15-week teaching plan to educate Korean learners in the varieties of different world English. The various Internet sources included news, radio and movie websites with the students subjected to more than 18 different varieties of English from these sources, with their progress checked via assessments. The only difference with the Baik and Shim (2002) model and my Saudi Arabian model would be the limiting the taught English to EIL only.

### Conclusion

The most popular language in the World is English and this largely due to English being the language people from different countries communicate in for various reasons. As a result of this popularity, there has been a huge increase in the number of institutions teaching English worldwide. The same can be said of Saudi Arabia too where there has been massive investment in trying to encourage Saudi Arabians to learn English as a foreign language. There are many forms of English as mentioned in this paper such as British English, American English or Canadian English however; I believe the best type of English to be taught in Saudi Arabia is EIL and that is due to its widespread connectivity throughout the globe.

In the context of Saudi Arabia this is important as Saudi Arabia on a yearly basis welcomes millions of religious pilgrims that come from all over the. For local Saudi Arabians, to learn and use EIL would benefit them immensely as this would boost local trade businesses and form new international partners with incoming tourists. Another reason for the importance to learn and use EIL is for Saudi Arabian professionals to go abroad to developed and developing countries to share and transfer technological advances and exchange cultural and historical knowledge. EIL is not a dialect of English or a new form of the English language but rather a standardization of the generally Inner Sphere models which is taught on a massive scale in order to provide a level platform for all who are trying to acquire English as a foreign language.

As mentioned in the discussion, although Saudi Arabia's economy is largely based on the Oil industry it is still highly affected by global changes and as the Information and Technology era's language of communication is English this makes it even more important for Saudi Arabians to learn or improve their EIL skills. This will benefit Saudi Arabians internally via intra-border trade from within Saudi Arabia and externally via inter-border trade with other countries as the stumbling block of communication is completely removed by the knowledge of EIL.

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