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TEACHING AND LEARNING EFL: MOTHERING, HOPES, AND DESIRES, by RIHAB

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Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as

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Abstract

Students' voices are increasingly considered as an integral part of the decision-making process in the design, implementation, and evaluation of curriculum. This study sought to understand the experiences of college-level Saudi women learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in relation to learning, teaching, content, and materials to re-envision curriculum. Data were collected from five teachers and six students at a women's-only college in Western Saudi Arabia. Data were collected through 21 individual interviews with students, two focus group discussions with teachers and students, and teachers' written reflection. The study employs reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to understand how Saudi women perceive their learning, how their perceptions may inform teachers' understanding of curriculum giving way to theorize critical curriculum in Saudi Arabia. Key findings indicate that prevailing family ideologies often restricted women's educational choices. This sense of constraint was exacerbated by the discrepancy between their prior EFL education and college expectations. When re-designing their learning experience, students emphasized the importance of creating engaged teaching and learning foregrounded in meaningfulness, vulnerability, and dialogue. Additionally, the study emphasizes the deep bond between students and their educators in women-only campuses. Students described their teachers as sister-mothers (*Abla*-mothering) mothers who valued their holistic growth and fostered their love for learning. Further, while teachers acknowledged restrictions on their agency, they emphasized their proactive efforts in creating nurturing and responsive learning environments. The study offers recommendations for policy makers which includes engaging meaningfully with students' voices by creating agentive roles as collaborators and pedagogical partners.

Key Words: EFL, curriculum inquiry, women's students' voices, engaged learning, mothering.

Exploring the learning experience of Saudi women teaching and learning EFL: Mothering,

hopes, and desires.

by

Rihab Alsulami

A Dissertation

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in

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Atlanta, Georgia 2023

Dedication

To my mom and dad for helping me go places they were not allowed to go. I love you and

I am eternally grateful.

إلى أمي وأبي لأنهم ساعدوني لأذهب أبعد مما ذهبوا. أحبكم وممتنة لكم للأبد.

To my beautiful supportive family in Jeddah and Atlanta.

الى عائلتي الداعمة والجميلة في جدة وأتلانتا.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study seeks to understand the learning experience of college-level women in Saudi Arabia in relation to learning, teaching, content, and materials to re-envision curriculum through the lens of learners. Curriculum is understood as the plan for learning which is distinct from the actual learning experience that goes inside and outside of the classroom (Graves, 2016). Such distinction between curriculum as a plan for learning as separate from what happens in classrooms is often missed in discussions around English as foreign language (EFL) curriculum in the Saudi context where curriculum is seen as a static document (Alghamdi, 2017; Alqahtani, 2019). I embark on this research to provide students with the opportunity to inform our understanding of curriculum development through focusing on their experiences learning EFL. My belief that students need to be acknowledged as partners in the process of developing curriculum propels me to investigate their EFL learning experiences. In this way, EFL curriculum can be revised as sociocultural, gendered, autobiographical, racial, and deeply personal site of inquiry (Pinar, 2004).

Teaching English in Saudi Arabia is invoked in conjunction with stressing the need for developing globally competitive workforce (Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2018). Despite the Saudi government's best efforts, achievement levels of Saudi learners have not improved (Alrabai, 2019; Liton, 2012). In addition to that, the clear divide between the need to preserve the nations' Islamic and cultural identity and promulgations of educational policies that aim at developing a globally competitive adds to the tensions around curriculum development (Barnawi & Alhawsawi, 2018; Elyas & Picard, 2014). Against this backdrop, I choose to centralize women's experiences whose voices are marginalized (Alharbi, 2021; Alghamdi, 2017). Such neglect of learners' voices in the literature surrounding the Saudi EFL context is an opportunity to redefine

curriculum through the lens of women, who often, were neglected due to the accessibility issues stemming from gender-based segregations in schools and due to the reliance on surveys and questionnaires as primary tools for data collections commonly found in the literature (Alghamdi, 2021).

The Researcher's Positionality

The adoption of critical reflexive stance from the outset of the project positions the researcher at an advantageous position in analyzing how their positionality, their perspectives, and past experiences inform the research process (Finlay, 2003). In what follows, I position myself as a teacher in Saudi Arabia, a former student-teacher, and a current graduate student where my various experiences in education guided me to develop a keen interest in centralizing students' voices.

As a Teacher in Saudi Arabia

From September 2015 to July 2016, I have taught English as a foreign language in a public university in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. As a novice teacher working in a rigidly hierarchical institution, I was asked to teach a predetermined textbook along with carefully crafted objectives. The disheartening state of such pre-packaged, one-size-fits-all materials is decried in the literature surrounding English language instructions in Saudi Arabia (Alqahtani, 2019). I came into the classrooms expecting to have more autonomy as a teacher who had earned her place in the classroom. However, I realized that my position as a teacher was nothing but a technician who was expected to follow a plan, implement the lesson, and assess the product objectively. My students' English proficiency levels were classified as beginners. Yet, I was instructed by my supervisors to never use Arabic, the students' first language, as part of instructions. Moreover, teachers were not allowed to develop their own tests. Students' midterms were outsourced from a

foreign educational company who is presumably specialized in developing valid and reliable testing tools. I lacked the autonomy over my own classroom. I could not develop my own lesson plans, nor could I develop my own tests. I felt defeated as I was not able to fulfill my goal which was to teach and help students succeed. I remember whenever I would have a review session with students before any major exam, I would dread the question that is often posed by students "what should we expect on the exam?"; a question I did not know how to answer as I was as clueless as my own students about the content of the exam. When proctoring midterms and finals, I would find myself sneaking a peak every now and then at students' computer screens to glance at the questions. I adopted the honesty policy and let my students know that I had no idea what their exam looked like aside from the fact that it was a 40-items multiple choice exam. I could see the confusion on their faces only partially masked by their politeness. Their faces looked bewildered by the fact that their own teacher had no idea what would be on the test.

However, I felt a glimpse of hope when the university decided to revamp the English language curriculum. I signed up to work on the curriculum committee who was entrusted to develop locally produced materials, learning goals, and assessment tools. The committee members were English teachers from both campuses; however, I noticed that women were continually overshadowed by men who held more authoritative positions. For example, when members were brainstorming unit themes, men showed preference towards themes that seemed to cater for male students' interests, such as "dangerous sports" without taking into consideration that this might be disengaging for other students. The promise of a new curriculum generated by practicing teachers seemed promising at the time. I was able to forgo the power imbalance between men and women campuses because I managed to convince myself that we wanted the same thing. We wanted students to succeed.

However, the process of developing curriculum did not start with learner's needs assessment as recommended in the literature (Graves, 2016). Instead, senior faculty members worked to derive learning objectives from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for language learning. I was given a list of learning objectives by a senior faculty so I could gather and develop materials that aligned with the learning objectives. The materials developed by the curriculum committee could be used as a supplementary material to be consulted under the teacher's discretion. Yet, the primary textbook was still outsourced from a publishing house.

As a Student Teacher in the United States

When I joined a teacher preparation program at a U.S.-based university in 2017, I had been inundated with courses on teaching methods, how language works and how best to teach it. Absent from the curriculum was the consideration of contextual barriers that transnational teachers are bound to face upon returning to their own local contexts. In my enthusiasm, I embraced western-based ideologies in the field of TESOL field thinking that they were inherently superior and far more objective. I embraced the western construct of method because they were taught under the assumption that any given teaching method should work regardless of context. Lin et al. (2004) underscored the nature of the theoretical canon in the field of TESOL and its affiliation with principles of enlightenment and rationality. Lin et al. (2004) described the ideal agent in the field of TESOL as "a transhistorical, unitary, individual, and disembodied mind whose scientific endeavors are not shaped or constituted by their historical, social, cultural, and institutional contexts" (p. 495). Internalizing the assumed superiority of teaching methods that are propagated in TESOL teacher preparation programs without assessing their viability and contextual relevancy revealed my unwitting complicity, as a teacher and a novice researcher, in

perpetuating the hegemony of North American and Eurocentric ways of knowing. It was not until I started to engage in dialogues with my professors about the peculiarities of my context, namely Saudi Arabia, that I realized the importance of assessing the viability of these methods in different contexts.

Additionally, as part of my teaching practicum course, I was assigned to teach English as a second language for adult learners in Los Angeles, California in 2018. What struck me the most about this experience was the lack of consideration of students' desires and aspirations in learning English. The class I co-taught with Ms. Nardini (pseudonym) had an age range from 19 years old to 65 years old students who had vastly different goals and career aspirations. Yet, instructions unfolded through the doctrine of objective method where students' subjectivities are marginal to the quest of attaining language proficiency. Having taught students there through Spring 2018 - Fall 2018, I developed a closer relationship with some of the students who attended the school. Learning about these students' aspirations and their backgrounds, I started to notice the misalignment between the curriculum and the students' goals. At this vocational ESL program, students were taught basic levels of language that they would most likely use in low-income service jobs. It runs parallel to a belief that immigrants are most likely to be at a socioeconomic disadvantage. I approached my host teacher with my observations and what I knew about the students. While she was surprised to learn about the students' background and career aspiration, her answer pointed out that the curriculum, and instructional materials were provided by the school upon which she had no control. Additionally, having approximately 27 students each trimester, which extended for two months only, allowed her limited time with her students. Further, the marginalization of the "other" in TESOL teacher education programs is highlighted in the neglect of contextual and sociocultural factors that shape learner's experiences

(Tinker Sachs et al., 2017). In this vein, Tinker Sachs et al. (2017) highlight the need for compassion, understanding the inseparability of culture and learning, and building on what student's bring to the classroom to develop their learning experience. Additionally, factors such as teacher's lack of autonomy over curriculum (Alghamdi, 2017; Alnefaie; 2016), misalignment of curriculum with students' needs and goals (Graves, 2016), and the lack of attention to context and how it shapes the pedagogical choices have all been pointed out in the literature (Luke, 2008). Yet, these factors persist to contribute to the deficiencies in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language.

As a Graduate Student in the United States

My experience as a doctoral student in the Teaching and Learning – Language and Literacy program at Georgia State University has nurtured the seeds of criticality I have cultivated throughout my lived experience as a woman teacher in Saudi Arabia, and as a transnational researcher in the United States. I learned that to understand how knowledge is produced and who is producing knowledge, one must critically analyze the literature to investigate what claims are being made, about who, and how are they being made (Kubota & Miller, 2017). Research could unwittingly perpetuate a negative image about language learners (i.e., Kumaradvielu, (2003) on harmful cultural stereotypes of Asian students in Teaching English as a second language "TESOL" field). The impetus for undertaking the dissertation in investigating the women's experience with EFL curriculum in Saudi is borne out of the desire to better understand the problem of the curriculum away from how the previous research investigated it. Previous research, such as Alseghayer (2021) on students' learning style argued that EFL learners in Saudi that "do not take their studies seriously. When they are given assignments, they complete them simply to fulfill the course requirements, without showing any

signs of taking them seriously" (p. 89). The same deficit view is strongly present in the literature on English language teaching in Saudi Arabia (Alrasheedi, 2020; Shukri, 2014). For example, in a study conducted by Alrasheedi (2020) Saudi learners' speaking abilities were found to be low due to "apathy and low motivation" (p. 74). Additionally, some studies investigating issues surrounding EFL curriculum in Saudi cites resistance to western culture (Al Nasser, 2015; Alrebai, 2019; Shukri, 2014). It did not go further to identify which aspect of the western culture that they resist? Is it possible that students' resistance stem from their rejection of the imposed curriculum? That is, they are not demotivated to learn English, they are expressing resistance to curriculum? What if we worked to change the EFL curriculum by starting from an understanding of how students experience the curriculum? Instead of understanding curriculum as a static document as it is configured in Saudi EFL classrooms (Alghamdi, 2017; Alqahtani, 2019), we are at a more advantageous position when we theorize curriculum by situating it in its historical, social, and autobiographical accounts of its recipients; students (Cary, 2006; Pinar, 2012).

To sum up, the numerous challenges I faced as an EFL teacher in Saudi Arabia and during my graduate studies in the United States heightened my awareness of the devaluing of students' voices in curriculum design and implementation. Instead of marginalizing students' voices, I believe that educators can work on sharing curricular decision-making processes with students, fostering anti-hierarchical, and dialogic relationship with them.

Teaching English in Saudi Higher Education

To give context to the study, this section provides an overview of teaching English in higher education in Saudi Arabia with a focus on policymaking. Teaching English has become central to the Saudi educational system where the Ministry of Education aims to develop "globally competitive knowledge-based community" (Ministry of Education, 2017). English, as

a school subject, was first introduced in 1930s after the discovery of oil and became a mandatory

subject in 1958 (Alqahtani, 2019). English language used to occupy a peripheral role in the Saudi

educational system prior to 2000s. However, a shift occurred in the educational policies where

English claimed a central focus in the system. The shift was borne out of the unsatisfactory

English proficiency as perceived by parents, educators, and government officials (Al-Hazmi,

2003; Al-Shammary, 2003) leading the Ministry of Education to introduce English to primary

school students as opposed to limiting it to intermediate and secondary school levels; a move that

was criticized for risking Arabic language development and negatively impacting students'

Muslim and cultural identity (Alabdualkareem, 2007; Alqahtni, 2019). In 2002, the Ministry of

education introduced new set of objectives underpinning English language curriculum.

> [T]o provide students with proficiency in English as a way of acquiring knowledge in the
>
> fields of sciences, arts, and new inventions, and of transferring knowledge and the
>
> sciences to other communities, in an effort to contribute to the spread of the faith of Islam
>
> and service to humanity.
>
>   (Ministry of Education, 2002 cited in Alqahtani, 2019, p. 122)

The emphasis on both gaining access to scientific knowledge and contributing to the

dissemination of Islam is understood as a step to reconciliate the instrumental role English plays

in global market without jeopardizing the morals and beliefs of Islam (Elyas & Badawood,

2016). A new initiative called National Transformation Program introduced by the Saudi

government in 2016 which stated its objectives for several ministries including the Ministry of

Education (National Transformation Program, 2016). The National Transformation Program set

objectives for several ministries including the Ministry of Education. There are 37 key

performance indicators aimed at improving the quality of education. Relevant to our discussions

are the goals centered on the creation of student-centered education, establishing a comprehensive framework for teachers' development, developing core life and employability skills and integrating it with curricula and extra-curricular activities; improving curricula and teaching methods, establishing a framework to align universities graduates with labor market needs, and fostering family involvement in education (National Transformation Program, 2016). The key performance indicators were set to be assessed every five years. In a recent published report by program, out of the 37 performance indicators set for the Ministry of Education, only 8 objectives were reported on as under study (National Transformation Program, 2020). Yet, there are no data available on the progress that has been made on the stated goals. Additionally, a recent statement was published on the Ministry of Education website justifying the introduction of English to primary school students by highlighting the instrumental goal English language serves for developing 21st century skills and meeting the requirements of the fourth industrial revolution (MOE, 2021). In the statement, the Ministry of Education highlights the goal of introducing English for first grade students which is:

> Preparing students for the labor market requires mastery of the English language, especially now due to the openness of the labor market in the Kingdom, and the multiplicity of opportunities, as well as the entry of many global sectors that require suitably qualified individuals with the languages needed for the modern era (MOE, 2021).

This statement can be linked to the Saudi government 2030 vision that the country has launched in April 2016. Saudi Arabia has launched its 2030 vision to restructure the country's economy and move away from oil-dependency to a more diversified economy based on market needs (Alzahrani, 2017; Alzahrani & Rajab, 2017). Such developments emphasized a greater role of

English instructions as vehicle of providing access to information which is motivated by meeting global market demands (Elyas & Picard, 2013). The pressures of maintaining the Arabic language as central to the Saudi education and the forces of globalization have continued to exert its influence not only on public school system but also in higher education policy (Barnwai & Alhawsawi, 2017). There are several universities, i.e., King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals and Royal Commission Colleges and Institutes, that opted to use English as a medium of instructions especially in subject areas such as medicine, engineering, business, and information technologies. The desire to obtain international accreditation for applied sciences programs is a major drive for universities in Saudi Arabia to adopt English as a medium of instructions (Phan & Barnawi, 2015). Moreover, the move to internationalize higher education in Saudi Arabia created a widely held belief that English as a medium of instruction is a promising tool for improving the quality of teaching and learning, however, with inadequate planning in absence of language policy (Shamim et al., 2016).

On the other hand, some universities have opted to design a preparatory program for first-year college students to facilitate students' transition into college-level education which requires a higher degree of English language proficiency (Barnawi & Alhawsawi, 2017). Preparatory year program (PYP) consists of subjects such as English, Math, Arabic, communication, and critical thinking (Dakhiel, 2017). The educational system in Saudi Arabia is not exempt from the sweeping effects of neoliberal policies and its orientation towards evidence and accountability. Conceptualizations of language policy within PYP intensive English as a foreign language course were fragmented, disoriented, and relied heavily on Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to derive standards for the development of curriculum, syllabus, teaching, and assessment which has been critiqued for its incompatibility with local needs and challenges

(Barnawi, 2012). Luke (2008) asserts that policies of curriculum in a globalized world tend to generate two contradictory responses "at once seeking a new corporate version of the industrial technocratic approach to curriculum, while promising to anchor identity and nation in the basics of a predigital traditionalism" (p 147). The contradictory nature of such forces shapes much of the discussion around educational policies in Saudi Arabia.

From the previous discussion on language policy and planning in Saudi Arabia throughout the public and higher education system, one could notice the tensions between proponents of the preservation of national, Islamic, and cultural identity and the opponents who base their analyses on market needs. Formulations of clear English language curriculum policy remain scattered and disoriented.

Problem Statement

The problem with EFL curriculum in higher education in Saudi Arabia is that students' voices are largely neglected in English as a foreign language curriculum design and implementation. From my experience as an EFL instructor in Saudi Arabia, I have seen firsthand how the adaptation of pre-packaged curriculum through major publishers did not correspond to increased proficiency in language learning. In fact, research in Saudi regarding EFL curriculum has shown the poor design of EFL materials and the consequent under-achievement of students (Liton & Ali, 2011; Mokovsky, 2019). Having served as a curriculum developer at a Saudi university, I could attest to the lack of consideration for students' background and interests in curriculum design. Research considering issues surrounding EFL curriculum has focused on stakeholders' views such as Saudi companies' business needs and its alignment with EFL education (Aben Ahmed, 2013), and the effects of policies on curriculum implementation and

delivery (Alhawsawi, 2013). However, missing from the discussion is centralizing students' experiences with EFL curriculum in the Saudi context.

The bulk of research that centers the experiences of students in Saudi Arabia is linked to testing theoretical psychological constructs by means of quantitative research methods. The discussions around students' experiences of English curriculum could mainly be grouped into looking at psychological aspects of learning a foreign language such as: anxiety (Alrebai, 2015; 2014), autonomy (Alrebai, 2017; 2016), and attitudes (e.g., Alkaff, 2013; Alsamadani & Ibnian, 2015). Another major area that centered students' voices is the research done on students' perception of learning strategies (Alrabai, 2010; Aljumah, 2012; Sharma, 2019). Saudi EFL students are frequently represented as disorganized, procrastinators, do not take full responsibility for their learning (Hershberger & Farber, 2008), unmotivated (Alshammari, 2022), lacking oral skills, and often relying on rote-learning methods to memorize passages and grammar rules (Al Seghayer, 2021). The literature presents a tokenistic representation of students' experiences, with some notable exceptions such as (Alghamdi, 2021; Althubaiti, 2018), relying on large-scale surveys (Aburizaizah, 2021; Hershberger & Farber, 2008) and quasi-experimental research and psychometric tests (Alamer & Alrabai, 2022; Alrabai, 2017; Mokovsky, 2019). Such positioning seems to identify students as data sources (Fielding, 2012) without opening up spaces for a cultural shift that recognizes the power of students' views on teaching and learning (Cook-Sather, 2006). Specifically, women's experiences within EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia have been under-researched. Seeking the narratives of learners' with EFL curriculum places us in an advantageous position to learn from them and potentially reshape their educational experiences.

Significance of the study

The motivation behind undertaking this study is to centralize women's experiences in EFL programs in Saudi, especially students. Education system in Saudi Arabia is segregated by gender. Therefore, women are expected to have a different experience from their male counterparts. The narratives of the participants of their learning experiences reflect the conditions of English classrooms in Saudi Arabia. The self, or rather the participants' selves, is a constellation of co-constructed experiences shaped by the socio-political, cultural, and gendered world they inhabit.

Pinar (2004) brings the self and the social together in the case of marginalized communities. In this vein, Pinar (2004) discusses the importance of narratives of women and marginalized communities; self-writing (narratives of experience) becomes an act of forming a coherent, mobilized self in solidarity with subjugated others. I think of theorizing the desired language learning alongside Saudi women as a subversive praxis. Theorizing alongside women was thought of as "wasting our time talking" yet, bell hooks (1994) argues for the importance of theorizing and doing intellectual work alongside women by recognizing the role it plays in cultivating communities of support (p. 67). In this study, theorizing alongside Saudi women acts to bring together the voices of teachers and students to theorize their desired learning and teaching. The narratives presented by participants are "first-person, singular and subjective" yet, they present a version that exists within a specific cultural, social, and historical point in time (Pinar, 2004, p. 39). Narrating their own personal experiences with the English language curriculum provides us with the opportunity of scrutinizing latent meanings, conscious and unconscious language. Moreover, narratives of women's' experiences with the English language curriculum can be instrumental and transformational. Araneda et. al. (2022) succinctly argued in

favor of including student's voice at the curricular level by highlighting the instrumental and transformational potentials; They assert that "understanding the importance of students' opinions as stakeholders can serve as a mechanism for quality control in teaching. ... On the other hand, from a normative perspective, understanding student voices can help change the balance of power between teachers and students" (p. 220). In this sense, not only will the participants' narratives be informing the teaching and learning process inside EFL classrooms, but it shifts the agentic roles that students are assigned within the often-described "teacher-fronted" EFL classrooms (Al Seghayer, 2021).

Research Question

The current study is guided by an overarching question followed by specific questions.

Overall Question

- What are Saudi women first-year college students understanding of EFL curriculum in connection to their previous learning experience and how can their understandings inform teachers' pedagogical practices?

Specific Research Questions

- What are the perceptions of Saudi college-level women of EFL curriculum, particularly, in relation to teaching methods, content, and materials used?

- How can their narratives inform teachers' understanding of curriculum?

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013) and Currere (Pinar, 1992; 2004; 2012) that overlap to inform the design, implementation, and framing of the results of the study.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is concerned with studying human experiences as a "source of knowledge and understanding" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 17). The study of human experience under narrative inquiry entails a recognition of the embodiment of knowledge (Bochner & Riggs, 2014; Clandinin, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). There is no unified definition of narrative. However, Eliot (2005) points out the six elements of narrative which are:

abstract (a summary of the subject of the narrative); the orientation (time, place, situation, participants); the complicating action (what actually happened); the evaluation (the meaning and significance of the action); the resolution (what finally happened); and lastly the coda, which returns the perspective to the present. (Eliot, 2005, p. 9)

However, these elements were identified based on the sociolinguistic traditions evidenced in the works of Labov and Waletzky (1997). Other narrative researchers define narrative research in relation to storied accounts of participants' lived experience in relation to a certain phenomenon (Clandinin, 2013; Pinneager & Daynes, 2007). The storied accounts of participants are obtained through various methods and strategies which are informed by the framework a researcher is using (Pinneager & Daynes, 2007).

Typically, research that is conducted within the traditions of narrative inquiry seeks to understand people's construction of their own lived experience and the nature of such an experience; to include participants in the process of identifying salient areas of research within their own narratives; to pay attention to narrative as a process and how it changes overtime, and finally, to how the self is constructed in relation to a certain phenomenon (Elliot, 2005). Further, Polkinghorne (1995) argues that the narrative meaning is the product of the mental realm. Moreover, he asserts that narrative meaning "works to draw together human actions and the

events that affect human beings. Narrative creates its meaning by noting the contributions that actions and events make to a particular outcome and then configures these parts into a whole episode" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 6). Such interconnectedness between thoughts and actions makes narrative inquiry a framework where theories are not separated from praxis. Metrova and Webster (2020) crystallize on the inseparability of theory and practice in the works of narrative inquirer by asserting that "narrative research forms a seamless link between the theory and practice embodied in the inquiry, and literature is used to enable conversation between theory and practice" (p. 30). As such, narrative inquiry differs from empirical traditional methods which starts with a theory that structures the inquiry.

Experiences are reconstructed in narrative research through three dimensions; the temporal, the social, and place (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The ontological commitment of narrative inquiry to Dewey's view of experience acknowledges that every experience has a past, a present, and a future (temporality) (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Thus, when a researcher steps into an experience to study, they step in the middle of the inquiry. As such, the phenomenon under study becomes transitional as it constantly undergoes change. Additionally, the social aspect of experience is concerned with the personal and social conditions where the feelings, hopes, desires, material conditions, and the environment of research participants come into play in shaping their storied accounts (sociality). Finally, the place dimension is concerned with how the place in which the inquiry is taking place is contributing to our understanding of a specific experience.

Narrative inquiry has been challenged in terms of validity and reliability; an argument that Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) acknowledge when distinguishing the post-positivist researcher from the narrative inquirer. They state that "what narrative inquirers gain in the proximity to

ordinary lived experience and the scope of their considerations, they, at times, sacrifice in

certainty" (p. 5). Understanding that there are different ways of representing an experience, the

narrative inquirer is not primarily focused on achieving the most possible "epistemological

clarity", however, they are moved by a commitment to transforming the human experience

(Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 8). The act of transforming human experience, for narrative

inquirers, begins with capturing a holistic and a complex view of people's experience.

Currere

Who gets to determine what counts as curriculum and marks its context? This question

was put forward by Luke (2008). This question becomes important in the context of Saudi

Arabia where teachers and students are frequently marginalized from shaping the policies

informing curriculum (Alnefaie, 2016). The political nature of curriculum is widely accepted and

extensively discussed in the literature (Luke, 2012; Pinar, 2012). Critical theorists (Giroux, 2004;

Apple, 2018) rejected the neutrality of curriculum and considered knowledge as a representation

of the dominant cultures through processes of exclusion, omission, and emphasis. In Saudi

Arabia, education policies express the nation/state desire to preserve the primacy of the Arabic

language and its Islamic character while attending to the demands of a globalized market (Elyas,

2020; Dakhiel, 2017). However, the introduction of English to 1st graders starting 2021 generated

some tensions among factions of society who perceived English as a threat to the Arabic

language which retains a sacred status as a key to understanding religious texts (Elyas, 2020). As

such, curriculum is imbued with institutional desires (Motha & Lin, 2014), which in the Saudi

context are formed centrally, leaving the desires of educators, students, and even parents out.

Historically, discussions about the English curriculum in Saudi have been narrowly explored

from the perspective of prescribed curriculum, meaning the documents, materials, and policies

that guide teaching and learning (Alqahtani, 2019; Alghamdi; 2021; Dakhiel, 2017). The concept

of prescribed curriculum upholds the idea that the central government, educational

bureaucracies, or the curriculum planning committees hold the ultimate expertise.

     However, in this study, I move away from the constricted scope of prescribed curriculum

to explore a different configuration of curriculum which centralizes the experiences of those who

are living it, students, and teachers. Pinar (2004) suggests that curriculum is a dynamic and

evolving learning journey that each individual takes, reflecting the cultural, social, and historical

contexts in which it is situated. Distinguishing the mandated curriculum from curriculum as a

living text helps us understand the complexities that arise when educational plans are met with

people who translate these abstract ideas into living (Aoki, 2003). Saudi educators need to

configure the boundaries of curriculum to draw from their own subjective self-understanding and

contextualize their understanding of curriculum to untangle it from the prescribed curriculum

(Alqahtani, 2019).

     In this study, I use the method of currere, proposed by Pinar (2004), which takes a

reflective look at the educational experience to analyze it through past, and present to envision

the future. Using currere, educators and students bring their own stories of past, present, and an

imagined future to inform new ways of thinking about education (Pinar, 2012). This means that

students and teachers draw from their life experiences inside and outside classrooms to identify

aspects of their educational experience that are desired, relevant, and problematic for them. I use

currere to explore the storied curriculum of each student through a series of three interviews

where I delve into their past English learning experiences, their experiences in the current EFL

program and how they envision EFL teaching and learning. As students share their narratives of

previous schooling, they draw on their own life experiences to re-think their educational

experiences. Similarly, Albers (2014) called on educators to engage the curriculum of everyday life and work to legitimate it. Here, personal, and social knowing become valuable tools for curriculum inquiry. Short and Burke (2001) define personal and social knowing as "the knowledge that learners bring from their personal experiences of living in the world and being part of specific cultural groups and social contexts" (p 32). Additionally, integrating the students' life experiences is essential to curriculum inquiry because it provides students with the opportunities to reflect on their sociocultural realities leading them to take actions to change their reality (Freire, 1982). Barnawi (2019) critiques the dominant paradigm of education in Saudi Arabia which does not create space students to cultivate their own voice and promote critical consciousness. Instead, classrooms are turned into spaces where students practice to the test (Alharbi, 2022). Therefore, starting curriculum inquiry from inquiring into how students perceive their EFL learning and teaching is needed in spaces where students are not engaged in critical discussions about their views and desires for their own learning.

Moreover, the narratives of learners are used as the basis of teachers' reflections. When educators draw upon their own lived experience as teachers, and through the experiences of their students, they cultivate a critical voice that is grounded in the challenges of their lived realities and informs their pedagogical choices. Therefore, currere offers an avenue for teachers to reflect on the learner's experience as well as their own. Moreover, as educators re-attune themselves to their own lived curricula as teachers, as well as their students', they disrupt the institutionalized structures that relegated them to mere implementers (Alnefaie, 2016). Additionally, focusing on the narratives of curriculum as a living text for both students and teachers unmasks a pattern of meaning in the participants' narratives which give way to the unraveling of tensions between what participants' experience, what they value, and what they desire.

Theoretical Considerations for Narrative Inquiry and Currere

Narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006) and Pinar's (2004) currere share some commonalities that inform the study. In what follows, I delineate these similarities and how such theoretical assumptions guide the exploration of Saudi women's experiences with EFL curriculum.

Narrative inquiry and currere (Pinar, 2004) share an interest in the learner's experience and their journey towards learning. For example, currere (Pinar, 2004) acknowledges the importance of the temporal aspect of learning evident in the four main stages which seeks to understand the regressive moment, the progressive, to analyze and synthesize new knowledge informing how curriculum is understood. On the other hand, the temporality dimension is present in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) which acknowledges the instability of narratives as they change over time. In this sense, narrative inquiry is not interested in a totalizing account of the experience under investigation instead, it co-constructs a partial storied accounts of participants' lived experience. Likewise, Pinar's (2004) currere moves to understand the knowing subject as a basis for curricular landscapes where the past, present, and future appear to inform such an understanding. Carey (2006) highlights the benefit of such positioning when she calls for abandoning the search for "generalizable solutions" and instead, calls for engagement with context-specific problems (p. 164).

The reconceptualization of curriculum theory with a focus on the experience of learners/teachers, and their storied accounts of these experiences (Jackson, 2010; Roh, 2006) offers us the tools to understand how students conceive of their experiences with EFL curriculum. Britzman (1998), as cited in Cary (2006), notes that

When all of these fields are considered most generally, when education writ large questions

its relation to social justice with the suggestion that education can be made from the proper

teacher, the proper curriculum, or the proper pedagogy so that learning will be no problem to

the actors involved, we might note that for there to be a learning there must be conflict within

learning (p. 11).

Proceeding from the view that the relationship between institutionalized curriculum and students

cannot be free from conflict, we are better positioned to reveal the sites of contestations. Using

Pinar's (2004) conceptual framework to understand how Saudi women reflect on their

experiences with EFL curriculum is indispensable in a context where textbooks are treated as the

sole source of curriculum (Alqahtani, 2019). A reconceptualization of EFL curriculum in Saudi

would shift the focus from textbook to curriculum as a journey. Further, exploring the

experiences of Saudi women with EFL curriculum offers us the potential of developing an

understanding of the social, cultural, and institutional world they inhibit which has been left

unexplored in the literature. In privileging the perspectives of Saudi women in the study, the

resulting accounts offer language teachers a space to reflect on their understanding of

curriculum. Additionally, I am hoping that this study will encourage researchers to view learners

as more than just data sources (Fielding, 2004) and work to systematically integrate students'

voices in curricular research. This study hopes to center students' voices as a catalyst for re-

imagining EFL curricular spaces in Saudi Arabia.

Key Terms and Definitions

Experience

Experience as a term is indispensable for the narrative inquirer. Dewey's theorization of

experience in schools considers the internal and objective aspects of experience. The objective

part is related to the physical elements of the setting that learners attend to which includes

textbooks, seating, and boards etc. whereas the internal aspect of experiences encompasses the

"students' internal lifeworld and the learning environment as experienced by the learner" (Erickson, et.al., 2008, p. 200). The focus on experience is not intended to valorize individuals' experiences. Instead, it explores the social, cultural, familial, linguistics and institutional narratives within which individual experiences are constituted, enacted, expressed, and enacted (Clandinin, 2013).

Foundation Year

Foundation year, sometimes referred to as preparatory year program (PYP), is a foundational year program that all college freshmen in Saudi must undertake. English language is a corner stone in this program which offers students with extensive English language program that helps bridge the gap between high school and college-level where most courses, especially in natural sciences tracks, are offered through English as a medium of instructions.

Curriculum

Curriculum in this study is defined as the learning experience that takes places inside and outside classrooms (Graves, 2016). This definition allows for a much broader discussion of the multifaceted nature of learning experience as it comprises the personal, sociocultural, historical, racial, gendered aspects of curriculum (Pinar, 2004).

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This study aims to investigate Saudi women's experience with the implementation of the English as a foreign language (EFL) curriculum in Saudi Arabia at the transition level from secondary school to university in the foundation year. The study investigates students' views of their EFL learning, teaching methods, materials, content, and how might their narratives inform teacher's understanding of EFL curriculum. The literature review is organized into five sections: 1) curriculum theory in English language teaching 2) student voice in relation to curriculum 3) orality, memorization, and embodiment in Kuttab Schools 4) issues related to EFL curriculum in Saudi Arabia, and finally, 5) issues related to women's education in higher education in Saudi Arabia.

In the first section, I explore the traditional conceptualizations of curriculum in English Language Teaching (ELT) theory and how it converges with conceptualizations of curriculum in the field of curriculum studies. This section draws heavily on theoretical discussions in ELT field about the different curriculum models, the role of teachers and learners with these models, and the pedagogical approaches used within them. In the second section, I discuss how student voice informs curriculum co-creation in higher education to conceive of different possibilities where students are afforded to participate in decision-making processes around their educational experience. In the third section, I discuss historical links between Kuttab schools, known now as Qur'anic schools, and formal schooling in Saudi Arabia. In particular, I address the genesis of schooling in Saudi Arabia, its links to Kuttab schools, and the newly formed concept of Islamic pedagogy. Then, in the fourth section, I move into discussing issues related to the EFL curriculum in the Saudi context by focusing on how teaching, learners, and curriculum have been explored in higher education. Finally, in the fifth section, since this study is centralized around women's

narratives, I explore the longstanding historical issues surrounding women's education in Saudi Arabia to provide a context for the peculiar challenges and changes to women's education.

Curriculum Theory in English Language Teaching

Curriculum in English language teaching has been traditionally divided into three major components: syllabus design, methodology and evaluation (Nunan, 2015). In syllabus design, issues of content, objectives, and rationale for teaching the content are developed (Nunan & Lamb, 1996) whereas methodology is concerned with studying the best practices by which English language is taught (Canagarajah, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and assessment is concerned with how well the learners have attained the objectives of learning (Nunan, 2015). Syllabus design has traditionally fallen under two main categorizations: product-oriented syllabus and process-oriented syllabus (Wette, 2018). The product-oriented syllabus is concerned with pre-specification of learning outcomes and course content as fixed entities whereas process-oriented syllabus focuses on learning experience and pedagogy (Wette, 2018; 2011). Such discrete conceptualization of syllabus design is a contested matter for researchers as well as language educators who acknowledge the necessity of using both designs. Yet, the degree to which process-oriented vs. product-oriented should be utilized is still a subject for debate (e.g., Littlewood, 2009; Nunan, 1995; Kumaravadivelu, 1991). Hedge (2000) states that, "the question has become not so much on what basis to create a list of items to be taught as how to create an optimal environment to facilitate the processes through which language is learned" (p. 359). This recognition has led to researchers and educators to attend to language learning as a complex and multi-faceted process that defies oversimplification. At the syllabus design level, "it has encouraged teachers to organize their courses around holistic learning experiences such as projects and tasks, in the belief that the resulting 'negotiation of meanings' is the most effective

facilitator of individual learning" (Littlewood, 2009, p. 246). There are considerable differences between both categories in relation to their philosophical foundations, syllabus planning, teaching, and learning approaches, assessment, teacher and learners' roles, and elements of macro-skills syllabi (See Table 1.). The philosophical foundation of product-syllabus is built around classical humanism and reconstructionism with a focus on knowledge (content, linguistic) (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013) whereas process syllabus is grounded in progressivism, constructivism, centering the needs of the learners and activating learning and thinking processes (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Syllabus planning in product-oriented syllabi is determined through a process of pre-selection and sequencing of content, and learning outcomes (Graves, 2000; Richards, 2001) whereas process-oriented syllabi are developed through tentative planning, subjective and objective needs of learners, and communication processes through learning (Nunan, 1988; Littlewood, 2009). Moreover, teaching and learning approaches within each approach differ in how they position the learners. Product-syllabus centers on deductive approaches with little involvement on the part of the learners (Larsen-Freeman, 2014) whereas process-syllabus attempts to negotiate with the learners by using inductive approaches (Wette, 2018). Concerning assessment, norm-referenced, indirect, and discrete point-assessment are foundational to product syllabus whereas criterion-referenced, direct-assessment form the bedrock for process-syllabus (Wette, 2018). Regarding elements of macro-skills, product-syllabus forms specifications about what text will be used by learners for interpretation and production whereas process-syllabus is interested in developing strategies for the interpretation and production of texts to engender deep processing (Wette, 2011). Finally, in considering teacher and learner's role, teacher is seen as an authority figure, a model, and a manager as opposed to students who are perceived as receivers of the curriculum within the product-

syllabus. On the other hand, teachers are perceived as organizer, facilitator, and a learning

councilor whereas learners are afforded opportunities of curricular creation and negotiation

within process-syllabus (Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Wette, 2018)

Table 1.

A summary of process-oriented vs. product-oriented syllabi

Components	Process-oriented	Product-oriented
Teacher's role	Facilitator, organizers	Authority figure and a model
Student's role	Learning councilors	Learner has little to no involvement
Context	Low-constraints context	High-constraints context
Methods	Communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching	Audio-lingual, grammar translation
Learning outcomes	Tentative planning, includes the objectives and subjective needs of students	Pre-fixed, adapting to the official curriculum
Language skills	Skills as integrated into the content	Skills as discrete tools to be mastered

Both approaches have received criticisms that nudged the ELT research community into

recognizing the limitations of each approach while working to infuse elements of both

approaches to arrive at a holistic understanding of constitutes curriculum in ELT (Littlewood,

2009). Product-oriented syllabi were criticized in Wette (2018; 46) on the grounds of being

"anti-educational" with predetermined outcomes that are not responsive to students' needs, for

assuming that knowledge about language takes place externally, often without the involvement

of the classroom teacher, and transmitted to the learner, for requiring that learning outcomes will

be verifiable by demonstration, for being undemocratic in planning what a learner should exhibit

after instructions implying the exclusion of learner from the process of shaping curriculum, for

having a distorted view of how learning should proceed in a linear fashion whereas in reality it is

complex and partial, and finally, for using impressionistic objectives to guide the assessment

process using words such as "adequate", "intelligible" and "complex". On the other hand,

process-oriented syllabi have been critiqued in Wette (2018) for their misalignment with the

educational sphere which stresses accountability and assessment, for its impracticality

considering the high stakes external assessments and prescribed curricula, its dependance on the

quality of teacher and their creativity given sufficient autonomy, which is not always the case.

  Additionally, the predominance of product-syllabus design has been linked to high-

constraints contexts where teachers are working with a predetermined syllabus as opposed to

process-oriented syllabus which takes place in medium to low-constraint contexts (Paran &

Wallace, 2016; Wette, 2018). Despite the polarities that exist between both approaches, there is

little empirical research on comparing both approaches due to the inherent constraints in

comparing two different settings while controlling for all factors involved in second/foreign

language education. Moreover, there is a dynamic relationship between context and curriculum-

making processes that are left unexplored within these two approaches. The process of adapting

official curriculum to local needs changes the curriculum. So, there is a disconnect between

theorizations of curriculum and how it is enacted. Related to this point, Hayes (2009) explored

the practices of Thai teachers as they negotiated the official curriculum with learners to meet

their needs. Participants in Hayes (2009) persisted to teach through methods such as grammar-translation; going against the communicative-oriented official curriculum because of their belief that grammar-translation methods are suitable to their own learners' needs. Similarly, Hu (2005) explored the practices of Chinese language teachers to investigate what contextual influences factor in their pedagogical choices. From Hu's (2005) investigation, what transpired is shaped by contextual factors such as the availability of resources and socio-economic conditions of the school and the community surrounding it.

Moving Forward

The discussions around curriculum theorization in ELT field lacks attention to contextual factors that affect the language learning process. The evidence presented by Hayes (2009) and Hu (2005) shows the importance of context in determining what is taught and how it is taught. Additionally, the assumption of value-free, context-independent curriculum is no longer valid (Menard-Warwick et al., 2016; Pennycook, 2016). Therefore, educators are encouraged to reflect on how the socio-historical characteristics of their particular classroom, such as context, learner goals, local traditions and institutional setting interact to shape their curricular decisions-making. Such reflection reminds us that "curriculum is a living, breathing organism through which we create our visions of our pasts, presents, and futures." (Ladson-Billing & Brown, 2008, p. 155). ELT curriculum theory is pre-occupied by processes such as syllabus design, teaching methods and, assessment devoid of sociocultural and contextual factors that impinge on the uptake and enactment of curriculum. Curriculum as defined by Pinar (2004) transcend these limits by situating it in the wider socio-cultural, and political context in which curriculum is implemented. Pinar (2004) argued:

The method of currere reconceptualized curriculum from course objectives to

complicated conversation with oneself (as a "private" intellectual), an ongoing project of

self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action – as

a private-and-public intellectual – with others in the social reconstruction of the public

sphere. Curriculum theory asks you, as a prospective or practicing teacher, to consider

your position as engaged with yourself and your students and colleagues in the

construction of a public sphere, a public sphere not yet born, a future that cannot be

discerned in, or even thought from, the present. So conceived, the classroom becomes

simultaneously a civic square and a room of one's own. (pp. 37–38)

In this study, the reconceptualization of curriculum as a situated dialogue embedded in a larger

socio-cultural, political, racial, and gendered structures (Pinar, 2004) offers the tools to deepen

our understanding of students' learning experience. It allows us to explore contextual factors that

are missing from the theorization of curriculum in the ELT field.

Student Voice in Curriculum

Student voice work is a concept that emerged in the last two decades (Cook, 2011; Cook-

Sather, 2010, Fielding, 2004; Thomson, 2011) to include wide ranging research agenda that is

centered around integrating student's voice in curriculum co-design (i.e., Ahmadi, 2021;

Bartousis et. al. 2016; Carey, 2013), student-staff partnership practices (i.e., Dickerson et. al.,

2016; Gravette et. al., 2020, Martenesa, et. al., 2019), governance, and quality assurance (Seale,

2010). In this review, I limit the scope of the discussion to an overview of the history of student

voice work, theoretical tensions for student voice work, and, lastly, I draw on empirical studies

of student voice and curriculum co-creation in higher education to address its value and

limitations.

History of Student Voice

Historically, student voice work has developed under the belief that students should participate fully in schooling processes (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Schools and colleges began to listen to students' voices, a change that was brought by The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which gave children the right to participate, that is to be part of the decision-making process in matters that affect them (Taylor & Robinson, 2007). Fielding (2011) traces the genesis of student voice work to radical traditions in education that are rooted in "participatory democracy" and "fellowship" (p. 5). The political undertones of the concept of voice are traced to the 21st century social liberation movements (Thomson, 2011). Therefore, the contemporaneous tradition of student voice work is described as participatory and action-oriented (Cook, 2011; Campbell, 2011). There are institutional and national factors that historically driven schools and colleges towards engaging students in the process of learning and teaching; for example, in the United Kingdom, 2002 Education Act required schools to consult with students (Taylor & Robinson, 2009); a trend that continued to influence higher education sector (Bovill & Woolmer, 2018). Additionally, factors such as governance and quality assurance pushed universities to adopt mechanisms to facilitate student engagement (Seale, 2010).

Student voice work is centered on challenging assumptions of students' role in teaching and learning (Fielding, 2006). Student voice work is concerned with "collaborative reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation or analysis" (Gravette, et. al. 2020, p. 2575). Fielding (2011) developed a model to elucidate how to best approach student voice work which he termed

"Patterns of Partnerships" (p. 12). This model consists of six levels in which teachers/educators/researchers can interact with students to co-create democratic spaces. In the first level, students are positioned as data sources (instrumental). In the second level, students are characterized as active respondents where staff takes the lead with some student support. At the third level, students are co-inquirers where in the last two levels; students are joint authors, and "intergenerational learning as a lived democracy" (Fielding, 2011, p. 12), respectively. By incorporating and responding to students' view of the educational experience, student voice work strives to change the nature of the relationship between educators and students from a hierarchical relationship, to a collaborative and participatory one.

Theoretical Tensions in Student Voice

The conceptual landscapes of student voice are marked by attention to theorization of voice, power, and establishing a role for students as a "change agent" (Hall, 2017). Theorizations of voice tend to evoke criticisms for being "singular", "disembodied", "tokenistic", one which conflates authenticity with purity and consistency; associates voice with "expressed words" only; binds the exercise of voice to certain times and ways (Thomson, 2011, p. 24). Similarly, Chadderton (2011) presented a post-structural criticism of theorization of voice as a truth that needs to be captured. Voice, according to Chadderton (2011), is "shifting, fluid and complex" (p. 73). Chadderton (2011) further argued that authorship practices in the student voice work needs to be called into question since such practices tend to present a totalizing account of student voice and presents students as one homogenous group without considering factors such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. Matthews et. al. (2019) analyzed the interpretive framing of partnership practices in student voice literature in higher education. They found that researchers have used interpretive processes to situate partnership practices such as "building on concepts",

"imagining through metaphors" and, "drawing on constructs" (p. 286). Concepts such as "participative reality, communities of practice, student engagement, deliberative democracy and ecology of participations" (p. 290) were strongly present in the literature as interpretive frameworks adopted to situate student-staff partnership practices. Additionally, metaphors are used to evoke a set of associations with student-staff partnership practices that are thought to be useful such as "self-authoring" and "translation" (p. 292). Self-authorship refers to the ability of self-definition as it relates to identity, belief systems and relationships; such an ability, as Lubiscz-Narwoka (2018) argued, provides an interpretive framing of how students engage in the process of curriculum co-design where participants are constantly rewriting themselves. Additionally, translation offers an open-ended framework to facilitate a deep engagement with the educational experience of learners (Cook-Sather, 2012). For Cook-Sather (2012), translation is rooted in an "analytical and iterative process" of meaning-making (p. 353). Adopting translation as an interpretive framework necessitates a shift in how researchers engage with student voice work as it shifts the process from research "on" students to research "with" students (Cook-Sather, 2012, p. 354). Metaphors such as these generate a set of possibilities that when applied to staff-student partnership, generate positive conditions that aim to change the relationship between the student/teacher and researcher/participants.

Although metaphors are productive to conceive of different possibilities to facilitate students' voice, "drawing on constructs" (Matthews et. al., 2019, p. 290) provides a way to tease apart hidden aspects of how student voice is afforded and enabled. Two constructs that are frequently invoked in much of the discussion around student voice are power and neoliberalism. Student voice advocates and researchers are engaging in what has been termed as "risky praxis"); one that is "seated in … radical processes of challenging, questioning, destabilizing,

deconstructing, and empowering" (Mathews, et. al., 2019, p. 292). Therefore, the construct of

power generated many debates; whereas some studies have examined power in relation to the

student-staff partnership practices (Cook-Sather, 2020; Mihan, et. al., 2008) and others made

contributions to theorizing power in student voice research (Cook, 2011) and problematizing

power (Seale, 2010; Hall, 2017). Cook-Sather (2020) drew on several empirical studies to

present an overview of the approaches used in the context of student voice to empower students.

Cook-Sather (2020) encouraged researchers to re-think their authorship practices when working

to promote student voice; promoting alternative authorship practices where students are involved

in conducting and disseminating educational research such as "speak-outs, performance/theater,

arts exhibitions; online or hard copy reports in the form of youth brochures, magazines, comics

or posters" (Cook-Sather, 2020, p. 185). Additionally, Cook-Sather (2020) argued that using a

research method that relies on open-ended processes where consideration of socio-economic,

familial, and community context are explored in-depth promotes a genuine engagement with

student voice rather than a tokenistic form of engagement. Mihan et. al. (2008) explored the issue

of power through an investigation of the processes of engaging undergraduate students in a

course redesign. They described their process as they proceeded with caution questioning

"whether we are willing to relinquish control over the process of restructuring a class" (Mihan,

et. al., 2008, p. 2). Four of the participants were students who had taken the course before while

three were part of the new cohort. This strategy is sought to bring together the expertise of past

students and current students. The relationship between students and professor was marked by

shared responsibility and trust as they evaluated textbooks, course objectives, and development

of tasks and ideas for assignment (Mihan, et al., 2008). The process of decision-making was

negotiated between staff members and students. Additionally, power presents a real issue to

researchers who are concerned with authenticity of voice. Cook (2011) critiqued the treatment of voice in qualitative research paying close attention to how voice is heard and interpreted. Cook (2011) offers considerations for researchers to pay attention to in the process of constructing the study to guard against co-opting student voice initiatives. To ensure the facilitation of an authentic voice to emerge, researchers must consider, according to Cook (2011), who is invited to participate (sample), how voice is enabled (methodology), and how voice is interpreted (data analysis). Coming from a background rich with participatory research, Cook (2011) argues that action research methodology is the most suitable method for conducting student voice work due to the absence of "hierarchy of credibility" (p. 313) where all participants are involved in the generation of knowledge through collaboration. Similarly, Jones and Hall (2021) urged researchers to consider the unbalanced power between teachers and students which can often limit our efforts in pursuing authentic, full participation from students. They offer guidelines for researchers who are interested in studying students' voice that is grounded in critical pragmatism which include: having a deep understanding of the school's community, acknowledging that people may not share the same understanding of values, rules, and collective meaning so use these moments as an opportunity for dialogue, offering a collective and contextual definition of students' voice, reflecting on the dominant structures of power within a given school's community, and creating opportunities for reflexivity. For Seale (2010), empowerment and transformation are foundational principles of student voice work. While there is a consensus on the value of students' perspectives, Seale (2010) points out that "there is no strong articulation of beliefs concerning whether or not student voice work in higher education involves transformation or empowerment" (p. 998). Indeed, there is an assumption that students'

feedback will automatically transform curriculum and teaching practice that is often found in higher education literature, but it is unclear how that transformation happens (Seale, 2010).

A second most commonly evoked construct in relation to student voice work in higher education is neoliberalism. A few studies discussed the role of neoliberalist policies in the uptake and enactment of student voice. When it comes to the introduction of the student voice agenda into higher education institutions, Hall (2020) noted that universities tend to use students' voice for their own means. In an increasingly marketized higher education system, universities ask students to fill end-of-semester surveys to evaluate teaching and learning; such practice does not constitute critical engagement with students' voice. In Hall's (2020) study, teacher educators described students' voice work as an "added layer of accountability"; creating consumerist approaches in the process of integrating student voice in teaching and learning (Dickerson, et. al, 2016). However, Dollinger and Lodger (2020) argue that student-staff partnerships are beneficial even when underpinned by market-driven outcomes such as employability. On the other hand, Darwin (2022) critiqued the neoliberal imagery that underpins the increasing interest of Chilean universities in student voice to "reshape practice" and "improve the responsiveness of the institution" (p. 4) while there is no evidence, in the Chilean context, that student voice is valued. In Darwin's (2022) exploration of the function of student voice in Chilean Higher Education system, artifact analysis and interviews with 10 educational leaders in 10 Chilean Universities were undertaken. The represented universities in the sample were categorized based on a typology that classified institutions into traditional, emergent, and private. The study findings suggest a limited value being placed on the value of student voice "as a mediator of institutional or teaching quality" (Darwin, 2022, p. 10). However, some emergent universities, which are attended by many students who lack adequate schooling background and social capital, tended to

engage student voice through course evaluations and students' forums. Darwin (2022) notes, however, in these emergent universities, the voice of students did not make any tangible effect on the students' learning experience. Additionally, there are differences amongst the universities in terms of the underlying reason for adopting student voice. Darwin (2022) found that whilst private institutions tended to operationalize diagnostic tools for assessing pedagogical effectiveness to monitor "students' progress and retention" (p. 14), traditional institutions have opted to use evaluative metrics that are used across higher education internationally (i.e., students surveys, students' forums), they generally expressed skepticism around the value of student voice. On the other hand, emergent universities placed a value on student voice to identify pedagogical issues and mediate these problems motivated by the need to keep their accreditation.

As an emerging body of work, student voice theorization covers the multifaceted factors that underpin the relationship between students and their schooling experience. It promotes a participatory and agentive schooling experience for students by including them in the decision-making processes.

Student Voice in Curriculum Co-creation in Higher Education

In this section, I turn my attention to studies that centralized student voice in curriculum co-design. The main keywords used to retrieve the literature are "higher education", "curriculum co-creation", "curriculum co-design", "student voice" and "student-staff partnerships". There is a growing interest in higher education in partnering with students to co-create curriculum. A number of studies (Ahmadi, 2021; Baroutsis et. al., 2016; Bergmark & Westman, 2016; Brooman, et. al., 2015; Carey, 2013; Carey, 2013a; Dickerson et. al., 2016) have presented great evidence on the effectiveness of such partnerships. Bergmark and Westman (2016) discussed the

process of co-creating curriculum with students in a teacher education program in Sweden. The study followed a case study design where the data were drawn from content analysis of course documents, survey data with open ended questionnaires, and a 90-mins interview with the professor of the course. Bergmark and Westman (2016) discussed the unpredictability of the process of engaging students in curriculum design as the professor was overcome with a sense of reluctance due to the student's initial resistance, and the hierarchical structuring of the university which results in pre-fixed learning goals, and ready-made study guides. Additionally, students reported a feeling of uneasiness toward co-creating curriculum due to their unfamiliarity with the course content which supports Bovill's (2014) observation that students can be involved in the design of the pedagogical aspect of learning and teaching whereas academic staff can take the lead on the content. Similarly, Ahmadi (2021) undertook an action-based research study in an EFL grammar course to explore the processes of involving students in curriculum co-design. Involving students in the curriculum design process means offering a degree of flexibility in the expected roles of teachers and students. Ahmadi (2021) noted that cultural norms underlie the resistance of some of the study's participants to the idea of students-as-teachers which aligns with Westman and Bergmark's (2019) call for a contextual and shared understanding of the student's voice.

The benefits of engaging student voice as part of the curriculum are highlighted in Baroutsis et. al., (2016) who undertook a study to explore the use of students' voices as a pedagogical tool in an Australian college. Interview data revealed that using student pedagogic voice is linked to both institutional and personal gains. Institutional gains include building students' capacity for leadership and increasing their democratic participation in society. Personal gains include community membership, a sense of belonging, and ownership of

decision-making practices which are based on trust and mutual respect. Carey (2013) investigated the experience of course representatives at a university in England to consider the role of student representation in engagement. Carey (2013) highlighted the link between student voice and gaining employability skills. Drawing on interview data with course representatives in health and social care programs, the participants' motivation behind undertaking their role, and their understanding of what their role as course representative entails were explored. Students saw an opportunity to develop their CVs by undertaking this role. Furthermore, participants saw themselves as a voice of their peers and utilized various tools to access their peers' voices such as planned meetings and surveys, however, they acknowledged that there are structural problems within the university that cannot be addressed at a course-level. Similarly, Carey (2013a) conducted a study to explore students' experiences with participation in curriculum design in a nursing program at an Australian university. The case study design along with iterative analysis of interview and focus group data revealed the altruistic motivation behind students' participation in curriculum development. However, tensions have risen as participants viewed their contribution as limited to complaints about the curriculum which stifled their roles in the process. Additionally, the ratio of student to staff in the curriculum development meetings was too high suggesting a degree of formality and inspiring an atmosphere of disconnect between staff and students. According to Carey (2013a), the design process of a shared curriculum development between students and staff should not be centered on airing grievances only but thinking of alternative ways to develop curriculum. Additionally, Brooman et al., (2015) conducted a case study to illustrate the value of students' engagement in curriculum design in the higher education context of the UK. The study that showed the process of student involvement in the co-design of the curriculum improved students' learning, and exam scores. Consequently,

students' perception of the course has positively improved. Martenesa et. al. (2019) explored

students' perspective on student-staff partnerships as participants were engaged in the process of

revamping a course in a medical program at a Dutch university. Participants in the study were

engaged in designing a course, collecting data for evaluation purposes, and discussing issues

with the curriculum committee. In the responses, students illustrated the value students bring to

re-designing a course by offering a "unique perspective" (p. 914). Participants felt that staff were

not receptive to student's feedback without offering justifications. A common criticism to the

processes of engaging student curriculum co-creation is that the "feedback loop is closed"

(Currens, 2011, p. 190); where students do not receive feedback on what actions will be taken as

a result of the curriculum co-creation. Martenesa et. al. (2019) emphasized a seamless integration

of student voice throughout the design and implementation processes; thus, ensuring that

students are kept informed throughout the process. Dickerson et. al. (2016) explored the

experiences of six undergraduate student researcher's learning from collaborating with academic

staff who initiated inquiries into aspects of teaching and learning at a University in the UK. The

study set out to document the project and investigates the students' view of their learning from

such partnership. Students expressed the value of involving them implying a sense of

"partnership between equals" (Dickerson, et. al., 2016, p. 259) while developing skills needed

for graduation and employability. While the previous studies established the benefits of

incorporating student voice in the design and implementation of the curriculum, they remain as

isolated practice working in limited contexts as opposed to an integrated aspect of the learning

experience.

Another set of studies (Bovill, et. al, 2016; Campbell, 2011; Currens, 2011; Dollinger &

Lodger, 2020; Hall, 2020; Mapstone-Mercer & Bovill, 2020; Matthews et. al. 2018; O'Neil &

McMahon, 2012) paid more attention to the processes and mechanism of fostering partnership in co-creating curriculum. Dollinger and Lodger (2020) created a model elucidating the main characteristics of the co-creation process. Data were obtained through qualitative surveys and in-depth interviews with participants from 10 student-staff partnership initiatives across the Australian higher education context. The resulting model focused on three primary areas: input, processes, and outcomes. The input dimension is concerned with individual and environment considerations. The process dimension is concerned with barriers, co-production, and value-in-use. The outcomes dimension involves benefits such as increased students' employability, self-efficacy, confidence, student ownership and engagement. However, the selection of case studies is predominantly composed of initiatives that were classified under the governance and quality assurance; 5 of the 10 selected case studies were aimed at improving graduates' employability to meet benchmarks imposed by the university's policy and improving service design such as enrollment processes (Dollinger & Lodger, 2020). As such, the processes of facilitation of student voice that Dollinger and Lodger (2020) proposed were based on student-staff partnership initiatives that were developed for "seeking compliance" which runs counter to the essence of student voice work (Jones & Hall, 2021).

O'Neil and McMahon (2012) explored the use of participatory action research approach (PRA) to initiate a curricular change in a physio-therapy program at a US-based college. O'Neil' and McMahon (2012) underscored the importance of having a neutral facilitator in focus groups because it mitigates the power imbalance inherent in student-staff partnerships. Indeed, neutral facilitation offers a safe space for students' voice to emerge (Campbell, 2011). Additionally, Matthews et. al. (2018) offered different mechanisms to enhance student-staff partnership by highlighting examples of students engaged in mentoring their own peers and had full control on

the design and implementation of learning activities in safe, low-stake environments and through connecting student-staff partnership to research-based initiatives which have long existed in various disciplines.

Students-staff partnerships are challenging due to the uniqueness of each context where different historical, social, and cultural factors mediate the process. Bovill et. al. (2016) addressed the challenges of co-creating learning and teaching drawing on examples from higher education in Europe and North America. Bovill et. al. (2016) illustrated that students have assumed a variety of roles in student-staff partnerships such as "co-researcher, consultant, pedagogical co-designer, and representative" (p. 3). The first three roles, they argue, are contingent upon staff creating such opportunities for students whereas student representatives usually are a student-led process. Bovill et. al. (2016) pointed out elements of resistance from both staff and students that may impede meaningful partnership such as the heavy workload faced by staff and the lack of incentives for students to step out of their traditional roles and engage in pedagogical co-creation. Additionally, the structure of the institution may present a barrier to educators who wish to engage students in partnership practices. In contexts where student-staff practices are counter-cultural, Bovill et. al. (2016) suggested starting with small elements of learning within classroom-level instead of attempting a large-scale co-design of a full program.

Issues of inclusivity and equity in student-staff partnership are overlooked in higher education literature surrounding student voice (Cook-Sather, 2020a). Cook-Sather (2020a), Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill (2020), and Currens (2011) were the only studies that focused on fostering inclusive and equitable partnership practices with students. Cook-Sather (2020a) analyzed the narrative accounts of students and staff who were engaged in Students As Learners

and Teachers program at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges drawing on data derived from primary research reports, informal feedback from staff and students, and publicly available reflections of staff and students. The dialogues unfolding through the co-creation process led staff and students in addressing inequities in their classrooms, and inviting underrepresented students to become pedagogical partners, thus, affirming their voices and feedback as an integral part of their courses. One of the academic staff participants stated that dialoguing with students helped sharpen her awareness of her own voice in the academy. Additionally, the student's voice was not only amplified within the pedagogical partnership program, but it also carried over to being outspoken in their other classrooms. Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill (2020) argued for fostering accessible and equitable partnerships with students. In their analysis of 11 UK-based staff-student partnership initiatives, Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill (2020) noted that many of these partnerships are "unpaid, small-scale, and extracurricular" (p. 2546) which raises questions about the equity and inclusivity of such initiatives. Consideration for paying students in this initiative would mobilize students who are less privileged, and who are probably maintaining employment while studying and have no time for extracurricular activities. Further, student-staff partnerships tend to centralize students who are privileged and those who are perceived by their peers as good students; thus, engaging the "usual suspects" (Mercer-Mapstone & Bovill, 2020, p. 2552). Additionally, Currnes (2011) questioned the degree to which student representatives in these partnerships represent the broader community of the student body in a given institution. Currens (2011) inspected the mechanisms that are used to elicit students' voice, its challenges, and limitations. Mechanisms such as surveys, questionnaires and student representatives are frequently employed elements to support efforts of student's voice expressions across higher education in the UK. However, such mechanisms are flawed. Currens (2011) argued that "black,

Asian, and white students have differing levels of satisfactions with assessment and feedback, yet these data are masked in reports of the overall return" (p. 188). Instead of relying on surveys and questionnaires, Currens (2011) advocated for continuing to maintain a dialogic relationship with students.

Moving Forward

The literature on students' voices is rapidly growing. However, there is a disconnect between theorizations of students' voices and operationalizations of the concept, especially as it relates to co-creation of curriculum. While the previous studies are rich in accounts of students' experience with curriculum co-creation, they remained largely descriptive of the processes and experiences of students. The previous studies did not systematically address the issue of representation, except for Cook-Sather (2020), as most of the studies did not elaborate on the social, racial, and class background of the participants, thus, missing an opportunity to explore how these factors inform and shape practices of student voice and co-creation of curriculum. Additionally, although power is a central construct in theorizations of students' voice as noted before, the empirical studies into students' voice in relation to curriculum co-creation have remained silent on issues of power, as Seale (2010) noted. Power imbalances were observed in students' accounts in pedagogical partnership with staff (Carey, 2013; Carey, 2013a; Martenesa, et al., 2019), however, these studies did not address what mechanisms were employed to mitigate the effects. Lastly, the link between educators' conceptualizations of curriculum needs to be examined in relation to how student voice is elicited and incorporated in the process of teaching and learning. In this study, students are positioned as actively engaged in re-envisioning their learning by drawing upon their gendered, racialized, and discursive constructions which aims to foster student-centered approaches to develop EFL curriculum.

Orality, Memorization, Embodiment and Kuttab Schools

In this section, I turn to the historical link between Kuttab schools, also known as Qur'anic schools, and EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia. I also discuss the central tenets of Islamic pedagogy (Boyle, 2006; Sabki & Hardaker, 2013; 2015; 2016; 2018), a recently developed concept, that is based on the approach to teaching found in Qur'anic schools. Although Qur'anic schools have been studied by various ethnographers (Hedman & Ganuza, 2019; Hoechner, 2011), the focus of this section is on establishing a historical link between early schooling in Saudi Arabia, and features of newly formed concept of Islamic pedagogy.

Before the advent of formal schooling in Saudi Arabia in 1930s, *Kuttab* schools has provided the only type of schooling available for students (Elyas & Picard, 2014). In the *Kuttab* schools, subject matters were limited to Islamic religious texts, Arabic language, and basic arithmetic (Elyas & Picard, 2014). Children in Saudi Arabia still receive religious instructions at home prior to enrolling in the formal school. Tibi (2001, p. 408) in his detailed book on education prior to the establishment of the Kingdom described the importance of initiating the children into adopting and embodying Islamic texts:

> The child's education began at home. As soon as he could speak, it was the father's duty to teach him "the word" [. . .] La Ilah Illa-Allah (no God but Allah). When the child reached the age of six years, then the child was held responsible for ritual prayer. It was then his formal education began.

Today, Kuttab schools are held less formally in mosques were students gather around the *Imam* or the preacher in a ceremonial-like atmosphere listening attentive
ly to the lecture. After the conclusion of the lecture, a time is allotted for discussion and questions (Elyas & Picard, 2014). Elyas and Picard (2014) note the similarities between the role

of the *Imam* and the teacher in English language classroom as teachers are positioned as the sole

authority figure in the classroom. Additionally, one of the most notable features of the *Kuttab*

school pedagogy is memorization (Shukari, 2014). While memorization and rote-learning

methods are two constructs that are commonly associated with the audiolingual method in EFL

classrooms, Shukari (2014) and Elyas and Picard (2014) trace back the prevalence of

memorization to Kuttab schools, alternatively called Qur'anic schools now. In what follows, I

discuss basic tenets of Islamic pedagogy, which is commonly practiced in Kuttab (Qur'anic

schools).

Islamic pedagogy is built upon the practices of teaching and learning found in Qur'anic

schools. It is an emergent concept that could be traced back to the work of Sabki and Hardaker

(2013) and Boyle (2006). The notion of Islamic pedagogy is premised on the intertwining of

knowledge and the sacred and sees itself as transcending time and place (Sabki & Hardaker,

2016). Sabki and Hardaker (2015) maintain that teachers who follow Islamic pedagogy are not

only well-versed in updated learning theories commonly found in western universities, however,

they view learning as a spiritual practice. The goal of Islamic pedagogy, according to Sabki and

Hardaker (2015), is to spiritually develop the human being. In Qur'anic schools, what used to be

Kuttab schools, knowledge is divided into two categories; revealed knowledge, and knowledge

that comes through reason *(aql)* (Boyle, 2006). The revealed knowledge is believed to be

revealed through God in Qur'an and is held as transcendental truths (Sabki & Hardaker, 2015).

Knowledge through reason is also considered instrumental to the overall growth of the human

being (Sabki & Hardaker, 2018). Such knowledge can be acquired through learning history,

literature, and sciences. While there are scholars (Sabki & Hardaker, 2018; Boyle, 2006;

Eickleman, 1974) who hold revelational knowledge at a higher level, some reject such

distinction arguing that "all true knowledge or science should help us to understand and realize the meaning and the spirit of divine knowledge in its widest sense, for personal and social development" (Sabani et. al, 2016, p. 29). Thus, affirming the belief in the holistic nature of learning as inseparable from the overall spiritual development of a person. Traces of the holistic approach to learning can be found in the Arabic word '*Tarbiyah'* which means education. *Tarbiyah* is taken from the root "raba" which means to grow, and increase used to describe the process of rearing a child into maturity (Nasr, 1989). This can be applied to seeking intellectual knowledge, spiritual development, and personal growth as drivers for the process of education (Sabki & Hardaker, 2016).

Three central features emerge in the literature in discussions around Islamic pedagogy which are orality, memorization, and embodiment. Orality in Arab communities have remained one of the most viable methods in preserving and transmitting culture even after writing had become common among Arabs (Schoeler, 2006). The style of lectures delivery is documented in Sabki and Hardaker (2018) ethnographic study of British Qur'anic schools and in the works of Boyle (2006) in Morocco where teachers recite the lectures from their memory while students sat down in circles around them taking notes. Additionally, students are called upon to recite what they committed to memory while paying attention to form, style of delivery, pronunciation, and grammar (Eickleman, 1976; Boyle, 2006). In Islamic pedagogy, there is an emphasis on memorization and embodiment to develop the learner's capacity to engage with the learned materials. Memorization is considered the first step of understanding learned materials, not a substitute of it, because it underscores the importance of transmitting sacred texts in its proper form (Boyle, 2006). Eickleman (1976) delineated the link between memorization and understanding. Eickleman (1976) offers a different way of looking at memorization from the

standpoint of Qur'anic schools as a tool used often creatively by learners in varied social contexts and through abstract manipulation of memorized passages in classrooms. In this sense, memorization, a central feature of Islamic pedagogy that has been critiqued by various western scholars (Boyle, 2006), is seen as a precursor to learning, and does not preclude understanding. Additionally, memorization of material is not seen as an end goal for the educative process, rather, embodiment is considered the lofty goal of learners in Qur'anic schools (Sabani et. al., 2016). Embodiment of learning is discussed in relation to two metaphors, engraving on a stone and developing a moral compass (Boyle, 2000; 2006). Boyle (2006) invoked a famous Arabic proverb to highlight the importance of embodiment in relation to learning in Islamic pedagogy found in the lines below:

"الحفظ في الصغر كالنقش على الحجر"

"Memorizing while young is like engraving in stone"

For Boyle (2006), the metaphor of engravement was invoked frequently by teachers who participated in the ethnographic study of Qur'anic schools in Morocco. It mirrored the process through which children are taught to appreciate, read, and comprehend religious texts. A second metaphor is "developing a moral compass" invoked frequently by teachers in Boyle (2006). When learners attempt memorizing religious texts and eventually embody it, values and ideas are instilled in them to guide them through life (Boyle, 2006). Such values are not instilled by mere repetition of texts, they develop as the learner is reflecting upon what they have memorized and acting upon their level of understanding (Sabani et. al., 2016).

Additionally, Sabani et. al (2016) argue for the value of Islamic pedagogy for fostering a personalized learning approach. Sabani et. al. (2016) argue that Islamic pedagogy acknowledges "a students' capacity to learn at their own pace, in their own preferred way, based on their

knowledge and cultural and religious differences" (p. 80). While Sabani et. al.'s (2016) views on learning faithfully depicts the Islamic view on learning, it does not match the structuration of learning experiences in modern day university settings which require accountability, rigorous testing, and structured curricula. This is opposite to the learning experience in Qur'anic schools where testing, certifications, and curricula are not structured around achieving a specific learning objective at a certain time and learners are free to move on their own pace (Sabani et. al., 2016; Hardaker & Sabki, 2013). In fact, Sahin (2018) noted the need for more systematic study of the pedagogical approaches found in Qur'anic schools since most of the ethnographies of these schools seem to be facilitated by socio-political interests and the need to assimilate these institutions in the cultural milieus of the west. For Sahin (2018), critical dialogue and openness from both traditional universities and their Islamic counterparts where deep reflection and dialogue would promote understanding of the philosophies underpinning their approach to education and lead to a more fruitful collaboration.

Moving Forward

To summarize, the presence of Kuttab (Qur'anic) schools in the Saudi context is still reflected in the practices of EFL classrooms, especially in relation to memorization (Shukari, 2014; Rajab, 2013). While conceptualization of Islamic pedagogy is centered around orality, memorization, and embodiment (Sabki & Hardaker, 2015), it is unclear how these tenets are transplanted into the structure of the university in Saudi Arabia. More studies are needed to elucidate the deeply embedded practices of Kuttab schools in Saudi EFL classrooms and how it is shaped by the structure of modern-day universities. This will provide some insights into how local ecologies of knowledge are subsumed under the chiefly Eurocentric, North American

pedagogies and the resulting competing ideologies that exists within each approach. In the context of this study, participants' narratives render their frames of knowing and valuing visible. As such, participants' narratives illuminate the ideologies underpinning EFL curriculum which would reveal how their learning is constructed, and what type of knowledge is valued.

Issues Related to EFL Curriculum in Saudi Arabia

Curriculum, in the Saudi context, has become inextricably and solely linked to textbooks. Textbooks are described by Alqahtani (2019) as the "de facto" curriculum in the Saudi Arabian EFL classrooms (p. 139). Alrebai's (2016) review of factors involved in the low achievement of Saudi students in EFL, Alerbai (2016) cites the use of L1 in the English instructions which minimizes students' exposure to the target language. Additionally, Alrebai (2016) attributed the problem of the curriculum in EFL to it being "prescribed", "ready-made" and largely focused on functional grammar (p. 25). Additionally, Khan (2011) cites inappropriate target curriculum as one of the barriers to learning in the Saudi educational system. In their review of the paradigm shift from teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to English as a second language (ESL) in Saudi Arabia, Alzahrani and Alkubaidi (2020) call for the modernization and localization of curriculum. Alzahrani and Alkubaidi (2020) discussed students' beliefs, teachers' training, curriculum and learning environment. The study highlights the need for changing the curriculum because "[it] is based on teaching the four language skills that are presented traditionally without taking into account the needs of teachers and students" (Alzahrani & Alkubaidi, 2020, p. 43). Moreover, the authors suggest a shift from EFL teaching practices to ESL where English should occupy a more prominent role in instructions in schools. Additionally, in a comprehensive review of EFL in Saudi Arabia, Mokovsky (2019) points to the necessity of undertaking a systematic and comprehensive research on the needs of various stakeholders in relation to

curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation. However, research on EFL curriculum in Saudi Arabia is centered around 1) teaching (i.e., Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Alnefaie, 2016; Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2016), 2) learners (i.e., Alrabai, 2019; Aljohani, 2009; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Khan, 201; Rajab, 2013; Alhaysoni, 2012), and 3) curriculum development and evaluation (i.e., Aburizaizah, 2021; Almuraibet, 2012).

Teaching

Teachers typically utilize three main sources to aid in teaching English which include pupil's textbook, pupil's workbook, and a teacher's manual (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). The issues surrounding English language teaching in Saudi can be categorized as belonging to two main categories: teacher's role, and pedagogy. Teachers' role in the development and implementation of EFL curriculum has received scant attention in Saudi Arabia. Mullic (2013) conducted a study based on the narratives of five male teachers at a Saudi university where he explored the teacher's voice in relation to curriculum development. The study presents a vivid picture of the marginalization of teacher's roles in curriculum development. "Curriculum development is carried out at the publishing house and the teachers just teach what they are forced to teach" (Mullic, 2013, p. 44). From the participants' narratives, the imbalance of power is more pronounced where marginalist ideologies and the distrust in teachers relegate them to mere implementers. Similarly, Alnefaie (2016) explored teacher's involvement in curriculum development through interviews with six male English teachers. Alnefaie's (2016) investigation reveals the lack of teacher's voice, their frustration with EFL curriculum and marginalization of teachers in the process of curriculum development. Additionally, Alghamdi (2017) investigated nine EFL teachers' conceptualization of EFL curriculum. The case study investigated how the nine participating teachers understand and negotiate EFL curriculum. Data were collected

through fieldnotes, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Findings revealed that all participating teachers viewed curriculum as a document to be followed. Additionally, participating teachers believed that factors such as culture, motivation, and learners' attitude affect students' learning. Further, teachers highlighted the restrictions they face when making curricular decisions which must be approved by the department's chair, even minute decisions; a participant noted "even if I do a power point, I need to send it for approval before I use it" (Alghamdi, 2017, p. 97). Alghamdi's (2017) findings are valuable in highlighting the rigid conceptualization of curriculum in the Saudi context which is compounded by the lack of autonomy on teacher's part. Furthermore, in their literature review on curriculum reform in several Asian countries, Mitchell and Alfuraih (2016) provide implications for Saudi curriculum reform. Although the study identified deficiencies in the curriculum that need to be remedied, some of the so-called deficiencies seemed to reflect the authors' belief in native-speakerism. The paper cites the need for a threshold of competency that teachers must have to be qualified "to teach" as part of the curriculum reform needed in Saudi Arabia which opens a discussion about teacher preparation programs that the authors failed to draw upon. Instead, Mitchell and Alfuraih (2016) invoked the binary of "non-native" vs. "native". The study cites Richard's (2010) statement that most of the region's teachers are non-native speakers (as cited in Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2016, p. 96). Authors, then, move to present a solution for non-native speakers' shortcoming by establishing a threshold quantified by an IELTS score. What Michell and Alfuraih (2016) invoke is an outdated, and long contested view that being a good English teacher is measured by how close a teacher is to the native-speaker's status.

In relation to pedagogy, the range of pedagogical practices that are at teachers' disposal is limited by the prescribed curriculum along with some contextual constraints (Alrabai, 2019). The

EFL prescribed curriculum is argued to reflect "its designers' personal perceptions and intuitions rather than on students' actual needs, goals, desires, and real-life concerns" (Alrabai, 2019, p. 104). Consequently, when learners' needs, goals, desires are not built into the curriculum, the pedagogical choices of teachers become limited to traditional teaching methods such as grammar-translation method, and audiolingual method. Alqahtani (2019) chronicles the prevailing pedagogies in the EFL Saudi context which started with the grammar translation method which was critiqued for its focus on written language. Such a critique, according to Alqahtani (2019), propelled the ministry of education to move toward adopting the audiolingual method which tends to focus on oral skills. However, the focus on drill and practice that is typically found within the audiolingual approach, according to Al Hajailan (2006), failed to equip students with the necessary communicative competence. The lack of communicative competence among Saudi learners, according to Alqahtani (2019), triggered a shift from audiolingual method to adopting communicative language teaching (CLT). The mounting evidence from different EFL contexts about the ineffectiveness of CLT, i.e., Korea (Yoon, 2004) and China (Zhang, Li & Wang, 2013), is echoed in the Saudi context as well. According to, Al Asmari (2015), Saudi EFL teachers in the study do not hold favorable views of CLT as an effective teaching method. Al Asmari (2015) attributed the negative views Saudi EFL teachers hold of CLT to the common misconceptions surrounding CLT; such misconceptions include not teaching grammar and relying completely on teaching communicative competence.

While CLT is still gaining prominence in Saudi Arabia, evidenced in the many recent studies (Alamri, 2018, Alqahtani, 2020, Batawi, 2007), there is a growing trend towards adopting CLT's offspring which is task-based language teaching (TBLT). TBLT takes as its crux the development of "workplans" which involve a "primary focus on meaning, real-world processes

of language use, any of the language skills, engages cognitive processes and have clearly defined communicative outcome" (Ellis, 2003, p. 9 – 10). Long (2015) sums up five critical advantages for using TBLT, which are functionality, accountability, learner-centeredness, relevance, and avoidance of problems within existing approaches to language teaching. While most of the studies conducted in TBLT aimed at accomplishing a communicative and functional goal, Tinker Sachs's (2009) goes further to uncover the role of risk-taking in the implementation of TBLT and managed to counter stereotypes about EFL learners. Tinker Sachs (2009) notes, "risks are involved, and it is the extent to which those risks are cushioned and scaffolded that determines whether teachers and learners make the leap across the divide from traditional language teaching methods to TBLT" (p. 108). In the Saudi context, Al Muhaimeed (2013) conducted a comparative study to assess the viability of TBLT as opposed to traditional teaching methods in intermediate schools. The quasi-experimental study found that TBLT significantly enhanced students' reading comprehension and was more advantageous than traditional teaching methods. Additionally, the study confirms that the constructivist theory of learning, which shares principles with TBLT, encourages problem-solving and learner-centeredness. Additionally, Khoja and Thomas (2021) explore the implementation of smartphone-supported TBLT in a college-level reading class. The quasi-experimental investigation involved three classes that received three different methods of teaching; one class has received instruction using the traditional Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) method, the second with a task-based approach, and the third using a set of mobile tasks that were designed for this study. Findings suggest that the experimental group scored higher in attention, achievement of tasks objectives, participation and volunteering compared to their counterparts who received the traditional method of instruction (PPP) and those used the mobile tasks only.

From previous discussion on teaching in the Saudi context of EFL, the clear constraints that each pedagogical approach has speaks to the perpetual state of confusion most teachers find themselves in towards the development in the field of EFL teaching methods. These constraints are also compounded when considering that the EFL curriculum is dictated centrally.

Learners

When considering research studies that investigate topics related to EFL learners in the Saudi context, the disproportional attention given to perceptual investigation comes at the expense of carrying out studies that document the processes of learning. This point is highlighted in Khoja and Thomas (2021) assertion that "while a considerable amount of research in Saudi Arabia has been based on students' perceptions, few studies have been conducted in live classrooms" (p. 1). Khoja and Thomas's (2021) assertion could be extended beyond the absence of empirical studies to include emphasizing the scarcity of qualitative investigations in addressing issues related to learning English in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, in his review of EFL research in Saudi Arabia in the past 25 years, Mokovsky (2019) points out the need of including more diverse instruments for data collection and research methodologies. In this section, I delve deeper into 1) general characteristics of learning English in Saudi Arabia 2) psychological/affective variables 3) curriculum implementation from the perspective of students.

General Characteristics of Learning EFL in Saudi Arabia. The literature is rife with discussions related to the many variables that affect learning English in Saudi Arabia. The strong cultural and religious traditions that affect learning have been discussed in previous studies whereby researchers have debated the Saudi culture's resistance to taking up English as a global language (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Elyas & Picard, 2019; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Additionally, a strong bias against using students' L1 in EFL classes exists in the literature. According to

Alshammari (2011), 60% of Saudi EFL teachers reported that the use of students L1 is necessary

to facilitate students' acquisition of English. However, Alrabai (2019) argues that the

incorporation of learner's L1 in instructions undermines students' communicative competence

and minimizes their exposure to the target language. Such claims appear to be indisputable facts

in the Saudi EFL context despite the emergence of various streams of research that support the

use of learners' L1, most notably translanguaging pedagogy (Conteh, 2018; Cummins, 2019;

Lin, 2018). Indeed, researchers need to be wary of perpetuating monoglossic ideologies and the

native-like competency threshold as the goal. Another common characteristic of learning English

in Saudi Arabia is the overreliance on teachers as the authority figure capable of transmitting

knowledge (Alrabai, 2019). Additionally, the lack of proper infrastructure in schools and

universities such as providing visual aids, access to language labs and technological support

seemed to contribute to the overreliance on textbooks and teaching through traditional methods

such as grammar translation methods (GTM) (Alharbi, 2015; Alrabai, 2019; Fareh, 2010). The

previous discussion on the general characteristics of learning EFL in Saudi shows the combined

weight of sociocultural factors, including teachers' and how they shape the process of learning.

Psychological/Affective Variables. A strong tradition of reliance on cognitivist

approaches to language learning resulted in a near saturation of studies exploring

psychological/affective variables in relation to EFL learners in the Saudi context. In this section,

a discussion around these studies and their results is warranted. Three notable variables have

been documented in the literature as fundamental to students' learning which are 1) readiness

and autonomous learning 2) motivation 3) the use of learning strategies. In terms of readiness

and autonomous learning, in a study conducted by Alrabai (2017), only 17% of the participants

assumed responsibility for their own learning. Similarly, Tamer (2013) assesses university level

students' readiness to engage in autonomous learning and shows the students' reluctance to engage in autonomous learning. Also, Farhani (2014) found that students' high level of motivation does not positively correspond with willingness to be involved in self-directed learning. Various justifications have been offered by researchers to explain the learners' declining level of autonomous behaviors including the nature of teacher-fronted classrooms, the paucity of technology-supported infrastructure, the ineffective teaching methods, the density of prescribed curriculum, the overly restrictive institutional rules, and the lack of teacher's support (Alrabai, 2017; Farhani, 2014; Tamer, 2013). A second well researched area is motivation and foreign language anxiety in relation to learning. The consensus around Saudi learners' low levels of motivation is well documented in the literature (Aljohani, 2009; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Khan, 2011) except for (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020) whose study yielded a high yet, differentiated levels of motivation among Saudi learners based on gender and academic major. Different explanations are offered to the low levels of motivations such as low autonomy and low self-esteem (Alrabai, 2014), difficulty levels of learning material poorly designed textbooks (Alkhairy, 2013), and lack of teacher's encouragement in addition to the teachers' tendency to hyper correct learners' mistakes (Aljohani, 2009; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Khan, 2011).

A third area of investigation of psychological and affective variables as it pertains to learners' performance in Saudi EFL is the independent use of learning strategies. Independent use of learning strategies is thought to facilitate the process of language learning. Documented in the literature are two of the most frequently used learning strategies by Saudi learners which are memorization and rote learning (Alkubaidi, 2014; Rajab, 2013). Additionally, Alhaisoni (2012) conducted a study to investigate the type and frequency of language strategies among 701 Saudi EFL learners. The results indicate that Saudi learners deployed learning strategies at a low to

medium frequency with cognitive strategies, (i.e., analyzing, practicing, reasoning), being most frequently used as opposed to affective strategies, such as controlling anxiety, which were the least frequently used. While the exploration of psychological and affective factors influencing learner's performance is important, these explorations tend to be narrow in focus and do not account for the sociocultural aspect of learning.

Curriculum Implementation from the Perspective of Students

Investigations of EFL curriculum implementation from the perspective of students are sparse in the Saudi context. In fact, there are only two studies (Alghamdi, 2021; Althbaitii, 2018) that explored EFL curriculum implementation from the vantage point of students. Alghamdi (2021) is considered one of the few qualitative empirical investigations of female students' experiences with oral presentations in EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia. Students were asked to prepare and deliver a short oral presentation. Data were primarily collected in form of students' reflection, field-notes, through the researcher's journal, and informal conversation with students. The thick description of how students engaged in the preparation and delivery of oral presentations marks a shift in how researchers in Saudi Arabia are approaching educational studies where various qualitative approaches are steadily gaining a foothold in what once was a predominantly quantitatively based context. In Alghamdi (2021), students were asked to choose a topic from a set of pre-selected jobs to discuss their dream job in a short oral presentation. Participants in this study highlighted their frustration with the topic because the topics do not align with what they wanted to address in their presentation.

While Alghamdi (2021) explored the implementation of oral presentations as part of the EFL curriculum, Althubaiti (2018) addressed the learning process of students in men campus as a multifaceted experience. Interestingly, Althubaiti's (2018) asserted that his study is a

sociological analysis of the learning process in EFL classrooms; it does not explicitly mention curriculum. However, curriculum as defined by Pinar (1992; 2004; 2012) refers to the field of curriculum as one that is concerned with studying the education experience and how the curriculum is institutionally organized. Althubaiti's (2018) doctoral dissertation is a case study designed using Bourdieu's notion of field, capital, and habitus to elucidate the students' learning experiences and the effect that the institution has on learning and teaching in the EFL program. Also, the author uses cultural capital to analyze the educational background on students' learning. Data were collected through document analysis of admission policies, interviews with lecturers and students, and observations. Moreover, the teacher's habitus and their approaches to teaching and how it influences learning were explored as an influential factor. The study found that the open admission policy at the institution to be a factor in accepting students with lower proficiency levels, thus, contributing to the overall low level of students in English. Additionally, the students' background helped in facilitating their learning experiences as those who have support in their families performed better than those who belonged to families with no higher education background. Teaching styles and the difference between approaches adopted by native speakers and non-native speakers' teachers were found to influence students' experiences.

Curriculum Development and Evaluation

Alharbi (2017) conducted a study to evaluate the secondary EFL textbook from teacher's perspective where teachers contested the clarity of learning objectives in the textbook and found the content to be unaligned with the teaching theories used in classrooms. Similarly, Aljouie and Alsuhaibani (2018) sought to report teacher's perception of EFL textbook series, Traveller 1 and 2 where teachers reported cultural incongruence between the materials and target culture. Additionally, teachers reported the linguistic complexity of the material is beyond their students'

level. Alfallaj (1998) sought to evaluate curriculum based on stakeholders' input from teachers, students, administrators as well as through examining teaching materials at a Saudi university. According to Alfallaj (1998), the materials used in teaching were poorly designed and did not align with students' needs. The delivery of the material was grammar-centered where students have scarce opportunities to engage in complex and meaningful learning tasks. Additionally, Almurabit (2012) evaluated the English curriculum at a community college in Saudi Arabia through content analysis of stated objectives, course design, and materials. One significant finding is the disconnect between the objectives of the curriculum, which focuses on "provid[ing] students with language basics" and "enable[ing] them to participate in simple communication", and the goal of the course, which assumes to prepare students to establish a threshold of proficiency that will enable them to engage in studying different majors with English as a medium of instructions (p. 243). More recently, Aburizaizah (2021) conducted a large-scale study which included 350 participants to evaluate the EFL curriculum at a Saudi university from the students' perspective. The majority of the participants reported in the survey that their overall level of English proficiency has improved. According to participants in Aburizaizah (2021), grammar and writing were two of the language skills that still needed to be improved whereas students reported that they have experienced significant improvement in presentation skills. Additionally, students reported dissatisfaction with some elements of the curriculum including the lack of essential resources like access to a library on campus, and the long classroom hours.

While these studies highlight the pitfalls of curriculum development, they do not specifically state what approach to curriculum design has been implemented. Given the fact that curriculum is dictated centrally in Saudi universities and schools (Alrebai, 2016) and stemming

from my previous experience as a curriculum developer myself, the approach to curriculum design that is commonly practiced in Saudi Arabia is forward design. Forward design (Richard, 2013) involves making decisions about the content of instruction, which in this case is the textbook used for the course, and then moves to consider the processes with which content is taught, and finally determines the output, which relates to how learners will be assessed. The problem with this type of curriculum design is that the planning of each stage is carried out by different specialists where there is a potential for mismatch because "different group of people performs different curricular functions, uses different discourses, and produces different curricular products" (Richards, 2013, p. 9). While decisions about the development of course content and materials in Saudi Arabia largely resides in publishing houses, how these materials are taken up by teachers may lead to a mismatch. Additionally, forward design approaches start from valuing expert knowledge (Richards, 2013), i.e., publishing houses in the context of Saudi Arabia, on the subject matter as a basis for selecting the content which devalues the expertise of the teachers, as well as disenfranchises learners.

Moving Forward

There are key points that can be drawn from the previous discussion on issues affecting EFL curriculum in Saudi Arabia. First, the static view of curriculum as a document which is followed by teachers (Alghamdi, 2017) and textbook-dominated (Alqahtani, 2019) presents a major challenge for language learning in Saudi Arabia. This view of curriculum leads to the oversimplified understanding of curriculum as a document that needs to be followed to achieve a certain goal without accounting for gendered, racial, and sociocultural factors that shape learning (Pinar, 2004). Researchers and educators are encouraged to theorize curriculum by drawing upon the local ecologies of knowledges (Paraskeva, 2011), and the particular sociocultural factors that

shape language learning. Second, the extensive research on psychological variables affecting learning portrays the cognitive tradition which permeates the literature (i.e., Aljumah, 2020; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Aljohani, 2009; Alrebai, 2017; Daif-Allah &, Khan, 2011; Tamer, 2013; Farhani, 2010). Therefore, educators and researchers must draw from various theoretical frameworks to uncover the various aspects of learning and teaching. Additionally, studies that explored EFL curriculum evaluation took the form of large surveys (Aburizizah, 2021; Aljouie & Alsuhaibani, 2018) which does not allow to capture the multi-faceted nature of curriculum. Further, monoglossic ideologies are strongly present in the literature which encourages limiting the use of students' L1 in EFL classrooms (Alfuraih & Mitchel, 2016; Alrabai, 2016; Alzahrani & Alkubaidi, 2020). Monoglossic ideologies in language classrooms inflict what Koyama and Kasper (2022) describe as "symbolic violence" against the rich repertoire that learners bring to classrooms (p. 3). There is a need for deconstructing ideologies that are enacted in Saudi EFL classrooms and affirmed in the literature. Such a move would help in training teachers to see the relationship between their language practices and the embedded language ideologies and how such ideologies influence learning (Kiramba, 2018). Further, revisiting curriculum through the narratives of students and through how teachers respond to it can help in facilitating discussions around ideologies underpinning EFL curriculum. Finally, the contextualization of the experiences of Saudi women learning EFL within the broader sociocultural issues influencing learning works to make visible crucial dimensions of learning that are largely overlooked in the literature.

Issues Related to Women's Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

Since the current study seeks to understand the experiences of college-level Saudi girls within the EFL curriculum, what is needed is to state the challenges and issues facing Saudi girls

in higher education. Any study on Saudi girls' education cannot be decoupled from the social, political, and historical conditions that shaped their educational experiences. Since its beginning in 1960, girls' education in Saudi Arabia has been a site of struggle between forces of religious scholars, on one hand, and those who pushed for reform, including King Faisal (Hamdan, 2005; Alswuaida, 2016). Girls came to schools in huge numbers to pursue the newly opened opportunities for growth and social mobility. However, the interlocking factors of sociocultural and legislative constraints had placed them at a disadvantaged position compared to boys (Alswuaida, 2016). In 1959, the General Presidency of Girls' Education was established which was entrusted to oversee the operation of girls' schools and universities in Saudi Arabia (MOE, 2021). While the Ministry of Education used to operate boys' schools, the General Presidency for Girls' Education was housed under the Department of Religious Guidance until 2002 (Hamdan, 2005). Hamdan (2005) asserts that such a move is made to

> ensure that women's education did not deviate from the original purpose of female education, which was to make women good wives and mothers, and to prepare them for 'acceptable' jobs such as teaching and nursing that were believed to suit their nature (p. 44).

In fact, the ministry of education policy documents in 1970 clearly states that "girls have a right to education according to *her instincts and nature* [emphasis added] and that this right should be based on protecting her dignity and image based on the Islamic Sharia" (Elyas & Badawood, 2016, p. 73). Such unquestioned assumptions about the nature of women have shaped educational practices in women's education in Saudi Arabia. The inextricable link between Saudi womens' education and Sharia law is pronounced in the above stated policy mandate. However, researchers like Hamdan (2005) argue that the narrow interpretations of Sharia law of religious

fundamentalists in Saudi Arabia is the cause of the tension surrounding women education and

not the teachings of Islam. Hamdan (2005) argues that "women's issues in Saudi society are

often mistakenly connected to Islamic teachings" (p. 45). In their critical examination of the

Ministry of Education guidelines which was published in 2005, Elyas and Badawood (2016)

delineates the centrality of inter-faith dialogues, spreading Islam and interculturality as the most

pronounced central objectives for teaching English; therefore, removing any reference to

assumptions about womanhood and its role in society. Since then, the government has introduced

several policies aimed at increasing women's participation in the job market and public life.

Most notably, the King Abdullah scholarship program that was introduced in 2005 which granted

thousands of students the opportunity to continue their education overseas with 120,000

participating students in 2012 (Hilal, Scott & Madaad, 2015). The program opened doors for

Saudi women who were restricted to study in certain majors only which allowed them to explore

more career pathways and educational opportunities away from the gender-inequality that

permeates the educational system of Saudi Arabia. Studies that discuss women's issues with

education in Saudi Arabia generally fall under 1) accessibility issues 2) challenges and

achievements over time 3) educational policies and women.

Accessibility Issues

A small number of studies discussed in-depth some of the accessibility issues unique to

Saudi women in education. Hamdan (2005) traced the history of women's education in Saudi

Arabia and noted that "in its early stages, the disparity in educational achievements between

females ran along class lines slightly more than was the case for boys" (p. 53). Yet, there are no

studies to date concerning class-disparity and how such disparities affect women's education in

the context of Saudi Arabia. Alrasheed's (2021) investigation of women's learning experience

during COVID-19 found that 21% of the study's sample had issues accessing online learning due to financial constraints, yet the study did not disclose information regarding participants' background in terms of income. Another overlooked factor is family. Indeed, Alwedinani's (2016) doctoral dissertation attests for the influence of background on Saudi women's subject choice in higher education where women who come from traditional families are more likely to succumb to the patriarchal system influencing their educational choices whereas women who come from non-traditional families learn to navigate the patriarchal norms of Saudi Arabia. The study was designed as an exploratory case study which recruited 40 women who either studied or worked at two different universities in the Western region of Saudi Arabia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and fieldnotes. The results highlighted the interlocking nature of patriarchy, the construction of gender in Saudi Arabia and how it affects their educational choices. Furthermore, because of the nature of segregation based on the assigned biological sex, Hamdan (2005) notes that women did not have full access to libraries on campuses because the library is central to universities where both girls and boys having different hours. Libraries for women were of poor quality in terms of materials and equipment (Arebi, 1994). Accessibility issues extends beyond access to some crucial educational facilities, it extends to studying certain majors (Alswuaida, 2016). However, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, one of the most prestigious engineering schools in Saudi, had announced in April 2021 that they will start admitting Saudi girls to their school in the academic year 2021/2022. The acceptance capacity for female students will be limited to 20% of the seats due to the limitation on resources (women faculty members among many other factors) (Tashkandi, 2021). Prior to this announcement, Alsherbeeny and Alsharari (2018) assert that the vast majority of public and private universities do not offer engineering degrees for women except Effat University, which

started offering engineering degrees for women in 2006. One huge gap in the literature surrounding women's education in Saudi is the lack of investigation of factors such as race, class, gender-based discrimination, and income-disparities and how such factors affect their educational choices. Saudi women are slowly gaining access to previously male-dominated arenas. However, disparities along the lines of class, race, gender-based discrimination are largely ignored in the literature. Thus, an uncharted territory is waiting for researchers and educators to research and arrive at a better, more complex understanding of issues facing Saudi women in higher education.

Challenges and Achievements Overtime

The challenges and achievements of women in higher education are chronicled in several research articles. Hamdan (2005) highlights the power struggle between religious scholars, who push for stricter rules on women's education, access to jobs and basic rights, and reformists, who recognize the value of increasing women's participation in education, leadership roles and economy. More recently, Elmoussa, Alghazo, and Pilotti (2021) argue that the institutional changes to women's education in Saudi tend to be slow and come in the form of "trickle-down announcements" (p. 4). They use the example of offering law degree programs for Saudi girls, which was announced in 2004, yet Saudi women who graduated from law schools were not allowed into the courtroom until 2012. Prior to 2012, Saudi women lawyers worked only as legal consultants in court offices and could not own their private law firms. Additionally, while the government has been committed to improving women's education since 1960 (Islam, 2014), there is a shortage of women instructors in women's campuses (Alshalawi, 2020). The number of women instructors in Saudi universities has increased from 4,700 in 2003/2004 to approximately 19, 600 in 2008/2009. On the other hand, men instructors have increased from 7,200 to

approximately 48,800 in the same period even though Saudi women have higher enrollment rates than men in higher education (Alshalawi, 2020). In addition, Alshaghdali, Greener and Loveless (2014) state that "the major symptom of gender disparity is the high drop-out rates in schools and colleges" (p. 610).

There is an upward trend in the new mandates regarding women's education in Saudi Arabia in the last two decades. The dramatic increase of government spending on women's education led to a dramatic increase of numbers attending colleges and universities in Saudi Arabia to constitute 58% as of 2014 (Islam, 2014). Additionally, mixed-gender universities are being opened where women are allowed to study the same subjects as men. For example, King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST) has been established in 2009 where women can be admitted to any major offered by the school without restrictions. While sex-segregation is still the norm in Saudi Arabia, Alshalawi (2020) and Alharth, Aldighrir and Alhareth (2015) report a trend in colleges and universities to move away from gendered-segregation which tends to restrict women's choices as the course offerings are not the same for everyone. Additionally, fields like engineering which has been previously restricted for men are starting to open for women as well (Alshalawi, 2020). Moreover, despite the restraints, women are pursuing higher education in Saudi at a greater rate than men where the ratio of women to men in enrollment numbers is (1.5) (Islam, 2014). The challenges Saudi women are facing in higher education and the achievements that they have attained are mediated by a complex system of cultural, sociopolitical, and class-based factors which is partially captured in the literature. More must be done to explore how previously stated factors affect women's education in Saudi Arabia. Next, educational initiatives and its relation to women's education in Saudi are explored.

Educational Policies and Women

The Saudi government has launched a massive development plan in 2016 which is called "vision 2030" to revitalize the economy, cut government spending, increase revenue streams, and create jobs (Grand & Wolff, 2020). Whereas earlier educational policies in relation to women's education were restrictive, as discussed in the beginning of section 2.6., newer initiatives under the provision of "vision 2030" pave the way to increased participation for women in the labor market. The goal is to increase women's participation in the labor market from 19% to 30% by the year 2030 (Grand & Wolff, 2020). The calls for revising educational policies, which are voiced in Alshalwi (2020), Alharth, Aldighriri and Alhareth (2013), to modernize the policy statements in relation to women's education seemed to have been taken into consideration. The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia posted a statement to highlight its commitment to "give women the right to free and distinctive education to achieve appropriate and effective educational outcomes to serve the country and its development future" (Ministry of Education, 2022). In their statement, the Ministry of Education lists several initiatives that have been developed to increase the quality of education received by women such as scholarship programs, employment, continuing literacy programs, women's transportation support programs, and children's hospitality service support programs (Ministry of Education, 2022). The statement is geared towards women's employment rather than education. All the stated initiatives, except for overseas scholarships and continuing literacy programs, are centered around empowering women through facilitating their participation in the job market. The new initiatives for women empowerment do not directly address structural gendered inequities that affect women's educational attainment in Saudi Arabia. The gendered structural inequities that impact women's experiences in education include limited access to some majors including engineering disciplines

(Alsuwaida, 2016), limited leadership roles (Alharbi, 2021), and strict interpretations of Islamic texts which imposes a constructed nature of womanhood that restrict their choices (Alahmadi, 2011; Hodges, 2017). While the government initiatives to empower women mark a departure from earlier policy statements on women's education, more needs to be done to uproot the gendered inequities.

Moving Forward

To sum up, while women's education was stifled by early strict interpretations of Islam (Hamdan, 2005), strict policy statements that impose a constricted womanhood (Elyas & Picard, 2016), limitations on subject choice where women from traditional families are likely to succumb to patriarchal system affecting their educational choices (Alsherbeeny & Alsharari, 2018; Alsuwaida, 2016), limitation on leadership roles (Alharbi, 2021), and the understaffing of women's campuses (Alshalawi, 2020), women's higher education in Saudi Arabia is undergoing reforms that are aimed at increasing women's participation in labor market (Grand & Wolff, 2020; MOE, 2022). However, how such reforms are implemented and who has access to labor market is a question that needs to be explored. While Hamdan (2005) noted that disparities in educational achievement in Saudi women's education ran along class lines, the influence of socio-economic status on Saudi women's education has been unexplored. In this study, I situate students' narratives within their social, cultural, and familial background to capture how such contexts facilitate their learning experience in EFL programs.

Concluding Remarks

From the previous discussion, the lack of emphasis on contextual factors in the theorization of curriculum within ELT is noted in the literature. Additionally, one could glean the peculiar challenges facing women in Saudi in relation to educational experiences which

strengthen the case for embarking on this project. Further, the rigid conceptualization of curriculum, in Saudi Arabia, as a text to be followed distinguishes this project from earlier undertakings because the proposed study investigates curriculum as a journey that encompasses more factors beyond the learned materials. The literature surrounding curriculum implementation is scarce and is methodologically limited that adds to the importance of undertaking this project. While there are only two studies that explored learner's experiences within EFL curriculum in Saudi Arabia in higher education setting (Alghamdi, 2021; Althubaiti; 2018), both studies are limited in their focus. While Alghamdi (2021) is one of the few ethnographic investigations in Saudi EFL classrooms, it only focused on the preparation and delivery of oral presentations and did not address curriculum as a whole. Additionally, Althubaiti's (2018) sociological analysis of learner's experience within EFL programs centered the experiences of men as the study is conducted on men's campus only. However, based on the discussion around women's education in Saudi Arabia, one could ascertain how gender-disparity shapes educational practices and negatively impacts women's education. Thus, there is a need for understanding how Saudi women reflect on their experience within EFL curriculum. The proposed study has the potential of offering a more complex analysis of curriculum as a journey students' take as opposed to the limited conceptualizations of curriculum in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 3: Research Design

The research design follows narrative research. Narrative research positions "people telling stories about their life experiences" at the center of the narrative project (Ollernshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 329). The theoretical framework used in this study, narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006) currere (Pinar, 2004), and Black feminism (Collins, 2000; 2004) are chosen for their focus on experienced meaning, telling, and re-telling of stories of women as a site of inquiry (Clandinin, 2006). The analytical tools used in this study are informed by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; 2022) to weave a polyvocal, recursive, analytical narrative of the experiences of college-level Saudi women within EFL programs and how such narratives inform teacher's understanding of curriculum. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; 2022) refers to analyzing stories with a focus on the content. I start by addressing the epistemological standing which informs the design of the study, and then move to discuss the research context, participants, data collections tools, and data analysis procedures. Additionally, considerations for translation, power and voice, reflexivity, quality, ethics, and limitations are discussed in light of the design, collection, analysis, and interpretations of the data.

Research Questions

The current study is guided by an overarching question followed by specific questions.

Overall **q***uestion*

- What are Saudi women first-year college students understanding of EFL curriculum in connection to their previous learning experience and how can their understandings inform teachers' pedagogical practices?

Specific research questions

- What are the perceptions of Saudi college-level women of EFL curriculum, particularly, in relation to teaching methods, content, and materials used?

- How can their narratives inform teachers' understanding of curriculum?

Epistemology

Assumptions about the ontology (nature of reality), epistemology (nature of knowledge), and axiology (the role of values) overlap to guide qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The epistemological standing in this study is informed by social constructionism which is guided by several assumptions about reality and nature of truth claims; meaning is constructed through a set of social relationships, our constructions of truth gain significance in relations to other forms of life (social dimension of reality), our constructions of truths are mediated by language, and finally, the arbitrary associations between words, their meanings and the potentials of multiple truths and realities (Burr, 2015; Gregren, 2015). In social constructionism, the subjective meanings are seen as negotiated socially and historically constituted (the social dimension of reality) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The idea that our constructions of truths come to life in interaction with various other forms of life is helpful in our understanding of how such constructions come to be(ing). Emphasizing that constructions come to be(ing) is intentional on my part to highlight the active, and "fluid" nature of the production of the analytical narrative as "socially constitutive" (Lindsey & Schwind, 2016, p. 16). In this study, social constructivism helps me to understand participants' narratives and views of curriculum as situated in their cultural, social, and historical contexts. It also allows me to engage in collaboration with participants to produce a multivocal analytical narrative as I draw on the perspectives of teachers and learners on the EFL curriculum. Drawing on social constructivism enables the recognition of

the participants as active agents in the process of meaning-making and draws on their subjective

understanding of their experiences.

Additionally, the assumption of an arbitrary relationship between the world and the word

(Gregen, 2015) means that the perspectives on truth should not be taken as value-free. Therefore,

a social constructionist approach gives way to privileging "an understanding of the social world

as "mediated by power relations in a constructed lived experience amidst social and historical

contexts, which, in turn, shape social reality" (Pino Gavdia & Adu, 2022, p. 2). The assumption

about the value-laden nature of knowledge counters a fierce critique that social constructionism

has faced since its popularization in the 1970's; critiquing constructionism for its uncritical

acceptance of multiple knowledge claims as valid (Gregren, 2015a). However, as

constructionists focus on the context the participants live in, they seek to know the historical and

cultural background of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Burr (2015) argues that social

constructionism takes a critical stance towards the taken-for-granted assumptions about the

world by challenging the objectivity of observations made about the world. Further, social

constructionism "endorses a subjectivist epistemology" (Lee, 2012, p. 406) which aligns with the

tools used to collect data in this study. The generated analytical narrative provides a partial and

subjective account, yet it illuminates the researcher's and the participants' social world.

Research Context

Academic **Program**

The study took place in a public university in the western region of Saudi Arabia. The

university offers "foundation year" program to all freshmen students, sometimes referred to as

preparatory year, in which students are organized into two tracks: humanities and science track.

In the humanities track, students must successfully complete courses in statistics, information

technology, law, administration, sports sciences, and English. In the science track, students must successfully complete courses in biology, chemistry, math, physics, and English. Students spend a full academic year in the preparatory program. Upon successful completion of their courses, they move to major in their desired field of study. It is worth noting that there are no publicly available data about students' enrollment numbers, and students' background information.

Program Design

Courses in English are core to the foundation year students. The English course is offered through English Language Institute at the university. Mainly, there are two levels to the English course: ELPR 101 and ELPR 102. There are differences between the two courses in their objectives and benchmarks. ELPR 101 aims to develop an independent user of the language which corresponds to B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for language learning. B1 on CEFR is associated with the ability to understand main points on familiar topics found around work, school, leisure, and travel. Additionally, speakers classified under B1 can describe and produce texts related to their experiences, hopes, & ambitions (CEFR, 2022). ELPR 102, on the other hand, aims to develop students' competency associated with B2 level on CEFR. B2 is still classified as an independent user, however, B2 level speakers, according to CEFR, exhibit the ability to discuss complex and abstract topics related to their area of specializations, the fluency to interact with native speakers with spontaneity and fluency, and the ability to produce detailed texts on varying subjects (CEFR, 2022).

While English is offered to both humanities and science track, the benchmark requirement is different for both tracks. Whereas successful completion of ELPR 101 corresponds to 4 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam for humanities track, the same course for science track corresponds to 4.5 on the IELTS exam.

Similarly, successful completion of ELPR 102 for humanities track is equal to 4.5 whereas the

same course level offered to scientific track equals getting 5 on the IELTS exam. Whereas a

score of between 4 and 4.5 on IELTS places the speaker as a limited user who can communicate

in familiar situations and show inability to use complex language, a score of 5 places the speaker

as a modest user who has the command over the overall meaning in different situations (IELTS,

n.d.). Table 2. below highlights the courses description, IELTS score correspondence and

instructional hours. (See Appendix A for the syllabi for ELPR course).

Table 2.

English course levels, IELTS corresponding scores, and instructional hours as divided by tracks.

	Humanities Track		
Level	Course	Instructional Hours	Corresponding IELTS Score
One	ELPR 101	18 hours/week	4.0
Two	ELPR 102	18 hours/week	4.5
	Science Track		
Level	Course	Instructional Hours	Corresponding IELTS Score
One	ELPR 101	18 hours/week	4.5
Two	ELPR 102	18 hours/week	5.0

Syllabi

The syllabi for English language curriculum (attached in appendix A) are structured

around achieving specific learning outcomes (SLOs) related to major skills including listening,

speaking, reading, writing, academic skills, presentation skills, and thinking skills. The materials

that are used in the course come mainly from two sources: Life Textbook Series by National

Geographic Learning and in-house materials developed by language teachers at the institute.

Course requirements include drafting and revising writing tasks, speaking tasks, daily exercises

and homework, in-class tasks including reading, listening, note-taking and comprehension

questions, and personal portfolios. Additionally, final projects and oral presentations constitute

the two major assignments of the course.

Introducing Participants

The participants in this study are a total of six EFL students and five EFL teachers. Every

participant has aspects of their stories that stood out me to throughout our conversations. While I

had cultivated a deeper relationship with students because of the design of the study which

prompted me to meet them 4 times. In the section, I introduce students, teachers, and critical

friend. Pseudonyms are used throughout the text to reference the participants.

Students

> **Rita.** An aspiring physician, Rita was quiet an eloquent speaker. She was a gifted student who competed in several competitions for poetry and writing. Some of her own stories were showcased in a national book fair by her teacher which speaks to the support she had at home and beyond. She talked about her experience growing up within an academically oriented and supportive family. Her mom is a vice principal in an elementary school and before that she was a decorated veteran teacher who won awards for being an innovative teacher. Her older sister is a physician which influenced her choice of medical school as a path to pursue in college.

> **Maryam**. Meeting Maryam for the first time, I was engulfed by rays of sunshine. Despite the long commute, she would change and go to Qur'anic school in her neighborhood's mosque after college. Maryam was also part of gifted school programs /Mawhiba/ throughout most of her K-12 experience. She worked on developing on a research project that did not make it to the final round of the competition because she was not aware she would have to contact the developers and developing the device before presenting her work to the panel. She spoke about the support she found from her research mentor throughout the process, which unfortunately, was not enough to let her know of the requirements for competing. Yet, she had another source of support, her older sister who competed in the same program years ago.

Rahaf. An aspiring computer engineer, struggled with the lack of sufficient attention given to EFL instruction in K-12 setting, according to her own views. She took a gap year after finishing high school, so she can focus on studying English. Her family provided her with access to tutoring services and sent her to the UK for four months for an intensive English language program. Rahaf also shared during our interviews that she has struggled with ADHD since childhood. Albeit not being formally diagnosed, Rahaf shared that it was noticeable for her teachers and her parents who did the best to accommodate her needs. However, no specialized support was provided to help her navigate how ADHD is affecting her learning.

Jehan. A gifted student, who was part of Mawhiba gifted classes throughout middle school and high school. While Jehan's upbringing seemed to have endowed her with certain socio-economic privileges (attending good private school, excelling in English). She seemed frustrated with having to re-route from computer science to English department because of the strict admission requirements. Jehan's desire for her own learning include connecting with the local histories of the place where she is living and learning.

Jumana. I met Jumana, a student at Translation and Languages department, for the first time to interview her in the office I was assigned in a quiet hallway. Despite the lack of family support for her own dreams of pursuing culinary arts school in college, she remained hopeful that her family will support her in pursuing her dream after finishing a four-year bachelor's program. "The road is longer now, but I will get there eventually Insha'Allah", Jumana said. Her outlook on learning is grounded in experiencing curriculum as opposed to receiving it.

Mona. Her overall demeanor was shy and reserved. However, she opened more and more as we met over the three interviews on campus. She spoke about her family not supporting her dreams of going into aviation school. They did not think it was a good lifestyle for her. Coming to this university, she hoped to get into sport sciences department, but she was 0.025 points away from making the required GPA for entrance. She said that she is trying to focus on doing well in her second choice major; translation department while figuring out what she will do next.

Teachers

The design of this study allowed me a one-time meeting with the teachers; however, I have come to see their dedication to their students, engage with their understanding of the challenges as well as the opportunities that exist in their context. Nehad, pseudonym, has been teaching English as a foreign language for twenty years now. She obtained her Ph.D. in applied linguistics from a UK-based university. Currently, she works as an English teacher and head of the exam committee. Hanadi got her Masters in TESOL from an Australian University and has been teaching English for ten years. Randa, a pseudonym, has obtained her Ph.D. two years ago from a US-based institution in applied linguistics and has taught English as a second language in the same institute for 7 years. Farrah, a north-African woman who noted her enthusiasm for helping a fellow doctoral researcher upon joining my study, has been working in Saudi for 7 years as an EFL teacher and is currently working to obtain her Ph.D. in cultural studies from a North African University. Finally, Rabia, has 7 years of EFL teaching experience at the same institute. Rabia is of a South Asian descent, even though Arabic is not her first language, she started picking up Arabic in her speech.

Critical Friend

Joining me in the process of parsing data into codes in order to generate meaningful, rich

analyses is my critical friend Yasmeen, a pseudonym, who has been teaching English as a

foreign language in Saudi Arabia for 9 years and holds a Ph.D. in higher education policy studies

from a U.S. based institution in 2020. I wanted to partner with someone who earned their degrees

in local institutions. However, due to the policies in place in higher education in Saudi Arabia,

which necessitates that faculty members obtain their training in one of approved abroad graduate

programs, I was not able to find that person. However, Yasmeen has received her bachelor from

a local institution before getting her MA in TESOL and Ph.D. in higher education policy in

United States. Currently, she teaches English as a foreign language and some ESP courses for

freshmen in a women's medical college in Saudi Arabia. I believe her prior experiences in being

a language learner, an EFL teacher, a researcher, and a course-coordinator would enrich my own

analyses through helping read against the grain of my own subjectivities, and my own

positionality. Below is a summary of the participants' information in Table 4. Pseudonyms are

used to reference the participants.

Table 4.

Summary of information about the participants and their roles.

Participant	Role	Notes
Rita	Student	ELPR 101 Science Track Gifted education Public schooling except KG and Pre-KG
Maryam	Student	ELPR 101 Science Track Gifted education
Rahaf	Student	ELPR 101 Science Track

		Public schooling Access to English abroad programs and private tutoring
Jehan	Student	ELPR 101 Humanities Track Gifted Education Access to private schooling
Jumana	Student	ELPR 100 Humanities Track A mix of public and private schooling Family is not supportive of her dreams to study culinary arts.
Mona	Student	ELPR 100 Humanities Track A mix of public and private schooling Family is not supportive of her dreams to study aviation.
Farrah	Teacher	7 years of EFL teaching experience and currently pursuing a Ph.D. in cultural studies.
Hanadi	Teacher	9 years of EFL teaching experience and holds a MA in Teaching English as a second language.
Nehad	Teacher	20 years of teaching EFL and holds a Ph.D. in applied linguistics.
Rabia	Teacher	7 years in teaching EFL, holds a MA in TESOL.
Randa	Teacher	9 years of teaching EFL, holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics.

Data Collection

The primary data collection methods that are used in this study are composed of 1)

individual interviews 2) focus group discussions with students and teachers 3) teachers'

reflections 4) researcher's journals/memos.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were used to understand the participants' views on EFL curriculum.

The interviews were conducted at the university where participants are attending since contextual

elements are crucial to the development of field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). However, there were one case where I felt the need to accommodate some of the participants' schedule constraints. Therefore, I interviewed Maryam two times online (through Microsoft teams) to facilitate the process of data collection in face of constraints imposed by the realities of the long commute which leaves little space for us to meet in between her packed schedule. I used Seidman's (1991) three-interviews-series design which entails conducting three interviews with each participant (See Appendix B). The design of these interviews is grounded in the belief that "people's [narratives] becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them" (Seidman, 1991, p. 10). The first interview helped in contextualizing the participants' experience by taking a life history approach (Seidman, 1991). The first interview is unstructured (Roulston, 2010) to allow participants to share stories of their past schooling experience and the type of support they have at home to achieve their career and education goals. This first interview provides a way of regressing into the participants' past to allow for a richer understanding of their journey (Pinar, 2004). The literature around learners in Saudi Arabia show a lack of attention for factors such as socio-economic status and family background. Therefore, the life history approach in the first interview is helpful in exploring how might these factors influence their learning. The first interview lasted for approximately 60 minutes.

Further, the second interview was a semi-structured interview (Roulston, 2010) that was expected to last from 60 to 90 minutes. In the second interview, the focus shifted from personal to focusing on the participants' experience with EFL curriculum in context examining their perception of EFL learning, teaching, materials, and content. Such a shift runs parallel to Pinar's (2004) progressive-analytical phase where participants reach into the present moment, their

perceptions of their current EFL curriculum to look forward into the future and chart new ways

of what is possible and what could be done to restructure their learning. Moreover, the third

interview is a semi-structured (Roulston, 2010) interview that lasted for approximately 45

minutes. In the third interview, participants were asked to bring an artefact from their

engagement with EFL curriculum during the interview. The artefacts can be an essay that they

have written in class or their textbooks. There are no imposed limits on what constitutes an

artefact except that it is directly linked to the participant's learning experience. The artefact itself

was not analyzed on its own, it was used to prompt deeper reflection on the participants' part.

Artefacts help participants "externalize their knowledge that would otherwise remain

inaccessible" (Teeavarunyou & Sato, 2001, p. 1).

Focus Group Discussions

In this study, I conducted two focus group discussions with students and teachers. After

the conclusion of the individual interviewing process with students, a second tool for generating

data was used with students which is focus group discussions. Franz (2011) defines a focus

group as a "carefully planned series of discussions to obtain perceptions on a defined area of

interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment" (p. 1380). In focus group discussions,

"researchers encourage participants to talk to one another; asking questions; exchanging

anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and point of views" (Roulston, 2010, p.

35). I used focus groups discussions with students to help in facilitating the generation of

description of the participants' accounts of engagement with curriculum, the factors affecting

their learning, and how we might revisit curriculum development to center students.

Similarly, I conducted a second focus group with five EFL teachers in the program to get

their perspectives on teaching and learning in the program. The focus group with teachers was

used to enrich the data by generating their perspectives on factors affecting students' learning, teaching methods, the type of support teachers provide for students, and materials and textbooks used in teaching and learning. There are issues that may arise during the process of facilitating discussions, Franz (2011) notes that facilitators need to learn about their groups ahead of time which would help in effectively navigating tensions pertaining to group's dynamics. Effectively using probes, pauses, preventing persuasion or conversion of opinions within groups, and fostering natural flow in discussions was used to maintain the integrity of data and authenticity of discussions (Franz, 2011). In focus groups, issues related to the confidentiality of participants are raised in the literature (Roulston, 2010), however, since the guides for the focus group discussions (See appendix C for students, and Appendix D for teachers) are structured around exploring issues related to learning, teaching, materials, and content of EFL curriculum. Such topics do not impinge on participants' privacy and therefore, adds to the value of the knowledge generated in such discussions.

While conducting both focus groups, I wanted to make sure that both focus groups were held on campus. However, with students, the extreme lack of congruence amongst the groups' schedule led us to agree on meeting on a Saturday to conduct the focus group interview. While universities in Saudi Arabia do not remain open during weekends, we could not arrange for the group focus to be held there. So, I offered that we meet in a café where we can reserve a quite study room. However, some participants', like Maryam, voiced their long commute concerns so we eventually settled on doing the focus group online. Similarly, I had run into the same issue while conducting the focus group with teachers because some teachers, like Farrah, complained about the long commute as she lived and worked about two-hour drive apart. So, we settled again on arranging online focus group.

Teachers' Written Reflections

Reflective writing has been widely used in qualitative inquiry as a way of generating secondary type of data where researchers use reflection to document their research processes (Jasper, 2005). However, Jasper (2005) argues for acknowledging the use of reflective writing as a primary data collection tool. The value of reflection is that it "enables practitioners to tap into knowledge gained through experiences. The practitioner gains a deeper understanding of the meaning of the experience by bringing to consciousness tacit knowledge" (Scalnon et al., 2002, p. 137). Writing reflexively acknowledges the centrality of the writer, the cultivation of self-awareness, and the promotion of internal dialogue that would unfold in the process of reflection (Smith, 1999). In this study, I used teachers' reflection in response to students' narratives to focus on the teachers' subjectivities, thoughts, and feelings which could lead to action (See Appendix E for reflection form). Participating teachers in the focus group discussions were sent a letter asking them to read the students' narratives, to reflect on the stories, and respond to it. Each participating teacher responded in their reflections to two main prompts: How would you relate to the student's stories as a teacher, and a former language learner? And how might these stories inform your teaching in the future? The teachers' responses provided insights into how the narratives of learners may prompt a deeper reflection on teacher's part and informed their understanding of curriculum.

Researcher's Journal

Additionally, I used researcher's journal as a third source for data collection and throughout the data analysis process. Researcher's journal served a dual purpose in this study. First, it is used to document information that would enrich and expand on participants' narratives such as contextual elements surrounding the interviewing processes. Secondly, researcher's

journal provided an avenue for the researcher to reflect on participants' shared accounts and respond to the issues participants' raise during discussions. As an EFL teacher and a curriculum developer, the insights participants provide overlapped with my experiences. Such an overlap triggered an emotional and intellectual response to what participants shared. Here, a researcher's journal constituted a form of data on its own as I engage collaboratively with participants in generating a shared understanding of their telling and retelling of stories. Composing an analytical narrative comes from examining who we are and how we interact with others in particular moments of interactions, moving inwardly and outwardly (Hickson, 2016). Therefore, the researcher's journal serves as an important source of knowledge that shapes the outcomes of narrative research.

Table 5.

Alignment of research questions and data sources.

Research Questions	Data Sources	Theoretical and methodological alignment
- What are Saudi women college freshmen students understanding of EFL curriculum in connection to their previous learning experience and how can their understandings inform teachers' pedagogical practices?	- Individual interviews - Researcher's Journal - Focus Group with students.	- Regressive, analytical, and progressive phase of currere (Pinar, 2004) - Sociality, temporality, and place (Clandinin, 2006).
- What are the perceptions of Saudi	- Individual interviews	- Regressive and analytical phase of currere (Pinar, 2004)

college-level women of EFL curriculum, particularly, in relation to teaching methods, content, and materials used?	- Researcher's journal	
- How do learners' narratives inform teachers' understanding of EFL curriculum?	- Teachers' written reflections - Focus group with teachers. - Researcher's journal	- Analytical, progressive phase of currere (Pinar, 2004) - Sociality, temporality, and place (Clandinin, 2006)

Data Analysis

The analysis of this study is informed by reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022). While drafting the proposal for this study, I had proposed to use thematic analysis in conjunction with narrative analysis to analyze the data in two phases. However, I had shifted my analysis to focus on generating an analytical narrative using RTA. In the following section, I explain the definition and basic assumptions of RTA, process of conducting RTA, the rationale for such a change in the analytical procedure and how RTA aligns with the goal of conducting this study.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

Thematic analysis is considered as an approach underpinned by various theoretical traditions and is inaccurately described as "homogenous entity" (Braun & Clarke, 2016, p. 740).

Qualitative research underpinned by positivist paradigms situates themes as discoverable which denotes their pre-existence conceptually (Braun & Clarke, 2016). However, the approach I utilize to thematic analysis is influenced by Braun and Clarke's (2016) conceptualization of theme development as an active, recursive, creative, and subjective engagement. Proceeding from this view, reflexive thematic analysis is premised on recognizing the subjective nature of the researcher's engagement, inviting researcher's reflexivity, and including rich description of data such as thoughts, triggers, responses, assumptions, and notes (Lainson et al., 2019). In this study, I use inductive, data-driven, thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2012) in working with data collected from the two focus group discussions, researcher's journal, students' individual interviews, and with data collected from teachers' written reflections.

RTA starts with the transcription process as a part of the familiarization phase (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Immersion in data sets works to familiarize the researcher with the big picture (Braun & Clark, 2012). In the transcription phase, researchers are encouraged to include contextual details surrounding the production of data such as the interviewing process, and the role of line of questioning in eliciting the participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Such emphasis on contextual details is needed since the process of thematically analyzing data is contingent on the coder's subjectivity, their theoretical sensitivity, and interests which all act as a filter for how data are coded (Saldaña, 2016). Braun and Clarke (2020) describe the process of reflexive thematic analysis as "unstructured" where coding is recognized as "inherently subjective" shaped by the researcher's ability to reflect on their assumption and how such assumptions delimit their coding (p. 39). In RTA, codes can be interpretive, or theoretical. Where theoretical codes align with latent coding, which refers to implicit ideas, meanings, or assumptions, interpretive codes align with semantic codes, which construct codes at the surface

level of meaning (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). The third phase involves generating, defining,

reviewing themes. While codes are concise and specific, themes consolidate the multitude of

codes into more complex themes to explain the phenomenon under investigation.

Themes in RTA differ from themes from other thematic analysis approaches (Braun &

Clarke, 2022). Variants of thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2022), approach

themes as topic summaries of participants' views. However, in RTA, a theme is considered a

patterned meaning that spans a range of data items that relate, semantically or latently, to the

organizing central concepts; therefore, providing themes with more than summaries of the

participants' response (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thompson (2022) notes that there are no limits

on the number of themes that can be generated to retain the richness of the analytical narrative by

identifying meticulously subtle themes. The process of generating themes includes a demarcation

of theme's limit to make sure that the data items under each theme cohere with the central

organizing concept of such theme (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). After generating, defining, and

reviewing themes, the write up of the final report begins.

An earlier version of this study included a combination of narrative analysis

(McCormack, 2000) in conjunction with thematic analysis as the two phases of conducting data

analysis. I made the choice to shift the analytical procedure to doing reflexive thematic analysis

instead for several reasons.

First, after collecting the data and transcribing it, I sat with the data sets to start

immersing myself in the data. This is when I started to think about my analytical tools and how

they could do justice to the generated data set. Trying to make sense of how I can re-story the

participants' accounts through McCormack (2000), I felt as if I was forcing the analytical

framework on my data as a grid that sliced the data set into fragmented bits. Interestingly,

McCormack's (2000) analytical framework is the result of her own dissatisfaction with the lack of explication from moving from interviews scripts to constructed stories. Therefore, through engagement with the data set, McCormack's (2000) outlined an interpretive framework for those who wish to employ a more systematized effort to turn qualitative data into stories. As a novice qualitative researcher, undertaking a project such as a dissertation using a tool you have never used brought to the surface my anxieties. While drafting the proposal for the study, I thought that applying a more systematized framework will help me navigate the untrodden paths of qualitative research.

However, engaging with the data through the initially proposed two phases was not as generative as I hoped. This led me to stop the analysis process and think about ways to shift my analytical procedure to do justice to the data set. Reading Braun and Clarke's (2022) book on *Thematic Analysis: A practical guide* has helped me correct some of my own misconceptions about thematic analysis as a homogenous method. Reading on the historical development of thematic analysis as a method in Braun and Clarke (2022) made me understand the different types of thematic analysis and I started appreciating the affordances of the method for a qualitative researcher interested in constructing stories based on generated data. Braun and Clarke (2022) distinguished RTA from what they called codebook reliability approaches that stresses the importance of seeking reliable coding across different coders. In RTA, the analytical narrative is premised on the researcher's creative, active, subjective engagement which shapes how the analytical narrative is developed. Braun and Clarke (2022) liken the researcher engaged with RTA as an artist, a composer, or a creative storyteller, who actively engages in the creation of knowledge through their mastery over their tools and techniques. Additionally, I chose to employ RTA because it addresses different parts of subjective situated, culturally specific

meanings, positionalities, and power relations. Moreover, doing RTA is a recursive process as opposed to one-shot systemic effort that was drafted in the study's proposal; therefore, more in line with Big Q qualitative research approaches [Refer to (Clarke & Braun, 2018) for a more nuanced discussion about the alignment between Big Q qualitative research and how it maps onto Big Q tenets]. Finally, shedding myself off the post-positivist tendencies, I chose RTA *knowingly* as a method that will help me generate a polyvocal narrative refined through multiple phases.

Translation

Cross-language studies is a term used to describe research that is conducted in a different language and is translated into English for dissemination (Temple & Young, 2004). The process of translation is not a straightforward process. There are many elements to consider when it comes to translating qualitative data which include 1) the methods that are used to conduct the translation, 2) the role of the researcher in the process, 3) the role of the translator, 4) and the timing of the translation.

The method I used for data translation is backward translation. Backward translation is when a translator conducts the translation from source language, in this case Arabic, to target language, English, while a second translator translates the documents from target language to source language to ensure the validity of translation (Sutriano et. al., 2014). Since I am a native Arabic speaker, I share the first language of participants in my own study. I assumed the role of the backward translator, while a third-party translator was recruited to do the forward translation. Due to the time-consuming nature of performing backtranslation in large data sets, such as in dissertations, Sutriano et. al. (2014) called for the translation of a minimal transcript to the source language unless a problem has emerged in the process of translating with the sample transcripts.

During the backtranslation process, I kept memos about the translation process to document decisions related to translation. If any issues arise during the backtranslation of the sample data set, the backtranslation process was to be repeated for the entire data set. The backward translator, in this case the researcher, would repeat the translation process, discuss the misalignment in translation with the forward translator, in this case the third-party translator, to ensure that both parties agree on the conceptual equivalence in data sets (Temple & Young, 2004). When an agreement is reached, the analysis would begin on the translated version. Whereas analyzing data in target language instead of source language is critiqued by researchers (Aloudah, 2022; Regmi et. al, 2010), this project depends entirely on the guidance of the dissertation committee who do not speak Arabic (source language). Therefore, the analysis was conducted on translated data sets. Figure 1. is a flowchart of the translation process employed in this study.

Figure 1.

The translation procedure employed in this study.

Forward translation from Arabic to English by the researcher

Backward translation from English to Arabic by a 3rd party translator

Are both translations aligned?

YES → Data analysis will commence on the translated data

NO

A meeting will be held with the 3rd party translator to discuss the misalignment
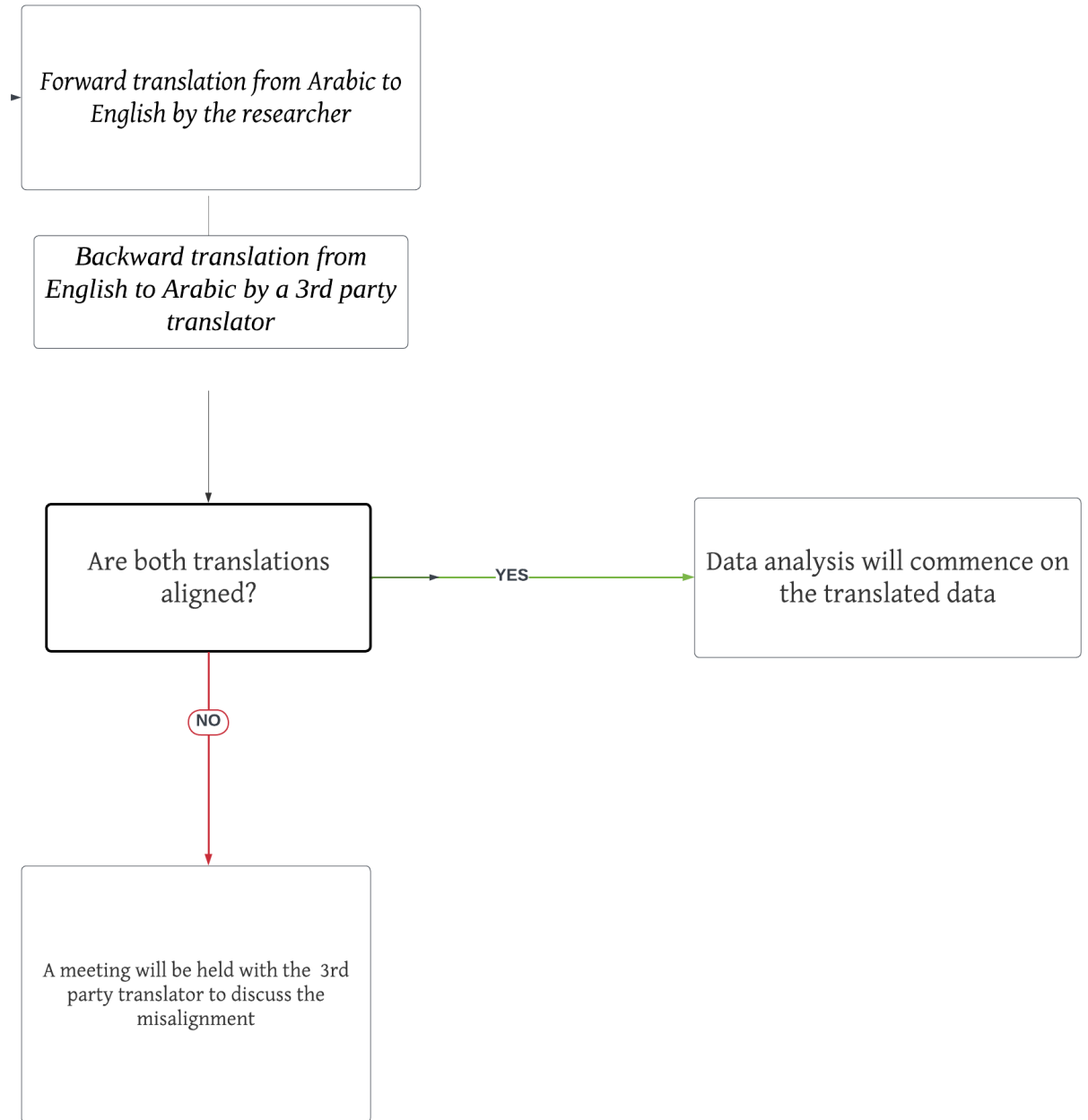
Power and Voice

Any discussion on students' perspectives on their own learning is entangled in issues of power and voice. Power in narratives is understood through the Foucauldian lens as ubiquitous, dispersed, and widely held (Esin et. al., 2014). Studies that are committed to centralize student voice in relation to curriculum tend to overlook the multiplicity of power as, local, historical, and

contextual in nature (Robinson & Taylor, 2009). Moreover, the onus of "empowering" student voice is more often placed on the teachers and administrators without addressing how the same teachers and administrators are bound in a struggle against heavily structured (Alnefaie, 2016) and oppressive systems (Robinson & Taylor, 2009; Cook-Sather, 2015). Using reflexive thematic analysis positions this study at an advantageous position to glean the situatedness, locality, and discursive nature of power in the narratives of participants. Additionally, I acknowledge that my positionality as a researcher, who is invested in understanding and constructing students' experience with curriculum, did not exempt me from being implicated in power structures that run the risk of mis-representing students' voices. However, I believe that designing this study as a collaborative effort between the researcher and participants helped in mitigating the risk of misrepresentation.

Furthermore, a criticized aspect of voice in relation to curriculum is that it assumes a "monolithic quality" and a "collective experience" for students regardless of their gender, class, and race (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 366). This study aims to present the potential of what Reay (2006, p. 179) calls the "cacophony of competing voices"; including that of the researcher and teachers. While, historically, women have faced discrimination in education in Saudi Arabia, each constructed interpretive story in the proposed study is situated in their own particular contexts by including narratives derived from their life history interviews without assuming a monolithic experience. The collaborative nature of this project remedies how student voice is treated where students were frequently positioned as "data sources" (Fielding, 2004; Cook-Sather, 2006). Instead, this study positions participants as actively engaged with the researcher in generating meaning and constructing their own narratives.

Reflexivity and the Researcher's Role

In our work as researchers, we weigh and sift experiences, make choices regarding what is significant, what is trivial, what to include what to exclude. We do not simply chronicle what happened next but place the next in meaningful context. By doing so we craft narratives; we write lives. (Richardson, 1990: p. 10)

Reflexivity in qualitative research refers to providing a methodological account of the research process from the viewpoint of the researcher as they engage in data collection and analysis (Finlay, 2002). Being reflexive is intertwined with narrative inquiry since constructing narratives relies heavily on the researcher's and participants' capacity to reflect (Craig, 2009). Taken this way, reflexivity is not an "opportunity to wallow in subjectivity" but a "springboard for interpretation" (Finlay, 2002, p. 225). Part of being reflexive during data collection is being responsive to the uncertainties and ambiguities of collaboratively engaging with participants in the interviewing processes to inform my understanding of their experiences (Elliot, 2005). This may include deviating from the structure of the interview to trace a thread of a story that may potentially enrich the data. During data analysis, Elliot (2005) recommends responding to the four questions: "what do we notice?", "why do we notice what we notice?", "how can we interpret what we notice?", and "how can we know that our interpretation is the right one?" (p. 159). As I engage in these questions continually throughout the research process, I am involved in a relational inquiry (Clandinin, 2006). In such a relational positioning, I was aware that I could not bracket myself out of the research process. Instead, I explored the participants' experiences alongside my own experience through observing, listening, writing, reflecting, and interpreting the shared inquiry. These processes informed the practice of remaining transparent, reflexive, and ethical narrative inquirer.

Quality

Quality in narrative research differs markedly from conventional research reports that stress reliability, generalizability, and validity (Polkinghorne, 2007). For narrativity, the plausibility of knowledge claims is built around whether knowledge claims are "truths-like" or "verisimilitude" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751). Polkinghorne (2007) notes that readers can make judgment on the plausibility of narrative knowledge claims based on the arguments presented by the researcher. Similarly, Riessman (1993) argues that the quality of narratives should be focused on establishing "trustworthiness" instead of looking for truth, a key semantic difference for her (p. 65). While truth assumes the existence of an objective reality, "trustworthiness" situates the narrative in the social world.

In this study, I employed five different quality measures that enhanced the utility of the generated analytical narrative. First, consulting a critical friend who shares a similar cultural and educational background, to check the process of theme generation and the coding procedure during the thematic analysis phase. The reasoning behind choosing someone with similar cultural and educational background stems from a recognition of my trans-national identity which could risk imposing a hegemonic read of the participants' stories. Second, member-checking, which includes getting feedback from participants during the coding process which adds to the complexity of the analytical narrative. Third, establishing an auditable paper trail, which includes procedural and analytical memos, reflection, completed transcriptions with gestures and tonalities marked where needed. The auditable trail becomes helpful in addressing the different parts of subjective situated, culturally specific meanings, positionalities, and power relations. Additionally, it helps the audience to read from a place of empathic understanding and suspicious interpretations enmeshed in the researcher's subjective understanding of the

participants' experiences. Fourth, the recursive nature of the methodological procedure, as opposed to one-shot systemic effort, provides multiple opportunities to generate a richer, more in-depth analytical engagement. Fifth, the polyvocality of the generated analytical narrative presents the reader with a chance to engage with multiple viewpoints and positioned worldviews; therefore, facilitating the process of reading against the grain, exploring latent meanings, and delving in different layers of analyses.

Ethics

Ethical dilemmas in narrative research permeates the process of developing the stories, the story's ownership, and how the stories are represented. Clandinin (2006) asserts that for the narrative inquirer, ethics are shaped by negotiation, trust, openness, multivocality, mutuality, and respect. Moreover, Elliot (2005) suggests that participants may find the researcher's construction of their narratives to be different and may compromise how they view their experience. As such, the process of data analysis must involve consulting with participants about whether the constructed stories reflect their intended meaning (Elliot, 2005; Smyth & Murray, 2000). Adams (2008), however, argues to move away from a prescriptive view of ethics to a more contingent approach. Working with ethics as a contingent process includes not knowing how the research communication practices may affect participants. I acknowledge that my construction and communication of the participants' experiences may become problematic; even after incorporating their feedback and negotiating the construction of the stories with them. Therefore, thinking about ethics as a contingent process is a reminder to stay vigilant about ethical decisions as they are continually in flux. I believe that my reflexive stance was instrumental in resolving any ethical dilemmas along the way.

Obtaining Informed Consent

Approaching the consent process in narrative research is heavily debated in the field of qualitative inquiry (Klykken, 2022; Ellis, 2016; Smyth & Murray, 2000). Instead of obtaining participants' consent in a one-shot procedure as commonly practiced in qualitative research, Smyth and Murray (2000) highlight the importance of approaching consent as a process that is continually negotiated between researchers and participants. They recommend informing participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any given moment. In the context of this study, I had met with participating students and teachers individually to explain the consent process over the phone to inform them about the process, and the purpose that their narratives would serve. I clarified for the participants that my focus was on getting their perspectives on learning and identifying the factors that affect EFL learning from their perspectives. I also highlighted the utility of their narratives and my belief that their narratives would add to the knowledge and understanding their learning experience within EFL curriculum.

Confidentiality

The names of the participants are anonymized to protect the confidentiality of participants. The data is stored in a secure computer. The researcher is the only person with access to the data and the dissertation committee. Data will be safely destroyed after 3 years of the project completion. Participants were informed that their names would remain confidential, and any identifying markers would be altered to protect their identity.

Limitations

There are some limitations to the study. Due to the complex and fluid nature of voice (Chadderton, 2011), translating primary data from source language to target language and conducting the analysis on the translated data presents a challenge which could lead to a loss of

intended meaning. Due to the constraints governing the implementation of this study, which entails the guidance of the dissertation committee who do not speak Arabic (source language), analysis is carried out in English (target language). Therefore, future studies can investigate the influence of translation on voice and narrative authenticity.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I highlighted the purpose of using reflexive thematic analysis as a method of analyzing and generating an analytical narrative, which I chose to embed it within the broader frames of narrative research and explaining why it is the best fit for the study. Furthermore, the chapter presents how that data were collected and analyzed taking into accounts concerns of power, voice, translation, reflexivity, quality, ethical considerations, and the limitations.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Results

This study investigated Saudi women experienced and envisioned teaching and learning in an EFL program at a university in the western region of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the study also examined how teachers respond to learner's narratives and how their narratives inform their understanding of curriculum.

The research questions aimed to understand the perception of students and teachers of the curriculum, and how they re-envision their teaching and learning during our discussions. The study is guided by an overarching question followed by specific questions.

Overall Question

1. What are Saudi women first-year college students understanding of EFL curriculum in connection to their previous learning experience and how can their understandings inform teachers' pedagogical practices?

Specific Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of Saudi college-level women of EFL curriculum, particularly, in relation to teaching methods, content, and materials used?

2. How can their narratives inform teachers' understanding of curriculum?

The study was conducted in a public university in western Saudi. I conducted the interviews with interviewees over the period of two months, January to February 2023. With students, I conducted a series of three interviews conducted in Arabic (students' first language) and a focus group discussion with all the participants. With teachers, I conducted a focus group interview in English and elicited their responses to students' narratives using reflective writing. All data collected from teachers were in English. I employed a constructionist reflexive thematic

analysis (RTA) approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to make sense of the generated narratives of participants.

In this chapter, I start by setting the scene for the generated analytical narrative by describing the social, cultural, and educational context by drawing on my own researcher's journal, and by drawing on participants' accounts of their place of learning. Additionally, under the critical junctures in analysis section, I explicate a detailed account of my own analytical engagement with the data sets, the participants' accounts, my own thoughts and feelings, and my own past experiences and how that influenced data generation and analysis. I, also, highlight how my critical friends' input shaped the generated analytical story. Moreover, I discuss the measures that were taken to ensure the authenticity and comprehensiveness of the analytical narrative. Additionally, I present the themes across each group separately and the shared themes across groups. Moreover, I address some of the ethical dilemmas I encountered and how I addressed my subjectivity. The reader is advised to proceed with an awareness that the task of RTA researcher is never complete and just comes to a complete stop after drawing conclusions from the participants' accounts to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2022). With that awareness in mind, the quality section of this analysis consists of an account of the different quality measures I employed, not to ensure transferability and credibility, but to enhance transparency in qualitative research reporting. So, the reader can join me in the journey of my own analytical engagement with the data set understanding where the journey has started, how it developed, and how I arrived at the generated themes.

Setting the Scene

The word 'university' or 'college' evokes certain common characteristics in many people's minds based on their own perception of what a university looks like. However, the

contextual nature of women-only colleges in Saudi Arabia deserves explication to help the reader make sense of the participants' world.

A women's college in Saudi Arabia would be exclusively for women students and staff, with strict regulations on entry and exit to campus. The campus was surrounded by a high wall or fence to ensure privacy and prevent unauthorized entry. Going through this process gave me a flashback from my undergraduate days where in some days, the gates were congested with students standing in a tiny room waiting for their IDs to be inspected by the security personnel. It gets overwhelming during high-traffic time around noon and early morning.

I went into the new campus. I had never been to this new location before. Opposite to Starbucks, I spotted a big room that was open with many students coming in and out. I felt curious so I walked in, it was fully carpeted in distinct way from all the other rooms. It is the prayer room where students go during their unified break time from 12:10 to 1:00pm to pray the afternoon prayer. Many other students seemed to be lounging there or working on their laptops in a more relaxed sitting.

I sat down on a bench in a hallway thinking about how it felt attending a women-campus only in 2009 in the very same city. Attending a women's-only campus in 2009 in Saudi meant reckoning with strict dress codes that were enforced by university staff who were marching the hallways and writing up the students' IDs in case of breaking the dress code. I remember coping with these rules by draping Abaya as a long coat to cover my pants as did thousands of other women marching the hallways every day. It meant being bussed to campus everyday as the driving ban on women was still active then, unless your family can afford hiring a personal driver. I did not have that luxury. I paid half of the two hundred dollars monthly stipend to cover the expenses of transportation. 13 years later, a lot has changed. In keeping with the

government's trajectory to empower women through various policies, a cultural shift seemed to be taking place within the high fences of the women's-only colleges. I could see it reflected on the idiosyncratic expressions of identities that many students showed in their fashion choices. While the ecologies of women-only campuses in Saudi Arabia have been largely ignored in the literature, this section highlighted some of the unique aspects of women-only colleges and how it shifted over time.

Analytical Journey

In this section, I summarize my process of data analysis and I highlight incidents that marked a critical turning point in my analytical journey. Due to the recursive nature of this inquiry, the analysis process did not move linearly from one phase to another; I continued to travel back and forth between different phases to deepen my understanding of the data.

My analytical journey started with translating students' data from Arabic to English. Doing so allowed me to immerse myself in their scripts. As I was translating the data, I was taking notes in my researcher journal noting my thoughts, reactions, and initial impressions. I went through the whole data set listening to transcripts after preparation and translation, taking notes, and developing analytical memos. In Figure 2. I present an example of my initial reactions, thoughts, and triggers that surfaced as I was immersed in the data sets.

Figure 2.

An example of researcher's analytical memos during data familiarization process.

- *For Maryam, education is tied to the overall development of the person and is not tied to achievement only. With that in mind, and with her own experience pursuing learning another foreign language independently, I found myself pondering this question: why wouldn't she apply the same tools to her EFL educations? Is it because students in EFL classes are positioned as a recipient and didn't try to break free from this position? Esp. that I noticed this reliance on teachers' "delivering" content in many different accounts in the study as well. This notion of relying on teacher's expertise seemed in tension with students' view of desired learning.*

- *The strong emotional component of learning is felt in Jumana's response to the quality of a good teacher, she highlighted that a good teacher makes you fall in love with the subject. What does falling in love with the subject entail? That is seen in her emphasis on the engagement component of learning, "a good teacher delivers the information in a fun way". The choice of words in delivering, makes me think about the how it reflects the nature of learning in schools and universities*

The previous process was repeated through the whole data set once more to ensure that the researcher has a grasp of the depth and richness of data; especially since the goal of reflexive thematic analysis is to do justice to the generated data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Then, I used NVivo 12 to start coding the data inductively (Saldaña, 2016) carrying out two rounds of coding through the entire dataset. Because the nature of coding in RTA is subjective (Braun & Clarke, 2022), researchers are called upon to exercise their judgment while choosing a coding approach that fits the purpose of their study. I chose to lean towards a fine-grain analysis approach because I wanted to capture the subtlety and complexity of the participants' experiences. I utilized mainly

two different types of coding: latent (theoretical) and semantic coding (interpretive) (Braun &

Clarke, 2022). In Table 6. I offer examples of preliminary coding from two data excerpts. I use

(C #) to reference the codes. These two excerpts came from the students' focus group discussion.

Table 6.

Examples of preliminary codes from data extracts.

Data Extracts	Preliminary codes
When you, as the ministry of higher education, want to teach students in English the moment they start in college until they graduate, come to an understanding with the ministry of and the occasion and come to agreement to how you can students who would be able to study in English from the beginning (C1). It's not reasonable that we wasted 12 years in Arabic and then colleges expect us to understand English right away and study everything in English (C2).	C1: Noting the disconnect between language policy in K-12 and higher education. C2: Contesting the shift in demand between K-12 and college.
We're being taught English since the 5th grade or 4th grade and some teachers didn't give it their all and when you said that the curriculum is all about practicing vocabulary and grammar (C3), this is what I meant by saying that it was marginalized in schools, and it was treated as a marginal subject (C4). This is true also in the case where some teachers use handouts to help student pass the test (C5). Even in English, in secondary school, I mean, for example, they should focus on developing skills related to scientific research, how to write a report (C6). Not	C3: Teaching English in K-12 occurs through skill and drill. C4: The lack of emphasis on EFL in K-12 instructions. C5: Teaching EFL in K-12 is test-oriented.

just in schools, even in college. We don't practice this type of writing, I mean, writing research (C7).	C6: Preparing students for college entails a broadening the focus of K-12 EFL instructions. C7: The lack of emphasis on different genres of writing in EFL college.

As I engaged in coding data at the preliminary stage, I employed mostly semantic coding because I wanted to stay close to what the participants were saying. I developed the theoretical codes in the later stage of coding because I wanted to develop a richer understanding of data first before I started developing the latent codes. An example of latent or theoretical coding is "writing as process vs. writing as a product" to provide an explanation for the underpinning paradigm that influences students' writing. An example of semantic codes is "creating a room for teacher's agency in curriculum decision making" to describe how teachers discussed how they navigated the restrictions placed on their agency within classrooms. The coding scheme is provided which contains only the higher-level codes that were used to generate the themes [please refer to Appendix F].

At this point in analysis, I started to examine how codes were entangled with one another to begin thinking about themes. Additionally, I developed my own analytical memos, generating possible themes, checking them against one another to judge their "themeyeness" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 71). Generating themes requires making in-situ decisions about the theme's definition, demarcated limits, and interpretive powers (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Weaving the patterned meaning together to generate themes, I had to make choices about which themes have

more interpretive powers and help me in understanding participants' experience. I generated themes, first, by focusing on students' own data (individual interview and focus group interview). Then, I generated the themes based on teacher's data (reflection and focus group interview). Further, I explored common themes across the entire dataset. The generated themes ranged from interpretive to theoretical or conceptual in orientation. While generating the themes, I reflected on whether the generated themes captured the multiple facets of the central concept for each theme. Reflecting on the complexity of each theme, I continued slicing and remolding the themes like a sculptor looking to fine tune their final piece. I highlight a critical moment that marked a turning point in my understanding of the generated data.

Critical Junctures in the Analytical Journey

The reflexive analytical engagement changes course overtime (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Taking time away from data while engaging in other writing projects gave me time to reflect on ideas and let them percolate. In this section, I highlight one of the critical moments that marked a turning point in the analytical process. As I was writing a different paper about a course I co-taught with my major advisor. While theorizing our processes of curriculum-making, as part of the project, place was central to theorizing the work we had done. I had come across Mahmoud's (2021) dissertation titled *the unspoken narratives of the empty quarter*. In Mahmoud's (2021) work, the idea of the desert as arid and empty is contested and the empty quarter, the largest desert in Saudi, is redefined as an ecosystem on its own. Reflecting on how globalizing and homogenizing views of native landscapes influenced how native land is represented made me question my own connection with women-only campuses as a place. Upon reflection, I began to re-trace how participants discussed their place of learning and how my initial interpretations made sense of these discussions. I noticed that my interpretations of the participants' relationship

with the place seemed to reflect the homogenizing view that critical geographers and new materialism theorists critiqued (Gruenewald, 2003) that looked at place as something that everyone is aware of yet rendered invisible in analyses. Re-reading data with that awareness in mind helped conceptualized how place is central to students' understanding of engagement with the curriculum.

Finally, in this section, I highlighted my engagement with the data using reflexive thematic analysis. This section drew on the systemic aspect of conducting qualitative research. Yet, acknowledged the unpredictable nature of research by explicating the critical junctures shaping my engagement with the data.

Ensuring Authenticity of the Analytical Narrative

In this section, I discuss the four quality measures implemented in this study to ensure the authenticity and depth of the analytical narrative. First, I have consulted with a critical friend who is a professor in educational policy in a Saudi medical women's-only college. We met online two times to discuss a portion of the coding scheme. In our first meeting, I shared 10% of coded and anonymized data with my critical friend along with the coding scheme. As we started discussing different interpretations for codes, I noticed that theoretical codes did not make sense to my critical friend as she struggled to understand the relevance of said theoretical codes to my research questions. Reflecting on her critique, it did not make sense to seek agreement on theoretical codes because these are subject to the researcher's theoretical sensitivities. So, instead, I shared with her the theme definitions, limits, and few excerpts. I asked her to reflect on the excerpts and whether they fit within the theme's definition and demarcated limitations. She responded to the themes in a written reflection connecting to what has been discussed.

Secondly, I conducted member checking (Candela, 2019) with participating teachers and students. Member-checking came after consulting a critical friend which informed my decision of sharing a portion of the generated themes with both groups instead of seeking agreement over coding scheme. Here, member-checking served mainly two seemingly contradictory goals, 1) authenticating the analytical narratives by checking with participants and seeking their validation, 2) seeking disagreements as a way of enriching the textual details of the analytical narrative. These two goals even though may appear contradictory on the surface, they work to complement each other within the context of this inquiry. While the study sought women's understanding of teaching and learning, it also sought to understand how they re-envision teaching and learning within their own context. Josselson (2011) notes that researchers seeking to understand participants' experiences are never doing purely interpretive work, especially when the goal of understanding an experience maybe intimately linked to changing it. As I interpreted the participants narratives, I was aware that my disciplinary training gave me access to disciplinary knowledge that would lead me to contradict participants' own self-understanding. Coming from a constructionist stance, I was aware that each participant reading their own analytical narrative would respond to it differently according to their own "meaning-making horizons" (Josselson, 2011, p. 39). Yet, the discomfort of seeking disagreement is encouraged (Josselson, 2011) to delineate the divide between the researcher's own understanding and that of the participant. To conduct member checking, I had sent participating teachers a copy of the write-up of themes 7 and 8, asked them to write down their thoughts, feelings, impressions that the texts has produced and whether they agreed with my representation or not. For the students, I chose snippets of their vignettes as represented in the first six themes, translated it back to Arabic, sent to them via WhatsApp, asked them to read the documents, reflect on it, and record

their thoughts and feelings down either in writing or via voice memos. These snippets varied in terms of their theoretical versus interpretive leanings. I chose to provide participants with snippets that interpret, or make sense of their experience, and theorize, or construct a deeper layer for meaning helping us in understanding the deeper meaning of their experience. I sought to have a balance between theoretical versus interpretive texts, choosing six extended portions of the text for each student. In doing so, I invited participants to comment, edit, contradict my own interpretations and theorizations.

Third, polyvocality here is used with reference to the multilayeredness of the narrative text (Josselson, 2011) to which the voices of the researcher and participants contribute. An example of the manifestation of polyvocality and how it transforms the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under investigation—or rather, construction. I found polyvocality to be useful in how the narrative text is augmented by drawing on several voices, subjectivities, articulations, and absences. For example, under theme #7, readers can see how students and teachers discussed the students' struggle with writing in different ways. While participating students drew on their previous experiences as a negative influence in their writing skills, participating teachers added a layer of meaning that concerns how writing instruction is structured and approached. Finally, an auditable trail is established which includes procedural and analytical memos, reflections, completed transcriptions with gestures and tonalities marked.

In sum, the authenticity of the analytical narrative is ensured by drawing on the validity of interpretations and seeking disagreements. Both processes are vital to produce a generative analytical narrative which deepens our understanding of how learning and teaching is constructed in women's-only spaces.

Findings

      In this section, I present the generated themes 1) according to students, 2) according to teachers, and 3) themes shared across the two groups. Direct quotes from participating students only are represented in both Arabic, source language, and English translation. This is because interviews with students were conducted in Arabic whereas English was used in generating teacher's data set.

Themes for students

      The themes that were generated through my engagement with students' data highlights the drivers influencing students' access to good EFL education, their struggle with the strict admission criteria, their shared emphasis on the desire for relational and engaged learning, and alignments between theorization of desired learning and their approach to task re-design.

      Accessibility of good EFL education

      This theme explores how access to good EFL schooling is facilitated by the intersection of socio-economic/material privileges and family support. Access to quality EFL education is facilitated by material privileges and access to additional support at home, yet not everyone can afford this. The contextual and shifting nature of privilege is reflected in the narratives of learners.

      Madaris khasa [private schools] and madaris qadeema [underdeveloped schools]: Privilege and access to good K-12 EFL education. In the context of this theme, being privileged means having access to certain advantages by belonging to a certain group or classification. This theme discusses how privileges such as access to private schooling, access to tutoring services, and access to opportunities for overseas learning experiences facilitates the process of learning English.

Access to private schooling is recognized by participating students as having a mitigating influence on the pitfalls of public EFL schooling in Saudi Arabia. However, few participants could have access to private schooling. Jehan, for example, believed that her access to English is facilitated by her access to private school. Jehan stated, "احس اللي ساعدني أكثر شيء هو اني درست بمدرسة خاصة. كانوا بيركزوا على الإنقلش / I think what helped me the most with English that I went to a private school. They used to pay attention to English." Similarly, Rita was enrolled in private schools for pre-school and kindergarten which led her to develop her competency in English much earlier than her peers who started learning English around 4th grade.

Yet, Jumana's case is at tensions with the idea of 'private schooling means good English' since she studied English and French at a private school until grade 3. Her mother noticed her lack of fluency in reading English, French and even, Arabic despite having a private tutor on top of attending a private school. Eventually, her mother decided to transfer her to a public school where she could catch up and learn Arabic. Jumana thought that her experience in private schooling was not developmentally appropriate, although helped her English. "احس يعني أبلاتي في المدارس الخاصة كانوا أفضل لأنهم يشرحوا كل حاجة بالإنجليزي / I would probably say I had better teachers in private schools because they explain everything in English." She felt overwhelmed by the load of learning and could not live like her peers who had more free time to engage in unstructured play.

On the other hand, the three participants who attended public schools critiqued K-12 EFL public education for how it is structured, how it is taught, and evaluated. Here, Maryam's comment provides a critique for how English curriculum is sequenced throughout K-12 schooling. "عني اذا فاتتك حاجة بسنة معينة أو معلمتك ما كانت تعرف تشرح كويس ممكن تعاني بالمستويات اللي بعدها / So, if you miss anything in any of these grades or had someone who didn't teach you well, you can fall behind quickly." Maryam's comment reflects her own personal experience as she fell

behind in her English classes because of "المناهج القديمة / outdated curricula" and teaching to the test.

<div dir="rtl">

يعني بعض المعلمات، للأسف الشديد، يعني بعضهم، كانوا يدونا كم صفحة عشان نذاكر منها للاختبار ويختبروك في دي الكم صفحة. بعضهم كانوا يأشروا لنا ايش راح يجي وايش اللي مو داخل معانا بالاختبار.

</div>

Some teachers, unfortunately, I mean, some of them, used to hand out few pages for us to study from and they will examine you in these few pages. Some of them used to highlight with us what is going be included in the test and what's not included.

Maryam, First Interview

She went on to succinctly sum up the influence of lack of accessibility to quality EFL on privileged students versus students who lack such access:

<div dir="rtl">

انا شفت كيف البنات اللي درسوا انقلش بمناهج مطورة من سنة رابع ابتدائي قد ايش كانوا كويسين بالانقلش. بس اللي درسوا الانقليزي من سادس ابتدائي، صح انو قدرنا نحسن ونطور من لغتنا بس هذا كله بيعتمد على استاذتك وطريقة تدريسها. بعضنا دخل مع استاذات ما كانوا كويسين وبعدها راحوا الجامعة وهنا كل شيء يصير أصعب لأن بالجامعة كل حاجة تدرسيها بالانقليزي ما عدا كم مادة.

</div>

I saw how people who studied in greater public-school systems and had English since 4th grade, I saw how good they were in English. However, for those of us who studied English starting 6th grade, we had improved our English because we had a good teacher. Some of us, ended up with teachers who are not very great and then went to college and this is where things get so hard because in college you study everything in English except few subjects.

Maryam, Focus Group Interview with Students

Rahaf, also, joined Maryam in critiquing the quality of EFL teaching which stems from the marginal status of English in K-12 curriculum suddenly becoming instrumental in their

college education experience: " اللغة الإنجليزية كانت مهمشة بالمدارس كمادة وفجأة لما دخلنا الجامعة صار كل شيء
Language was not an important part of بالإنجليزي. هذي لغة اللي بنتكلم عنها مو شيء أقدر أتقنه بوقت قصير /
school curriculum and suddenly, we went to university, and everything is in English. This is a language that we are talking about. It is not something I could learn in this limited time frame."
Rahaf had access to overseas learning English immersion program in the UK to remediate the lack of English proficiency after 9 years of EFL public schooling. However, participants, like Maryam, lacked access to such opportunities. " من جد يعني لو حصلت لي الفرصة اني أطلع بعثة أدرس
Seriously, if I had the chance to انجليزي الحين راح أوقف دراستي الجامعية هنا و بعدين أرجع أكمل الجامعة /
study English abroad now, I'll put my college education on hold and go and study English and then come back here to finish college," Maryam admitted with enthusiasm. Maryam's strong desire for learning English abroad masks a distrust in the public education in preparing her to college education. She asserts,

الجامعة بتختلف مرة عند المدرسة. احنا ما نعرف نسوي بحث، من وين نبدأ، وكيف نبحث عن مصادر

موثوقة ومن نطلعها؟ عشان كذا نحس أننا ضايعين خصوصا الناس اللي ما عندها أحد بالبيت درس بالجامعة قبلهم.

> College is very different than school. We do not know how to conduct research, how to
>
> look for credible resources, where do we start from and where do we draw from? So, we
>
> feel lost especially people who do not know someone who had been in college before
>
> them.

Maryam, Focus Group Interview with students.

Maryam's comment brings to the fore the issue of accessibility of knowledge in college education to which she feels unequipped. Moreover, Jehan echoes the same sentiment by expressing the need for " نطور مهارات البحث العلمية/ developing skills related to scientific research" and "how to write a report / كيف نكتب تقرير علمي." Students are feeling unequipped to enter college

due to a perceived marked gap between K-12 schooling and college education in Saudi.

Regarding the concerns around the quality of K-12 education, Jehan is a case in point. Jehan was

classified as a gifted student in middle school and joined the *Mawhiba* program, where gifted

students are placed in classrooms under the supervision of a research supervisor. Gifted classes

focused on involving students in research projects and such an opportunity was not given to

students in regular classrooms. Whereas gifted classes in K-12 strove to include students in

challenging projects, yet they fell short, in Jehan's case, to add value. Jehan explained, " كان عندنا

we used to / معلمة وحدة مسؤولة عن الطلاب الموهوبين بالمدرسة، يمكن عشان كذا ما كان في تركيز على جانب البحوث

have one teacher responsible for gifted students in the school, maybe that's why there was lack

of attention to research projects." Such lack of guidance had Jehan disengage from her gifted

classrooms.

The influence of privilege and how it facilitates the process of accessing quality EFL

education is not a researched area. This theme suggests that access to private education facilitates

access to English while students who studied in public schools criticized the lack of focus on

English as a school subject. This, in turn, raises issues about the accessibility of good foreign

language teaching, which is instrumental in realizing their dreams in the face of increasing

demands for English language proficiency in job market.

Malu Elaqa Bel Fuloos [it is not about the money]: The influence of family support on

students' choices. This sub theme discusses the role that family support plays in shaping the

trajectory of students' educational choices. While there are various forms of support that students

are offered by their families (blood-brothers and sisters), I intend to focus under this subtheme on

how participating students address the availability of family support and how it influences

students' career and/or educational choices.

Participating students generally affirmed the value of family support in realizing their career/educational aspirations. However, not all students are afforded the same level of support at home, if any at all. Rahaf believed that family support alone is not sufficient to guide students. For her, family support can be undermined by the intergenerational gap between parents and children which causes tension. Rahaf explained, ''أبوي ما كان يفهمني أغلب الأمور، أو بالأحرى ما كان My father didn't / مستوعب التحديات اللي بتواجهنا هالأيام. الاخوان أقرب لك بالعمر مو زي الأهالي، في فجوة عمرية teach me most things, or rather, he did not grasp the challenges we are facing nowadays. Brothers are closer to you in age. Not like parents where there is a generational gap." Such tensions can be seen in Mona's case. Her family did not support her dream of going to aviation school, albeit being able to provide for the cost of the private tuition fees. Mona explained, ''الموضوع صار كذا ودخلت هذه الكلية بناء على معايير القبول. قلت لك، حلم الطيار وأهلي منعوني منه مع إنهم كانوا قادرين على تكلفة الدراسة. / It just all happened without planning, and I got into this department based on the requirements that I met. I told you my dream is to be a pilot and my family stopped me from pursuing it despite being able to provide for the cost of tuitions." I share a glimpse of my reflection after concluding the first interview with Mona.

> *Mona's family did not approve of her choice of aviation school because of the enforced instability that comes with having unstable schedule, especially, for a woman. She felt frustrated with their lack of support. Her dad, instead, offered to buy her a car to motivate her to attend the school. She did not feel like she had much of choice. I wished she had.*

> *Researcher's Journal Entry #1: January 14th, 2023*

Similarly, Jumana, albeit growing up with a privileged access to English, French, private schooling and tutoring services, did not feel supported by her family. After high school, Jumana

decided to join a diploma program for culinary arts school. Despite getting accepted in two distinct programs, she did not pursue either. First, she got accepted into bachelor program in a free public four-year degree program in the capital city. Despite the cultural and political shift towards women empowerment, evidenced in allowing women the rights to reside outside the family's house without needing a male guardian's approval (Arab News, June 9th, 2021), and despite the recent shift of women seeking residence and working outside what used to be a traditional family house, for Jumana's family, they did not endorse her decision to attend the school. It meant moving away too young; it is still uncommon for a Saudi 18-year-old woman to live independently. Second, she got accepted into a two-year culinary art private school program with a price tag of 13,000$. Despite her family's ability to pay for it, her dad refused. Jumana explained,

الموضوع ما كان له علاقة بالفلوس، يعني كان يقدر. نقدر ندفع الرسوم بس يعني أحس انه كان رافض. كان يحسبني اني حابة أعانده. يلا مو مشكلة. ان شاء الله أخلص الأربعة سنين هنا بعدين أقدر أخذ الدبلومة.

It was not about the money for dad, he can. We have the means to pay for it, but I think it was a way to say no. He thought that I was being stubborn. But it is what it is. I will finish the 4 years here Inshallah and then I'll get my diploma.

Jumana, First Interview

Despite the lack of support, Jumana remained hopeful. "دحين الطريق صار أطول بس راح أوصل إن شاء الله /The road is longer now but I will get there Insha'Allah", she asserted.

This subtheme highlighted the conflicting contextual nature of privilege in the realities of young Saudi women. While access to family support is valued and recognized; having access to socio-economic privileges does not necessarily translate into access to more opportunities. Sometimes, like in the cases of Jumana and Mona, the ideological orientation of the family,

evidenced in refusing to accept women's autonomy over their own futures, stands in the way of achieving their educational desires. I end this section with an excerpt from my own reflection on the nature of change and how it is enacted in the Saudi sociocultural sphere.

I am sitting here reflecting on Rebecca Solnit's (2004) ruminations on the nature of change in her book titled Hope in the dark: Untold history, wild possibilities. In her book, Solnit (2004) reflected on social change and activism. Solnit (2004) reflected on the power of the margin in enacting change. For Solnit (2004), once an action has moved to mainstream, it has become part of the dominant narrative, and the task of an activist is to return to the margin to critique what has now become a hegemonic ideology. Solnit's (2004) critically reflexive posture propelled me to reflect on how change is enacted in the sociocultural sphere in Saudi Arabia. The government has introduced several pro-women empowerment policies that facilitated their access to overseas learning program, I am a beneficiary of one, access to more opportunities in job market (Ministry of Education, 2022). Yet, the family still wields a significant power over women's autonomy and choices. Sure, access to socio-economic privileges seems to grant some people more opportunities for growth and development but does not guarantee success because while family has wielded, historically some political power, it still wields a lot of power socially and culturally. Set this way, while change is enforced top-down hierarchically, it does not necessarily translate into an uptake from the bottom up. Yet, I am hopeful because as Solnit (2004) asserts, hope that is foregrounded in cynicism translates into retreat from communion and helping one another. However, hope that is foregrounded in optimism translates into positive commitment to transformation. Solnit (2004) reminds us to be committed to making concrete steps towards manifesting our desired realities, breaking

away from unproductive socially constructed norms and assuming a reflexive posture in face of the ambiguity of change.

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Researcher Journal Entry #2, January 31ˢᵗ, 2023

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Mehtajin English Lil-wazifa: The value of English for job prosperity and beyond

This theme addresses the value of English as perceived by students. Their accounts reflect the commodification of English driven by job-market needs. Additionally, I discuss how students' linked learning English to their own personal desires, beyond getting a job.

Students' own awareness of the value of English is clearly shown in their constructions of the role English plays in their lives, beyond classrooms. Participating students realize the role English plays and its links to job prosperity, especially considering the country's new development plan dubbed, vision 2030. The country's new development plan launched in 2016 with a focus on the re-diversification of the country's economy (Alzahrani & Rajab, 2017). The plan is linked to developing students' English language competency to compete in the global job market (Alzahrani, 2017; Alzahrani & Rajab, 2017). Therefore, students were aware of the value of English as a catalyst for their career aspirations. Jumana, for example, thinks that learning English well in college is a step in the right direction for her to obtain a scholarship funding opportunity and study at a culinary arts program abroad " يعني أحس أنا دحين حاركز على اللغة الإنجليزية / لأنه بإذن الله حتساعدني انقبل بالبعثة وأكمل اتعلم فنون الطبخ برا I mean, now I am focusing on English because, God's willing, it will help in getting a scholarship grant to study culinary arts abroad." Similarly, Rita spoke about the value of learning English by highlighting the conditions of many young people who are jobless because they did not speak English. Rita argued, " أشوف ناس كثير معاهم شهادات جامعية بس عشان ما عندهم لغة انجليزية، مو قادرين يلاقون وظائف / I see a lot of people who have college degrees but because they don't speak English, they can't find jobs." Similarly, Jehan

stated that "اذا عندك لغة انجليزية وهذا اللي سمعته، ما جربت بنفسي، عندك فرصة أكبر تحصلي وظيفة / if you have English, and this is what I hear, I didn't try it, you have a bigger chance of getting a job." Their accounts underscore the instrumental role English plays in a globalized economy.

Rahaf, also, brought to light the difference in quality between resources that are available on the internet in English and Arabic. For Rahaf, having access to English means having access to the language with which scientists communicate; a community she aspires to join one day. She argued that you cannot teach STEM in Arabic because "تتدرس، هذي المواد انكتب عنها بالإنجليزية بالإنجليزية، البحث فيها بالإنجليزية / it's been written about in English, … taught in English, … studied in English." Therefore, Rahaf believed that STEM subjects should always be taught in English; even during K-12. Her remark generated a spirited discussion during the focus group with students about the value of English compared to their first language, Arabic. Some students, like Rita and Rahaf, believed that English is instrumental in securing a job in Saudi so, one should prepare students to speak it fluently even if it meant adopting English as a medium of instruction (EMI). Rita noted, "ليش، يعني، زي كل طلاب السنة التحضيرية احنا قاعدين نأخذ نفس الأحياء والكيمياء حقت الثانوي ما علمونا هي بالإنجليزي من البداية؟ / I mean, like all preparation year students now, we are taking the same biology, chemistry ... we had in high school but in English. Why didn't we teach them in English to begin with?" Therefore, while Rita and Rahaf understood the consequences of using EMI during K-12, it is a sacrifice they are willing to make to pursue their career aspirations.

On the other hand, participants like Jehan believed that we can still translate STEM textbooks to Arabic like many other Arab countries do. For Jehan, even though she speaks English fluently, the importance of pride in mother tongue is clear in her preference for translation over using EMI. She says, "مو لازم نأخذ كتبنا من الغرب باللغة الإنجليزية وندرس المواد العلمية بالإنجليزي، نقدر نترجمها للعربية ويصير عندنا منهج علمي عربي بالكامل / we don't have to take textbooks from

the West in English and teach science in English. it could be translated into Arabic, and we would have a fully Arabic curriculum for these STEM subjects." As participants engaged in this spirited discussion, I managed to see how their preference for EMI in K-12 schooling is motivated by two things, 1) the gap between K-12 EFL instructions and 2) the expectations placed on students to be able to study STEM subjects in English despite feeling unprepared for the task yet. Eventually, the group came to a consensus that whatever scenario is adopted, in this case Arabic vs. EMI, it must be done consistently across different levels of education. Saudi students going to college and finding themselves suddenly expected to study everything in English is analogous to an American student studying Spanish as a foreign language and was forced to study everything in Spanish once they arrived in college.

The promise of a lucrative job is not the participants' only motivation to learn English. Participants discussed the value of English beyond the access it provides to material security. For Jumana, being fluent in English is analogous to "اني أكون مبسوطة وواثقة من نفسي/ being happy and confident in myself." She states, "إني أكون مرة متعلمة، هذي نعمة / being truly educated, this is a blessing." For Jumana, the reward is a spiritual form of bliss and happiness that come with being "مرة متعلمة / truly educated." Similarly, Jehan thinks that learning a language is a chance to learn from difference. She states:

احنا مو بس نتعلم لغة، احنا بنتعلم ثقافة جديدة، بنتعلم من أسلوب حياة دي الثقافة وبتغير مفاهيمنا في بعض الأشياء. يعني نتعلم لغة ونتعرف فيها على أصحاب هذه اللغة، ايش أسلوب حياتهم؟ ايش ثقافتهم، ايش ممكن نقدر نتعلم منهم.

We are not just learning the language. We are learning a new culture, a new lifestyle that greatly expands our horizons and broadens our perspective on things. It means learning a

new language in which we begin to discover people who speak the language. What is their lifestyle? What is their culture? What can we learn from them?

Jehan – Focus group discussion with students

Jehan's outlook on language learning as a window into learning from other cultures shows a deep curiosity that can be instrumental in language learning. For others, English gave them access to tools and communities that they wished to join. Maryam, for example, thinks that English gives her access to communities of scientists who she would like to engage. Interestingly, English was an obstacle for Maryam in the past when she competed nationally in a gifted students' competition in middle school. When she began to present her work in front of the panel, she was asked to switch to English. Maryam explained, "حاولت أتكلم بالإنجليزي معاهم وما قدرت فقمت حولت عربي لأنه ما قدرت أوصل فكرتي / I tried to speak with them in English but I couldn't so I switched to Arabic because I was unable to communicate my ideas." Rahaf shared a similar sentiment with Maryam. She stated that students who represented Saudi in international STEM competitions did so because they had at least average competency in English which in turn gave them access to knowledge that would otherwise be unavailable to them.

Rahaf believed that "أقصد من ناحية المحتوى، المصادر بالإنترنت اللي بالإنجليزي متوفرة بشكل أكبر، حتى / even resources are much wider and more accessible in English when it comes to content on the internet, I mean." Statements such as those made by Rahaf and Maryam go to show the extent to which access to English can be potentially transformational for a person. Had Maryam been fluent in English and had earlier access to quality EFL education, she would have probably competed internationally. One main takeaway is that access to English is instrumental to young Saudi women beyond just getting a job.

To sum up, this theme underscores the value participants attributed to English beyond getting a job. While market-needs driven participants to prioritize learning English, they also acknowledged the access it gives them to tools and communities they desire to join. The participants' narratives sheds light on the role English plays in cyber-connected world. It raises questions about who gets access to what content, and how students' English proficiency may limit their access to scientific content, thus, limiting their knowledge.

The desire for engaged learning and teaching through *Hiwar* [Dialogue]

This theme explores students' desire for engaged learning and teaching by exploring the intersection of dialogue, place, and curriculum in students' narratives. Drawing on bell hooks (1994) conception of engaged teaching, the students' desire for engaged learning is further separated under subtheme 1) good teaching is engaged and fun, and 2) being in dialogue with place. Both subthemes underscore students' critiques of the confinement of learning to classrooms, their assertion on drawing on the concrete realities to reimagine their learning, and in creating alternative, active, agentive roles for learners.

Good teaching is Tafaeuli [engaged]. Participating students' conception of good teaching rests on two criteria; engagement and fun. In reimagining curriculum, Jehan stressed the importance of engaged learning and the open-endedness of learning. Jehan argued, " طريقة التدريس نفسها ممكن تكون تفاعلية أكثر وتستخدم استراتيجيات. يعني كذا في أشياء نسويها، نتحرك، ويكون في حوارات. / The way of teaching could be more engaging by using more strategies. Things we can do, move around, discuss." Similarly, Rita stresses the role of engagement with materials rather than spending time working on textbook exercises. She states, "نبغى نسوي أشياء ممتعة مو بس نقعد نقلب الصفحات ونحل تمارين / we want to do more fun things instead of flipping through the pages and working on exercises." Moreover, constructing the learning experience for Mona meant that students get to engage and

speak more, especially with a native speaker. This stems from the lack of emphasis on dialogue

and communication during class time. Mona painted a painfully silent class where the teacher

lectures for two hours and the rest of the time remains unutilized.

احنا فعليا بنتعلم ساعتين باليوم، حرفيا بس ساعتين. بقية الوقت، ما يكون عندنا شيء نسويه. يمكن الأستاذة

تقعد تتكلم شوية بعدين تسكت ونقعد احنا جالسين نستنى الوقت يعدي وبعدين نمشي. يمكن أول ما تدخل

الأستاذة يكون فيه تفاعل بالبداية بس بعدين خلاص نجلس نستنى الوقت يخلص. بعد ما تخلص الأستاذة

الشرح، نقعد بس كذا ساكتين يعني وأحس اننا قاعدين نضيع وقتنا.

> We learn for two hours, literally two hours, the rest of the time, we don't have anything to
>
> do. Maybe she will say a few words and then stay silent and we just all sit around so the
>
> time would pass and then we leave. There is a little bit of engagement when the teacher
>
> comes in at the beginning of the class but then we just sit around and wait for the time to
>
> pass. After the lesson was being taught, all of us sit and it becomes so quiet. So, I feel
>
> like we're wasting our time.

Mona, Second Individual Interview

The desire for engaged learning is space for yearning that students have discussed

repetitively across different interviews. When asked about what she would change about

curriculum, Jumana responded: " راح أغير المواضيع و أنوعها ونحط أشياء فيها تفاعل ونقاشات بالمنهج أكثر من

I will change the topics and diversify it. We / اللي دحين موجودة عشان الكل يقدر يتفاعل بوقت الكلاس

include more dialogues and discussions in the curriculum, much more than it has already been

done so everybody could engage more during class time." Similarly, Jehan craves a classroom

space that "مليانة حركة ونقاشات / buzzes with movement and dialogue." In her recollection of her

favorite teacher, Jumana said: "كانت كأنها وحدة مننا، تأخذ ورقة وتجلس معانا وتقيم الطالبات معانا / she used to

be like one of us. She will take a paper like us, and she will sit down with us and grade the

students with us." Her statement made me think about the role students' play in the learning process. Her memories of her favorite teacher, in elementary, although a distant memory, yet it was imprinted in her memories of schooling. I am assuming because the teacher offered them something that they have not experienced before, having an active role in the process of learning. In this vein, Jumana stressed the value of experiencing curriculum as opposed to receiving it. She states, "اذا في حاجة في الكتاب مكتوبة، يعني كذا يكون حلو اننا نجربها ونتفاعل معاها. زي ما قلت لك، احنا نبغى نسوي كل شيء، يعني والله نقدر نسوي أكثر كمان/ If there are something written in the book, it's good to try it, make it experimental and engaging. As I told you, we want to do everything. I mean, we can do even more." Similarly, Mona stresses the value of experiencing English in interacting with other people. Mona's desire for her learning involved engaging in experiences that would facilitate interacting with native speakers, especially now that Saudi Arabia is moving to attract a lot of tourists. Mona asserts, "يعني مثلا يساعدونهم اذا يحتاجون شيء، يفتحون معاهم موضوع يعني، في ترحيب، أو أي شيء. أهم شي، انهم يحتكون مع هذول الناس اللي يتحدثون هذه اللغة خارج إطار الجامعة في مواقف حقيقية. I mean, they could, for example, help them if they need anything, start a dialogue with them, welcoming them, or anything. I feel like the most important thing is to engage with these people who speak that language outside of college setting in real life situations." Mona suggested building opportunities in curriculum where students can engage in dialogues with visitors or tourists in touristy areas, for example, having students volunteer to work as a tour guide where they could interact with tourists and answer any questions.

Similarly, Rahaf describes her definition of good teaching: "مو بس يعطوك محاضرة، يعني ينبسطو معاك مرات يخرجوك من جو الجدية و / they do not just lecture you. Occasionally, they would try to get you out of serious mode and have fun with you." Further, Maryam's definition of learning centers round engagement. For Maryam, engaging with the materials would lead to "تطبيقها /

implementing it", which is her own goal for learning. When I asked Maryam, how she would like to engage with her English course, she stressed the value of engaging students as equal partners by asking students to bring materials to class. Maryam says, " يعني لو أنا كنت معلمة، كنت بقول للطلاب يجيبوا معاهم قصص نقرأها سوا. أكيد يعني حاجيب معايا مقالات وكذا بس أكيد راح أخلي الطلاب يجيبوا كمان. / I mean, if I were the teacher, I would ask students to bring their own stories, sometimes, I will bring my own articles, but I would definitely have students do that too." In Maryam's case, desiring a redistribution of power relations where students can assume active role in learning in one way to ensure good, and engaged teaching. For Jumana, good, engaged teaching engages the student in embodied and experiential type of learning; inducing that aliveness that she kept alluding to as a measure for learning.

This subtheme draws our attention to the value of engaged learning. However, there are areas that can be explored in further research including, how can engage students in designing their own learning experiences? What mechanisms can we use to ensure the authenticity of represented students' voices? How can these mechanisms be effectively implemented even within rigidly structured curricula?

Being in Hiwar [dialogue] with place. This sub theme represents the students' desire for a place-conscious learning. Place conscious or place-responsive learning (Greenwood, 2013) is a term used to refer to approaches to education, which grew out of postcolonial frustrations, seeking to center ecologies of places and to explore the land as "an active participant" that includes a "growing sense of what the place demands of us in our attitudes and actions" (Cameron, 2003, p. 176).

In this subsection, students emphasized the value of learning by engaging in dialogic learning in places beyond the classrooms. The participating students' emphasis on place-

conscious learning grew out of their frustration with the confinement of learning to classrooms. Rita found the focus on the textbook and "بس نحل تمارين / doing exercises" to be disengaging. Rita, further noted during focus group interview, that with some teachers, you could tell " بس ييغوا يخلصوا الصفحات حقت الدرس / they just want to finish the assigned pages" of the textbook. Maryam interjected here and asked, " ليش احنا مقيدين بطريقة تدريس معينة؟ دائما! / Why are we limited to the same way of teaching? All the time." I asked Maryam about what she meant by same way of teaching. She responded, "نقضي وقتنا على الكتاب يعني / just going through the pages, I mean." The participants' disenchantment with textbook-dominated approaches to learning sheds light on openings for exploring other places where learning could occur. For Maryam, for example, that meant establishing student-led support groups where " نقدر نتقابل مع بعض، نشتغل سوا، وهذا الشيء ممكن يخلي الجامعة تشوف اننا نحتاج اندية للطلاب / we can always meet, work together, and this might make the university recognize the need for a student club". Maryam noted that the lack of community initiatives like establishing students' clubs is not going to hinder her process of learning outside classrooms. Maryam, further explained, " يعني ايوا احنا لسى بنتجمع ونتكلم عن الصعوبات اللي نواجهها يعني لو في حاجة معينة ما فهمتها في الكلاس، راح اسأل زميلتي تساعدني / I mean, yeah, we still try to come together to talk about the difficulties we are facing like if I did not understand a specific issue in class, I would ask my friend to help me with it." She noted that she received support from her classmates as they frequently came together, discussed the challenges they face, and came up with plans to resolve these challenges. The missed opportunities for growth highlighted in the lack of student-led initiatives makes me wonder about how that would transform students' experiences.

Maryam's views on the need to establish students' clubs, where they could meet and discuss the challenges facing them, pushed me to think the value of providing Saudi women with a third space for learning. Gutierrez (2008) explored the value of developing a third space where

students from minoritized communities engage in inquiry that destabilizes traditional

conceptions of academic literacy and replaces it with forms of literacies that are contingent upon

students' sociohistorical contexts. Participating students pointed out the absence of such spaces

where learning could develop in a less-hierarchically structured way, which in turn, may allow

for emergence of counterhegemonic literacy practices. Mona suggested providing students with

opportunities to engage with the wider community on campus to exchange ideas, talents, poems,

and writing. Mona stated, '' تلقي قصيدة، تلقي اللي تبغى يعني كانت أيا مواهبهم، يشاركون انهم للطالبات فرص في لو

قصة، حتى لو بس على مستوى التحضيري في مبنانا وبيننا احنا الطالبات، عشان تشجع الطالبات وتحمسهم يتكلمون،

ويجربون أشياء جديدة باللغة الإنجليزية/ if there were opportunities for students to share their talents,

whatever they are. I mean, if you want to share a poem, a story, even if it was just us students in

our own preparation year building because this is going to encourage students to at least speak

and try different things."

Mona expanded on Maryam's statement by critiquing the physical environment of

schooling, '' يعني أحس المدارس المفروض يكون فيها أندية، واشياء زي كذا، ويغيرون تصميم المدارس والفصول مو كلها

نفس الشيء/ I feel like schools should have clubs, things like they change the classroom setup, they

shouldn't all look the same." Similarly, Rahaf criticized how classrooms are set up.

مبنانا مليان فصول زي اللي تشوفيهم بالأفلام اللي تجيك ثلاث جدران فيها نوافذ كبيرة. انت مو قاعد تصمم مكتب،

انت قاعد تصمم قاعة محاضرة. الكلاسات لازم تكون مغلقة بشكل عام لأن تحتاج تركيز كثير من الطلاب. شفت كثير

أستاذات بيتشتتوا وطالبات بيتشتتوا.

Our building is full of classrooms like the one you see in the movies where the lecture

hall has three big ceiling windows. You're not designing an office space; you're designing

a class. Classes should be closed off environment generally because you need students to

pay attention. I have seen many times teachers getting distracted and students getting

distracted.

Rahaf, First Individual Interview

Reflecting on Rahaf statement led me to wonder about the role her diagnosis of ADHD

affects her learning especially in classroom environments that are set up to be in busy, bustling,

and open hallways. Rahaf's statement sheds light on the level of support that exists in

accommodating the learner's needs in the design of inviting and open classrooms.

Further, participating students explored the affordances of cyber-space to displace

learning and offer alternative agentive roles for learners. Jehan stressed the role of cyber-space,

especially in relation to flipped learning, in developing a more engaged, and autonomous

learning. She frequently revisits YouTube channels to facilitate her understanding of the

curriculum. Jehan explained, " أحب أشوف فيديوهات تتعلق بالمواضيع اللي احنا نناقشها، أو إذا ما فهمت مثلا قرامر

I love to go look for vlogs about the themes we are / معين، أبحث أونلاين في مصادر يعني زي اليوتيوب

reading about, or if I didn't understand a specific grammatical structure, I would look for online

resources, I mean, like YouTube." Similarly, Jumana affirmed the role of flipped learning plays

in helping her become a fluent reader through providing her with access to audio version of the

reading passages. While flipped learning is affirmed as a positive aspect of enacted curriculum,

participating students highlighted the lack of institutionally supported access to technology-

mediated learning tools, and only offering Microsoft suite through university-based email. Jehan

noted, " أستخدم أشياء زي نوتابيلتي عشان أخذ نوتس بالكلاس بس دائما أوصل نقطة يقول ادفعي، حتى مع قرامرلي/ I use

tools like notability to take notes in class, but I always hit the paywall, even with Grammarly."

The reliance on a limited set of technology tools and disregarding the role of tech-mediated

learning in a space with tech-savvy youngsters raises questions about the contemporariness of institutionalized curriculum.

Additionally, participating students explored the value of cyber-space in engaging in immersive, concrete, and expansive learning. Rahaf suggested starting a YouTube channel operated by students, under the supervision of an instructor to monitor and oversea content, to facilitate the exploration of different agentive roles for learners. Rahaf advocated for engaging students beyond the classroom walls because it could 1) " خاصة في السي على يشتغلون انهم الطلاب يساعد يتخرج ما بعد معيد يصير يبي اللي / help students in building their CVs, especially those looking for academic jobs after graduating," and 2) " يشرفون يقدرون المعلومات نظم قسم مثلا الأقسام بين تعاون فيه يخلي تقنية ناحية من القناة تشغيل على/ build partnerships with different departments like, Information Technology to oversee the technical aspect of running a video vlog," which in turn leads to exchanging expertise and establishing communities of learning across campus.

Additionally, Jehan's desire for her learning connects with exploring the intersection of tech-mediated tools, such as vlogging, and cultural histories. While reconstructing a speaking task that she brought along, Jehan argued that a better version of the task, which revolved around giving a presentation on the food scene in Belgium, would center around exploring the narratives of" مرة كبيرة بتغيرات تمر شافوها و المدينة سكنوا اللي الناس / people who inhabited the city long before we did and who saw it grow and go through immense changes." Additionally, Jehan's exploration of the nature of change in her own local context provides a social commentary on the sociocultural conditions of her own context, which may potentially lead to "conscientization" (Freire, 1994). Moreover, by drawing on local rich traditions, coupled with tech-mediated tool, Jehan's desired version of learning presents a rich tapestry of knowledge. Jehan's reconstructed task draws attention to the value of enriching curriculum by drawing on orality, poetry, and art in Middle

Eastern Arab community. Jehan noted, "ممكن أضيف أغاني يعني هذا الشيء مرتبط بثقافة البلد وتراثها / I could add songs like it is part of the city's cultural heritage." Similarly, Maryam suggested taking the class somewhere in the open air, the library or even somewhere outside campus. However, Maryam recognized the restrictions that are placed on teachers which restrict their ability to take decisions such as meeting outside for class. She argued, " يعني كأستاذة، انت أكيد ما راح تقدري تقولي لطلابك يلا اليوم قابلوني في مكان برا الجامعة لدرسنا / of course, as a teacher, you cannot ask your students to come meet you in a place outside classroom to teach them" which goes against their desire for a more expansive, place based (Grunwald, 2003; Hackett et al., 2022) type of learning where the boundaries between community and school are blurred. For example, students wanted to write about their hopes and dreams, researching problems in their community, environments, and cultural geographies. Yet, they are faced with a learning environment that focuses solely on textbooks; neglecting the opportunities that exist in their locales for a more engaged, and place-responsive learning.

To sum up, this theme explored participating students' construction of engaged fun learning which connects with their ecologies of communities (in person vs. cyber space), locales, cultures, and histories. For them, engaged learning meant connecting concepts to their own contexts and mobilizing more agentive roles to describe their desired roles.

Alignments between students' theorizing their desired learning and task redesign

This theme discusses how students theorized their own learning by highlighting the alignments between students' theorizations and how they approached task redesign. This theme draws heavily on data generated in the third interview where students were asked to bring an artefact from the EFL curriculum, critique it, and redesign it. Additionally, the discussion

includes drawing on participants' own understanding of the challenges they face with traditional pedagogy and how it positions students.

As I engaged in analyzing data, I noticed how students' own perception of their desired learning aligned with the way they approach task redesign in the third interview. For example, Maryam brought in her speaking task to discuss with me. The speaking task revolved around presenting a story about a challenging time in your life. Maryam decided to use a podcast format and opted to design her presentation with another classmate. She shared how she felt about the traditional presentation format, adding, " ما أحب أوقف قدام الكل وأتكلم، عشان كذا فكرة اني أعمل بودكاست مع زميلتي ونتكلم كمقابلة، مريحة أكثر عشان أركز على الانسان اللي قدامي. / I don't like standing in front of everyone to talk, that's why I find the podcast idea more comforting because I could focus on the person in front of me." As we discussed what she would change about the task, she decided to keep it as a podcast, yet engaged the audience in question-and-answer session, and through interactive games. Maryam has repeated over the three interviews that for her " التعلم بالنسبة لي يعني تفاعل / learning, to me, means engagement." Including the audience as an integral part of discussions shows the value Maryam places on engagement.

Moreover, Rita brought in her writing assignment which centered around writing about an influential personality. In this writing task, students were asked to work in groups and write about someone that influenced their personal development. Rita chose to, instead of writing in traditional format, turn this essay into a short video. When I asked her about the chosen format, she said, "يساعد أكثر بتوصيل الرسالة / it helps in delivering the message." The short documentary involved the retelling of a story of a philanthropic figure that adds to the richness of students learning. The final message that Rita would like to generate is that "ما في شيء مستحيل / nothing is impossible." In choosing to deliver such a final message, Rita aligns her definition of learning,

which is wedded to the importance of changing one's behavior by learning. For Rita, learning is about " تلقي المعرفة والقيم وكمان طبعا يؤدي إلى تغير في السلوك/ receiving knowledge, values, and principles that lead to change in behavior, of course." She states, " الواحد من يوم هو طفل يتلقى المعلومات، كل حاجة تقريبا يتعلمها عشان يعرف الصح من الغلط / since you are a kid, everything you learn helps you so you could tell right from wrong" which assumes a central role in the spiritual development of a learner.

Similarly, Jehan's conception of good teaching transcended the pre-imposed limits on heavily structured curricula. When Jehan came for the third interview, she brought along her speaking task in which she discussed food culture in Belgium. Her rendition of learning included working on a video vlog, as a form of investigative documentary, in which complex sociological phenomena are explored to generate a desired, and relational learning. Jehan explained, " لما يصير عندنا فرصة نتكلم عن أشياء بنشوفها حولنا بمجتمعنا، أكيد راح أكون متحمسة أشارك / when we get the opportunity to discuss things that we see around us in our communities, of course I will be excited to engage." Stressing the importance of relational learning in the desired learning by stressing the role of learning within one's own ecologies of culture, histories, and communities. I asked Jehan, what possible places and phenomena she would like to explore within EFL curriculum. She responded, " أنا دايما عندي فضول تجاه المغاتير / I always been fascinated with the phenomenon of /El mghatir/" (women who wear face-covering, traditionally worn outside the house, even at home with their husbands and families). In such a case, Jehan was drawing on her own understanding of local sociological complex concepts to develop an investigative documentary about social phenomenon related of their daily realities.

Students' desired learning suggests an underlying desire for agentive roles for learners. For example, students, like Maryam, asserted the value of being actively engaged in learning.

For Maryam that meant engaging students in material selection. For Jehan, this meant playing the teacher's role occasionally. Jehan said, " أحس. يعني نقدر مثلا نخلي الطالبات يقوموا بدور الأستاذة مرات / هذا الشيء بيختبر فهمنا وبنفس الوقت يغير روتين الكلاس / I mean, we can for example have students teach the class sometimes. I feel like this will help in testing our knowledge and at the same time changes the routine." However, the mandated curriculum does not create opportunities for students to exercise autonomy over their learning, forcing them to assume a passive role in their own learning. Mona reflected on her role in the process of learning as I encouraged her to consider alternative roles that learners can occupy in classrooms. Mona stated, " ما أحب كيف انه بالكلاس احنا بس جالسين نسمع للمحاضرة. مو بس أنا، حتى بيني أنا وزميلاتي تناقشنا بهذه النقطة وكان نفسي اننا نكلمها بس بطلنا / I don't like that we just there and listen to the lecture. It's not just me, I discussed this before with my classmates and I wanted to speak to her, but I didn't." When I asked her why? she shared her reluctance to approach her teachers with critiques because she did not think it was her place as a student to tell the teacher how she would work. While course evaluations work traditionally to provide retroactive quality measure, they are insufficient alone in improving the learning experience for current students. Fostering dialogic spaces starts by cultivating a shared responsibility for learning where students can feel comfortable enough to ask their teacher for additional practice, feedback, etc. especially with underutilized classroom hours. Reflecting on Mona's reluctance to share her concerns with her own teachers, I started questioning, why would students hesitate to ask for help? Is it the intimidating authoritarian image of a traditional professor that some teachers exude? is it a misconception on Mona's part in understanding her role as a student? or is it a mix of both? Rahaf reflected on the restrictions placed on learners' roles in traditional pedagogy and how it fosters learner's dependency on teachers:

لو على طريقة التعليم المفضلة، أنا بقولك أني أنا ترى حب التلقي لأن هذا اللي تعودت عليه. أنا ما أقول لك أنا إنسان كده بس هذا اللي انبنى فيني. بس أنا أساسا شخصية متلقية، ولكن لو كنت من يومي صغيرة تعلمت كيف إني أبحث عن المعلومة، انبنت هذي بشخصيتي بحيث أني أعرف أبحث عن المعلومة نفسها، ترا هذا كله يبني.

If it was about my preferred learning method, I will tell you that I like to receive because that's what I was taught to do. I'm not telling you I am like this but that's what has been built into me. I am a person who likes to receive but if I was taught how to look for information since I was a kid and had that built into my character so that I could go and look for information myself, that all can be built.

Rahaf, Third Interview

Similarly, Jehan paints a picture of a quiet and disengaged classrooms which inform our understanding of the roles and possibilities afforded to students: " معظم الأحيان، الكلاس يكون هادئ مرة ومحد يتكلم الا نادرا. الأستاذة تحاول مرات تخلي الكلاس يتفاعل بس يمكن لو تعلمنا باستراتيجيات تفاعلية أكثر بيتحسن الوضع / most of the time, the class is super quiet, and no one talks unless in some rare occasions, the teacher tries to make students more engaged but maybe if she teaches us using more collaborative strategies, it will improve." Students' statements on the role of traditional pedagogy in creating barriers against engaging in dialogue are supported by Yahya (2013), who attributed learner's anxiety to the dominance of traditional pedagogy. Here, during the third interview with Jehan, I found myself stopping a lot and giving Jehan time to sit with her thoughts before fully articulating them. She asked me if she could use a notepad to brainstorm ideas and I agreed. This difficulty in communicating their reiterations of institutionalized curriculum suggest the lack of opportunities students are offered to be involved in decision-making processes around their learning. This hunch I had was confirmed by Jehan as we concluded the interview, she remarked, " أحس نحتاج جلسات زي كذا عشان نفكر خارج البوكس / I think we need more of these sessions to help us

get out of the box." In fact, Hanadi, a participating teacher highlighted the constricted autonomy learners because as students "no one has ever asked students, Okay guys, what do you want to learn this semester?" Hanadi's statement underscores the insufficiency of end of semester surveys as a feedback mechanism and a call to engage students' voices actively, rather than, retroactively.

To sum up, while students' re-imagination of institutionalized curriculum involves varied and engaged roles in their own constructed desired learning, students' own account of previous learning included a passive construction of their roles as learners. However, I argued that such passive constructions are places that students were forced to occupy within traditional pedagogical approaches (teacher-led) and due to the lack of opportunities students are afforded to engage in curricular decision-making. The potentials of exploring the alignment between how students theorize their own learning versus how they approach task redesign informs our understanding EFL curriculum. In tracing how students discussed their desired learning, I was able to draw on what constituted a desired learning and how students developed it.

Themes for Teachers

In this section, I highlight the generated themes through my engagement with the teacher's data separately. Two main themes were generated addressing 1) the limitations placed on teacher's agency and how teachers carved up room to exercise their agency, and 2) how participating teachers they foregrounded their notion of change in curriculum by decentralizing textbooks as the sole source of learning.

Teachers' agency over curriculum: some wiggle room

This theme addresses the limitations on teacher's agency in curriculum development and the opportunities that exist in creating more space for their participation. Additionally, this theme

discusses the suggestions put forward by teachers to ensure the inclusion of their voices as stakeholders in the process of curriculum development.

Hanadi acknowledges that teachers are operating within an existing power structure that forces them into the role of implementer. Hanadi states, "the curriculum is always organized by … policymakers. But the curriculum is about the person who teaches it. Right? And the students will learn it. So, where is our opinion?" Hanadi's statement problematizes the lack of inclusion of teachers and student voices under the curriculum development processes (Alnefaie, 2016). Further, a contributing influence that seems to restrict teacher's agency is the overreliance on textbook as a single source of curriculum that is commonly practiced in Saudi EFL classrooms (Qahtani, 2019; Alghamdi, 2021). Hanadi reflected on how students are forced to "spend the time between pages, but I have to cover those pages with my students because the syllabus is built around it" which further disenfranchises learners and constricts teacher's agency. Hanadi encouraged teachers to draw on students' voices in their pedagogical approaches. She states, "I think as an educator, it is important for me that I give my students the space to be creative during class because it changes the routine for them." Undergirding Hanadi's statement is a recognition of the value of change when anchored in students' needs.

Additionally, a contributing influence on the restrictions placed on teacher's agency is the rigidly structured nature of the course design. Randa explains, "I think part of the curriculum and this part is mainly ungraded meet the student needs, prepare them for the life occasions, um, prepare them for their future professions." Here, tensions arise between how the course is graded and how it is enacted. Randa believed that non-graded assignments are meeting students' needs. However, despite catering to students' needs, these non-graded assignments remain peripheral to the course because they do not count towards students' grades. Randa argued that "the more

meaningful activities are not graded. So, we as teachers, we find ourselves in this struggle. Where do we focus more on?" Further, the mandated course time-frame forces teachers to expedite their teaching to chase after moving learning objectives irrespective of students' needs. Hanadi explained, "sometimes I wouldn't have time to address fully students' needs because I have to sort of, finish a certain part and grade it and submit it to the course coordinators." The previous questions are critical to consider in the face of limitations on teachers' agency and the implication it has on learner's needs.

While teachers highlighted the constrictions placed on their agency, they strove to recognize the value in creating spaces to exercise their own agency. Nehad believed that teachers can bring "a sense of freedom to the materials taught" by exploring options that are "less focused on rules and structures" and more "personally relevant to students." Nehad's notion of agency is constructed by drawing on moments where teachers establish relevance to "students' culture, age and interests". However, the assumption about the singularity and homogeneity of students' experiences is reflected in Nehad's use of "students' culture, and age". A singular use of "culture and age" assumes a homogenous view of students' experiences, which is an assumption that neither data sets, in this study, nor theorization of students' voice*(s)* (Cook-Sather, 2007) support. For example, students come to this program with varying level of competence and to assume a homogeneity of unaccounted for experiences is akin to reproducing power structures that led to the marginalization of students' voices in the first place. Further, even though participating students lived in the same city and traveled varying degrees of distance to campus does not mean they shared a homogenous cultural context. For example, Mona stressed the importance of her online gaming community as a motivation behind learning the language. Additionally, African, Southeast Asian, and South Asian migration patterns enriched the cultural

texture of the Hijaz region, where the study is situated (Al Essa, 2009). Each group brings with it a set of worldviews, linguistic, and cultural features that should be drawn upon as funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, et al. 1995; Moll et al.,1992). Recognizing the heterogeneity of students' experiences, ethnic backgrounds, cultural and subcultural affiliations should be treated as an asset for learning. Similarly, Randa highlighted the opportunities created by exploiting the extra time remaining in class and asking students "so, what do you need to learn?" While Randa has built her notion of change around catering to students' needs by asking them about what they needed to learn, others, like Farah and Rabia stressed the value of engaging students in games and creative opportunities to learn.

Further, participating teachers highlighted the need for including their voices in the process of developing and evaluating curriculum. Nehad, for example, expressed the need to have an end of the year meeting with policymakers to discuss teachers' views on curriculum implementation, development, and evaluation. She explained, "I would love if we could hold end of semester meeting or even end of year, where we could evaluate the implementation of curriculum, and make recommendations to the department." Here, Hanadi interjected and stressed that teachers should, in turn, include students in the process too. Hanadi stated, "I would also ask teachers to include students' voices in curriculum." However, Hanadi did not provide mechanisms through which the inclusion of student voices can be insured in the process of implementing, developing, and evaluating curriculum. This suggests a greater need to focus on uplifting and including students' voices as stakeholders because of the lack of conceptualization of how students' voice work in a deeply and overly structured learning spaces.

Randa suggested the need to form an informal community of practice or *CoP* (Wegner & Nücklas, 2015) by teachers to reflect on their enactment, development, and evaluation of

curriculum. Randa stated, "I think we could come together informally to discuss and reflect on our pedagogical approaches." Absent from Randa's suggestion is the focus on integrating the voices of students as part of the community of practice, in turn, suggesting the teacher-fronted nature of learning in Saudi classrooms (Alghamdi, 2021). Hanadi echoed the need for such a community that brings teachers together to reflect on their practice. Hanadi asserted, "if we have such a focus group every end of year and then come up with all the ideas introduce them in the curriculum in the next year, we'll do just fine". Yet, for a CoP to thrive, thinking together in a space of mutual engagement and learning amongst all stakeholders is demonstrated as necessary in (Pyrko et al., 2019). While students' voices are essential component of the much-needed community of practice, the mechanisms through which these voices are recruited, organized, and represented need to be carefully outlined, to reflect the heterogeneity of students' experiences and prevent the tokenization of students' voices (Fielding, 2004).

To sum up, while participating teachers discussed the restrictions placed on their practice, they highlighted how they created a space to exercise their agency. These created spaces catered for students' needs, and for the creation of spaces for engaged learning. Additionally, this theme discussed the value of creating CoPs of learning where teachers and students evaluate curricular decision processes.

Decentralizing textbooks as the sole source of learning

This theme addresses teacher's understanding of the limitations of textbook-oriented approaches to teaching, how it limits their agency in class, and how teachers theorized alternatives to decentralize textbooks as the single source of learning.

Teachers, like Nehad, for example, critiqued the limitation being placed on textbook dominated curriculum because "no matter how good a textbook is, there will be some sort of

limitation", she asserted. One of the major limitations of the textbook used in the course is that it has been used for over 5 years now. To change a textbook every year is expensive. Nehad goes on to explain how the overuse of the same mandated textbook manifests in the curriculum enactment at the English language institute,

> They have answer key for all the exercises so when you're teaching …, let us say the grammar part, and you do the exercise with them, just to make sure that they understand, and you know apply what they learned, they already have the answers in hand. So, you cannot make sure that they are answering the exercises themselves. They are not of course applying. Well, so as a teacher you do not enforce the learning.
>
> *Nehad, Teacher's Focus Group Discussion*

Rabia, Randa, and Hanadi all agreed that they faced a similar issue in their classrooms. I believe that it is expected that students will be more concerned about grading than actual learning because of the profound implications that the grades have for choosing a major which influences subsequent career choices. Participating teachers, however, engaged in creating spaces to decentralize textbooks as the sole source of learning by drawing on external materials just "to make sure that the students, you know, are learning and they understood what I am covering" Nehad asserts. In this vein, teacher's draw on their own developed materials or outsourced materials to assess the learning. Additionally, for Randa, the problem of overusing the same textbook over a period of approximately five years produces students who are only proficient in what is in the textbook and in exams, they underperform. Randa stated, "there is something wrong here when students participate in class yet get 9 out 20 in their midterm". Randa's assertion speaks to the limitations of overusing the same textbook which influences students' performance.

Participating teacher's agreement on the limitations of overused textbooks raised an interesting opportunity to ask them in the focus group discussion about how they would do curriculum differently. Here, the responses varied in scope. For a teacher like Nehad that meant giving the teachers an outline for the objectives of the course and the general topics they need to cover with their students, "ask[ing] teachers to bring their own materials" and "monitoring the implementation process." Randa expressed total agreement with what Nehad suggested. For Hanadi, doing curriculum differently means drawing a distinction between teaching students how to use the language rather than focusing on teaching content. Hanadi argued, "I think at the end of the day, I try to focus on how my students can use the language in the real world. I cannot just teach my students content and expect them to just follow this content like memorize it." On the other hand, Farah and Rabia expressed their contentment with the textbook; stressing the engaging flipped learning component which enhances students' own learning.

Reflecting on the variety of positions constructed by teachers, I was able to glean how teachers positioned their role in the process of material selection. Through omittance and centralizing teacher's role in material selection and generation, Randa and Nehad did not consider students' voices suggesting a lack of consideration of students' voices in the process of material selection/generation. Such omittance, whether deliberate or not, raises questions about how participating teachers view their own roles. Exploring this question would help in deepening our understanding of the undergirding assumptions about the role of learners and teachers in EFL classrooms in Saudi. Additionally, Hanadi presented a more student-empowering approach to curriculum re-doing. Hanadi reflected, "I always leave time after we covered the materials to ask students, what do you need to learn? Nobody ever asked us that question when we were

students." Her approach drew on the needs of students to offset the limitations placed by the overused, and pre-packaged curricula.

To sum up, teachers advocated for decentralizing textbooks as the sole focus of instruction and discussed the limitations placed on learning by overusing the same textbook over an extended period of approximately 5 years. This theme also shed light on how most participating teacher's, except for Hanadi, articulation of curriculum-redoing failed to carve space for students' voices which, in turn, suggests the dominance of teacher-centric approaches to teaching and learning.

Themes shared across groups

In this section, I introduce themes that were generated by excavating the entire dataset. The themes discussed participants' understanding of the common problem students face with writing, their perception of enacted EFL curriculum, and how other mothering shapes the relationship between students and teachers in women-only campuses.

Writing instruction: The root of the struggle

This theme discusses teachers' and students' understanding of the problem of writing as a common problem that EFL students face. Teachers and students suggested that the lack of emphasis on writing instruction in K-12 schooling, limitations on how writing instructions are constructed, the view of writing as a product (skill-based) as opposed to a process as contributing to the students' struggle with writing.

Writing in this course is limited to scripted topics, such as writing an informal versus formal emails, a descriptive paragraph, and opinion essay. Students expressed their need for more free-writing sessions beyond the scripted tasks. Mona, for example, asserted the need for more free-writing exercises since '' الكتاب ما يحتاج ٤ ساعات كل يوم عشان نخلصه، يعني تقدر الأستاذة تخلينا

نكتب عن أي شيء / the textbook does not need 4 hours every day to cover it, we can do more writing. Like the teacher can ask us to write about whatever." Similarly, Rahaf believed that extensive reading must be done in tandem with writing tasks. Rahaf recounted how her English private tutor helped her overcome her struggle with writing. " كانت تخليني اقرأ قصص وألخصها بطريقتي. she used to have me read short / لما أكتب القصص كانت تطلب مني أغير في نهايتها أو أحداثها بطريقة كرييتڤ stories and summarize it in my own way. When I write the story, she would ask me to change some of the ending or the events in a creative way." Rahaf's experience inside classrooms did not emphasize such a creative spirit in writing and focused on scripted topics. Similarly, Jehan the professor / المفروض الأستاذة تعطينا مقالات أو كتب نقرأها عشان نستكشف أنواع مختلفة من الكتابة " ,asserted could give us an article or a book to read about so we can explore different ways of writing." While all participating students attributed their struggle with writing to how writing tasks are structured in the course, Jumana added that basic literacy skills like reading and writing were never emphasized in her K-12 schooling. She added that most students develop basic reading and writing skills in early grades. However, Jumana argued that, in high school writing is clearly underemphasized both in Arabic and English stating, " والله شوفي أنا ما أعتقد انه كان في تركيز على الكتابة بشكل عام في المدارس بالذات في الثانوي لا بالعربي ولا بالإنجليزي. أحس كنا غالبا بس نتكلم، نشارك، نجاوب بس ما نكتب كثير. / Look, I do not think that writing was emphasized generally in schools, especially in high school, not English nor Arabic. I feel like we would always speak, participate, answer questions but we do not write a lot." For Jumana, that manifested into a struggle with even basic skills like spelling, she said, "أنا كذا أكتب الكلمات زي ما أنطقها في اللغتين / I write the word as I sound them out, in both languages." Therefore, participating students' construction of their experience with writing suggests limited pre-scripted topics, lack of free-writing exercises, and the need for more extensive reading and writing as a catalyst for improving students' composition.

Participating teachers agreed that writing is one of the most challenging areas for their students to develop. Rabia shared that students are unwilling to express themselves in writing. "In terms of writing, most of the students, first of all, they are not, … willing to express themselves in words on the paper", she asserted. Rabia stated that students "do not have the will to write" which reflects a deficit view of students' abilities. Instead, a good question to ask is, what other ways may help turn this disenchantment to excitement and fun? Randa and Hanadi offered a different explanation for students' lack of enthusiasm about writing. They believed that Saudi students never learned how to express their thoughts and feelings in writing. For Randa, whose graduate training revolved around studying composition and writing instructions, students' struggle with writing seemed to stem from two closely related reasons: first, the common characterization of writing as a product versus process, and second, neglecting the potentials of writing as a vehicle of self-expression. From Randa's reflection on teaching writing and composition, students' approach to writing seemed almost too mechanical where "they count the words" to meet the requirements of the task. Participating teachers, such as Farah and Hanadi, shared a similar view of students' approach to writing as a finished product. Randa explained the prevalence of product-oriented approaches to writing by drawing from her own experience as a doctoral researcher. Randa wrote,

> As an English learner, I have always felt that I do not know how to write in English and this feeling grow up with me as an instructor. I have always felt that I need to work on my English writing and improve it in any possible way. As an ESL student, I was too shy to ask for help. But when I moved to the US, I decided to practice my writing as much as I can and seek help. I asked for help at the writing center, asked my peers to review my

papers, or even my professors there. Now, I feel like my students need to understand that writing is an ongoing process.

Randa's Teacher's Reflection Form

Perhaps nowhere is Randa's point clearer than in the case of Maryam who shared that " ما في عندنا كتابة كثير. أحس يعني نقضي وقتنا نتعلم كيف نكتب وتركيب الجمل بس ما بنكتب فعليا أشياء كثير / we do not write a lot. I mean, like, we spend most of the time learning how to write and sentence structures, but we do not actually write a lot." This raises questions about how writing tasks are constructed and approached. If most of the instruction focused on "how to write" or the mechanical aspect of writing, then, one must wonder about the creative aspect of writing.

Randa's second point about writing as a vehicle of self-expression can be seen in her experience teaching opinion essays. Randa shared that many times during the course, she found that students did not express their opinions in their essays. Rather, they would go and gather information about the topic of the essay and write such facts. Randa stated,

> I believe that the way that writing is taught and K-12 schools in Saudi's contributes to the problem because now I am working with students on an opinion essay, I noticed when grading the papers that students rarely expressed their opinions in these essays. When I asked them if they understood what an opinion meant, they clearly understood it, but they did not share their opinions in the essay. We wrote about the users experience with iPhones, and I asked them to reflect on their own experiences and write an essay about it; that discusses whatever aspect of their own experience. However, when I got the essays back, I noticed that the students went on to research basic information about the design of the iPhone, the year it was released, and some basic information about the device. What

was missing from these essays was the student's own voice and the student's own experiences.

<div align="right">*Randa's Written Reflection Form*</div>

Similarly, Hanadi reflected on students' struggle with writing and attributed their struggle to lack of emphasis on writing instructions in K-12 schooling. Hanadi argued that "we were never taught the right way to put our thoughts in words and express our feelings regardless of the language we are using". Hanadi's use of "we" suggests that both instructors, especially Saudi nationals who studied and obtained their training in Saudi Arabia, and learners struggled with writing at some point. This is supported by Randa's reflection on how she, as a language instructor, struggled with writing when she arrived at the United States for her graduate training. Further, Nehad argued that students need the "opportunity to write more" and "make new different mistakes" students could learn from. Such emphasis on affording students more practice in writing suggests a dissatisfaction with how writing is structured in the course.

To sum up, while participating teachers and students agreed in their discussions that writing is the most challenging skill, both groups offered different explanations for the issue. For students, the issue stems from the lack of ample practice in writing. For teachers, the issue of writing stems from how writing is structured in the course and the theoretical divide between product-oriented vs. process-oriented approaches to writing instructions. Both groups, however, agreed that the lack of emphasis in K-12 schooling on writing instruction contributed to students' own struggle with writing.

Perceptions of enacted curriculum: helpful, yet not enough

This theme addresses teachers' and students' perception of the enacted curriculum. Both students and teachers found aspects of the curriculum to be helpful and remedial. This theme also

addresses some of the shortcomings of the course such as lack of placement testing which have a negative influence on the learner's experience in the course. Additionally, discussions generated around the extensive nature of the course concluded that time could be used more effectively.

Repetitiveness was discussed by students as a double-edged sword. Participating students highlighted their concerns about the sheer repetitiveness of themes in EFL textbooks. However, they found contextualized grammar instructions to be especially remedial and helpful. For Mona, the repetitiveness of themes demotivated her from paying attention and learning in class. Mona reflected, "صرت أحفظ ولا أهتم بالمعلومات كثير يمكن عشان كذا ما تثبت بمخي عشان كله كله نفس الشيء. نفس القصة. / I started to memorize and not care about the information that is why it does not stick because it is the same thing, same story." Similarly, Rita argued that the overall structure of the course is like English classes in high school with little to no additions. Therefore, Rita wished for more complexity that would break the cycle of repetitive themes and enrich their learning. Rita said, "احنا بنأخذ نفس المناهج اللي أخذناها بالمتوسط والثانوي بس اللهم زادوا عليها شوية أشياء. بس ليش ما يخلوها أعمق من كذا؟ / We are studying the same stuff we have been studying in middle and secondary school EFL except with minor additions. Why do not they make it more complex? We can do more than this." Nehad, a participating teacher, shared that throughout her career she taught different courses but they almost always "follow the same patterns" where language skills are taught in isolation, reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Yet, repetition sometimes is referred to by students as helpful and remedial as in the case of contextualized grammar instructions. Both Jehan and Maryam agreed that the contextualization of grammar helped them in remedying the decontextualization of grammar instructions commonly practiced in K-12 settings. Jehan believed that she is benefitting from this course. Even though she could take IELTS and score 5 which will help her in waving the English course requirements, she said that she would prefer to

keep taking English because it is "الكورس يساعدني في اني اعوض بعض الأشياء اللي فوتتها في المتوسطة

والثانوية من ناحية الإنجليزي / helping me catch up on what I missed in middle school and high school

English." Whereas the remedial nature of the course is acknowledged in students' accounts, it

makes me wonder about the expectations placed on students. Students, especially those who are

majoring in STEM related fields, are expected to study their subjects via English as a medium of

instruction (EMI). Nehad, a participating teacher, stated, "the goal of the course is to equip them

with general English" so they can go to the respective departments with a deeper understanding

of general English. Nehad's statement raises questions about the alignment between the course

stated goals and the learner's goals for their own learning. Such misalignment becomes

problematic in an overly structured course since teachers, such as Randa, shared that the

structure of the course restricts her ability to respond to her students' needs. Randa stated, "we

are bound by a time frame to submit grades to course coordinators" which requires teachers to

adhere to a pacing guide.

Additionally, participating students discussed lack of placement testing as one of the

major shortcomings of the course. Students are placed in their level depending on their track. If

they are studying in humanities track, students will start with level 100 and move to 101.

Similarly, if they are studying in science track, students will start with level 101 and move to

102. Jumana shared her confusion about whether she fits into her assigned level because "مرات

أحس اني قاعدة أتعلم أشياء جديدة ومرات أحسه مرة سهل. حتى أستاذاتي يقولوا لنا انتو مستواكم أحسن من كذا /

sometimes I feel like I am learning new things, sometimes I feel like it is too easy. Even our

professors say that we are above this level." Similarly, Rahaf argued that she was placed

"randomly" in a level that does not match her ability level. Therefore, she was demotivated by

the disconnect between her proficiency level and the course content; leading her to drop from the

university and enroll in English language immersion program in the UK for 4 months. Additionally, Jumana recounted incidents in class where her classmates were confused over basic information such as the use of capital versus small letters. Jumana stated, "كانوا قاعدين يفكروا وهما يكتبوا الحروف السمول والكابيتل. بعد أسبوعين، واجهتني حاجة بسيطة ما عرفتها وهذا الشيء خلاني أفكر كيف انه كل أحد مختلف وكل معلمة عندها طريقة شرح مختلفة /they were thinking as they were writing these capital and small letters. After two weeks, I encountered something basic that I did not know and that got me thinking about how everyone is different and how every teacher had a different way of teaching." Jumana argued in favor of placement testing, even at the classroom level. Jumana stated, "يعني مو لازم القسم نفسه يسوي الاختبار، الأستاذة تقدر تختبر طالباتها عشان تعرف مستواهم وتساعدهم. / The department does not have to do a placement test; the teacher can do that to test her students' knowledge and help them." The lack of placement testing becomes highly problematic as teachers encounter students with varying proficiency levels, learning profiles, needs, and interests. When students are funneled into these classrooms only based on their track, the course structure fails to accommodate critical aspects of the learner's needs, interests, prior learning experiences, and future goals.

Lastly, participating students and teachers discussed the extensive nature of the course. Students spend 4 hours and a half, four days a week to study English in this course. While all participating students and teachers have expressed their concerns over the mental fatigue resulting from staying in class for 4.5 hours for 4 days a week, however, the extensive nature of the course was also used to justify catering for students needs and interests.

The range of negative emotions expressed by both groups about the extensive instruction time were tied to issues such as mental fatigue, burnout, and long commute for those who live far off campus. When it comes to staying in class for long hours, Jehan notes, "بس تكوني جالسة وتسمعي

تسمعي، تسمعي، تسمعي، خاصة بالساعة الأخيرة، ما تقدري تشاركي لأنه مخك قاعد يقفل / you just sit there, listen, listen, and listen. Especially in the last hour you cannot even participate because your brain is shutting off." Similarly, Rita noted the influence of spending approximately 4 hours a day " نقعد بس نحل تمارين / sitting and working on exercises" which she stated, "مرة متعب/is very draining." Additionally, Mona noted that the materials do not require this intensive time to be covered which leaves, in Mona's case, a lot of unutilized instruction time; leading students to " الكتاب المقرر مو صعب وما أظن انه يحتاج مننا ٤ ساعات يوميا. اللي يصير اننا بنهاية الكلاس نقعد جالسين نستنى متى الوقت يخلص عشان نمشي / the textbook is not that complicated. I do not think it needs 4 hours of instructions a day. What happens is that we just sit around waiting for time to pass so we can leave." One could see from the previous statement the influence of teaching style on how students experience instruction time. For Jehan, listening for a lecture for 4 hours leads her brain to shut off. Here, listening to a lecture suggests the dominance of lecture-based teaching which negatively influences learner's level of engagement. Similarly, for Rita and Mona, the confinement of learning to textbooks for 4 hours made the class feel "متعب / draining" and " ممل / boring", respectively.

However, differences in teaching style influence students' engagement with class and materials despite the extensive instruction time. Maryam highlighted how her teacher's engaging approach to teaching makes the "الأربعة ساعات تروح بسرعة /4 hours go by so fast". Additionally, students invoked the extensive instruction time to argue for more practice in areas where they needed improvement, like speaking and writing. Mona noted, " لو يعطوا وقت لكل طالبة، بس عشان تتعود على ممارسة اللغة / if they assign a certain time for each student … just so this student can get used to speaking the language." Rita, on the other hand, proposed that a hybrid-modality is adopted seeing how well it worked during Covid-19. " أحس راح يكون افضل لو كان الكلاس مقسم جزء أونلاين وجزء

بالفصل زي أيام كوفيد عشان يكون عندي وقت أدرس/ I feel like it would best if the class is hybrid, some classes are offered online and some in class. Just like Covid-19 days so I can have time to study." Rita's suggestion provided a way to mitigate the influence of extensive instruction time on commuters like Maryam who commutes from Mecca to Jeddah daily.

To sum up, this theme discussed the teachers and students' perceptions of enacted EFL curriculum. While aspects such as contextualized grammar instructions were deemed remedial, few issues needed more attention such as the repetitiveness of themes, the lack of placement testing and how it influences learning inside classrooms, and the influence of teaching style on learner's engagement during the extensive instruction time.

Abla-mothering: cultivating empathic classrooms in women's-only educational spaces

This theme foregrounds the relationship between teachers and students in the notion of Muslim mothering (Pappano & Olwan, 2016). Upal (2005) defines mothering, from an Islamic perspective, as not only limited to a biological function of childbearing but encompasses the spiritual, emotional, and compassionate care extended to others beyond the biological ties. Muslim mothering is developed to challenge the western gaze that views Muslim women as disengaged, obedient, and faceless (Sinno, 2016). This theme sheds light on the caregiving practices of Saudi women educators and how it shapes their interactions with students. Further, this theme discusses how mothering helps students engage in classrooms, and how teachers are responding to students' emotional investments by recognizing the emotional load of learning on students in the face of high-stakes prospects.

Here, mothering is connected to students' learning within and beyond classrooms. When Rita was recounting memories of her favorite teacher in school, she emphasized the deep

connection they had. Rita explained, "تسمع لنا / she listens to us" and "تخلينا نتكلم عن قصص من حياتنا /

she asks to share stories from our real life." Rita drew inspiration from teachers whom she

engaged with in less formal way. She stressed the importance of creating warm and empathic

sphere between teachers and students by favoring teachers who "تضحك معانا / laughs with us" and

show interest in their experiences. Rita went on to discuss what makes a good teacher,

لما أبلتك تكون مو بس معلمة، تكون أم بكل ما للكلمة من معنى وتحسسك انها معاك في كل شيء، هي كانت معانا قلبا

وقالبا في المدرسة وبرا المدرسة. كمان كانت مسؤولة عن التطوع فكنا دائما نروح معاها لدار المسنين والأيتام. ما

كانت معلمة انجليزي وبس. كانت كل شيء. مع انها درستني سنة وحدة بس لكن تركت بصمة على شخصيتي.

When your teacher makes you feel that she is not just a teacher, she is also a true mom,

and that she could be with you in everything. She was with us inside and out, whether in

school or outside. She was also in charge of volunteering. So, we were always taking part

in volunteering in senior houses and orphan's shelters. She was truly not just an English

teacher, she was everything. Although she taught me for one year only, but she left a very

visible mark on me.

Rita, First Interview

Here, Rita uses the term "أبلتك / your teacher" taken from the root "أبلة / Abla" in Hijazi

Arabic, the dialect spoken by participants, which in turn is derived from the Turkish word "*Abla*

/ older sister" (Gündüz, 2016). Curtis (2016) defined the role of "*Abla*" in Turkish communities

as women who work as a stand-in family member to meet the educational, moral, spiritual

demands of other women in their community. This sense of Muslim mothering found in previous

studies (Pappano & Olwan, 2016; Sinno, 2016; Upal, 2005) refers to the experiences of Muslim

women engaged in negotiating and reconstructing mothering within networked communities of

support. Here, the term *Abla*-mothering is used to refer to the caregiving practices and the ethos

guiding Saudi women teaching practices as sister-mothers through the lens of Muslim mothering. Referencing teachers as "*Abla*" reflects the role of a teacher as another "أم / mother", in Rita's words. Similarly, Mona spoke about her favorite teacher in school and how she developed intimate knowledge of the students, their likes, and dislikes. In a space of mutual learning, grows the recognition of the affordances of deep connections and mothering. Mona explained,

خلاص تحفظ البنت خلاص تعرف أنه أنا منى وإذا قلت أي شيء خلاص يعني تحفظه على طول. تتذكر أي حصة يعني تكلمنا وكذا فتتذكر شيء أنا قلته أول ولا تذكر شيء أنا فهي كذا تدقق فينا كلنا. فمرة يعني هذا الشيء كان حلو فيها. كانت هي اللي حببتني في العلوم، فما أنسى لها هذا الشيء أبدا.

> She would know the student. She would know me and know if I say anything, she will remember it immediately. She would remember what we talked about in each class, and she would remember something I said before, so she is very attentive to details about all her students and this is something I really liked about her. She made me love science, so I will never forget that.

> *Mona, Third Interview*

Focusing on "تتذكر / remember[ing]" and being "تدقق / attentive to details" suggests that Mona valued being seen. Developing an intimate knowledge of students' own needs, likes, and dislikes helped Mona feel "special" which fostered her love of science. Similarly, Jumana stressed the value of emotional support she receives from her teacher which is especially helpful in easing students' language learning anxieties. Jumana explained, " كانت دائما تقول لنا إذا لغتك ضعيفة، وما تفهمي، عادي إتز أوكي، أنا معاك، وراح أساعدك. يعني أحس ليش أقلق إذا هي معانا؟ / She would say that if your English is weak and you don't understand. it's ok, I'm with you and I will work with you. I would feel, like, why would I be nervous if she is with us?" Jumana's expression affirms the role that teachers play in cultivating classrooms as safe spaces for learners. Similarly, Rahaf

discussed the emotional support her teacher showed, fostering an empathic and caring learning

environment:

<div dir="rtl">

هي مهتمة فينا جدا جدا، ومهتمة بالطلاب، وتحاول تساعدنا قد ما تقدر وانا اعتقد لأنها حاسة فينا، وحاسة كيف احنا

متبهدلين بالمناهج، وكيف اننا ما نضيع درجة وما نقدر نضيع درجة، أصلا. يعني فعلا معتبرتنا زي بناتها، والله

يسعدها بتلاقي دعوات مننا.

</div>

> She is really caring, and she cares about the students and tries to help us as much as she
>
> can, and I believe she does that because she feels for us. She feels how we are really
>
> struggling, how we don't want to lose any marks. I mean, she really thinks of us as her
>
> own daughters and God bless her, we would always pray for her happiness.

Participating teachers were cognizant of the emotional load of learning on students in the

face of high-stake prospects. Teachers knew how important it is for students to perform well in

English because it could potentially risk a students' own chance of getting in their desired major.

It weighs much heavier in their GPA because of the high number of hours studied, 18 hours a

week. In fact, Randa shared her concerns over how the rubrics for writing are "too strict". In her

effort to ease students' fear, Randa decided to follow a looser interpretation of the rubric. She

said, "I worry for their grades too because I understand how sensitive this stage is." Nehad

suggested that teachers should foster empathic classrooms because the students' struggles are not

limited to language proficiency but involve dealing with "emotional challenges." Nehad wrote in

her reflection:

> Helping students with emotional challenges is a major role for an EFL teacher … as long
>
> as you put all your efforts towards the thriving of your students, you will always win.

Nehad Reflection Form

Here, Nehad emphasized the role of the teacher in cultivating spaces for her students to thrive and grow, describing the growth of learners as a rewarding experience. Additionally, Farah stated, "I appeal to their hearts first, then their minds. We laugh, we exchange smiles, and tell jokes, then I introduce the unit and the lesson with high vibes." Farah discussed the importance of fostering a holistic approach to learning where learner's hearts and minds are engaged.

To conclude, this theme highlighted how teachers' relationship with students fostered students' love of learning and supported them emotionally; therefore, shedding light on the uniqueness of relationship between teachers and students in women-only campuses. Also, this theme discussed how teachers responded to the emotional challenges that students face.

Researcher's Role in The Process of Data Generation

In the section, I discuss my own role in the generation of the data sets. I draw on incidents during interviews to highlight what techniques I used to elicit participants' responses, how participants responded to the use of such techniques, and highlight my own growth as a researcher over the course of data collection process.

One of the most challenging interviews I conducted was the third interview with students where students were asked to bring in a task, critique it, and redesign it. The third interview drew on students' own imagination. So, I had to find ways to engage their imagination which included role-playing, drawing on their own definition of learning, recalling stories about their favorite teacher and how they may inspire them. Here is an example of an exchange I had with Mona in the third interview:

منى: ممكن نفكر مع بعض؟ أحس بيساعدني كثير.

Mona: Can we brainstorm together? I feel like it would help me.

رحاب: أوكي، فكري بالمواضيع اللي تحبي تكتبي عنها.

Rihab: Ok, think about the topics you like to write about.

-Silence for 40 seconds-

رحاب: خلينا نفكر بمواضيع محتملة تكتبي عنها بهذا الأساينمنت وبعدين ممكن نخليه أعقد أكثر، انت قلت إنه سهل. ممكن نضيف عليه أشياء. هذي الخطوة الثانية. خلينا على الأولى الان.

Rihab: Let's brainstorm possible topics that you would like to write about for this assignment and then work on complexifying it, you said it was easy. We can add things to it. This is the second step, let's stick with the first step now.

منى: اممم، في شيء أحب أكتب عنه بس أحس انه -ابتسمت وبدت غير مستعدة لمشاركة فكرتها- ما أعرف لو بتكون مناسبة.

Mona: Uhmm, there is this thing that I like to write about, but I feel like [smiled and seemed hesitant to share] I just don't know if it will work.

رحاب: تقدري تقولي لي ونكمل نشتغل على الفكرة.

Rihab: You can tell me, and we can work to develop it.

In the first two lines in the previous exchange, when Mona felt stuck and asked me to brainstorm ideas with her, I hesitated for a second thinking that this might be biasing the data. I proceeded to tread carefully by using her own critiques of the task. By highlighting her own critiques of the task, I was trying to prompt her to think about turning the critique into valuable information that would inform her task designing process. Additionally, in line 7, the reader can see Mona hesitating to share her own thoughts. I have encountered the same issue with two other participants where I felt participants were self-censoring or hesitant to share their own ideas. In moments like these, I affirmed their voices, asked them to share opinions without fearing

judgement, and re-iterated that whatever perspective they bring is valuable because it speaks to their experience.

Additionally, over the course of the interviews with multiple students, I learned when and how deviation from interview protocol can bring richness to the data. For example, one of the interview questions included the phrase "you're asked to re-imagine curriculum" which was perplexing to students. I believe because the direct translation to Arabic of the word "re-imagine" is part of an academic writing discourse that students found it difficult to grasp. Instead, I started using the word "change" instead of "re-imagine". However, the word "change" is loaded with assumptions about what is being changed as "bad". With that awareness in mind, I started to tell participants that change does not necessarily mean that something is bad, I just want to know how you would conceptualize curriculum according to your own views. Further, I noticed that the word "curriculum" immediately triggered students to think about their textbook. Consequently, their answers largely centered issues relating to the textbook. I made sure we have a shared understanding of what constitutes curriculum which broadens the parameters of their proposed changes. I noted that curriculum includes teaching style, setting, time, resources both in class and outside class, previous learning experiences among other things. My intention was not to enforce my own understanding of curriculum on the participants, rather, broadening the parameters of curriculum helps them in generating broader, and potentially richer ideas, especially given the goal of the task at hand; to co-construct their understanding of curriculum.

In sum, locating the researcher in the process of generating data opens the researcher's processes to scrutiny; therefore, enhancing the quality of reporting in qualitative research. In this section, I highlighted my engagement with the participants and the techniques I used to generate the data.

Translation

In this section, I discuss the translation procedure that was implemented. Further, I discuss some of the challenges encountered in the process of translation. As initially proposed, I translated all students' interviews from Arabic to English, assuming the role of the forward translator. Then, I started searching for professional translation services in Saudi because participants mostly used Hijazi dialect, a sub-dialect of Arabic spoken the western region of Saudi alongside other dialects (Al Essa, 2009). Yet, after contacting three professional services, the price exceeded the budget I allocated for translation at least 3 times. My funding did not cover translation service fees, so I had to pay out of pocket. I decided to search for freelance translator online with established credentials and an online presence. I contacted a freelance translator online and sent over 10% of the documents to be translated. When I received the translated documents, I checked the first two pages and decided to check the rest later. Coming back to the document, I realized that the only readable part of that document was the first three pages. The rest seemed like an extremely hard to decipher AI translated version of the dataset. I contacted the translator but unfortunately could not get a response.

Instead, I decided to contact a critical friend, a fellow Saudi EFL educator, to check the translation. We met online to discuss her notes and thoughts. Our discussion did not generate any major discrepancies regarding translating data. Most of the notes my critical friend had pertained to restructuring few sentences to enhance readability in target language (English). However, some of the data I handed over to my critical friend contained excerpts from earlier interviews where I used the word "re-imagine" (discussed under the previous section). My critical friend noted that translation should also be sensitive to the participants' backgrounds. Her point is supported by Aloudah (2022) who called for verifying the appropriateness of interview guides

especially when they are developed based on English speaking literature. As stated in the previous section, through reflection on the first interview, I was able to utilize various strategies to engage participants in re-imagining curriculum without necessarily using the word "re-imagine". An imposition of English academic discourse could have seriously undermined the quality of the interview guide. Such an imposition is a reminder to researchers to remain reflexive and introspective while conducting interviews.

Ethical tensions and resolutions

The task of the narrative researcher is to engage in an ethically transparent form of inquiry. As such, my task was to stay vigilant of moments of ruptures, and tensions and how it influences the data sets. I observed such moments of tensions and ruptures during the data collection and analysis. In this section, I discuss these incidents and how I drew on my own understanding of the culture to resolve such tensions.

There were moments of tensions that posed an ethical challenge for me as an interviewer. In my first interview with Jumana, we were discussing her hopes and dreams. She shared with me how her family denied her the possibility of studying at a Culinary Arts school despite being able to financially afford it. Jumana grappled with why her family stopped her from pursuing her dreams once arguing that "because it was just a diploma", and later saying, "my dad thought I was being stubborn." Recounting that experience was difficult for Jumana as she tearfully said, "I am going to cry now." She reached out to the tissues box while maintaining a big smile and trying to remain calm. I could not find the words to console her. I offered to take a pause from the interview, but Jumana assured me that she can continue talking. Jumana remained hopeful and smiled saying, "the road is a little longer, but eventually, I hope I get there." In such moments of distress, I prioritized the emotional wellbeing of the participant by offering to take a

pause. Her hopeful attitude made navigating the situation easier for me and we moved on from discussing her hopes and dreams to a different topic.

In another tensioned moment, I had sat down to interview Maryam for the first time. She was quiet and reserved when I interviewed her for the first time; giving short answers without wandering too far from the point of the question. So, I had to prompt her to explicate some of her stories. The moment of tension unfolded when she started recounting her experience in a gifted school program in middle school. Maryam's experience with the gifted program ended in achieving a milestone which is working on a theoretical paper proposing a new way to test for Tuberculosis that does not involve the use of x-rays, rather, through breathing. Her paper was applauded for its potential, but Maryam lacked access to support. She did not know that she had to contact engineers, develop the device, test it, and report the results. I asked about why she did not think about developing it later, apart from the gifted school program. As I asked this question, I watched as Maryam's posture shifted from comfort to discomfort; from a relaxed posture to a visibly closed-off posture with her arms crossed over her chest. Maryam said, "I was letting my personal life affect my school and could not balance my personal life, mental health and schoolwork." Using phrases like "personal life" and "mental health" accompanied by her shifting and uncomfortable posture nudged me to stop probing any further because it is not customary to probe people when they use coded language in the Saudi culture, especially in contexts where you are meeting a person for the first time. Drawing on my inside knowledge of the culture helped me navigate the tension without running the risk of alienating her by asking too many intrusive questions.

Being an ethical narrative inquirer necessitates a treatment of ethical dilemmas as they are always in flux and cannot be predicted (Adams, 2008). My approach to both situations was

deeply committed to protecting participants from unnecessary stress and minimizing the risk of alienating them. Additionally, my own positionality as a researcher who shares a common culture with the participants proved a valuable resource.

Coda

In this chapter, journeying along Saudi women allowed me to explore the complex realities of their present and past educational experiences. The generated analytical narrative explored challenges arising from the how privilege operates in the lives of Saudi women, and their desires for meaningful and engaged learning. The overly determined nature of curriculum was discussed as restrictive to teachers' agency which in turn limit their ability to respond to students' needs. Further, students noted their struggle with writing in the course as stemming from various influences including the lack of emphasis on writing in K-12 EFL instructions, the lack of emphasis on free-writing, and the dependence of pre-scripted topics. Additionally, findings highlighted how teachers addressed students' needs by decentralizing textbooks as the sole source of learning. Moreover, the deep bond between students' and their teachers highlights the unique dynamic of student-teacher interactions in women-only colleges in Saudi Arabia. I discussed the analytical tools used to generate the themes, the different quality measures implemented in the study, and my own role in the study by drawing on the different techniques I used in the interviewing process. Further, I discussed the ethical dilemmas I encountered during the interviewing process and how I resolved it. In the next chapter, I continue to re-weave the threads of the generated analytical narrative into the literature surrounding EFL teaching and learning by drawing on issues from the local Saudi context and the global contexts.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, I start this chapter by reflecting on how thinking with stories (Clandinin, 2013) informed my research processes. In addition, I move to summarize the findings of the study and answering the study's questions. Then, I move to juxtapose the findings in relation to the literature. Here, I made a conscious choice to prioritize the body of literature that deals directly with the Saudi context; citing some western-based work as needed. This decision is based on my belief that the peculiarity of the Saudi context drives most of the underpinning issues faced in the educational context and thus, deserves to be attended to with a contextual understanding. Additionally, I discuss the implications of this study on a personal level, for teaching, policy, and research. Finally, I end this chapter by discussing the limitations of the current study, leaving openings for future research to tackle.

Thinking with stories

Storytelling works to deepen our understanding of the lived experience as "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). In narrative inquiry, the researcher begins their inquiry from a reflexive stance that is sensitive to the intricateness of the participants' experience (Clandinin, 2013). Here, I reflect on the importance of theorizing learning through stories of Saudi women teaching and learning EFL.

During my initiation into the teaching profession as an EFL teacher in Saudi Arabia, I wondered if I would make a good teacher. I remember going to my mother with my fears. She said, do you remember how your teachers taught you when you were a student? I nodded in affirmation. Then, just do what they did, and you will be fine, she replied. As my teaching experience progressed, I felt that emulating my previous teachers was not enough. In fact, most

of my previous teachers were either strict disciplinarians or maintained a largely detached

composure as they seemed interested in delivering knowledge only. The classes were largely

teacher-fronted and relied heavily on lecturing. Propelled by the desire (Ahmed, 2010) that is

defined as what is lacking and the energy that drives such desire, I sought stories as a site of

reconstructing and reconceiving of possible rearrangements of EFL curricular landscapes in

Saudi Arabia.

Collectively, the narratives of participants represent a meaning-making activity that

reflects the sociocultural contexts in which these stories are embedded (Bamberg, 2004). As

storied beings, our stories can reflect our own voices or can echoes the dominant cultural

narratives. We either accept the dominant narratives or author our own to exercise our agency.

The dominant narrative about Saudi EFL learners, in particular, positioned them as lacking in

organizational skills, procrastinators, do not take full responsibility for their learning

(Hershberger & Farber, 2008), and unmotivated (Alshammari, 2022). As a Saudi EFL teacher,

and a researcher, I wanted to give students the opportunity to co-construct their EFL learning

experience and co-author their own desired learning, away from the deficit positioning.

As I engaged with students in the study, I felt that they resisted, at least initially, claiming

the role of the teacher as they reconstructed learning tasks. Such resistance may be explained by

the lack of opportunities students are afforded to make decisions that directly intervene in their

learning. Yet, I gave them a space to think, and in some instances brainstorm or even draw from

previous learning experiences to inform their own thinking. As we shuttled back and forth,

reflection and deliberation became valuable tools to recast their narratives in a new light.

Additionally, Clandinin and Connelly (1990) argue that "deliberately storying and re-storying

one's life" is fundamental to "personal (and social) growth" (p. 5). As a researcher interested in

understanding the participants' experiences, I wanted to highlight the potentials of learning from students to disrupt the authority of knowledge that teachers, including myself, hold. Asking participating teachers to reflect on the narratives of learners provided an avenue for teachers to reflect on, and perhaps even modify, their pedagogical practices in response.

Summary of findings

In this summary of findings, I summarize findings in relation to the two main specific questions for this research study.

Specific r*esearch* q*uestion 1: Salient aspects of students' learning experiences*

Regressing into the past learning experiences (Pinar, 2004) of participating students, the finding of the study discussed the role of family support and access to good EFL schooling in facilitating students' experience in college. In discussing the role of family support, the study suggests that being materially privileged does not equate to having access to support in the family sphere. While being materially privileged provided some participating students access to overseas learning opportunities and private tutoring which helps in remediating the lack of quality in K-12 EFL learning experience. Additionally, the ideological orientations of the family work to undermine women's autonomy over their educational choices as in the case of Jumana and Mona.

Additionally, the gap between EFL instruction in K-12 schooling and EFL college instruction rears its head as one of the main influences on students' performance. Participating students highlighted the marginality of English as a subject throughout their K-12 schooling which stands in contrasts to college where students, especially who major in STEM fields, are expected to study using English as a medium of instructions. Such parity between previous

learning experiences and expectations of what is yet to come causes students to feel anxious over their future.

Moving into the analytical stage (Pinar, 2004) students offered a critique of the dominance of textbook-centric approaches to teaching, noted in the literature as a dominant mode of teaching in Saudi Arabia (Al Qahtani, 2019). Participating students also noted that spending time between the pages of a textbooks with repetitive themes, topics, and scope produces students who are only proficient in that specific textbook. Indeed, participating students noted that while the course has remediated some of the pitfalls of their K-12 EFL schooling, such as the lack of contextualization in grammar instructions, they felt unequipped to learn using English as a medium of instruction as expected in STEM related majors. In fact, English does not only influence their future studies, English influences students' prospects in getting a job as dictated by market needs. The narratives of students highlight how they conceptualized the value of English as an avenue to developing confidence and learning from difference.

Further, students explicated their desire for engaging learning experiences by drawing on the extensive nature of the course where students spend approximately four hours, four times a week in class. Additionally, students argued that the lack of placement testing prior to taking English contributes to their confusion over whether they are benefitting from the course or not. Further, the students' invocation of teachers as other mothers (Upal, 2005) highlighted the depth of their relationship, therefore, fostering students' love of learning.

Moving towards the progressive moment (Pinar, 2004) students articulated their reimagination of the instituted curriculum. Students' narratives highlighted their desire for engaged teaching and learning (bell hooks, 1994). Developing engaged pedagogy is built on vulnerability, mutuality, and dialogue within the classroom and with the outside. Developing

engaged pedagogy for students meant sharing stories of their lives. Such exchange of stories

should be reciprocal (bell hooks, 1994) and non-coercive (Delgado, 2000). bell hooks (1994)

noted that mutuality in exchange helps redistribute power where the teacher and students engage

in relational learning. Students' conception of engagement in teaching and learning is

foregrounded in dialogue with their concrete socio-historical realities informing the design of a

more immersive learning experience. Students highlighted the need for engaging in place-

conscious learning (Hackett et al., 2022) by calling for taking learning outside the confines of

walls and textbooks to the streets, malls, even hospitals and parks (Tinker Sachs et al., 2019).

The need to promote place-consciousness learning works to decentralize textbook approaches to

teaching and provide students opportunities to engage in meaningful learning.

Specific r*esearch* q*uestion 2: Teacher's response to students' narratives*

Participating teachers highlighted feeling limited by the pacing guides and the overly

structured curriculum which impacted their ability to respond to their students' needs. However,

teachers discussed how they created spaces to exercise their agency by decentralizing textbook-

based approaches to teaching. One of the drawbacks of this course, as teachers suggested, is the

overused textbooks. Teachers noted that because the same textbook has been used for five years

now, students pass on their textbooks to other classes which becomes problematic when students

have access to the answer key. Teachers argued for relying on their own materials to assess

learner's understanding. Further, teachers discussed the underlying influences contributing to the

students' struggle with writing. Teachers noted that writing instructions are influenced by the

product-approaches which impacted how students approach writing as a mechanical process.

Instead, teachers argued that shifting attention to writing as a process helps students better at

refining their writing skills. Additionally, teachers argued that students are not used to expressing

their thoughts in writing raising questions about the quality of K-12 writing instructions. Therefore, teachers suggested approaching writing as an exercise in self-expression.

Moreover, as teachers responded to the emotional challenges students face in their first year in college, the narratives of the teachers reflect an empathic approach to teaching by recognizing the high-stakes nature of first year in college as it determines the students' entrance to their desired major, encouraging students to find their voice, and dealing with the emotional challenges as they arise.

Discussion of findings

In this section, I situate the findings of the study in the larger educational research in Saudi Arabia in relation to issues concerning the role of teachers and learners in classrooms, pedagogical elements influencing students' learning, language policy in higher education in the Saudi context, and socio-economic influences underlying Saudi women's educational experiences.

Pedagogical issues surrounding EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia:

EFL Writing instructions. The findings of this study reported students' struggle with writing as Aburizaizah (2021) indicated without delving deeper into the underlying issues influencing students' ability to write, hence its reliance on a large-scale survey response. Participating students suggested that their struggle stemmed from the lack of focus on writing instruction in K-12, even in their first language, the lack of free-writing exercises, and the heavy focus on the technical aspect of writing. Aburizaizah (2021) noted that many students fail intensive English academically every year in college due to the prevalence of traditional teaching methods in K-12 where the majority of EFL instruction time focuses on grammatical structure and memorizing vocabulary, relegating other aspects of language learning to the margin.

Similarly, Alshammari (2020) notes that Saudi students struggle with L2 writing because of the underpinning learning paradigm that focuses on "learning to write" as opposed to "writing to learn" (p. 15). However, Delpit (1988) notes, "students need technical skills to open doors, but they need to be able to think critically and creatively to participate in meaningful and potentially liberating work inside those doors" (p. 384). Additionally, students problematized how writing is structured in the course with pre-scripted topics where most of the writing instruction is focused on filling out exercise sheets. Here, it is useful to consider Behizadeh (2019) framework for powerful writing pedagogy (PWP) as a tool to decenter the functional approach to writing prominent in Saudi EFL classrooms. Behizadeh (2019) argues that PWP aim to engage students to write for impact, encourage students to produce multimodal compositions that interrogates social justice issues, and connect writing to students' interests, lived experiences, global/local issues. Writing as an act of self-expression was identified by teachers in this study, as a lacking aspect of writing instructions in EFL programs in Saudi Arabia. Utilizing critical frameworks, such as PWP (Behizadeh, 2019), to teach writing draws on the students' own self-expression to make impact and help students "write for real purposes and audiences" (p. 270). While such frameworks are developed within the broader US-based institutions, educators can exercise their self-reflexivity and their knowledge of their local context to assimilate such critical tools to be used in Saudi EFL classes. Further, participating teachers problematized how writing is influenced by the product-oriented paradigm producing students who put too much emphasis on adequate fulfillment of the specified goal of the task. Saudi English language teachers, in Alkubaidi's (2019), expressed similar concerns over the lack of emphasis communicative aspects of writing genres that serves as important, and often neglected, part of EFL writing instructions. Therefore, focusing on the functional approach is not sufficient to develop learners' writing

genre-awareness. Saudi EFL educators should shift their writing instructional approaches by using process-oriented approaches views writing as a "non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to construct their own meaning" (Zamel, 2003, p. 165). Further, participating students attributed many of the challenges they are facing in the course to how K-12 EFL curricula are taught and structured. However, more research is needed to explore the connection between literacy skills, especially with respect to writing, in K-12 settings and how it influences students' writing processes in English. Additionally, as the Ministry of education (2021) introduced English to primary levels students to prepare students for the labor market which requires mastery of the English language, more research needs to be conducted to explore the alignment of K-12 curricula with the requirements of English in college to ease students' transition from school to college, considering the instrumental role English plays in higher education in Saudi Arabia.

Students as pedagogical partners. Reflecting on the imbalances in power between students and teacher helps in developing a deeper understanding of the learning environment and creating openings for authentic engagement with students' voices (Jones & Hall, 2021). In this study, voices of teachers and students are rendered invisible in the process of curriculum development. Previous research has highlighted the marginality of Saudi teachers' voices in curriculum development (Mullic, 2013; Alnefaie, 2016). While teachers acknowledged the limited space available to tailor their instruction to meet students' needs, they wanted a seat at the table as a stakeholder. Yet, the absence of consideration of student voices in teachers' articulations, except Hanadi's statement that included students, suggests a predominantly teacher-centric approach to the process of developing curriculum.

Further, Allmnakrah and Evers (2020) argue for a fundamental shift in the Saudi classrooms where critical thinking is integrated into each subject to "help students deal with ambiguity and negotiate the bewildering pace of social and technological change" (p. 39). Yet, Allmnakrah and Evers (2020) focused on the teacher's training and teacher role in facilitating such a shift. Their research did not include any discussion on what role students will be assuming in the process of generating such a shift. Instead, the assumption is that "teachers will disseminate it in their own teaching practice and among their students" (p. 39). If the teacher is expected to "disseminate" criticality, then, are not we merely calling for the reproduction of a teacher's critical consciousness? How can we develop students' criticality when students are absent from the construction of their own critical consciousness? Hamdan (2014) argued that Saudi educators tend to view knowledge as something that would be imparted to students. Thus, dialogue and discussions become a neglected part of the learning experience, pushing learners to assume a passive role. Hamdan (2014) goes to argue that to create knowledge-based society, we must shift our view of knowledge as an active construction through collaborative inquiry where the responsibility for learning is shared between students and teachers.

Moreover, I argue that to facilitate the shift to a knowledge-based society (Khorsheed, 2015; Alohali & Shin, 2013), the realities of Saudi classrooms must be called into question to mobilize alternative progressive modes of education. Resisting the roles ascribed to learners as passive lies in the creation of oppositional and critical learning spaces where students engage with a wide range of issues that affect their lives; therefore, creating spaces for students to reclaim their voice (Cook-Sather, 2007). Mohanty (2014) notes that resistance lies in engaging with normative discourses to uncover subjugated knowledges in a pedagogically defined way. I

argue that interjecting facets of learner's lived experiences in the curriculum has the potential of revealing subjugated knowledges that were relegated to the margins in Saudi classrooms.

Moreover, as students desired agentive roles in learning, the findings indicated the alignment between how students defined learning and how they approached task redesign; providing an avenue for educators to consider students as pedagogical partners to enhance their learning experience. When students are engaged as partners in curriculum development and design, they move from being passive consumers to active agents whereby such a shift engenders the development of metacognitive awareness of what is being learned (Cook-Sather, 2007). Participating students contested the dominance of traditional pedagogy in Saudi EFL classroom practices which assigns students a passive role in the learning process. Creating opportunities for students to engage in re-thinking learning and teaching redefines the role of the educator as a facilitator redistributes the power relations between teachers and students. Here, it is useful to consider Bovill et al. (2016) typology for the different roles that students can occupy in co-creating curriculum. Bovill et al. (2016) discussed four roles students often assume in co-creating curriculum: 1) consultants, sharing and discussing their perspectives on teaching and learning, 2) co-researchers, collaborating on research projects with university staff in connection to issues relevant to students learning and experience, 3) pedagogical co-designer, collaborating with teachers on designing learning, teaching and assessment, and 4) representative, student-led bodies that participate in decision-making processes across university settings. Creating opportunities for students to engage in such roles would help in creating responsive and inclusive campuses. While some of these roles may entail making large-scale changes in the hierarchy of the university that may otherwise be unattainable in a deeply structured settings, like the EFL program where the study is based, Saudi educators can work to engage students in co-creating

curriculum by focusing on small-scale changes on course-level or even in daily lesson plans to provide students with agentive roles in the process of learning.

Promoting place-conscious language education. The confinement of learning to classrooms led students to call for displacing learning and placing it within their communities. Participating students', like Rita, desired to experience immersive learning "to live what it means to be a nurse or a physician." Similarly, Maryam wished to be engaged in working in the community through university-organized partnerships, critiquing the lack of such initiatives. She stated, "the university does not have a club for students where they go and do community work." Students desired to have hands-on experiences in different places within their community. Such connection to places beyond classrooms may work to foster students' agency as they see themselves as active agents in schools, universities, and community at large. Additionally, place-consciousness in learning offers students meaningful opportunities to explore, apply, and advance their curricular knowledge.

Their calls align with what Ellis (2004) termed an emplaced curriculum which explores the intersection of place and students' experience with an awareness of how human agency is facilitated and/or constricted by place. Massey (1994) critiqued the view of place as "bounded enclosures" (p. 7). Such a view, Massey (1994) argue, is derived from the need to feel the security of boundaries and the dualistic thinking that assigned place a "static being" (p. 8). Instead, we are better positioned in understanding the concept of place by exploring it as a "process" that unfolds relationally through the social interactions, negotiations, conflict, and resolutions (Massey, 1994, p. 149). Exploring place in relation to curriculum helps us discern the way in which place impinges on the identities of learners. An emplaced curriculum gives

students the opportunity to explore their local realities in the context of *global place* (Massey, 2004).

Further, centralizing issues of place in curriculum sheds light on issues of mobility and access. Massey (1994: p. 20) encourages us to consider place as "socially formed, socially evaluated and differentiated ways" which opens the way to a critical engagement with the politics of mobility and access in the lives of Saudi women. Exploring differential mobilities (Massey, 1994) leads us to understand the socio-spatial dimension of power that impinges on the lives of women. As people experience the material dimension of place cognitively and affectively, their understanding of place is mediated by social negotiation such as conflict and difference (Massey, 2004). With the rapid changes that Saudi women experience associated with the new policy mandates encouraging more women participation in labor market, more women are leaving the domestic sphere to earn and contribute to the family economy. Several policy mandates provided by the Saudi government work to facilitate this shift by providing incentives for women to join the job market by providing women's transportation support programs, children's hospitality service support programs, employment opportunities and scholarship programs like King Abdullah Scholarship program (KASP). Such a shift will bring to the surface issues of power among multiply positioned actors and places that would give researchers access to a richer understanding of the intersection of place, gender, race, ethnicity, and power in educational spheres.

Abla educators, students, and their spaces of Tarbiayh. The findings of the study discussed the students' deep relationship with their teachers which was shaped by care, respect, and emotional support. Historically, the relationship between teachers and their students, in the Saudi context, is shaped by the Islamic cultural beliefs that elevated teachers as an indisputable

authority. The symbolic power that teachers hold is derived from the image of the messenger of

knowledge that formed the basis of Madrasa Islamic schooling (Elyas & Picard, 2010). In fact,

one of the terms used to refer to a "teacher" in Hijzai Arabic, the dialect spoken by participants,

translates to *"Abla"* meaning "older sister" which entered Hijazi Arabic dialect through Turkish

language (Al-Saud, 2012). Jamjoom (2010) discusses how Saudi women teachers conceptualized

their teacher identity around "being a parent", referencing their students as "their daughters", and

being the "originators or bearers of a truth that was entrusted to them and that hence must be

given to students" (p. 557). Such positioning could be explained by the inseparability of

"tarbiayh" and "education" in the Islamic context. The Arabic term "*tarbiayh*" means fostering

the development of individuals in various aspects, e.g., physical, emotional, educational, moral,

and spiritual (Jamjoom, 2010). These early socio-cultural and religious influences shaped the

culture of classrooms in Saudi Arabia where teachers are accorded high respect and looked up to

beyond their status as teachers. With such respect, comes a duty that participating teachers

embraced. Teachers were cognizant of the emotional challenges that come with learning a

foreign language and shared their concerns for the wellbeing and success of their students in the

program, especially that not all students get access to quality EFL instruction prior to coming to

college. This makes students fall under a lot of pressure to perform and eventually contributes to

their self-inhibition as Farrah, a participating teacher noted. By emphasizing the development of

empathic classrooms ethos, teachers drew on the importance of helping students to thrive. As

participating students built their conception of good teaching based on some current, and past

learning experiences, they used examples of teachers who worked to foster empathic and caring

educational spaces. These teachers, according to participants, created a learning environment

where students felt seen, heard, and valued, fostering a positive and supportive atmosphere for

their academic and personal growth. Their approach acknowledges that attending to students'

emotional well-being enhances their overall learning experience. I argue that the care and

empathy teachers provided can be seen as a way resist the neoliberal sweeping effects of policies

in higher education in Saudi Arabia which forces students to become burdened and drop out of

universities as EMI policies are increasingly promoted (Barnwai, 2022).

Language policy in higher education in Saudi Arabia

In this study, participating students discussed their preference for English as a medium

for instruction (EMI) in their K-12 education to bridge the gap between college and K-12 EFL

instruction. In Saudi Arabia, almost every higher education institution features an English

department that provides graduate and postgraduate programs and teach students in English

courses at the institutional level (Alnasser, 2022). English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has

been adopted as an official policy in several Saudi universities, especially in teaching STEM

subjects (Elyas & Alhoorie, 2023). Barnawi and Hawsawi (2017) argue that it would be unfair to

expect students to move from practically having little phonemic knowledge of English, as is the

case of students leaving K-12 schools, to be able to reach intermediate level B1 on Common

European Framework of Reference for languages in one year. This echoes the findings of this

study as participating students expressed their lack of preparedness for taking on EMI after

completing this course. In fact, students with lower proficiency in Shamim et al., (2016) study

perceived English as the main factor that can determine their futures, thus, serving as a

gatekeeper for better job opportunities (Hopkyns, 2020). Saudi researchers have identified

numerous pedagogical issues associated with the widespread use of English as a Medium of

Instruction (EMI) in most Saudi universities (Al Nasser, 2022; Le Ha & Barnawi, 2014;

Barnawi, 2021). Researchers in the Arabian Gulf region have also questioned the rapid

expansion of EMI and its potential impact on the Arabic language and heritage. These concerns centers around the marginalization of Arabic from both the public and educational spheres, English serving as a gatekeeper for better job opportunities, an increased cognitive load on students, and a decreased sense of cultural belonging (Hillman & Ocampo Eibenschutz, 2018; Hopkyns 2020a, Hopkyns & Elyas, 2022). Moreover, Al-Bataineh (2020) points out, in the case of the United Arab Emirates:

> By making higher education available only in English, a powerful two-fold message is communicated to the learners and the community: the first explicitly affirms the strong ties between knowledge acquisition and English, making English a must-have language and the measure of success while the second implicitly suggests no obvious relationship between Arabic and knowledge acquisition, making Arabic dispensable and irrelevant to success (p. 12).

Participating students were aware of the market-driven push that positions English as a necessity for gaining employment which influenced their call for more English instructions through K-12 schooling. As Saudi Arabia continues to promote STEM for women, evidenced in developing Girls4Tech initiative (Joudah, 2023), students who are interested in pursuing careers in STEM fields seemed to position English as vital for their careers. Rahaf noted that "there are many disciplines that are mostly studied, discussed, and researched in English." In some cases, like Jehan's, translation and the Arabization of textbooks and instructions is put forward as a tool to preserve the primacy of Arabic as the language of Qur'an. She stated, "English should be taught as a language, no more, no less. But all other subjects should be taught in Arabic because we are an Arab Muslim nation" proposing that "it could be translated into Arabic, and we would have a proper full curriculum for these STEM subjects in Arabic language." These varied

positions bring to the fore how globalization and the wholesale adoption of EMI language policy influences local languages. Guilherme, Manuela and Menezes de Souza's (2019) notion of *glocal* languages provide an alternative to the duality of global/local languages. In their book titled *Glocal languages and critical intercultural awareness: The south answers back,* Guilherme, Manuela and Menezes de Souza (2019) theorized glocalization to redefine a different form of globalization, or rather, glocalization. Menezes de Souza (2019) asserts that glocalization, globalization redefined, allows for a paradigm shift in the way relationships are conducted between global north and south in terms of knowledge flow. In Saudi Arabia, I argue that an emphasis on glocalization should involve the adaptation of English to fit local contexts and creating space for linguistic hybridity where students are switching between Arabic and English, towards creative hybridity over linguistic purity (Hopkyns, 2020). Emphasizing linguistic hybridity may lead to the emergence of local varities of English that emanate from the multiple ethnic, racial, gendered, religious, and sociocultural influences peculiar to the Saudi context; therefore, capturing the complexity of students' linguistic repertoire and fostering a sense of ownership over English language.

Sociocultural influences shaping women's EFL learning experience in Saudi Arabia

In this study, socioeconomic factors, such as access to material privileges and ideological orientations of the family worked to facilitate and/or undermine students' access to quality EFL education. Hamdan (2005) asserted that historically achievement parities among Saudi women ran along class lines. Further, Al Lily and Waibel (2021) assert that women-headed households in Saudi are more vulnerable to poverty due to the traditional roles assigned to women as nurturers who are expected to be stay-at-home mothers. Moreover, Al Lily and Waibel's (2021) investigation of the socioeconomic factors underlying urban poverty concluded that being of

African-decent increased the risk of being poor in Saudi Arabia. Yet, the study did not attempt to

provide an explanation for such a correlation. In this study, students who come from materially

privileged families had access to more opportunities to offset the limitations of K-12 EFL

instructions. For example, participants like Jehan agreed that going to private schools helped her

cultivate proficiency in English due to the increased focus on foreign language instructions.

Similarly, Rahaf dropped out of college and her family funded a 4-months language immersion

program in the United Kingdom before she came back and enrolled at the university again. Rahaf

discussed how this program helped her overcome the struggle of learning English. While

influence of these factors has been discussed in previous studies, there are no educational support

initiatives in schools and universities for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds

(Al Lily & Waibel, 2021).

Furthermore, the role of ideological orientation of the family is discussed as a major

influence on the educational choices of women. In this study, participants such as Mona and

Jumana faced backlash from their families over their choices; denying them the right to choose.

This is in line with Alsuwaida's (2016) conclusion that women from traditional families are

likely to succumb to patriarchal system influencing their educational choices. Yet, Saudi women

are forging community-based kinship relationships with their *Abla*-educators as other-mothers

that provide them with support. Such support may work to mitigate the lack of support found at

home. In fact, kinship relationships, in the Saudi context, has been explored in relation to

biologically driven constructs like consanguinity or social practices through affinity (marriage)

(Alghanim, 2012). The contemporary patriarchal and hierarchical structure of Saudi families is

premised on the hierarchy of age and gender where the contributions of women in familial

networks are largely ignored (Almosaed, 2008). In this study, Saudi educators, *Ablat [plural*

form], played a pivotal role in providing community-based support outside the sphere of traditional family structures. Such undertheorized empathetic learning spaces provides researchers valuable insights into the contributions of Saudi women that remained unacknowledged in familial community-based support networks. Shedding light on the role of *Abla-*educator, as sister-mothers and a source of support, provides a counternarrative where *Abla-*educators are actively engaged in establishing and maintaining networks of support with their students inside and outside classrooms. This counternarrative shows that despite the restrictions around their teaching practices, they managed to forge new ways to respond to their students' needs by fostering holistic learning environments.

Implications

Since the impetus of this work has been my deep commitment to uplifting students' voices, especially young Saudi women, it is only reasonable to discuss the implications of this work on a personal level. Additionally, I draw implications for teaching, policy, and map out future directions in research.

Personal

On a personal level, engaging in this work has been transformative. When I taught English at a Saudi university for two years before pursuing graduate school, I heard many cautionary tales about getting too close to students because they would not respect you. Being a novice teacher back then, I wrongfully followed the common wisdom that the authority of a teacher must be always upheld which led me to develop distant attitude from my students. I remained wary of sharing any glimpses into who I was as a person and what I stood for. Meeting with the participants and discussing their desires for relational learning allowed me to reflect on my own initiation into teaching and how it influenced my position. While participating students

discussed the role of their teachers as other mothers, my time as a student in the classrooms was not as fruitful. In fact, my 5th grade math teacher used corporal punishment against students for failing to answer correctly. Corporal punishment is now banned in Saudi schools. Yet, I could not help but ask myself, if the ritual of control (bell hooks, 1994) some teachers were subjected to as students influenced their position on how they approached their relationship with their students. I know that the many instances of power abuse I have been through as a student taught me about the unabashed authority of the teacher. In these spaces, I learned about what kind of teacher I did not want to be. Yet, I did not know how to be. Even though on a subconscious level, I knew that developing a distant attitude from my students was not helpful, yet I was too afraid of the unknown and how would students receive me. I am moving forward learning from participants about the potentials of relational learning and their desire to develop egalitarian, warm and empathic spaces. Such learning will deepen my commitment to uplift students' voices and hold spaces for our collective critical, cognitive, and personal development.

Making Saudi EFL Teaching responsive to students' voices

To attempt re-imagining curriculum with students in teacher-fronted learning spaces like Saudi classrooms (Alrebai, 2019; Gulanaz, Alfaqih & Mashhour, 2015; Alseghayer, 2014) is to attempt a redistribution of roles where students assume an active role in the process. Ellsworth (1989) questioned the role of the student in student-teacher interactions as theorized within critical pedagogy, identifying the need for teachers to "criticize and transform [their] own understanding in response to the understandings of students" (p. 300). Additionally, proponents of student voice work (Cook-Sather, 2020; Fielding, 2004; Mathew et al., 2019) critiqued the closed-loop feedback mechanism that characterizes most of student voice research where students' feedback centers around airing grievances without effectively utilizing such feedback.

Yet, this study was designed with a deep-seated belief that teachers can be students too. Drawing on bell hooks (1994) conceptualization of engaged pedagogy, the vulnerability of the engaged educator creates spaces for them to grow alongside their students. When teachers begin embracing the lived experience of their students with all its struggles, sameness, and alterity to enrich curriculum, teachers enter in relational knowing whereby the lived experiences of their students inform their pedagogical choices. Teachers committed to uplifting students' voices engage in what Mathews et al. (2019, p. 292) called "risky praxis" that destabilizes, questions, and challenges the status quo. Additionally, teachers are called upon to create space for students' creative self-expressions and dialogue to facilitate their learning.

Policy changes responsive to student voices

Both teachers and students' voices are marginalized in the processes of curriculum planning and development in Saudi Arabia. Recommendations for policy makers includes ensuring that all stakeholder's voices are represented meaningfully. A meaningful engagement with both teachers and students cannot be achieved through conventional feedback mechanism like course evaluation. Instead, policy makers can develop more comprehensive mechanisms to include both teachers and students in curriculum evaluation. This may include hosting end-of-semester meetings where a group of students and teachers are invited to share their opinions about the course. However, I would suggest holding the meetings with the teachers and students separately to ensure privacy in sharing opinions because issues of power and different positions on the hierarchical structure of the institutions may lead students to self-censor. Additionally, engaging with students' voices, in particular, should account for students' own past experiences by representing students with varying degrees of language proficiency and their socio-economic backgrounds to better understand students' varying needs. Moreover, one of the drawbacks of

this course is the lack of placement testing. Instead, the placement of students in their respective levels depends on their major in college. Science-track students are placed at higher level than humanity-track students while both groups receive the same number of EFL instruction hours throughout their K-12 education. This creates tensions as students sometimes felt that the course is either too complex or too easy. Developing a placement test can dispel students' confusion and ensure that students are being placed in classrooms based on their competency level, a far more accurate measure than what is being implemented currently.

Research needed: more women, more space and place, more epistemological diversity

This study leaves many openings for future researchers interested in the experience of Saudi women in educational spaces. The study emphasizes the need for more research to investigate the alignment between curriculum, students' goals, and needs. In particular, research concerning how admission policies and language policies, as part of the larger instituted curriculum, impacts women's educational choices needs to be explored in depth. Additionally, while factors such as the ideological orientation, class, gender, and racial/ethnic background have been discussed in the literature separately (Al Lily & Waibel, 2021; Alsuwaida, 2016; Hamdan, 2005) as influencing poverty and educational attainment in Saudi Arabia, yet more intersectional analyses are needed to explore how such factors intersect to influence the lives of women in Saudi Arabia. Further, this study discussed the role of access to material privileges facilitated the participants access to better quality in previous learning experiences in EFL classrooms, and with the numbers in Al Lily and Waibel (2021) showing that women-headed households are more vulnerable to poverty in Saudi, future research can explore in depth the intersection between the socio-economic determinants of urban poverty in Saudi Arabia and how they influence students' achievement.

Moreover, the spatial dimensions of learning needs attention due to the lack of variability in research methods that are employed to understand women's experiences in women-only colleges. Here, it is useful to consider, for example, the implications of gender as difference (Dixon & Jones, 2006) and how it influences the differential spatial experiences of men and women. Such analyses can cover a wide range of research problems by analyzing the differential spatial experiences of women which in turn can yield insights into what specific processes contribute to such differences with an understanding that these processes may not operate in the same way for all women. Therefore, more qualitative studies are needed to examine the ecological, spatial, and socio-cultural realities of women-only educational which underpins the processes of learning and teaching in Saudi classrooms.

Therefore, the research agenda of Saudi academics need to be diversified by drawing on various methodological, epistemological, and theoretical traditions to develop a richer, expansive, multiple, and mutually enriching inquiries. Alohali and Shin (2013) noted in their discussion of research productivity in Saudi universities that social science research in Saudi contributed to less than 1% in international journals whereby disciplines like medical sciences and engineering producing the majority of publications from Saudi universities. While Alohali and Shin (2013) attributed the problem of the scarcity of Saudi published scholars in international journals to the lack of training, yet I believe that funding opportunities are scarce for social science research in Saudi Arabia. In fact, Alohali and Shin (2013) noted that research productivity in Saudi Arabia is largely funded through three major bodies including centers of research excellence, implementing a National Science Technology and Innovation Plan (NSTIP), and building science parks. However, the three funding bodies, as discussed in Alohali and Shin (2013), center efforts in the field of material sciences, renewable energy, water, oil and gas,

petrochemicals, nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, electronics and communications, space and aeronautics, energy, environment, and advanced materials. Indeed, Alzahrani (2011) explored the lack of encouragement to publish, the high load of teaching, and difficulties in having access to articles in publishing journals as negatively influencing Saudi professors' research productivity. Nurannabi (2017) argued that universities should prioritize and invest in creating opportunities for research funding through partnering with business sector. However, this can prove difficult owing to the organizational structure of higher education in Saudi Arabia that relies largely on government funding (Al-Awad et al., 2020). Yet, the 2019 University Law was passed by Saudi Council of Ministers to diversify sources of revenue and granting universities partial administrative independence from the ministry of education which is now in effect in three major Saudi public universities (Albeshir, 2022).

Limitations

This study is designed to explore the teaching and learning of English language in a women's-only campus in Saudi Arabia. While participating students are still language learners, I conducted the interviews in Arabic. However, issues of translating the interview guide from English to Arabic posed a challenge in few instances as explicated under the translation section in the previous chapter. I noticed that while conducting the member-check with the participants, none of the participants contested the analytical narrative I developed, except for two students who did not provide any feedback despite multiple attempts to reach them. Bearing in mind the authority of the researcher over the knowledge in the field, it might have made students more hesitant to contradict the construction of their experience. Instead, it would have been more helpful had I asked students to rewrite their analytical narratives to see how they would construct it differently. However, this may prove to be a challenging task because this study used

translation in three different phases of the study: translating the interview guides from English to Arabic, raw data from Arabic to English, and then, translating the constructed narratives from English to Arabic for participating students to read and comment on. Future research can explore how translation and the inevitable loss of meaning impinge on the process of ensuring the quality of the analytical narrative.

Conclusion

The study explored women's understanding of their own experiences teaching and learning in a EFL course at a women's-only college in Saudi Arabia. Students' narratives highlighted the role of family support and access to quality EFL schooling in facilitating their college experiences. Despite access to material privileges, family ideologies can undermine women's autonomy over their educational choices. Additionally, the gap between K-12 EFL instruction and the expectations in college causes students to feel anxious over their futures due to the perceived importance of English in obtaining a job in Saudi, especially in STEM related fields. Students critiqued the repeated themes in the textbook, the lack of placement testing, the insufficient attention given to writing instruction. While students theorized their own learning, they stressed the importance of creating engaged teaching and learning foregrounded in meaningfulness, vulnerability, mutuality, and dialogue. Further, consistencies between how students defined their desired learning and their approach to task re-design which could be utilized effectively by teachers to align their curricula with students' own desired learning. Additionally, teachers felt constrained by pacing guides and a structured curriculum, limiting their ability to address students' needs. Teachers exercised their agency by decentralizing textbook-based approaches and relying on their materials for informally assessing learning. Teachers identified the underlying influence that contributes to students' struggles with writing

due to product-oriented approaches and advocated for focusing on writing as a process of self-expression. Finally, amidst these challenges, the emergence of familial, community-based support networks guided by the ethics of *Abla*-educators provided Saudi women students support while trying to navigate the challenges of transitioning from school to college settings. By providing invaluable insights into the overlooked contributions of Saudi women within familial community-based networks, the counternarrative presented here underscores the agency of *Abla*-educators in fostering holistic learning environments.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Syllabi for ELPR - Course Outcomes

Listening

- Can understand standard spoken language, live, or broadcast, on both familiar and unfamiliar topics normally encountered in personal, social, academic, or vocational life. Only extreme background noise, inadequate discourse structure and/or idiomatic usage influence the ability to understand.
- Can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization.
- Can follow extended speech and complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar, and the direction of the talk is sign-posted by explicit markers.
- Can keep up with an animated conversation between native speakers.
- Can with some effort catch much of what is said around him/her but may find it difficult to participate effectively in discussion with several native speakers who do not modify their language in any way.
- Can follow the essentials of lectures, talks, and reports and other forms of academic/professional presentation which are propositionally and linguistically complex.
- Can understand announcements and messages on concrete and abstract topics spoken in standard dialect at normal speed.
- Can understand recordings in standard dialect likely to be encountered in social, professional, or academic life and identify speaker viewpoints and attitudes as well as the information content.
- Can understand most radio documentaries and most other recorded or broadcast audio material delivered in standard dialect and can identify the speaker's mood, tone etc.
- Can understand documentaries, live interviews, talk shows, plays and the majority of films in standard dialect.
- Can read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources selectively. Has a broad active reading vocabulary but may experience some difficulty with low-frequency idioms.
- Can recognize and understand expanded range of concrete (and some abstract), idiomatic and technical vocabulary relating to common knowledge, facts, opinions, feelings,

ideas, and basic concepts and applications relating to numeracy, science, technology, social issues, Canadian citizenship, literature, media, health, education, jobs and occupations, financial and consumer services.

Grammar Knowledge:

- Grammar and syntax structures to interpret texts (such as perfect tenses, basic conditionals, basic reported speech, noun clauses, relative clauses, passive and active voice, infinitives, and gerunds).
- Conventions of mechanics and punctuation and how they are used to organize the text and create rhythm, emphasis, etc.
- Ability to produce a full range of grammatical and lexical structures, including those occurring in specific topic areas in academic and professional disciplines.
- Ability to produce intelligible and communicatively effective pronunciation.

Reading

- Can read correspondence relating to his/her field of interest and readily grasp the essential meaning.
- Can scan quickly through long and complex texts, locating relevant details.
- Can quickly identify the content and relevance of news items, articles, and reports on a wide range of professional topics, deciding whether closer study is worthwhile.
- Can obtain information, ideas, and opinions from highly specialized sources within his/her field.
- Can understand specialized articles outside his/her field, provided he/she can use a dictionary occasionally to confirm his/her interpretation of terminology.
- Can understand articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular stances or viewpoints.
- Can understand lengthy, complex instructions in his field, including details on conditions and warnings, provided he/she can reread difficult sections.

Grammar Knowledge

- Can recognize and understand expanded range of concrete (and some abstract), idiomatic and technical vocabulary relating to common knowledge, facts, opinions, feelings, ideas, and basic concepts and applications relating to numeracy, science, technology, social issues, Canadian citizenship, literature, media, health, education, jobs and occupations, financial and consumer services.
- Grammar and syntax structures to interpret texts (such as perfect tenses, basic conditionals, basic reported speech, noun clauses, relative clauses, passive and active voice, infinitives, and gerunds).

- Conventions of mechanics and punctuation and how they are used to organize the text and create rhythm, emphasis, etc.
- Ability to produce a full range of grammatical and lexical structures, including those occurring in specific topic areas in academic and professional disciplines.
- Ability to produce intelligible and communicatively effective pronunciation.

Speaking

- Can create moderately complex to complex spoken communication in moderately demanding contexts of language use within the four competency areas *(1-Interacting with others; 2-Comprehending or giving instructions; 3-Getting things done; 4- Reproducing information (in writing only), and Comprehending or sharing).*
- Can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to field of interest.
- Can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
- Can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.

Grammar Knowledge

- Can demonstrate fluency in using grammatical, syntactical, and lexical structures typically occurring in moderately demanding academic, community, and work contexts
- Can use an expanding range of abstract, technical, idiomatic, and conceptual vocabulary to report and discuss personal and factual information, and to express ideas, opinions and feelings about familiar topics and issues.
- Can produce intelligible and communicatively effective pronunciation.
- Can produce a full range of grammatical and lexical structures, including those occurring in specific topic areas in academic and professional disciplines.
- Can produce intelligible and communicatively effective pronunciation.

Writing

- Can use the language fluently, accurately, and effectively on a wide range of general, academic, vocational or leisure topics, marking clearly the relationships between ideas. Can communicate spontaneously with good grammatical control without much sign of having to restrict what he/she wants to say, adopting a level of formality appropriate to the circumstances.
- Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction, and sustained relationships with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party. Can highlight the personal significance of events

and experiences, account for and sustain views clearly by providing relevant explanations and arguments.

- Can understand in detail what is said to him/her in the standard spoken language even in a noisy environment.
- Can engage in extended conversation on most general topics in a clearly participatory fashion, even in a noisy environment.
- Can sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker.
- Can convey degrees of emotion and highlight the personal significance of events and experiences.
- Can keep up with an animated discussion between native speakers.
- Can express his/her ideas and opinions with precision, present and respond to complex lines of argument convincingly.
- Can take an active part in informal discussion in familiar contexts, commenting, putting point of view clearly, evaluating alternative proposals and making and responding to hypotheses.
- Can with some effort catch much of what is said around him/her in discussion but may find it difficult to participate effectively in discussion with several native speakers who do not modify their language in any way.
- Can account for and sustain his/her opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments, and comments.
- Can keep up with an animated discussion, identifying accurately arguments supporting and opposing points of view.
- Can express his/her ideas and opinions with precision, present and respond to complex lines of argument convincingly.
- Can participate actively in routine and non-routine formal discussion.
- Can follow the discussion on matters related to his/her field, understand in detail the points given prominence by the speaker.
- Can contribute, account for, and sustain his/her opinion, evaluate alternative proposals, and make and respond to hypotheses.
- Can understand detailed instructions reliably.
- Can help along the progress of the work by inviting others to join in, say what they think etc.
- Can outline an issue or a problem clearly, speculating about causes or consequences, and weighing advantages and disadvantages of different approaches.
- Can cope linguistically to negotiate a solution to a dispute like an undeserved traffic ticket, financial responsibility for damage in a flat, for blame regarding an accident.

- Can outline a case for compensation, using persuasive language to demand satisfaction and state clearly the limits to any concession he/she is prepared to make.
- Can explain a problem which has arisen and make it clear that the provider of the service/customer must make a concession.
- Can understand and exchange complex information and advice on the full range of matters related to his/her occupational role.
- Can pass on detailed information reliably.
- Can give a clear, detailed description of how to carry out a procedure.
- Can synthesize and report information and arguments from a number of sources.
- Can carry out an effective, fluent interview, departing spontaneously from prepared questions, following up and probing interesting replies.
- Can take initiatives in an interview, expand, and develop ideas with little help or prodding from an interviewer.

Grammar Knowledge

− Can use moderately complex grammar and syntax structures (such as perfect tenses, basic conditionals, basic reported speech, noun clauses, relative clauses, passive and active voice, infinitives, and gerunds) to convey meaning effectively and precisely.

− Can expanded range of language (such as concrete, some abstract, idiomatic, and technical) and skills to compose formal, informal, personal, and social messages; to relate or narrate stories and events; to report personal and factual information; to express ideas, opinions, and feelings about familiar topics and issues; to ask about and respond to inquiries; and to argue points.

− Can expanded range of vocabulary that includes words and expressions relating to a variety of topic areas (such as general content areas, occupational areas).

− Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization conventions.

− Can use complex grammar and syntax structures (such as past conditionals, past or future perfect passive, perfect or past infinitives and subordinate adverbial clauses) to convey meaning effectively and precisely.

− Can use a wide range of vocabulary, including synonyms and abstract, technical, and literary language (such as metaphors, similes).

− Can control grammatical and syntactical accuracy, punctuation, paragraphing, etc.

Thinking Skills

• Can use different reading techniques according to the purpose of the task (such as skimming to get the gist, scanning to locate detailed information, speed reading and in-depth reading).

• Can evaluate and judge to interpret written texts.

Academic Skills
• Can use dictionaries, thesauruses, and other reference sources online and in print formats.
• Can use keyboarding and word-processing skills for composing, revising, editing, formatting, and printing texts.
• Can search for information (including dictionary use) and computer/Internet literacy skills.
• Can check understanding, such as confirming information and paraphrasing.

Appendix B

Interview Guide with students

1st Interview (Life History Approach)

1. Tell me about yourself.

    1. When were you born, and where did you grow up?

2. What activities do you enjoy doing outside school and what makes them interesting for you?

3. Tell me about your K-12 schooling.

    1. What type of schools did you attend? Where they any different than those of your siblings, if you have any?

4. What aspirations and hopes do you have for your career and education? How does your educational experience facilitate and support your aspirations?

5. If you were to re-imagine schooling in Saudi Arabia, what would it look like?

6. What type of support available to you at home, school, community to excel in your studies?

7. Is there anything you would like to add about yourself that you would like to tell me?

2nd Interview

1. Tell me about your classes and students here at the university.

2. What is learning, to you, and how do you learn?

3. Tell me about a lesson/unit that you liked, and why?

4. Tell me about the content of English curriculum such as the content of the assigned readings, the content of your writing assignments, and the content of your oral presentations.

        1. If you had to reconstruct your assignments, what would you do differently?

5. Tell me about your English exams/quizzes.

        1. How do you prepare for it?

6. What are the obstacles you face learning EFL? How do you overcome them?

7. What support do you need to learn English successfully?

8. What do you think about the learning environment at this school?

9. What are the resources you have? What are the resources you use? What are the resources you need?

10. If you have a chance to change things in the curriculum, what would you change?

11. How does your experience in this course support your hopes for your education?

12. What do you wish for in your learning that you currently do not see or have?

3rd Interview

1. Tell me about what you brought in today. Why did you bring this artefact?

2. What type of support did you receive while developing this artefact?

        a. Support from your teacher, at home, or some learning facility on campus.

3. If you had to remake it with unlimited resources, what resources do you think you need?

4. If you had to reconstruct this artefact without any imposed requirements, what would you differently?

Appendix C

Guide for Focus Group Discussions (Students)

Good afternoon.

Thank you for coming. A focus group is a relaxed discussion for the themes I generated from your interviews.

The purpose

We are here today to talk about your learning experiences. The purpose is to have in-depth discussions for the issues you talked about in the interviews. I am not here to share information, or to give you, my opinions. Your perceptions are what matter. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. You can disagree with each other, and you can change your mind. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel.

Discuss procedure

I will be taking notes and audio recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to say. I explained these procedures to you when we set up this meeting. As you know everything is confidential. No one will know who said what. I want this to be a group discussion, so feel free to respond to me and to other members in the group without waiting to be called on. However, I would appreciate it if only one person did talk at a time. The discussion will last approximately one hour. There is a lot I want to discuss, so at times I may move us along a bit.

Participant introduction

Now, let's start by everyone sharing their name, what's your English level, and what is your track (science or humanities)?

Discussion Topics

English as medium of instructions

Enacted curriculum

Pedagogy

K-12 EFL

Learner's role

Closure

Is there any other information regarding EFL learning and curriculum that you think would be

useful for me to know?

Thank you very much for coming this afternoon. Your time is very much appreciated, and your

comments have been very helpful.

Appendix D

Guide for Focus Group Discussions (Teachers)

Good afternoon.

Thank you for coming. A focus group is a relaxed discussion for the themes I generated from your interviews.

The purpose

We are here today to talk about your perspectives on teaching, learning, content, and materials used in teaching. I am not here to share information, or to give you, my opinions. Your perceptions are what matter. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. You can disagree with each other, and you can change your mind. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel.

Discussion procedure.

I will be taking notes and audio recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to say. I explained these procedures to you when we set up this meeting. As you know everything is confidential. No one will know who said what. I want this to be a group discussion, so feel free to respond to me and to other members in the group without waiting to be called on. However, I would appreciate it if only one person did talk at a time. The discussion will last approximately one hour. There is a lot I want to discuss, so at times I may move us along a bit.

Participant introduction

Now, let's start by everyone sharing their name, and how long have you been teaching EFL at this program?

Discussion Topics

Teacher's role

Pedagogy

Assessment

Writing

Closure

Is there any other information regarding EFL teaching and learning and curriculum that you

think would be useful for me to know?

Thank you very much for coming this afternoon. Your time is very much appreciated, and your

comments have been very helpful.

Appendix E

Teacher's Written Reflection form (TRF)

The following statements are six excerpts from students' narratives. After reading the excerpts, and reflecting on them, please respond in your reflection to the following two questions.

1) How do you relate to learner's stories, as a language teacher and possibly, a language learner at a point in your life?

2) How might these narratives inform your teaching?

A guide for reflection:

- Your reflection shouldn't be less than one-page. You are welcome to share more.

- Your reflection can address the two questions but does not have to be limited to them.

- Your reflection may focus on your own subjectivities, thoughts, and feelings in response to students' narratives which will help me understand your experience and point of views.

Excerpts 1)

"I don't know how to write. It is something I struggled with even when I was in school, but this is something I didn't work on, myself. I was often told to work on my writing, especially, spelling. I mean, even in Arabic, we didn't get to practice writing much in schools. In this class, we don't write much either. We just write simple answers, but not much practice on writing longer passages. I know how to write simple answers to simple questions. I think they just want to make things easy for us."

Jumana, a pseudonym, ELPR 100

Excerpt 2)

"Things I would change? Uhmm, I will maybe include inviting speakers to the class to talk about their journey in learning English, include stories, or expertise of other language learners because this is more fun and engaging. I asked people who mastered English, 'what did you learn from studying grammar?' They were like, ok, we benefitted from learning grammar but at a certain point it becomes unimportant. We know grammar rules; we have memorized it, why are we still focusing on it?"

Rita, a pseudonym, ELPR 101

Excerpt 3)

"I love writing about personal things. Like this assignment we just had, we were asked to write about a journey we had and send it to a friend as an email. So, it was a real journey. When it is real, you know how to fully express yourself. I know how to write at lengths when it is personal and real."

Rita, a pseudonym, ELPR 101

Excerpt 4)

"One of my teachers really likes to engage us in discussions outside the course materials. She relates the content of the class to some personal stories, and she lets us share our own personal experiences as well. She is also very understanding and supportive. She said that in our presentation, we won't lose marks on our delivery, tone, etc. because it was our first time. She wanted us to be comfortable at talking."

Maryam, a pseudonym, ELPR 101

Excerpt 5)

"English is not emphasized at all in K-12 schooling, not like in university. The way we were taught English in schools are very different from here. Because it wasn't emphasized, we didn't get much practice in speaking. Language is a sea, and it is hard to master it when you are not practicing it. It is hard to master it this way."

Rahaf, a pseudonym, ELPR 101

Excerpt 6)

"The way of teaching materials is very important. A lot of teachers rely on the textbook and the CD that comes with it. So, they just show the book where you could see the answer keys. I feel like this is very boring. There's this strategy that one of my teachers used, and it was so exciting. She'd let us teach certain grammar rules for example. It was very fun. We were listening and laughing the whole time. it doesn't have to be done in every class but some classes, maybe?"

Jehan, a pseudonym, ELPR 101

Appendix F
Coding Scheme

Aligned theme	Codes	Code definition	Type of code (Braun & Clarke, 2022)	Excerpt from data
Accessibility of good EFL Education in K-12	1. The quality of K-12 EFL learning is mediated by socioeconomic influence.	Students who had access to English earlier, especially in private schools, where English instructions is prioritized felt they benefitted from their earlier exposure to the language.	Semantic.	"I think what helped me the most was that I went to private schools. They used to pay attention to English" – Jehan. "I would probably say I had better teachers in private schools because they explain everything in English" – Jumana.
	2. The marginal status of English in K-12	Students discussed the role of English in K-12 instruction compared to college education which becomes more prominent.	Semantic	"We're being taught English since the 5th grade or 4th grade and some teachers didn't give it their all and when you said that the curriculum is all about practicing vocabulary and grammar, this is what I meant by saying that it was marginalized in schools, and it was treated as a marginal subject. This is true also in the case where some teachers use handouts to help student pass the test." – Rahaf

"Some teachers, unfortunately, I mean, some of them used to hand out few pages for us to study from and they will examine you in these few pages. Some of them used to highlight with us what is going be included in the test and what's not included." -- Maryam |

	3. Lack of family support as an impediment for dreams	Participants described their lack of family support as an impediment for their dreams.	Semantic	"It just all happened without planning and I got into this department based on the requirements that I met. I told you my dream is to be a pilot and my family stopped me from pursuing it despite being able to provide for the cost of tuitions" – Mona.
				"It was not about the money for dad, he can. We have the means to pay for it, but I think it was a way to say no. He thought that I was being stubborn. But it is what it is. I will finish the 4 years here Inshallah and then I'll get my diploma" – Jumana.
The value of English for job prosperity and beyond	4. Learning English as a pre-requisite for job	Participants discussed the role English played in obtaining a job in Saudi.	Semantic	"I see a lot of people who have college degrees but because they don't speak English, they can't find jobs" – Rita. "If you have English, and this is what I hear, I didn't try it, you have a bigger chance of getting a job" – Mona.
	5. English as a key for self-development	Participants discussed the role English plays in getting access to "different perspectives" and online resources.	Semantic	"Even resources are much wider and more accessible in English when it comes to content on the internet, I mean" – Rahaf. "We are not just learning the language. We are learning a new culture, a new lifestyle that greatly expands our horizons and broadens our perspective on things. It means learning a new language in which we begin to discover people who speak the language. What is their

				lifestyle? What is their culture? What can we learn from them?" – Jehan.
	6. EMI and Arabic language: a contested issue.	Participants discussed and debated the role English plays in their schooling. While some of them advocated for the use of EMI in K-12 schooling, some sought out solutions by translating textbooks.	Semantic	"I mean, like all preparation year students now, we are taking the same biology, chemistry ... we had in high school but in English. Why didn't we teach them in English to begin with?" – Rita.

"We don't have to take textbooks from the West in English and teach science in English. it could be translated into Arabic, and we would have a fully Arabic curriculum for these STEM subjects." Jehan.

"let's face it, if you don't know English today, you know nothing. I mean, just google any information in Arabic and English to see what I mean." – Jumana. |
| The desire for engaged learning and teaching | 7. Building opportunities for engaged learning through dialogue. | Participants highlighted their desire to engage in dialogic learning where discussions, dialogues, and engagement are central to the learning experience. | Semantic | "The way of teaching could be more engaging by using more strategies. Things we can do, move around, and discuss" – Jehan.

"If there are something written in the book, it's good to try it, make it experimental and engaging. As I told you, we want to do everything. I mean, we can do even more." – Jumana. |
| | 8. Creating room for engaging in learning | Participants discussed the desire to connect in learning experiences | Semantic. | "I mean, they could, for example, help them if they need anything, start a |

beyond textbooks and classrooms	that connects them with their communities.		dialogue with them, welcoming them, or anything. I feel like the most important thing is to engage with these people who speak that language outside of college setting in real life situations". – Mona. "It would be great to have experiences set up as part of the curriculum that relates to our desired major. Like for example, I want to be a doctor. Why don't we connect with people who have experience in going to medical school and they can visit our class and talk about their experience." – Rita
9. The need to engage students in campus-wide activities.	Participants emphasized the need fostering for establishing students'-led clubs and students-aimed community events; thus, nurturing the emergence of communities of learning across campus.	Semantic.	"We don't have students' clubs where we could meet and discuss our issues. We still plan and meet in cafeterias, me, and my friends but it isn't always feasible." – Maryam. "If there were opportunities for students to share their talents, whatever they are. I mean, if you want to share a poem, a story, even if it was just us students in our own preparation year building because this is going to encourage students to at least speak and try different things" -- Mona.
10. The limitations of textbook-oriented teaching	Participants felt disconnected from their learning experience because it is textbook-dominated.	Semantic	"I feel like we just keep going through the pages in every class. Why are we always restricted to one way of teaching?" – Maryam.

				"I feel like it is draining and boring to just sit there and go through the pages" – Rita.
Alignments between students' theorizing their desired learning and task redesign	11. Creating agentive roles for learners	Participants discussed their desire for more agentive role in the process of learning where they get to assist in material selection and assuming the role of the teacher which can be contrasted to the dominance of textbook-oriented pedagogy.	Semantic	"We can have students teach some portions of the class. I think of grammar being the easiest to teach. It would be fun to do and help us engage more." – Jehan. "I mean, if I were the teacher, I would ask students to bring their own stories, sometimes, I will bring my own articles, but I would definitely have students do that too." – Maryam.
	12. The alignment between students' definition of learning and their approach to task redesign.	As students theorized their desired learning, their views of learning, in the first interview, aligned with how they approach redesigning the task.	Latent	"Learning is about engagement. Anything I can do to engage and implement what I am learning" (1st interview with Maryam). "I feel like adding a Q&A and games in my presentation would help the audience to engage with me. It also tests if I understand what I am saying or not. Because if engagement was not part of the presentation, I would honestly just memorize the text and go" (3rd interview with Maryam).
	13. The role of traditional pedagogy in engendering learner's passivity	Traditional, teacher-centric classrooms permeate EFL classroom practices in Saudi Arabia which relegates students to passively receive, without being active in the process.	Semantic	"If it was about my preferred learning method, I will tell you that I like to receive because that's what I was taught to do. I'm not telling you I am like this but that's what has been built into me. I am a person who likes to receive but if I was taught how to look for information

				since I was a kid and had that built into my character so that I could go and look for information myself, that all can be built." – Rahaf. "We just there and listen for 4 hours a day. It gets overwhelming." -- Jehan
Teacher's agency: a wiggle room	14. Creating room for teacher's agency curriculum planning	Participating teachers suggested ways to engage the teachers as part of the curriculum planning process and suggested mechanisms to engage in decision-making.	Semantic	"I would prefer to have teachers develop their own materials. I can give them the objectives of learning, and what needs to be achieved and then monitor the implementation process" – Nehad. "I would love if we could hold end of semester meeting or even end of year, where we could evaluate the implementation of curriculum, and make recommendations to the department" – Randa.
	15. Acknowledging the limitations on teacher's agency in curriculum development	Teachers contested the marginalization of their voices which impacts their ability to respond to their students' needs.	Semantic	"We don't have a voice in decision-making. I think the curriculum is about the teacher who is teaching it, the students who are learning. Where are our voices?" -- Hanadi. "Sometimes I wouldn't have time to address fully students' needs because I have to sort of, finish a certain part and grade it and submit it to the course coordinators" – Nehad.
Writing instructions: The root of the struggle	16. Lack of focus on free-writing exercises	Participating students problematized how writing instruction is approached in the	Semantic	"The textbook does not need 4 hours every day to cover it, we can do more writing. Like

versus pre-scripted topics.	course which focuses on drill-and-skill, and pre-scripted topics and lacked free-writing where students get to choose what they want to write about.		the teacher can ask us to write about whatever" – Mona. "The writing in this class is more about learning how to write sentences than actually writing a lot." – Maryam
17. Writing as process versus writing as a product.	Participating teachers attributed the struggles of students with writing to how writing instructions are generally approached with a focus on the finished product without realizing the recursive, process-oriented paradigm that views writing as exploratory.	Latent	"Students just want to submit the task. They count the words to get to the words' limit. I think this has to do with how they view writing processes" Nehad. "As an English learner, I have always felt that I do not know how to write in English and this feeling grow up with me as an instructor. I have always felt that I need to work on my English writing and improve it in any possible way. As an ESL student, I was too shy to ask for help. But when I moved to the US, I decided to practice my writing as much as I can and seek help. I asked for help at the writing center, asked my peers to review my papers, or even my professors there. Now, I feel like my students need to understand that writing is an ongoing process." Randa
18. The need for more intensive reading as catalyst to improve students' compositions.	Participating students emphasized the lack of exposure to wide variety of extensive readings that may potentially improve their writing.	Semantic	"The professor could give us an article or a book to read about so we can explore different ways of writing" – Jehan. "She [tutor] used to have me read short stories and

				summarize it in my own way. When I write the story, she would ask me to change some of the ending or the events in a creative way, but we don't do the same in class." – Rahaf.
	19. The need for writing as self-expression.	Writing as self-expression is one of the neglected potentials of writing instructions in Saudi Arabia. The functional approach underpinning writing instructions may explain why students are resistant to expressing their opinions in essays. Maybe, they simply never got a chance to exercise using their personal voice in writing.	Latent	"In terms of writing, most of the students, first of all, they are not, … willing to express themselves in words on the paper" – Rabia. "I am working with students on an opinion essay, I noticed when grading the papers that students rarely expressed their opinions in these essays. When I asked them if they understood what an opinion meant, they clearly understood it, but they did not share their opinions in the essay." – Randa.
The perception of enacted curriculum: helpful, yet not enough	20. Repetition of themes as de-motivator	Participating students discussed the repetitiveness of themes in EFL courses which seems to influence students' engagement with the course.	Semantic	"I started to memorize and not care about the information that is why it does not stick because it is the same thing, same story" – Mona. "We are studying the same stuff we have been studying in middle and secondary school EFL except with minor additions. Why do not they make it more complex? We can do more than this." – Rita.
	21. Misalignment between the objectives of the course and students' needs	Participating teachers discussed the course goal as to equip students with general English, shedding concerns on how such goal aligns with student's needs,	Latent	"The goal of the course is to equip them with general English so they can go to the respective departments with a deeper understanding of general English." – Nehad.

	especially bearing in mind that some of these students will go on to study the rest of college via EMI (e.g., students in STEM fields) and lack of placement testing too.		"I don't know if the course is enough to help them study using English as a medium of instruction." – Hanadi.
22. The lack of placement testing as an impediment for learning	Participating students expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of placement testing before assigning students into proficiency levels. This causes students to struggle with the relevance and the pace of the course.	Semantic	"Sometimes, I feel like I am learning new things, sometimes I feel like it is too easy. Even our professors say that we are above this level" – Jumana. "When I first enrolled at the university, I was placed randomly at level 101. I found this course to be extremely difficult. My grades were affected by how badly I did. So, I decided to drop out of the university, go to the UK for a language immersion program for 4 months. I am lucky that my family could afford this and supported me. Now, I re-enrolled at the university and I think this course is relatively easy now." – Rahaf.
23. Contextualized grammar instruction as remedial	Participating students discussed one of positive aspects of the course is the focus on contextualization of grammar instructions as opposed to skill and drill approaches in K-12 schooling.	Semantic	"It is helping me catch up on what I missed in middle school and high school English, especially in grammar." – Jehan. "I like the part where we learn grammar because it tells us how to use it, when, and gives a lot of cues that help me understand it better."

			Semantic	"If they assign a certain time for each student … just so this student can get used to speaking the language" – Maryam.
	24. The extensive nature of the course as a double-edged sword	The time extensive nature of the course was sometimes problematized by students when referencing traditional, rote-learning pedagogy, but it was used by participants to call for more focus on students' needs.		"We just sit there and work on exercises for 4 hours a day. How does this help us? It is very draining and boring." – Rita.
Mothering and the relationship between teachers and students'	25. Mothering facilitates the students' learning.	Participating students reflected on their conception of good teaching which ties into facilitating a space for empathy, developing intimate knowledge of the students' own life experience, and compassionate care extended to students.	Latent	"She would know the student. She would know me and know if I say anything, she will remember it immediately. She would remember what we talked about in each class, and she would remember something I said before, so she is very attentive to details about all her students and this is something I really liked about her. She made me love science, so I will never forget that." – Mona
				"When your teacher makes you feel that she is not just a teacher, she is also a true mom, and that she could be with you in everything. She was with us inside and out, whether in school or outside. She was also in charge of volunteering. So, we were always taking part in volunteering in senior houses and orphan's shelters. She was truly not just an English teacher, she was everything. Although she taught me for

			one year only, but she left a very visible mark on me." – Rita
26. Recognizing the emotional load of learning on students	Participating teachers recognized how essential students' success in this course and how consequential it is to the rest of their college experience. Participating teachers affirmed their own roles in dealing with the emotional challenges that students experience.	Semantic	"Helping students with emotional challenges is a major role for an EFL teacher … as long as you put all your efforts towards the thriving of your students, you will always win." – Nehad. "They think English is too difficult to grasp, thus, feeling helpless and overly inhibited. It is the teacher's role to encourage them get engaged, speak up. I keep complimenting any student's humble effort and response. So, anything they do best to their ability is welcomed. This is the way to help them get their voice reclaimed. I appeal to their hearts first, then their minds. We laugh, we exchange smiles, and tell jokes, then I introduce the unit and the lesson with high vibes to help establish a less stressful learning environment." -- Farrah "I see how many of my students freeze during exams. I know how critical their success in this course is for their success in the university. But the pressure can get the best of them sometimes." -- Hanadi
27. The value of teacher's emotional support	Participating students expressed the role their teachers play in supporting them	Semantic	"She would say that if your English is weak and you don't understand. it's ok, I'm with you and I will work with you.

		emotionally to overcome their inhibitions and learn English successfully.		I would feel, like, why would I be nervous if she is with us?" – Jumana. "I was really convinced that I will never be good in English until I met her. She used to encourage me to get over my fear of English and she would say, it is all in your head. You convinced yourself that you are not good, and that fear took over you and prevented your growth." – Rahaf.
Decentralizing textbooks as the sole source of learning	28. The overused textbooks negatively impact learning.	As the course mandates the use of a textbook, teachers discussed how the overused textbook influence learning inside the classrooms.	Semantic	"No matter how good a textbook is, there will be some sort of limitation. One of the challenges we are facing as teachers is that the textbook has been used for 5 years now. Our students come to class, and they have answer key for all the exercises so when you're teaching …, let us say the grammar part, and you do the exercise with them, just to make sure that they understand, and you know apply what they learned, they already have the answers in hand. So, you cannot make sure that they are answering the exercises themselves. They are not of course applying. Well, so as a teacher you do not enforce the learning." Nehad. "I have students who would always participate in class and are active. But they don't perform well on exams. They care more about getting it right, so they borrow their friend's textbooks from a previous semester and start

| | | | answering in class. There is something wrong when a student |
| 29. Decentralizing textbook as the focus of instructions. | Teachers were discussing the ways in which they endeavored to mitigate the influence of overused textbooks and to bring the focus back on language. | Semantic | "I bring my own materials to make sure that the students, you know, are learning and they understood what I am covering" – Nehad.

"I always leave time after we covered the materials to ask students, what do you need to learn? I think at the end of the day, I try to focus on how my students can use the language in the real world. I cannot just teach my students content and expect them to just follow this content like memorize it" – Hanadi. |

Appendix G

Consent Form for Students (English and Arabic version)

Georgia State University Informed Consent (Participating Students)

Title: Exploring the learning experience of Saudi women teaching and learning EFL: mothering, hopes, and desires

Principal Investigator: Dr. Gertrude Tinker Sachs

Email: gtinkersachs@gsu.edu

Student Principal Investigator: Rihab Alsulami

Email: ralsulami1@student.gsu.edu

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The purpose of this research is to investigate how EFL students experience the curriculum and how their narratives inform teachers' understanding of curriculum. It hopes to reimagine a different way of looking at curriculum grounded in the experience of its recipients, students. If you decide to take part, you will be interviewed a total of four times where each interview will last for an hour. All interviews will be audio-recorded. The interviews will take place individually (a total of three) and in-groups (one interview). In addition, you will be asked to read and give your feedback during data analysis phase to ensure that the researcher's interpretations are accurate. You will be asked to share your experience with the EFL curriculum in preparatory year program.

By agreeing to be part of this study, you agree to be interviewed and for these interviews to be audio-recorded. You acknowledge that, at the completion of this research, the tapes will be in a secured place and then the data will be destroyed after three years. You acknowledge that your answers will be de-identified and given to EFL teachers in the study. You acknowledge that the information may be published, but your name will not be associated with the research.

You do not have to be in this study. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

You will be given the opportunity to ask whatever questions you desire, and all such questions

would be answered.

For any questions, please contact Rihab Alsulami at ralsulami1@student.gsu.edu.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

Participant _____

Date: _____

Researcher _____

Date: _____

جامعة ولاية جورجيا

نموذج الموافقة المسبقة

عنوان البحث: زيارة المناهج من خلال قصص الطالبات السعوديات مع تعلم اللغة الانجليزية

المشرفة: د. قيرترود تينكر ساكس

العنوان البريديGtinkersachs@gsu.edu

الباحثة الطالبة: رحاب السلمي

يُطلب منك المشاركة في دراسة بحثية. الغرض من هذا البحث هو استكشاف كيفية تجربة طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

للمناهج الدراسية وكيف تؤثر رواياتهم على فهم المعلمين للمناهج الدراسية. وهي تأمل في إعادة تصور طريقة مختلفة للنظر

إلى المناهج الدراسية بناء على تجربة متلقيها، أي الطلاب. إذا قررت المشاركة، فستتم مقابلتك أربع مرات حيث ستستمر كل

مقابلة لمدة ساعة. سيتم تسجيل جميع المقابلات بالصوت. ستتم المقابلات بشكل فردي)ثلاث مقابلات فردية(وفي مجموعات

(مقابلة واحدة). بالإضافة إلى ذلك، سيُطلب منك تقديم ملاحظاتك أثناء مرحلة تحليل البيانات لضمان دقة تفسيرات الباحث .

سيُطلب منك مشاركة تجربتك مع منهج اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في برنامج السنة التحضيرية .

أمنح بموجب هذا الإذن إجراء المقابلات وتسجيل هذه المقابلات صوتيًا. أقر بأنه عند الانتهاء من هذا البحث ستكون الأشرطة

في مكان آمن ثم يتم إتلاف البيانات بعد ثلاث سنوات. أقر بأنه ستتم مشاركة اجاباتي مع المعلمات المشاركات بالدراسة بدون أن

تتضمن ما قد يفصح عن هويتي الشخصية. أقر بأنه قد يتم نشر المعلومات، لكن لن يرتبط اسمي بالبحث. أفهم أن لي مطلق

الحرية في رفض أي إجابة على أسئلة محددة في الاستبيانات. أفهم أيًضا أن لي مطلق الحرية في سحب موافقتي وإنهاء

مشاركتي في أي وقت دون عقوبة.

لأية أسئلة، يرجى التواصل. لقد أتيحت لي الفرصة لطرح أي أسئلة أرغب فيها، وقد تم الرد على كل هذه الأسئلة بما يرضي

مع رحاب السلمي على ralsulami1@student.gsu.edu

Appendix H

Consent form for Teachers

Georgia State University Informed Consent

Title: Exploring the learning experience of Saudi women teaching and learning EFL: mothering, hopes, and desires

Principal Investigator: Dr. Gertrude Tinker Sachs

Email: gtinkersachs@gsu.edu

Student Principal Investigator: Rihab Alsulami

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The purpose of this research is to investigate how EFL students experience the curriculum and how their narratives inform teachers' understanding of curriculum. It hopes to reimagine a different way of looking at curriculum grounded in the experience of its recipients, students. If you decide to take part, you will be interviewed in a group with other participants. The interview will be audio-recorded. In addition, you will be asked to write one reflection paper in response to prompts posed by the researcher.

By agreeing to be part of this study, you agree to be interviewed and for these interviews to be audio-recorded. You acknowledge that, at the completion of this research, the tapes will be in a secured place and then the data will be destroyed after three years. You acknowledge that the information may be published, but your name will not be associated with the research.

You do not have to be in this study. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

You will be given the opportunity to ask whatever questions you desire, and all such questions

would be answered.

For any questions, please contact Rihab Alsulami at ralsulami1@student.gsu.edu.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

Participant _____

Date: _____

Researcher _____

Date: _____