

Effective English Language Teaching and Learning: Innovations and Challenges in Saudi Arabia⁽¹⁾

By

Professor Abdulaziz I. Fageeh
College of Sciences and Arts, Tanouma,
King Khalid University

Dr. Mohamed Amin Mekheimer
College of Languages and Translation,
King Khalid University
College of Education,
Beni Suef University

Abstract

In Saudi Arabia, language teaching/learning has undergone a variety of interesting changes in the theories and applications of foreign language pedagogy, influencing the methodologies these theories and practices underlie, and the teaching/learning procedures they imply. These progressive innovations have been introduced to identify the most effective means of scaffolding foreign language learning in Arab countries. In recent years, the approach favored by applied linguists and language educators has come out to be Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The Communicative Language Teaching has been proven to provide ample opportunities for effective foreign language learning. The elements of this approach can be incorporated into a variety of methods of delivery, course content, syllabus structure, and material types. While CLT is widely and successfully implemented in English as a native language (ENL)/ English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, its application and success may be limited in English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. In EFL environments – particularly in the Saudi context – CLT encountered many impediments, which obstruct its implementation in real-life classrooms. For overcoming these impediments, many curricular innovations have been developed and implemented over the last few decades, gaining differing levels of success. Research in curricular innovations can drive practical insights to improve the learning of English in global EFL learning communities. This study provides a contour on using CLT in Saudi Arabia and how it can be activated as a curriculum innovation in college foreign language teaching and learning.

Keywords: Language Teaching, "English as a Foreign Language, communicative language teaching approach.

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التعليم والتعلم الفعال للغة الإنجليزية: التجديدات والتحديات في البيئة السعودية⁽¹⁾

إعداد

د. محمد أمين مخيمر
مدرس كلية التربية
جامعة بني سويف

أ.د. عبد العزيز إبراهيم فقيه
أستاذ اللغويات التطبيقية
بجامعة الملك خالد

الملخص:

مر تعلم وتعليم اللغات في المملكة العربية السعودية بالعديد من التغيرات المثيرة في نظريات وتطبيقات تعليم وتعلم اللغات الأجنبية مما أثر في طرائق ونظريات وممارسات تطبيقات التعليم والتعلم وتضميناتها التربوية. وقد أسفرت هذه التغيرات عن ابتكارات مستمرة تم إدخالها لتحديد أكثر الوسائل فعالية في تعلم اللغات الأجنبية في الدول العربية. حيث استكشفت الدراسة الحالية كيفية نشر تلك التجديدات في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية (ELT) وكيف يمكن أن تحفز هذه الابتكارات فعالية تدريس برامج اللغة الإنجليزية كما يراها أعضاء هيئات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في بعض الجامعات السعودية. وقد اتبعت هذه الدراسة المنهج الوصفي البحثي عن طريق المسح، الذي تم تصميمه كدراسة تقييمية للتجديدات والتحديات التي تواجهها مناهج تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية؛ حيث تم تقديم استطلاع رأي الخبراء بتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية إلى ثلاثة وثلاثين مدرساً للغة الإنجليزية في خمس جامعات سعودية، كان منهم 20 معلماً فقط هم من استجابوا على الاستبيان. تم تطوير الدراسة الوصفية على خلفية الأبحاث السابقة ومراجعة الأدبيات ذات الصلة. وقد أظهرت النتائج الكمية أن الابتكارات في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية شملت دمج تقنيات التعليم / التعلم عبر الإنترنت المناسبة لأساليب تعلم الطلاب والتصاميم التعليمية ونتائج التعلم والتقييم وتمكين المعلمين والحضور الاجتماعي ومهارات الدراسة والتفكير. كما أبرزت النتائج النوعية فوائد هذه التجديدات وعيوبها وآثارها على التقييم. واختتمت الدراسة بإلقاء الضوء على المكونات الحاسمة للمناهج الفعالة القائمة على الإنترنت وتأثيرات مناهج تقديم برامج تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية القائمة على الإنترنت في الجامعات السعودية؛ حيث يمكن للبحوث في التجديدات المنهجية الدفع برؤى عملية لتحسين تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في مجتمعات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ حيث توفر هذه الدراسة تضمينات استخدام مدخل التدريس الاتصالي وغيرها من تجديدات تعلم اللغة في المملكة العربية السعودية وكيف يمكن أن تستخدم كجزء من حركة تطوير المناهج الدراسية في تدريس وتعلم اللغة الأجنبية في المستوى الجامعي.

الكلمات الدالة: تدريس اللغات الأجنبية؛ تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ مدل التدريس التواصلي.

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Introduction

In English language teaching, particularly in Saudi Arabia, attempts to reform and change EFL curriculum and pedagogical practices are common. This trend has in recent decades grown to be a large and important global industry (Alnujaidi, 2008; Jwaifell & Al-Mothana, 2013; Canagarajah, 1999; McKay, 2008; Pennycook, 2003; Phillipson, 2009; Tollefson, 1995). These changes are adopted either by dint of the governmental, educational policies that foster reform and development or by the bandwagon effects of contemporary developments. In this regard, Richards (1984) earlier argued that methodological innovators seem to desire immediate implementation on a worldwide basis. Therefore, language-teaching reformers continue to be calling for the adoption, adaptation, and applications of new teaching and curricular innovations on substantial grounds of awareness of diffusion in innovative factors and processes. In this context, educational reformers and theorists traditionally believe in the inevitability of progress which is epitomized by the famous saying: "Build a better mousetrap, and the world will

beat a path to your door" (Christensen, 2002; Heyne, Sauter, Widenfelt, Vermeiren, and Westenberg, 2010; Tuomi, 2005).

Several authors argued that the primary element in bringing about change is through diffusion of innovation (Estabrooks, C, Thompson, D., Lovely, & Hofmeyer, 2006; Markee, 1993; Tuomi, 2005; Diep & Ngoc, 2017; Li & Edwards, 2013; Sasaki, 2018; Yin, Kennedy, Goh, Paul, Markee, 2009). According to Rogers (2003), a theory of diffusion of Innovations fundamentally aims to demonstrate and describe how, why and how fast new ideas are spread within and across cultures. It is a process by which an innovation is communicated through specific channels over time among the members of a social system. Individuals progress through five stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. If the innovation is adopted, it spreads via various communication channels. Yet, whether this spread is in all respects a desirable event or not (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2003; Phillipson, 2009; Tollefson, 1995), it is a fact universally acknowledged that the spread

of English as a global language is primarily due to economic, educational, and socio-cultural reasons (Baccaglini, 2013; Lee, 2016; McKay, 2008).

This article provides an overview of the theories and methods which have guided the discipline of English Language Teaching (ELT), highlighting the pedagogical and curriculum changes that have emerged with each innovation in the field of ELT in Saudi Arabia with a review of the best practices and innovations diffused in college language teaching. The article seeks to analyze research findings that addressed the improvement of English language teaching (ELT) in Saudi Arabia, in particular as related to curriculum innovations in Saudi Arabian college settings. Though these studies focus in particular on the Saudi context, they are also applicable to other EFL contexts.

Problem

There are specific inherent challenges that need to be explored in the diffusion of innovation in the process of creating an amenable ELT in EFL classrooms in Saudi colleges. The continuous adoption of novel methods, approaches, and techniques for language learning and teaching is not that of acceptance, but it is one of effectively using these approaches or practices as a reaction of the motivation and attitudes of both teachers and students. In some cases, an

ELT methodology adoption may be seen as an educational decorum that bears little significance to the reality of education. The article is, therefore, meant to recognize challenges and identify the methodological changes currently taking place in ELT and to ameliorate future endeavors at ELT reforms in Saudi universities.

Research Methodology

This paper is an analytical study manipulating evaluation research. The research methodology here applied follows an interpretive, descriptive tradition through an exhaustive review of pertinent literature and collating results from prior studies in the analysis of the problem underpinning this study as well as reports of a survey study. The article specifically examines the perceptions of ELT experts in TEFL at the university level as regards challenges and diffusion of innovations in effective English language teaching and learning. It further scrutinizes research findings that elucidate state of the art in English language teaching, especially this that is pertinent to EFL curriculum innovation.

Evaluation research is useful for assessing the quality of current programmes of study, where the researchers examined the effectiveness of different aspects of the educational curriculum for ELT, particularly the challenges and diffusion of innovations

in effective English language teaching and learning (Patton, 2002). This genre of research can provide a basis for decisions that are significant in the evaluation of current educational practices (Patton, 2002).

Methods of Data Collection

The survey instruments consisted of a reflection survey developed and standardized for purposes of the present study by the researchers to glean evaluation data on the challenges and diffusion of innovations in effective English language teaching and learning as perceived by university professors. The survey included close-ended Likert scale statements (quantitative data) and open-ended questions (qualitative evidence). These instruments were used to measure the factors that contributed to the effectiveness of innovations in English language teaching and learning and the challenges and diffusion of innovations from the perspectives of ELT university professors.

Sample and Tools

The ELT Experts Reflection Survey was given to thirty-three English language instructors in five Saudi universities. Only 20 teachers responded to the questionnaire. The ELT Experts Reflection Survey gathered descriptive data from the instructors in order to examine the challenges and diffusion of innovations in effective English language

teaching and learning based on their teaching experience and EFL curriculum effectiveness in their colleges. Informants were asked about their teaching experience, course development experience, and faculty ranking. The questionnaire sought both quantitative and qualitative data.

The validity of the Questionnaire

The ELT Experts Reflection Survey has been submitted over email and snail mail to a jury of TEFL connoisseurs so as to determine its face validity. All jury members voiced their desire that the statements be contextualized and relevant to use in a Saudi environment. Some jurors commented that the language is highly technical and may be sophisticated, "some of it seems a bit advanced". They recommended that the questionnaire be modified to highlight areas of ambiguity or technical sophistication.

Reliability of the Survey

The survey was administered to 17 male lecturers in the researchers' local college to determine its reliability, employing a test-retest method. The reliability of the survey has been defined using the Kuder-Richardson formula (21). The reliability co-efficient computed for the 30 items was 0.76, which is a relatively high, yet conservative estimate of the reliability of the tool.

Literature review

Advances in Theory and Methodology

Data analysis revealed that there were significant Language learning and teaching was classically grounded in learning grammar rules and memorizing vocabulary. This Grammar-Translation Approach was useful in enabling one to translate from a second language into the native language. The GTA method is still pervasive now in many EFL settings as "it requires few specialized skills on the part of teachers [and] tests of grammar rules and translations are easy to construct and can be objectively scored" (Brown, 2007, p.19). However, the Grammar Translation Method can do little to help language students to learn how to communicate using the foreign language in real life situations effectively.

Consequently, the Direct Method came to be used alike, and simultaneously with the Grammar Translation Method, being grounded in commonly believed assumptions about second language acquisition. This is especially true for the sound premise that learning a foreign language occurs in much the same way as native speakers acquire the first language. Some of these assumptions ensure that the native language of FL learners should be abandoned in the FL classroom. Assumed also is that communicative,

helpful, common vocabulary and useful grammar patterns should be presented to the students as early as possible. So much as this is true, inductive grammar points teaching through modeling, drill and practice should be adopted in lieu of deductive grammar teaching. Further and above all, attention should raptly be directed to both speaking and aural-oral comprehension. Partially, because of the complexity of implementing the Direct Method in the classroom, it fell out of favor in the 1920s. The fundamental premises of the Direct Method resurfaced in the primary linguistics-based Audiolingual method (ALM) of the 1940s.

With the introduction of the Audiolingual Method (ALM), new hope for learning a foreign language effectively came prominently. This approach was and is still so successful that adaptations of it can still be found in language classrooms today. The ALM was characterized by a heavy dependence on imitation and memory, typically presented in the form of dialogues, conversations and pattern drills presented in drill and practice activities and exercises to help students better learn the grammar structures in the target language. Learning was traditionally seen as a matter of habit formation; thus, errors were immediately corrected, and accurate responses were immediately reinforced to avert fossilization of errors.

However, Audiolingualism failed to consign to the EFL student the ability to transfer their skills beyond the classroom into actual communication events. Therefore, in the 1970s and 1980s, the notion of communicative competence gained preeminence in language teaching (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972). According to Canale and Swain (1980), an illustrious model of communicative competence views language learning as the enhancement of skills not only in linguistic and grammatical competences but in the sociolinguistic competence as well. Developing sociolinguistic competences helps EFL learners to brush up on the learners' abilities to use language appropriately according to social norms that are learned together in the language learning and acculturation process *per se*). The model also aims to develop learners' discourse competence or the ability to use language in extended discourse rather than merely in de-contextualized utterances as well as to develop the strategic competence or the ability to compensate for one's language deficiencies through a variety of communicative tasks adapted in real language use settings). This shift in the linguistic paradigm inspired the rise of what is currently known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), now universally accepted, in many manifestations, as a powerful approach to language teaching worldwide.

Communicative Language Teaching / Learning: Analysis

The Communicative Approach has come into existence as a result of significant developments in Cognitive Psychology and the Psychology of Education, having its primary aim as "making communicative competence the goal of language teaching and acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p.121). This approach to language learning/teaching has borne out a varied array of classroom practices that focus on the following (Brown, 2007):

1. All aspects of communicative competence;
2. The authentic language presented and used in meaningful contexts;
3. Creating equilibrium between fluency and accuracy in students' developing language abilities;
4. Preparing students to use language both productively and receptively in unrehearsed, real-world contexts according to their needs;
5. Restricting the teacher's role to be that of a mentor, a facilitator of the learning process, and a guide in an almost student-centered classroom rather than as an all-knowing controller in a teacher-dominated environment;
6. Students were active participants in a collaborative, cooperative learning process.

The principles of the Communicative Approach have given vent to a variety of methods and techniques now in currency in ELT practices. One such approach is the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which emphasizes classroom-based activities that engage learners in language use, thereby focusing on meaning, as learners master the basics of the language in use. Brown (2007) maintains that,

"A task-based curriculum specifies what a learner needs to do with the English language regarding target tasks and organizes a series of pedagogical tasks intended to reach those goals" (Brown, 2007, p. 51).

Another CLT variation is the Content-Based Instruction (CBI) approach and its related English for Specific Purposes (ESP) variant method, in which the learning of specific disciplinary content takes place through the foreign language. CBI can be seen in academic settings and professional contexts where English is taught and learned to acquire the technical jargon and professional literature of a specific discipline (e.g., medical professionals, the sciences, etc.). Both of these approaches allow the integration of language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in the development of students' communicative competence. In this way, students can fulfill both practical goals and language needs in a

fashion that tailors the professional needs of learners to match their language needs in an integrated approach.

An off-shoot of the CLT that is grounded in its principles is that of "experiential learning." This approach aims at

"giving students concrete experiences through which they discover language principles by trial and error...giving students opportunities to use language as they grapple with the problem-solving complexities of a variety of concrete experiences" (Brown, 2007, p.291).

CLT principles and techniques may appear in some approaches that have been proposed, implemented, and evaluated in recent years in EFL curricula in Saudi Arabia (Alhadiah, 2017; Alobaid, 2016; Alsaiani, 2015). These CLT-driven language curricula are characterized by the following principles (Brown, 2007):

1. Focusing on all aspects of communicative competence
2. Focusing on authentic language presented and used in meaningful contexts
3. Striking equilibrium between both fluency and accuracy while improving language skills
4. Preparing students to use language both productively and receptively in unrehearsed, real-world settings

according to their needs

5. Utilizing the language teacher as a facilitator and guide in a student-centered classroom rather than as an all-knowing controller in a teacher-dominated environment
6. Enabling students to be active participants in a collaborative, cooperative learning process

Research conducted in Saudi Arabia demonstrates that the EFL syllabus design and curriculum content is consistent with communicative-based approaches rather than relying on highly structured, grammar-based approaches (Alshuaifan, 2009; Al-Subahi, 1988; Onsmann, 2012).

The present study raises a severe demand for a new syllabus which should be based on the communicative-functional approach but with taking the student's level of proficiency in English and their language needs into consideration, too. Their needs should be qualitatively analysed in order to build authentic learning experiences and authentic CLT-based content to disseminate a culture of communicative language use. The implementation of these needs analyses should be operationalized concerning the methodology of classroom instruction to reflect the integrative scheme of the communicative/functional design of English language teaching materials and methods grounded in CLT.

In experiential learning, rather than merely learning about a topic, students are directly involved with the subject matter, "usually there is some physical involvement in the phenomenon as well" (Brown, 2007, p.291). Current ELT approaches to foreign language teaching highlight the importance of EFL learners' self-paced activities of foreign language learning in initiative-taking and active engagement in active learning situations that simulate real-life communication.

Language learners should be responsible for their own learning to develop their self-learning as EFL learners and language users in real communicative situations. This change in the research paradigm has yielded a refined interest in learners themselves as active participants in a cognitively-directed process of learning. EFL learners should, therefore, be counselled to develop a necessary reflective orientation by making use of their learning experiences, attitudes, motivations, beliefs, and assumptions about foreign language and learning (Jaatinen, 2001; Johnson 2004; Kalaja and Barcelos, 2003; Kohonen, 2001; 2003; 2004; Lehtovaara, 2001; Little, 2001, 2004; van Lier, 2004). This approach assumes that practices of communicative language learning, communicative language use, acculturation, and cultural learning, and cognitive learning methods and strategies

are crucial to foreign language learning.

However, EFL learners should be able to skillfully and consciously process their own learning at their own pace. In this way, foreign language learning requires explicit awareness and knowledge of what it is that needs to be learned to reach an acceptable level of proficiency (Ataya, 2015; Lichtman, 2012). This kind of learning includes both metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness about target language learning (Wistner, 2014). From this perspective, learning is viewed to be an ongoing process of creating novel, original and creative knowledge and practice in the transformation of foreign language learning experiences (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2018).

Further, and above all, the rapid technological advancements that have occurred – and will undoubtedly continue to happen – has given birth to the technology-enhanced language learning environment that has become an increasingly vital component and medium of CLT worldwide. Integration of computerized technology is often referred to as Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL). Whatever the name, computerized technology provides many situational-functional teaching and learning opportunities of the target language. The use of word processors helps develop writing skills in as much as the Internet, video and audio

media, and digital storage can provide adequate material for target language learning and teaching materials sufficient for developing all language skills.

Through CALL and CALL-mediated CLT, critical components of a communicative syllabus can be available (Alshumaimeri, 2009). For example, CALL provides various possibilities and events for classroom interaction, and for creating comprehensible input suitable for multiple learning styles and strategies. CALL is also conducive to student collaboration and, concurrently, student autonomy which can support and meet the affective needs of the target language learners (Butler-Pascoe & Wiburg, 2003). The application of technology is especially encouraging given its influential presence in the lives of EFL learners in their use of Internet-based learning via e-learning management systems, mobile education, and Internet media, such as YouTube and Facebook applications, and the like (Aldosari, 2010a; 2010b; Fageeh, 2011; Mekheimer, 2005).

Instructional and Curricular Applications of the CLT in Saudi Higher Education

The implementation of communicative language teaching principles in EFL environments has seldom been regarded to be tricky at higher levels of education in practice despite the pervasively-held belief in the effectiveness of CLT. No

matter whether CLT is adopted by the national curriculum experts, communicative language teaching curriculum may encounter different restrictions, which impede lasting and robust implementation. These difficulties occur in the areas of the teacher, the students, the educational system, and the construct of CLT itself (Aldosari, 2010b).

Teachers may face difficulty regarding their possessing misconceptions about the elements of CLT due to several reasons and manifestations; viz, lack of training or limited opportunities for retraining in CLT activities and tasks, a shortage of competence or confidence in their English skills, and lack of time in classroom schedules to better improve communicative language teaching. EFL learners have limited motivation to learn English as a means of genuine communication, which makes them unable to engage in communicative activities.

Aside from these difficulties associated with implementing CLT that can be ascribed to EFL teachers and learners, some problems arise out of the nature of the EFL educational system, such as the large class sizes (30 – 50 students) that are common in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan and the like.

Furthermore, while national

ministries of education may officially decree that communicative approaches be utilized, there could be some resort to grammar-based examinations, thus motivating teachers and students to stay focused on conventional, non-communicative teaching methods. Besides, there could be a shortage of logistic and administrative support for EFL teachers and programs that aim to make the changes necessary to create a successful communicative curriculum for ELT. Finally, CLT as a method is itself less clearly defined than are other, more traditional methods such as Grammar-Translation and Audiolingualism. Therefore, stakeholders throughout the educational system, from governments to students, may lack clarity on precisely what CLT is, how it can be utilized, and what benefits it can bring.

The best practices in the literature and orature of foreign language pedagogy in the Arab Gulf indicate that there are a plethora of language learning benefits that arise from adopting and adapting the CLT to language teaching and learning (Almelhes, 2016; Alsaiari, 2015; Hagar, 2016; Osman, 2015). Researchers believe that the applications of CLT can be expedited when learners perceive the hurdles in the curriculum revisions done on a regular basis (e.g., Alonso Luaces, 2015; Cattell, 2009; Huang, 2011; Pu, 2009; Uwamahoro, 2014). Therefore, there should be an understanding of the

links between theory and practice in foreign language learning and teaching (Liao, 2011; Zhang, 2013; Dimitrieska, 2016). There should also be semi-structured and creative, free situations available in classrooms for students to help them to use the foreign language in real-life tasks and activities communicatively (Brown, 2007). Researchers and practitioners also believe that EFL learners should acquire an awareness of how learning occurs and how they can use available opportunities for real-world communication, which emerge from task-based approaches to ELT (Brown, 2007; Butler, 2011).

Further, and above all, the application of technology-enhanced methods in EFL learning environments is one of the most encouraging approaches to curriculum innovation in the ELT classes. Considering ELT in the pre-tertiary education curriculum, the integration of technology is an exceptionally natural blending of target language learning with their interests and apparently natural inclinations (Aldosari, 2010a; 2010b; Fageeh, 2011).

Besides, in EFL contexts, students' lack of exposure to authentic native speaker English can impede the natural growth of adequate listening and speaking skills. Listening and speaking skills or communicative abilities could be thwarted due to instructor-related causes or to the EFL students

themselves, especially when teachers and learners share the same native language and they do not tend to use the language fluently outside the classroom. Furthermore, real-life opportunities for communication with native English speakers are rare, so there could be no real chances to use the target language communicatively outside the classroom. Therefore, ELT curriculum designers and classroom practitioners should work out novel ideas to create authentic English uses in the target language classroom (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Communicative language use can occur in a diversity of ELT settings and in several creative ways to develop students' aural-oral skills that can help increase their general motivation to learn the target language (Aldosari & Mekheimer, 2013; Mekheimer, 2011; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008).

Additionally, prior research in ELT offers practical insights for EFL teaching professionals to develop, implement, and evaluate curriculum innovations geared towards developing communicative English abilities of learners in EFL contexts (Aldosari & Mekheimer, 2013). Research on innovations in this area of English language education continues, and one promising model is the emergence of a world Englishes acceptance movement in English language education literature, setting aside the controversies of the Standard versus Colloquial usages of English

(Aldosari & Mekheimer, 2013). Modern technology use such as access to YouTube and social networking media plugins that enable intercultural, inter-lingual and inter-dialectal interactions and enhance developing essential writing skills (Jou, 2008; Mekheimer, 2012).

Findings

The Instructors' Reflection Survey gathered descriptive data from the instructors in order to look for correlations between teaching experience

and course effectiveness. Instructors were asked about their faculty rank, teaching experience, and course development experience. The instructors were asked how long they had been teaching at KKU and how long they had been teaching the e-courses under investigation in this research. The results of these questions on the survey indicated instructors' teaching experience. The results are summarized in Tables 1 through 5 below.

Table 1: Instructors' Ranks

Faculty Rank	NO	%
Professor	2	10
Associate Professor	3	15
Assistant Professor	8	40
Instructor	7	35
Total	20	100

Table 2: Teaching Experience of faculty

Online Teaching Experience	NO	%
Less than one semester	2	10
One semester to two semesters	6	30
Two semesters to three semesters	5	25
Two semesters to four semesters	7	35
Total	20	100

The Figure below summarises these percentages:

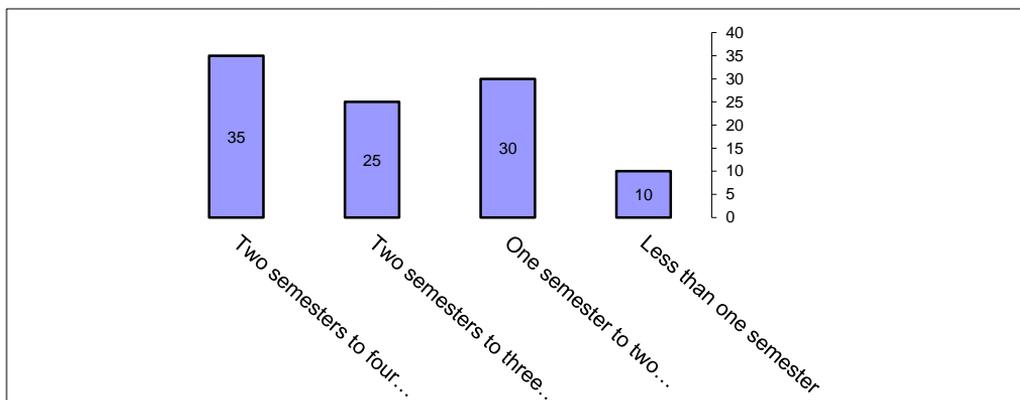


Fig. 1: Experience with Online Teaching

Table 3: Teaching Experience in Higher Education Institutions

Previous Teaching Experience in Higher Education Institutions	NO	%
Yes	14	70
No, if no skip question #5	6	30
Total	20	100

Table 4: Total of Teaching Experience in Higher Education Institutions

Total Number of Teaching Years in Higher Education Institutions	NO	%
Less than one year	-	-
1 year to less than 2 years	6	42.9
2 years to less than 3 years	2	14.3
3 years to less than 5 years	3	21.4
5 years to less than 10 years	3	21.4
10 years to less than 20 years	-	-
Total	14	

Table 5: Overall ELT Course Development Experience

Overall Online Course Development Experience	NO	%
1 course	2	10
2- 3 courses	5	25
4-5 courses	9	45
6 or more courses	4	20
Total	20	100

The figure below summarises these percentages:

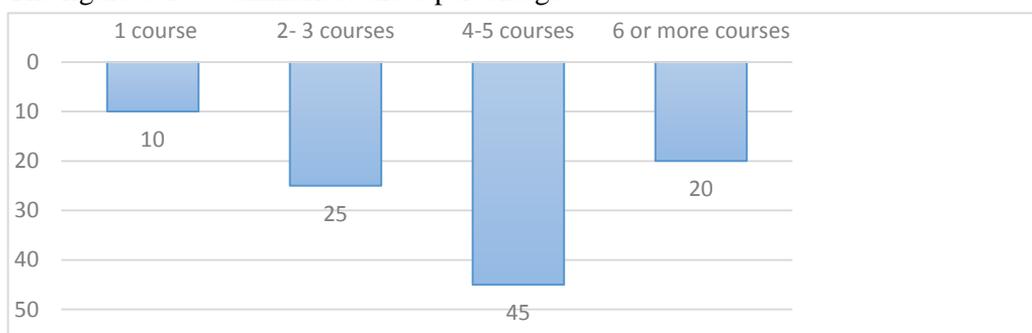


Fig. 2: ELT Curriculum Development

The first question in this survey requested information about the ranks of the faculty conveniently selected for this study who were involved in teaching, developing and evaluating ELT courses. The results showed that 10 % of faculty were professors, 15 % associate professors, 40 % assistant professors, and 35 % were instructors. The most startling result about the ELT courses taught by the study participants was that 90 % of the surveyed faculty members were involved in developing their English language courses more than once. None of the

instructors who participated in this study was teaching for their first time, although 10 % of them said they taught the courses for less than one semester while 35 % taught these courses for about four semesters. On the contrary, none of the instructors had been teaching the courses involved in the study for over 10 years. Yet, 15 % were teaching for one to two years and 30 % were teaching for five to 10 years. For the most part, the instructors who participated in this study have had sufficient teaching experience at Saudi universities and elsewhere.

Interestingly, therefore, 70 % of the participants had previous teaching experience of instruction in higher education institutions. Of this percentage, 42.9 % have had one to two years of teaching experience, while none had more than 10 years' experience.

The survey also provided information about the instructors' experience in designing ELT courses. Research findings about English language curriculum development experience demonstrated that many of the instructors involved in this research had developed 4 to 5 ELT courses. Only 10 % developed only one ELT course, 25 % developed from one to three courses

while 20 % designed more than six courses for teaching English as a foreign language. This low percentage of ELT instructors with low experience in ELT course development could be attributed to the fact that the educational policy in Saudi universities does not allow low experienced teachers to design ELT courses independently from the authorities in the English departments. As for the responses of faculty regarding their agreement to the organisation of instructional design and course development, Table 6 below summarises these responses.

Table 6: Instructional design and ELT Course Development

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Don't Know		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1. New EFL curriculum structure and materials are well organized and regularly revised compared to previous courses.	2	10	5	25	-	-	10	50	3	15
2. New developments and innovations in the ELT curriculum are introduced because old syllabi lack coherence and interconnectedness.	16	80	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5
3. The new EFL curriculum is designed with various visual, textual, and/or auditory materials and activities that are innovated to improve teaching and learning.	-	-	1	5	-	-	18	90	1	5

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Don't Know		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
4. The new EFL course contents available in CD-formats, online, or on e-learning platforms are typically appropriate and updateable compared to old, traditional books.	3	15	5	25	-	-	8	40	4	20

In an effective EFL class, instructional design and course development efforts should work to afford students with clearly stated expectations and teaching/learning strategies, as well as sufficient feedback and opportunities for interactive, collaborative and cooperative learning. The electronic format of EFL course content or learning software, e-learning platforms, or other electronic or online media used in delivering these courses in Saudi universities such as the Blackboard Academic Suite technology were reported to be currently used more often than not. This technology helps present and deliver the course contents in interactive, multimodal sensory media that pander to the students' various learning styles of the students. In addition, these materials can be updated on a regular basis.

According to faculty' responses, 65 % of the faculty agreed that generally the

structure and materials of EFL courses in their departments are well organized and well formatted as well as being revised on a regular basis compared to previous courses. On the other hand, 35 % disagreed that the structure and materials were well organised. In addition, 80 % of the respondents were in disagreement as to EFL course syllabi lacking in coherence and consistency. Nonetheless, 5% of the participants had neutral perceptions; whilst 10 % only agreed to the perception that the EFL curriculum had sufficiently orderly structure and materials.

In general, this section tapped into the respondents' views concerning organization and design of the online courses, the agreement to whose statements (57.5 %) indicated that the courses were well-designed and finely organized and integrated with the purposes and activities of learning, as is shown in the following figure:

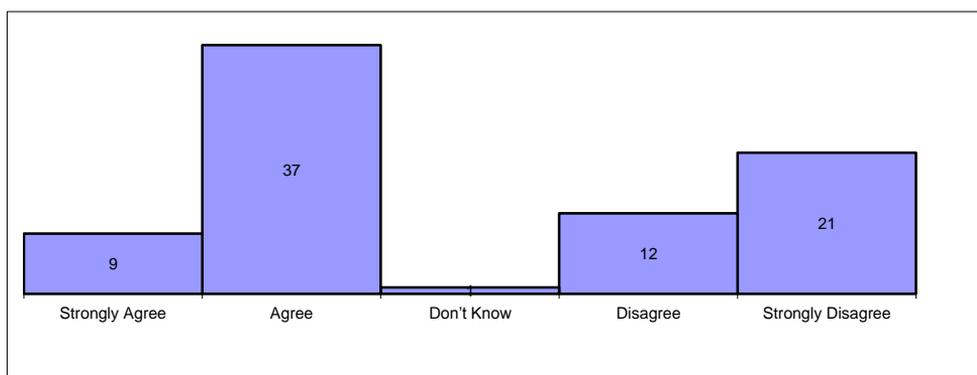


Fig. 3: Instructional design and Delivery of the EFL Curriculum

Table 7: Student learning outcomes

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Don't Know		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1. The learning outcomes outlined in newly developed courses are clearly explained in NCAAA course specifications format.	1	5	4	20	1	5	11	55	3	15
2. The teaching/learning activities, tasks, methods and procedures that are required to successfully complete the class are clearly defined as specified in the NCAAA.	-	-	5	25	-	-	14	70	1	5
3. Sufficient time is allowed for achieving outcomes.	5	25	6	30	2	10	5	25	2	10

Faculty respondents have also reported on how they perceived student-learning outcomes in EFL learning contexts, given the challenges and innovations of education today. Out of total responses, 70 % of the informants amongst faculty noted that the learning outcomes outlined in the syllabus are clearly explained in NCAAA course

specifications formats before courses are initiated. These course specifications are made available over Blackboard early in the first week of study. In addition, 75 % indicated that the teaching/learning activities, tasks, methods and procedures that are required to successfully complete the class are clearly defined as specified in the NCAAA. Startlingly, 35

% of faculty agreed that sufficient time is allowed for achieving outcomes, while 55 % disagreed to this perception. Conceivably, the reason for this is that much learning effort is exerted by the students themselves in EFL classrooms or on their own at home, which is an

essential feature of self-directed learning. Largely, informants commonly agree to the statements of this section in a positive way, indicating better learning outcomes of the curriculum innovations that invest in e-learning activities; this is shown in the figure below:

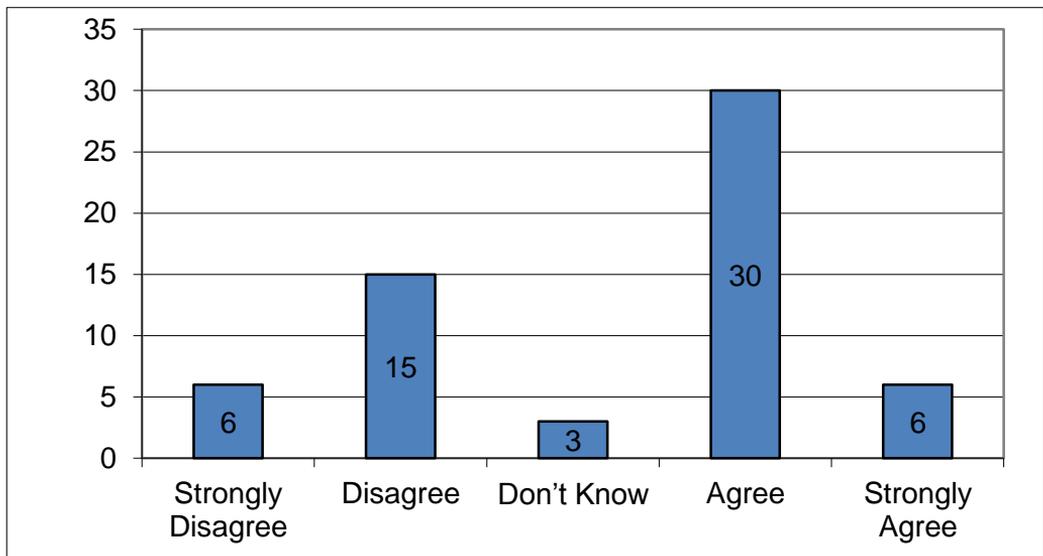


Fig. 4: Student learning outcomes

Table 8: Developing Assessment and Evaluation

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Don't Know		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1. A significant challenge to evaluation is that assessments are haphazard and summative in nature; regular formative assessments are normally ignored.	-	-	3	15	2	10	1	5	14	70

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Don't Know		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
2. New EFL courses guide students on how they will be graded in the class as well as in teaching.	6	30	5	25	-	-	7	35	2	10
3. New EFL courses provide assignment activities with appropriate levels of difficulty to provide formative evaluation.	8	40	5	25	-	-	3	15	3	15
Diagnostic assessment is done early before course instruction begins and for remedial education and feedback on students' assignments is provided within a reasonable timeframe for course coordinators and quality management offices.	4	20	3	15	1	5	8	40	4	20

As for assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes as a result of using EFL curricular innovations, faculty from different universities indicated that one significant challenge to evaluation is that the assessments are done haphazardly with traditional courses compared to the innovations in curriculum developments. Yet, 15 % disagreed to the statement that assessments are haphazard, while 10 % were neutral. In addition, participants were split into two halves; one half believed that grading systems are clearly explained in class, while the other half disagreed. Furthermore, 60 % of the informants indicated that feedback on

assignment is provided within a reasonable time frame, expectedly because of the Blackboard software used.

The figure below mostly displays much disagreement as to the efficiency of assessment procedures devised for the EFL curriculum after technology innovations had been introduced. The reason could be that the overlap in evaluative procedures, as well as the variety of assessments techniques employed in e-learning environments, could lead some teachers and students as well to be confused. Another problem arises; namely, it concerns how to transfer the evaluation results into the

credit hours system. Furthermore, some in online environments. assessments occur in a haphazard fashion

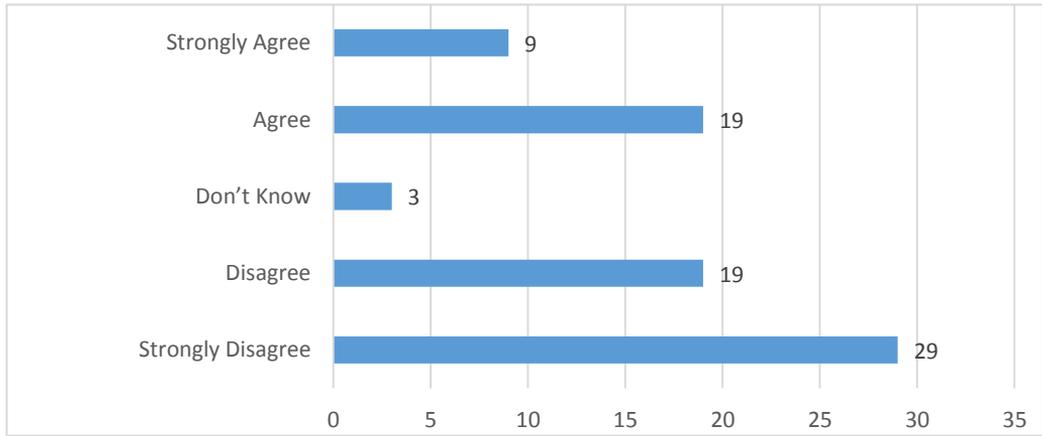


Fig. 5: Assessment and Evaluation

Table 11: Student Empowerment

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Don't Know		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Innovations in the EFL curriculum offer the students many opportunities to express themselves communicatively.	2	10	4	20	-	-	7	35	7	35
Innovations in the EFL curriculum offer the students many opportunities to share their cultural backgrounds.	6	30	5	25	1	5	6	30	2	10
Innovations in the curriculum offer the students the opportunity to express their voices as to how they will be graded.	5	25	7	35	1	5	6	30	1	5

Most participants (70 %) showed that sufficient opportunities in new EFL EFL college students are offered curricula to express themselves communicatively as in online courses

more than it was the case in the traditional curriculum. However, 55 % could not perceive that EFL students have enough opportunities to share their cultural backgrounds and experiences when they learn EFL in the new EFL curriculum. Moreover, 70 % also disagreed that curricular innovations offer EFL students the opportunity to express their views as to how they would

be graded, but 35% perceived otherwise. Maybe the regulations of the Saudi universities as elsewhere in governmental higher education are rigid, and no dictum can even be considered as regards the university grading system which is unbreakable even by faculty. The figure below shows the general concurrence to the overall statements in this section:

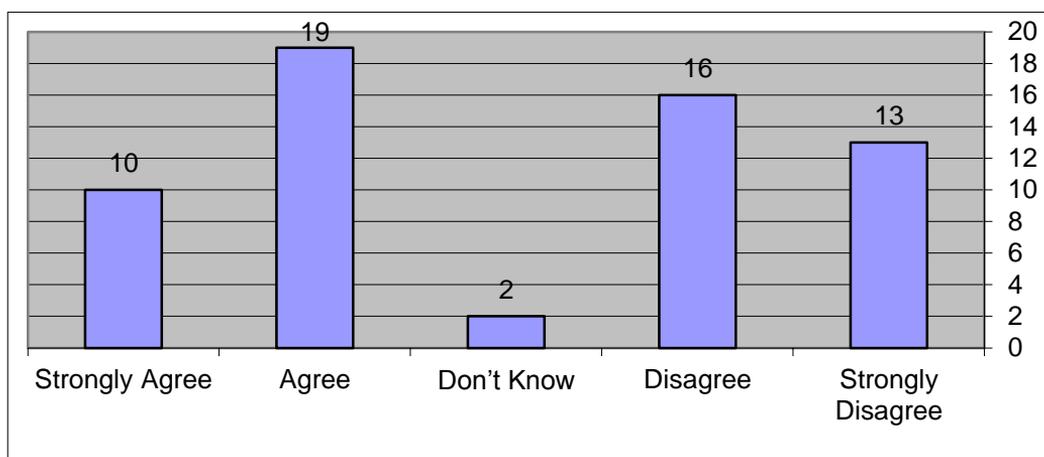


Fig. 8 Student Empowerment

Table 12: Social Presence

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Don't Know		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
EFL learners are encouraged by curriculum innovations to post in English about themselves in social interaction platforms such as in discussion boards, wikis, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc.	3	15	4	20	1	5	7	35	5	25

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Don't Know		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Students are required to think in-depth about learning topics as in reading, writing, listening and speaking activities.	1	5	1	5	3	15	7	35	8	40
Anonymity in social interactions can lead to cheating and other unethical practices in the assessment of free online learning activities.	9	45	6	30	-	-	4	20	1	5
EFL learners are given opportunities for positive interactions with other students in e-learning settings.	7	35	6	30	1	5	4	20	2	10
Curriculum innovations can help EFL learners to feel part of a global EFL learning community.	6	30	4	20	2	10	5	25	3	15

The table above showed that a great percentage of informants, exactly 70% of the participants believed that EFL students in the new curriculum are encouraged to post a self-introduction on whiteboard. Furthermore, 75% of them also believed that students are required to think in-depth about a subject. However, 25% believed that anonymity can lead to cheating and other unethical practices. Even less participants (30%) perceived that EFL students are given opportunities for positive interactions with other

students. Some of them (40%) further believe that the Curriculum innovations can help EFL learners to feel part of a global EFL learning community. This could be perhaps due to the nature of the virtual learning environment itself, which constrains peer interactions. Therefore, half the informants disagreed to the point that students in this virtual learning environment felt they were part of a larger learning community. The figure below summarises these findings diagrammatically:

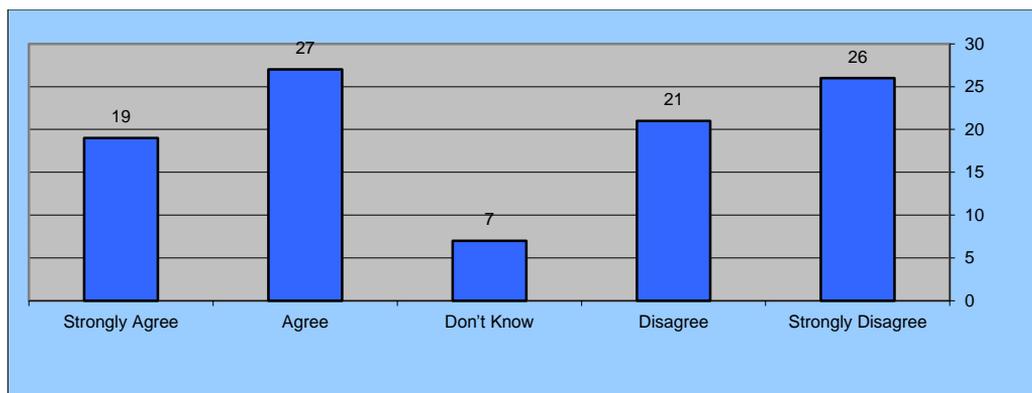


Fig. 9 Social Presence

Table 13: Study and Thinking Skills

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Don't Know		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Students are required to think in-depth about a subject.	3	15	4	20	2	10	9	45	2	10
Students are required to analyze, synthesize, and interpret information.	2	10	5	25	1	5	8	40	4	20
Students are required to problem solve.	2	10	1	5	1	5	5	40	5	40
Courses can help students develop critical and creative thinking.	3	15	-	-	-	-	6	45	5	40

In this section, 75 % also agreed that online courses require deep thinking, while 15 % were neutral and 10 % disagreed. However, a greater percentage (55 %) agreed that the specific subject area in-depth thinking was required as

part of the online course. About 60 % also concurred that online course delivery induces the development of higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and interpretation, which are core skills to creative thinking.

As well, 80 % and 85 % agreed that online courses help in developing problem-solving skills and critical and creative thinking skills, respectively. A great percentage also (75 %) disagreed that anonymity is conducive to cheating and other unethical practices, while 25 % agreed to this point. Overall agreement

to statements of this section refers to a wider concurrence to the statements, which indicates that online course delivery could be motivating to more creativity and critical thinking of the students inasmuch as instructors believed. The figure below shows this comparison:

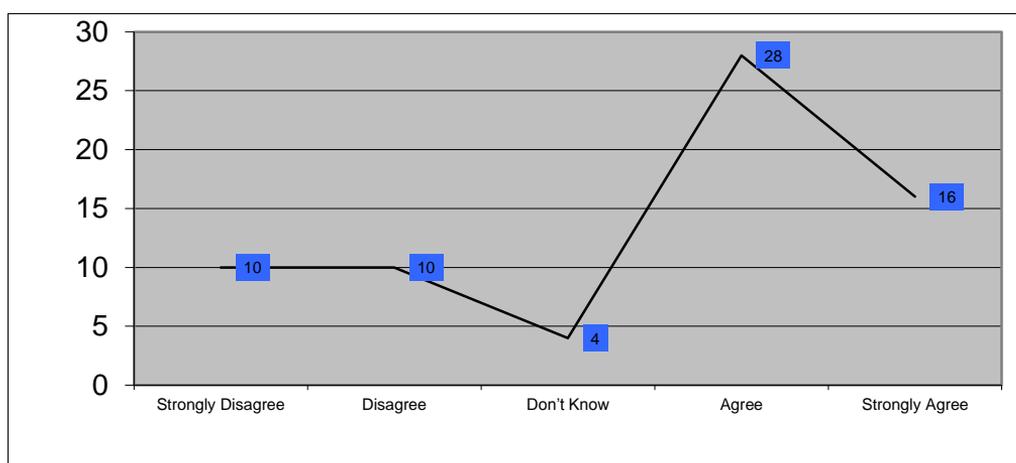


Fig. 10 Study and Thinking Skills

Table 14: Course alignment

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Don't Know		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Learning activities and assignments that reflect student interests and abilities are provided.	1	5	2	10	1	5	9	45	7	35
Learning outcomes are in alignment with the EFL curriculum requirements.	2	10	1	5	3	15	8	40	6	30
EFL Programme assessments are in agreement with the content and learning goals.	2	10	3	15	-	-	8	40	7	35

As for EFL curriculum alignment, a higher percentage of the participants (80 %) responded that the activities and assignments reflected student interests and abilities. As well, 70 % agreed that learning outcomes are in alignment with the curriculum requirements. Many participants (75 %) also coincided that assessments are in harmony with the

curriculum content and learning goals. Approximately most of the responses tallied that there is a high perception of EFL curriculum alignment with students' proficiency levels, course requirements, content and goals students' proficiency levels, course requirements, content, and goals as is shown in Fig. 12 below.

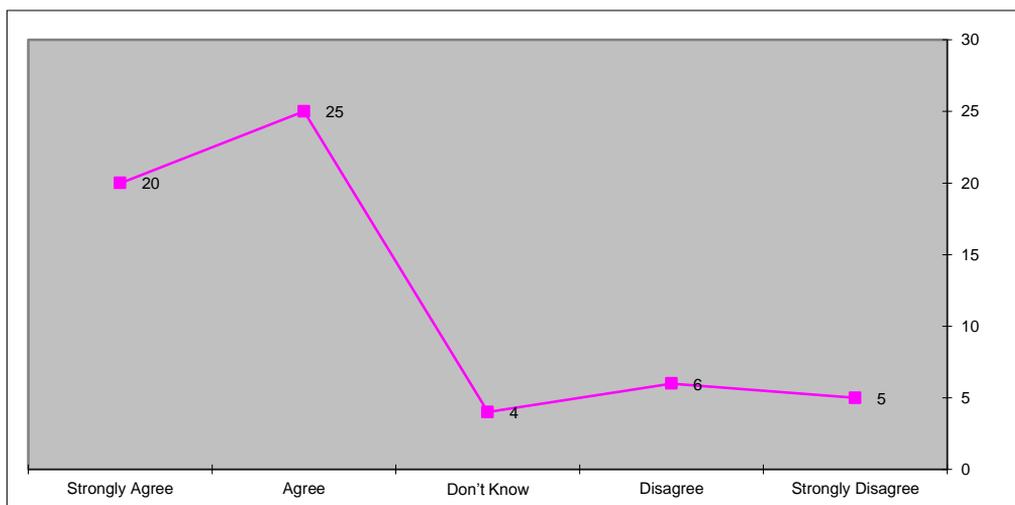


Fig. 11 Course alignment

Benefits of Online Course Delivery

The following table (Table 15) summarises the responses of the informants as to their perceptions about the advantages of online delivery methods of the EFL curriculum.

In their views, accessibility is the greatest benefit of online courses (70 %), then comes student-centredness (55 %), and flexibility (45 %) and finally collaboration (35 %).

Table 15: Benefits of Online Courses

Benefits of online courses	Frequency	%
Accessibility	14	70
Flexibility	9	45
Student centered	11	55
Encourages collaboration	7	35

The participants in the open-ended section of the questionnaire which tapped their perceptions about other advantages of technology innovations in the EFL curriculum indicated that online courses could offer better accessible opportunities for learning and alternative mediums and milieus for information. They also believed that these innovations could enhance student-to-student and faculty-to-student communication. They further perceived that these innovations could facilitate the use of different techniques and procedures to assess and evaluate students' progress. The participants also cited other advantages such as time flexibility and geographic flexibility. They indicated that EFL learners do not have to physically attend classes or take notes in face-to-face interactions with their teachers. Another benefit cited the fact that EFL learners who tend to be timid to share their

learning experiences in a physical classroom are usually much more gregarious in the online learning environment. They tend to be more willing to post comments or respond to discussion queries on the class discussion forum and threads. Learners are usually more predisposed to asking their instructors questions via email. Consequently, a shy or timid learner can have a more positive learning experience in an online environment.

Challenges of Curriculum Innovations

Informants agreed with higher percentages up to 80 % that isolation and lack of face-to-face interactions are the major challenges of making full use of technology innovations introduced to the EFL curriculum. In addition, it was revealed that technical skills of faculty or students could be another major drawback (50 %).

Table 16: Benefits of Online Courses

Drawbacks of online courses	Frequency	%
Isolation	16	80
Lack of face-to-face interactions	16	80
Time intensive	6	30
Lack of technological skills in students or faculty	10	50

The respondents further cited other disadvantages such as discipline-related problems and time management problems, difficulties with credit transfer, difficulties with access to knowledge and technology. Some participants, in this line, observed that online courses are more laborious and time-wasting than teaching traditional courses because communication via email or discussion boards requires more time than communication conducted during a face-to-face class. Another disadvantage of online courses mentioned by faculty is the complete lack of supervision.

Effects on Teaching Pedagogy

A great number of informants (95 %) responded that online course delivery has affected their teaching methods and styles. Most of them have recognised the importance of developing sound pedagogy that meets the needs of all students. As with other types of pedagogy, however, the effectiveness of online teaching depends upon the way

instructors utilize the available resources. According to respondents, online course instruction may become the preferred instructional delivery method for some students and for themselves as well if the full range of content, goals of the course and methods and styles of presentation are amenable to technology and the outcomes are equal to those of traditional methods. Therefore, they can deliver online course content through a variety of instructional tools including media presentations and notes, computerized tutorials, links to outside resources, discussion forums, and e-mail for communication among students and the instructor. Some of these include the way in which online courses can be accommodating to many teaching and learning styles, but given technological impediments, it is difficult to accommodate everyone. Furthermore, there is a problem with time management in online course design and online teaching; informants indicated that online teaching can be more time-consuming, as it requires daily

interaction. Specifically, instructors emphasized that they spent more time helping some students to understand the materials.

Many participants indicated that the effective online class provided a variety of supporting media as earlier said, such as discussion forums, and e-mail for communication. As such, they highly appreciated the broader integration of materials that are embedded in online course delivery, such as video clips, web links, and audio lectures. Another interesting dichotomy of perspective was the way in which students tended to view the instructor as the most important element to providing a successful learning environment, while the teachers tended to view the course structure, objectives, and communication mediums as the most important.

Faculty also noted that online teaching which uses technology and web-based resources could also influence traditional course design and course alignment. Informants suggested that their online teaching experience had also affected the way in which they taught their courses in real-life classrooms inasmuch as it affected their teaching pedagogies in virtual classrooms. They discovered that the availability of online resources, the unique nature of online communication, and the extensive use of written communication have all induced them to re-evaluate their teaching in the

traditional classroom. Several instructors stated that they could incorporate more web resources, online assignments, and online multimedia technologies in the traditional classes.

Effects on Assessments and Evaluation Techniques

The diversity of assignments and activities helps address the need for variety in student learning. Informants, with greater frequency of responses in several wordings, noted that assessments could be enhanced through launching online course evaluations and peer assessment, though some teachers cited that these were not always as effective in an online environment as in the traditional curriculum. They were uncertain of inventing or introducing new contrivances to improve these methods and expressed concerns. The Blackboard technology, it was cited by some informants, could be used to support effective evaluation methods used to evaluate student work, such as monitoring assignments, Blackboard discussions boards, projects, and quizzes.

Critical Components of Effective Online Courses

Informants indicated that there are certain components which are critical to the success of online courses, such as instructor availability, clear directions, interaction and communication, a dynamic curriculum, and technical

accessibility all contribute both to learning and the ease of use in an online course. Others referred to more interesting and livelier materials, thought-provoking questions, and a variety of quizzes and exercises will generate motivation and enthusiasm for learning. But more significantly, informants made frequent mentions about the grading system; they indicated that course materials, instructions, and grading systems must be “organized, well written, and up-to-date,” while assignment deadlines should be “frequent and firm”.

Improvement of Online Courses at KKU: Faculty Suggestions

Informants in greater frequency of responses indicated that more systematic faculty training as to how to use Blackboard e-learning technology. They also requested that technicians should always be readily available to help solve the problems that crop up sometimes with the Blackboard programme. Many informants indicated that the programme does not sometimes function well outside the campus when they try to access the system from servers other than the KKU’s server. Some also mentioned that it is sometimes difficult to upload outside web information, like visual and audio content.

Furthermore, they expressed a desire for more interaction and the development of a community of online professors.

Some many requested more collegial professional development and coordination to make best use of Blackboard.

Thoughts about Online Course Delivery in Saudi Universities

Concisely, participants in this study believed that they preferred to teach the EFL curriculum online because it suited their teaching styles, their learners’ learning styles. In addition, they also liked the community of learners who tended to prefer online courses and enjoyed the relaxed learning atmosphere.

On the other hand, some faculty revealed several negative aspects of online teaching, such as problems with time management and problems with the physical and social presence of faculty. A great many are hired from other Arab, Asian or Western countries where many of them expressed a feeling of disturbance as to potential firing in case they fail to stick to the standards of online course teaching. They also believed that “personal, face-to-face interaction between student and instructors and between students and other students should be optimized first by the teachers and then in the curriculum designs.

Conclusion

Innovation could be a shadowy endeavor at making a positive change in learning and teaching. This change is the

result of adopting innovations whose success cannot be guaranteed. However, to make the implementation of change successful, several steps should be followed:

1. Make sure that not only is the change required, but that the intended ELT audiences notice the call for recent developments in ELT theory and practice;
2. Plan moderate curricular developments that are neither too arduous (in ways inducing greater resistance) nor too diminutive (in ways that belittle the importance of these innovations), both of which may cause the new curricular developments to flop;
3. Ensure that curriculum developments and innovations cover both what is practical and achievable, and that no impediments remain in a way that might preclude success;
4. Adopt a broad spectrum of curriculum development strategies, including eliciting support from all concerned authorities, improving and sustaining open communication so that all concerned parties could remain aware of the development process.
5. Attract the community's participation in the curriculum reform process so that they have a sense of ownership.

This study has focused on the recent innovations in developing and practising

ELT in the English language curriculum to promote successful learning of English in EFL university settings. Research findings cited in this study are expected to enthuse teachers to accept and develop these innovations as well as to provide support for the implementation of these innovations not only on campus but also in the entire society, from the formal higher education institutions to the informal social settings such as the virtual learning environments.

Pedagogical implications

Reviews of prior research and the findings from the present study can yield pedagogical implications to gear EFL teaching innovations in universities. These implications show the salient features of proven teaching/learning methods and approaches. The pedagogical implications drawn from this study are as follows:

1. Language instructors should focus on skill development rather than subject knowledge and follow more learner-centered and self-directed, self-paced learning, especially in life-long technology-enabled, technology-assisted learning contexts.
2. EFL instructors should guarantee more diversity of eLearning activities and teach language skills in integration through eLearning platforms.

3. EFL teachers at colleges should integrate the use of authentic materials and language learning simulations in online learning milieus.
4. EFL teachers need to integrate social interaction media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in their day-to-day life learning or any other similar modes in eLearning platforms.
5. EFL teachers should use more 'communicative' activities for enhancing their students' listening, reading and writing abilities embedded in e-learning platforms.
6. EFL instructors provide links to free online resources such as textbooks, EFL learning websites, discussion boards, blogs, wikis, YouTube videos on EFL learning, etc. to EFL learners.
7. EFL instructors need to conduct periodical curriculum evaluation to highlight students' successes and recognize their difficulties with the implementation of innovations in the foreign language curriculum.

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