

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SAUDI ARABIA: A BOOK REVIEW

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ABSTRACT: *English Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia: An Introduction* is a book by Yousif A. N. Alshumaimeri published in 2019 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The first part of the book provides an overview of the study of the English language. The second part analyses the various approaches and teaching methods used in English language instruction. At the end of each chapter, discussion activities for teachers and students are outlined. English is currently being taught in most public learning institutions worldwide. Despite this, there are not enough books available to assist international student teachers from various backgrounds and cultures with different first languages who are studying to be English teachers. Alshumaimeri's book identifies several methods and approaches that can be used when teaching English, discusses their advantages and disadvantages and describes the roles of teachers and students in these methods. While it targets students of English, this book provides a rich history of teaching English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. These factors make the book relevant for student teachers of English.

KEYWORDS: teacher education, English language teaching, teaching methods, undergraduate students, EFL, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

English Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia: An Introduction, written by Alshumaimeri and published in 2019, provides insights for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student teachers. The book is relevant to student teachers from Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia, who learned English as a foreign language. This review highlights the book's strengths and limitations and explores its incorporation into EFL teacher preparation programmes.

There are several aspects of the book that make it suitable for training EFL student teachers. First, it was written for Saudi Arabian undergraduate EFL students, university lecturers and researchers. It is also an accessible guide that defines the roles of both teachers and students in the classroom through various language teaching methods. The book was designed as a coursebook, and at the end of each chapter, in-class discussion exercises and homework for the student teacher are

presented. The book includes a variety of activities, including pair work, group work, individual tasks and multiple-choice questions.

The first chapter provides background on the English language and its importance. Readers are familiarised with the definitions, characteristics and nature of English. This chapter describes the different levels of linguistics and gives an overview of the English language. The chapter concludes by highlighting the importance of English as a lingua franca.

In the second chapter, the author provides the target audience with a comprehensive account of EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia. Readers are introduced to the English language and how it is currently taught in the country. Student teachers learn about the goals of teaching English at various educational levels and the context in which English is taught in Saudi Arabia. They are also familiarised with various levels of spoken English as it is taught in Saudi Arabia.

In the third chapter, the author provides short accounts of the history of English and its relationship to other languages. Readers learn the origin of the English language, how it spread over the years and the influence that Arabic, among other languages, has had on it. This chapter enables student teachers to learn the origins of English – its Indo-European and Germanic roots, for example – and understand how the language has evolved.

The fourth chapter also focuses on the history of the English language and compares it to Arabic. The author presents the characteristics of Arabic and discusses the similarities and differences between the two languages. Some of these similarities and differences include aspects of the alphabet, phonology and vocabulary. The author also suggests useful strategies to assist Arabic speakers in learning English. For instance, teachers should engage students in tasks and activities that help them recognise the differences between English and Arabic and avoid possible barriers to communication.

In the second part of the book, the author begins with an introduction of the main terms used in the literature on language teaching methods, provides definitions of and explores the relationships between the terms, methods, approaches, procedures and techniques. The fifth chapter discusses two teaching methods, the Grammar Translation Method and the Direct Method. The author outlines the main principles of the Grammar Translation Method while addressing its shortcomings. The author also discusses the main principles of the Direct Method while providing reasons for replacing the Grammar Translation Method with the Direct Method and other teaching approaches.

The following chapters present a summary of key teaching methods. In the sixth chapter, the author describes the Audio-lingual Method. Similar to the previous chapter, student teachers are first introduced to the main principles of this method, followed by a description of its pros and cons.

Readers learn that two characteristics of this method are that oral skills must be taught first, and there must not be any homework. The disadvantage of the Audio-lingual Method is that students do not play an active role since it is a more teacher-centred approach.

Similarly, the seventh chapter introduces the communicative approach and its concepts, which have their foundation in psychology and linguistics. Readers are familiarised with the principles of this approach as well as its pros and cons. The author also introduces readers to the theory of learning concept. The author concludes the chapter by discussing the roles of teachers and students in the classroom. From this chapter, student teachers understand that the communicative approach encourages an interactive, harmonious relationship between teachers and students.

In the eighth chapter, the author focuses on the Task-Based Approach and describes how it evolved from the communicative approach. The author calls attention to the main principles of this method and outlines how to utilise it and design tasks. The author also addresses the different kinds of task definitions in this method and highlights the features of the task as a learning unit. The author then details the two main task-based instruction frameworks and examines their similarities and differences. After reading this chapter, student teachers will realise that the Task-Based Approach consists primarily of classroom tasks, which the author insists should be motivating. This method increases students' exposure to English, especially lexical terms, patterns and collocations. Chapter nine covers the Total Physical Response (TPR) Method, including its main principles, its advantages and disadvantages in the teaching process and the roles of both teachers and students in this approach. In this chapter, readers also learn of the three theories that underpin the TPR Method (the childhood language acquisition theory, the theory of affective filter and the right brain–left brain theory). This approach entails the use of motor skills and minimal verbs.

The tenth chapter describes the Suggestopedia Method and its principles and procedures, outlines the roles of both teachers and students in this approach and discusses its advantages and disadvantages. Student teachers understand that in this method, the teacher has total control of the classroom. Students must learn to believe in the system and acknowledge that the teacher has all the authority, which is one of the method's disadvantages. However, one benefit of this method is that it improves students' focus.

The eleventh chapter introduces yet another teaching method, the Silent Way Method. The chapter begins with an outline of the principles of this method, how it is applied in the classroom, the roles of teachers and students, and the pros and cons of this approach. Readers learn that in the Silent Way Method, the learner is an active participant, and teaching mainly involves using physical objects. One advantage of the Silent Way Method outlined in this chapter is that it provides a safe space for learners to make mistakes without being reprimanded. However, one drawback is that students may feel lost because the teacher provides no explanation of the language being studied.

Finally, the last chapter addresses the Community Language Learning Method and explains its principles and how it is used by teachers. The roles of teachers and students in this method are also presented. Key activities in this approach include free conversation, transcription and reflection. The Community Language Learning Method encourages students to develop self-confidence and independence by allowing them to engage in conversations using simple expressions. The method is especially applicable to lower level learners who struggle to communicate in a foreign language. However, when using this method, students may become so independent that the teacher may no longer feel the need to provide guidance.

CONCLUSION

English Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia: An Introduction addresses the dearth of English teaching resources tailored to the Saudi context. The book is constructed in a way that takes students through the stages of learning English in a non-English-speaking country by giving an overview of the nature of the language, a brief history of where it originated and how it has evolved. The author also describes the eight methods and approaches that can be used to teach EFL in Saudi Arabia. Anyone planning to pursue a career in teaching, primarily in Saudi Arabia, should read this book.

References

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