The Implications of Authenticity and Intensity in EFL Teaching: A Study of the Intensive-Year Programme at the College of Telecom and Electronics (CTE), in Saudi Arabia

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The current study endeavours to examine the extent to how authenticity, usage, and intensity of native English instruction impact EFL students behaviourally and linguistically at the preparatory year programme in CTE, where students undertake an intensive English course for one year. The programme is managed by an American company called Interlink and is entirely staffed by native English teachers. The implementation of this English instruction encompasses motivational, pedagogical, and administrative challenges that hinder its practicality for positive and achievable learning outcomes. To this end, this paper will attempt to address the sociolinguistic and historical profile of EFL in Saudi Arabia in order to present an overall picture of this study’s context.

Keywords: EFL, AYP, intensive, authentic, pedagogy, linguistic, students’ needs

Introduction

English as a foreign language (EFL) in Saudi Arabia (SA) has undergone various dramatic modifications due to some variables that lead to transforming the educational landscape in the Kingdom. Among the most significant of these are ongoing economic development, strong presence of English in Education and media, participants’ attitudes and motivation. In addition, educational native English companies and the substantial number of Saudis studying in English countries can be seen as concomitant influences that affect EFL in the Saudi context.

There are a number of researchers who have specifically studied the linguistic aspects of EFL learning and teaching in regard to methodology, curriculum, policy constrains, and teacher preparation that need to be functioned in with any appraisal of EFL paradigm in SA (Al-Subahi, 1988; Al-Mulhim, 2000; Alsobaihi, 2005; Al-Seghayer, 2011). On the other hand, some authors have gone beyond this as they mainly investigated the relationship between the Saudi society and EFL on what is known as sociolinguistic studies. They discuss the issues of attitudes towards English and its culture, anglicisation, and the role of the learners’ social status in perceiving EFL (Al-Kahtani, 1995; Abed Alhaq & Smadi, 1996; Al-Khatib, 2006; Parry, 2012).
It is assumed that exposing EFL students to native instructors besides adopting authentic practices and materials may have overwhelming consequences on the learning process in so many ways. Before addressing these issues in this paper, I will generally critique the sociolinguistic profile of EFL in order to paint an overall picture of the target context. This includes the history of English instruction in SA, its current status, and the attitudes of EFL students.

**English in Saudi Arabia**

**History of English in Saudi Arabia**

Historically speaking, most of the Gulf Cooperation states such as Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates were introduced to English in the 19th century as a result of the British trade interests (Charise, 2007). However, it is unclear how English was established in SA since it has never been under European or American rule (Al-Seghayer, 2005). It was, indeed, the government’s own desire that initiated the introduction of EFL to its population. After the establishment of modern SA in 1932, the country realised the necessity of educating Saudis who would be able to communicate in English with the outside world. Additionally, the rapid growth of petroleum production and revenues crystallised the importance of establishing EFL programmes that aim to train Saudi workers to staff positions in the government as well as in the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) during that time (Al-Seghayer, 2005).

The production of oil in the early stages required Saudis who could speak English with foreign labour either inside or outside the country (Alsobaihi, 2005, p. 12). Also, the large proceeds generated by the oil industry enabled the government to start large-scale development programmes in infrastructure that included transportation, telecommunication, electricity, water, Education, health, and social welfare (Al-Seghayer, 2005, p. 126). Such programmes required foreign manpower, the language of which was English, and training Saudis who could communicate with these English speakers. Subsequently, the policy makers in the Ministry of Education (MOE) understood the significance of introducing English into the existing curriculum to overcome the shortage of English users in the country.

The Saudi educational system adopted teaching EFL in 1928 (Al-Seghayer, 2011), and since that time, numerous changes and revisions have continuously taken place. The curricula of EFL in SA and the weekly instructional periods have undergone several transitions during the past 60 years. These developments are chronologically summarised as the following:

- In the 1960s, there was the first appearance of a comprehensive English curriculum entitled *Living English for the Arab World*. During that period, the number of instructional hours was eight a week in both intermediate and secondary stages (Al-Seghayer, 2005);
- In the 1970s, the *Living English for the Arab World* curriculum remained but the instructional hours were reduced to six weekly. However, this programme was not suitable for students’ linguistic needs and interests according to Al-Subahi (1988);
- In the 1980s, the MOE collaborated with Macmillan Press to introduce a new programme called *Saudi Arabian Schools’ English* in the intermediate and secondary schools. The number of teaching hours was six until 1982 when it changed to four weekly. To this day, the number of instructional hours remains four in both stages;
In the 1990s, the MOE launched a series of textbooks for both stages by collaborating with some specialists from King Fahad University (Al-Seghayer, 2005). However, this series was criticised for its omission of certain aspects of the Saudi society and culture such as famous people, lifestyle, and historical events and places (Al-Mulhim, 2000);

In the 2000s, the MOE decided to introduce English in the primary schools (called *English for Saudi Arabia*) at the sixth grade rather than in the seventh, with two hours of instruction a week. This change according to Al-Sobaihi (2005) was instituted due to the fact that most of the graduates of Saudi Arabian high schools and colleges possess low proficiency in all language skills (p. 12);

In the 2010s, the MOE started teaching English in the early stages of the primary schools; precisely in the fourth grade. McGraw-Hill Education was in charge of designing the curriculum entitled *We Can!* The number of instructional hours remains two a week until the present day;

In the same manner, English has palpably existed in all other stages of tertiary Education such as universities, military academies, technical and vocational institutes from the time they were established in SA. King Fahad University took the lead in this by widely adopting English as a language of instruction since the day the University was founded in 1975. Similarly, the new modern university called King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) did so in 2009. Furthermore, most of the scientific and medical colleges in other 36 Saudi universities use English extensively, not only as a medium of instruction, but also in designing courses and tests since the time these universities were established in the 1970s, 1980s until the present.

**Status of English in Saudi Arabia**

English in SA is functioned as a foreign language (i.e., it is an EFL country), and Saudi English is considered to be a performance variety. In other words, Kachru (1985) sets a model of the three concentric circles that represents the diversity of the spread of English and the practical domains in “which English is used across cultures and languages” (p. 12). The inner circle is comprised of such countries as America, Britain, and Canada. In the outer circle, English is used extensively for internal purposes such as in Nigeria and India. As an EFL country, SA goes to the expanding circle where English is used as a medium of communication, business, trade, diplomacy, media, and as a means of Education.

Berns (1990, p. 53) states that there are four functions for English to perform: interpersonal, instrumental, regulative, and imaginative-innovative. Abu-Eshy (1988) refers to this, but from an Islamic standpoint. He points out that “Muslim users of the English language vary between those who use it for instrumental purposes, whether due to their occupational needs or educational necessity, and those who use it for sentimental or integrative purposes” (as cited in Abed Alhaq & Smadi, 1996, p. 312). In the Saudi context, English performs the instrumental function as a means of instruction in all stages of its educational system and as a medium of communication with foreigners.

English reaches a great status in SA as it is the only foreign language taught in both of general and tertiary Education. It is also a core subject at all levels and majors of the Saudi educational system. Besides adopting English as a medium of instruction in higher Education, it has become an essential requirement for some fields such as medicine, engineering, and science. Currently, getting accepted into the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) bachelors’ programmes requires students to have acceptable English for admission
in the national or international tests. For instance, students need a minimum grade of 45 in STEP (a recent national established test), 400 in TOEFL, or 3.5 in IELTS (TVTC, 2015).

The status of English in SA also promulgates in some other facets of employment. For example, advertisements for jobs in the private sector such as hospitals, hotels, banks, petroleum industry, and constructions prefer employees with English proficiency. Also, the expansion of the Saudi economy has gained international interest and respect. It has become a very attractive market for South Asia, South East Asia, North America, and Europe. Moreover, as a member of the world community, SA has solid diplomatic relationships with countries of both native English speakers and non-native speakers. Similarly, important trade partnership with the United States (US) and Britain and their provision of technology, engineering, Education, and industrial expertise has encouraged English as the language of international communication in the country. For all these reasons, English language has become the medium of communication in SA.

SA has a multi-ethnic workforce which is mostly concentrated in the private sector (by enlarge from Asia, Africa, and Europe). They form the majority of Saudi’s multilingual society. As a consequence, English and its variants (such as Indian, Filipino, Pakistani, and Egyptian versions of English) are basically used and spoken as the primary *lingua franca* among these foreign workers in the country (Al-Khatib, 2006, p. 122). However, it is not obvious how widespread their personal usage is and which of these (or other) “Englishes” are most commonly used as *lingua franca* in SA (Charise, 2007). In the last decade, English has been increasingly implemented as the *lingua franca* in the Kingdom. Nevertheless, this dissemination of English does not present any significant challenge to the prevalence of Arabic especially amongst Arabic speakers (Al-Khatib, 2006, p. 3). Furthermore, Arabic is still the dominant language in daily conversation between these foreign workers and native Saudi citizens.

English also has an immense presence at TVTC since it was established in 1980. In contrary to the MOE where English is taught for general purposes (EGP), English at TVTC shows strong dominance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in all of its 35 existing technical colleges. Examples of ESP courses are English for Electronics, English for Computing, English for Telecoms, English for Tourism, and English for Technology. In EGP courses, the primary focus is on the basic sentence forms and functions in addition to boosting students’ communication skills such as comprehension and confidence. According to the General Doctorate of Designing and Developing Curricula in TVTC, 84 percent of English courses are ESP (26 courses) while only 16 percent are allocated for EGP (5 courses).

The low percentage of EGP courses at TVTC’s curricula may reflect reversely on students’ language performance. According to the research, the importance of EGP is that students become more acquainted with basic lexical and structural elements that comprise spoken and written texts required at any further ESP situations or even at quotidian contexts. Pedagogically, possessing a solid understanding of EGP should be intense and preceding ESP instruction to gain satisfactory results (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

The issue of graduating students lacking sufficient competence of EGP is always reported by the private sector where most of TVTC graduates are supposed to be hired. It sets English proficiency as an essential criterion for recruitment. This dilemma puts TVTC under high pressure to revise its existing policy towards teaching English.
Therefore, TVTC has decided to establish the Academic Year Programme (AYP). It signed a partnership agreement with Interlink Language Centres in the US in 2012 through their representative in the country (called English Gate Academy) and this continues to the present day. Interestingly, these programmes are targeting both of the existing and graduates students. By means, AYP is set for the students who have just finished their secondary schools and carried out in three technical colleges: College of Telecom and Electronics in Jeddah, College of Telecom and Information in Riyadh, and College of Applied Technology in Yanbu. It is also known as the English preparatory programme. On the other hand, the Graduate Year Programme (GYP) serves students who have successfully completed their diploma in one of TVTC academic programmes. GYP is carried out in 20 sites all over the country; 5 for females and 13 for males.

Both AYP and GYP programmes aim to boost students’ English proficiency in all language skills through a holistic curriculum, taking other interrelated issues such as preparation, interaction, punctuality, performance, and attendance into account in the process of teaching and assessing. The syllabi for both programmes are similar as they have a suggested scope and sequence framework applied alongside the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages (see Appendix A). Students are divided up and assessed based on CEFR and expected to move through these four levels of proficiency: A0, A1, A2, and B1.

Interlink’s teaching philosophy is based on increasing students’ role in the learning process on what is called student-centred approach. Instructors are seen as facilitators who are mainly monitoring and guiding rather than teaching. Moreover, instructors have a high level of autonomy in terms of adopting materials that cope with students’ current needs especially in the first year of implementation. They are free to deliver lessons that build on their students’ interest, and construct activities, tasks, and projects that are level-suitable for the students. Later on this paper, we will see how this methodology affect EFL students when it is replaced by textbooks.

Attitudes Towards English in Saudi Arabia

In the Saudi context, many people may have negative attitudes towards the external policy of the native English-speaking countries such as the US and Britain. The American-British invasion of some Islamic countries in addition to their passive role in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict has generated such ill feelings amongst most Saudis. In contrast, attitudes towards native speaking people and EFL were, and to some extent, still remain generally positive since SA has not been colonised by these two major English countries. Such unaggressive perception is reasonably common in the situation of a sociolinguistic study, in which the language of the country, precisely the Arabic language in SA, has not been historically threatened by English Language (Ostler, 2005, p. 444).

Religiously speaking, the Saudis’ positive attitudes towards English are justifiable. There are many verses in the Quran (Islamic Holy Book) as well as in the sayings of the Prophet Mohammad that encourage learning a language regardless to whom this language belongs. It can be also argued that such positive attitudes come from the fact that the Arabic Language has “its distinctive ideologically faith-based integrative and unifying role among Arabs” (Abuhamdia, 1988, p. 34). Thus, it would not be weakened by the domination of English as media for science and development.
Although there is a limited amount of research into attitudes towards EFL or varieties of English in the Saudi context, the findings of these studies are enormously helpful as they give an overall indication of how EFL is perceived and utilised. The significance of these studies is also because they address the central areas which lead to understanding the EFL profile in SA in general. These areas are categorised into three bases: ideological, sociolinguistic, and linguistic.

Firstly, a comprehensive study was carried out in mid-90s by Abed Alhaq and Smadi examined the attitudes towards EFL of 1,176 Saudi university students, representing all Saudi universities at that time. The main finding was that English does not present a threat to Islamic and Arabic culture, unity, and the national identity for the vast majority of the participants. Moreover, most participants link the knowledge of English to their social prestige. Another interesting finding is that over 70 percent of respondents do not find a link between learning English and westernisation. This result gives an indication that Saudis distinguish between English as a carrier of culture and English as a component of culture (Abed Alhaq & Smadi, 1996, p. 311). Likewise, this finding supports what has been argued earlier regarding Saudis’ positive attitudes towards the people and EFL.

Secondly, a demographical study was carried out at the preparatory year in King Saud University by Parry (2012). The sample included 200 male university students classified as urban rulers (104) or Bedouins (96). The study tried to measure the students’ perceptions towards anglicisation of jobs considered to be major professions in the country. In other words, it aimed to dismiss Abed Alhaq and Smadi’s findings in 1996 when they claimed that there were three key factors leading to negative attitudes towards anglicisation: westernization, national identity, and religious commitment (p. 309). Parry (2012) claims that students’ positive attitudes are not only towards anglicisation but also towards the “process of westernization” in general (p. 44). Parry (2012) further believes that Bedouins and older generation view the establishment of EFL as a threat to their national identity and religious commitment while the young generation seems to embrace this phenomenon positively (p. 19). However, these results are somewhat arguable since most Saudis do not generally perceive English as an element of the English culture, but a transformer of this culture. Similarly, Abed Alhaq and Smadi (1996, p. 307) found that learning EFL never westernises students nor weakens their national identity.

Although Parry’s demographical study gives an overall sociolinguistic reading of EFL in SA, it is very selective in terms of its purpose and participants. The purpose of the study is centralised on students who are willing to gain entrance to college of Engineering and Medicine where English is primarily the language of instruction. Students who study in these two fields are expected to have a prior positive attitude and integrated motivation towards English. Thus, the results drawn from this study cannot be generalised to other domains where English is not the main language of instruction. Additionally, the way participants are characterised in Parry’s study as urban rulers or Bedouins is inaccurate due to the researcher’s misunderstanding of the demography of SA. Being identified as an urban ruler or what is so called “liberally minded person” is not attributed to the status of the whole tribe or to the modernisation of a city but narrowly to the educational status of the family or person only.

Thirdly, a linguistic study was carried out by Al-Kahtani (1995). This study investigated the attitudes of Saudis who had lived in the US between two and six years towards three different varieties of English: Standard American English (SAE), Black English (BE), and Indian English (IE). The findings revealed that the
preferences towards these varieties were as follows: SAE was the most preferred, BE occupied second position, and IE was the last favoured (p. 176). This study also showed that longer residence by the participants in US had produced a linguistic bias towards BE.

At present, SAE appears to be the most preferable and imitated variety of English amongst Saudi speakers in comparison to other “World Englishes” or United Kingdom (UK) “exonormative” varieties (such as standard British, Scottish, Welsh, or Irish). This preference is attributed to four key factors. First, there is a huge number of established American companies in addition to the substantial manpower that has been imported since 1960s to work in conjunction with Saudi workers in SA; second, the strong presence of SAE in mass media such as in TV programmes and Saudi national press; third, the large number of Saudis studying in the US to pursue further Education in the last 30 years. Currently, out of the 150,000 Saudi studying overseas, about 110,000 students are in the US whereas there are only 14,000 in the UK (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Finally, like most EFL countries, SA relies greatly on academic publications and textbooks from the US (such as McGraw-Hill Education and Macmillan Press). Moreover, the official attitude also plays a central role, for instance, educationalists, academics, and officials in SA refuse local English and perceive SAE as the sole standard (Al-Asmari & Khan, 2014, p. 320). This refusal has definitely influenced the spread of other World Englishes in the Kingdom. It makes SAE not only widely spoken, but also dominant in all aspects of the Saudi Educational system.

**Research Paradigm**

**Research Questions**

The main pre-set goal of applying AYP in TVTC is to boost students’ linguistic skills during their study as well as attract them to join technical and vocational schools. The private sector sets English competency as an essential requirement for recruitment. This study endeavours to assess how EFL students benefit linguistically and behaviourally from being exposed to native-authentic English learning environment for a year. Hence, the following stated questions are set to address these variables:

1. What are the linguistic and behavioural benefits of exposing EFL students to an intensive English programme for a year?
2. What are the participants’ views towards authentic English practices?
3. What are the main challenges of adopting intensive and authentic English in EFL discipline?

**Sample**

There are two interrelated samples in this research. First is the teachers’ sample, which consists of 42 teachers representing almost 30% of the total number of the Saudi teaching staff at CTE. Second is the students’ sample, which includes 241 students out of the 500 (48%) studying in the preparatory year. This sample is divided up into two selective ones: Students who still study in the preparatory year (mostly term three students) and those who have completed this programme and currently enrolled in their majors.

**Methodology**

The applied research methodology is a quantitative approach through a questionnaire survey. However, what seems to be quantitative or qualitative here is not the research method itself but the manner in which the data
is analysed. They are quantitative if they are analysed in numbers and qualitative if they are scrutinised in words. The questionnaire contains two types of questions: close-ended and open-ended. In the closed questions, participants are asked to choose one possible answer through a set of questions aimed at obtaining data addressing their views and attitudes towards AYP. The opened questions leave the participants to form the wording, length of the answer, and the types of issues to be mentioned. The closed questions generate quantitative data (charts and numbers) whereas open questions are used to create qualitative data (themes and patterns).

Findings and Discussion

Attrition Rate and Discipline

It is worth mentioning that “Preparatory Year” is slightly different from AYP as it refers to all other courses taught along with AYP in the first year such as Computing, Mathematics, Physics, Arabic, and Islamic studies. The Preparatory Year at CTE has been running for three years, 2012–2015, with a total number of nine intakes, three in each year. One academic year is divided into three terms. So far, seven graduated cohorts have successfully completed this intensive programme out of the nine. The capacity of admission for a new intake is determined by some variables such as class size, number of the available teachers, attrition rate in the previous term, number of dismissed double-fail students and graduated students from AYP.

The issues of withdrawal, dropping out and expulsion are commonly seen in TVTC colleges and have been negatively impacting both of the learning process and the admission rate. This instability is attributed to these challenging factors:

- Low level students who enrol in TVTC colleges as best go to Universities;
- The absence of admission criteria for TVTC students;
- Less vacant jobs for TVTC graduates;
- Limited number of seats for those who are willing to pursue their higher Education;
- Bad reputation of technical and vocational Education amongst Saudis.

As part of overcoming some of these barriers, TVTC has revived its educational system by adopting the AYP in three colleges to increase the quality of learning and teaching as well attract students to the technical Education.

Class size was a key element in admission for the first three intakes; only 25 students was the maximum number allowed in one class, but later this stipulation was removed. For example, there were six classes in term one in 2012 and each one had a total number of 24 students only (146 students), while in term three in 2015 the number reached 43 students in each class (530 students). Undoubtedly, such a substantial number does not widely stimulate language usage for EFL students nor foster teachers to fully apply all the learning practices such as clarifying, assessing, giving feedback, dealing with special needs or gifted students. The discipline rate and level of commitment is affected in a large class and deteriorates with low level students.

It can be argued that the AYP is certainly a “filtration process”. The number of students in the first semester of one intake is dramatically reduced when they reach term three. The level of discipline and performance in term three is high in comparison to term one. The following figures show the number of students enrolled in each of the seven intakes. They show the number of students enrolled in each term, number of the students reaching term three, and the graduating from term three.
Figure 1. Enrolled students vs. graduated students.

Figure 2. Enrolled students vs. graduated students.

Figure 3. Enrolled students vs. graduated students.
Figure 4. Enrolled students vs. graduated students.

Figure 5. Enrolled students vs. graduated students.

Figure 6. Enrolled students vs. graduated students.
As shown in all the Figures 1–7, almost one third of enrolled students successfully completed the entire intensive year. The vast majority of those who reached term three graduated, and very few of them failed due to attendance or poor grades. This fact seems to be very consistent for all intakes. It is attributed to the high level of motivation and discipline that students possess at this particular stage as most of attrition and failure take place in term one and two. Furthermore, dismissing double-fail students has helped the remaining students to do their best in terms of punctuality and performance which may otherwise expel them from the college.

Double-fail students are dismissed when they fail due to poor grades (below 60%) or attendance (below 80%) twice during the AYP. Noticeably, this procedure is only applied at Jeddah CTE as the other English programmes in Riyadh and Yanbu do not comply with the same format. This policy is advantageous at both the administrative and educational level. It maximises students’ discipline and progression as well as creates more unoccupied seats
for admission each term. For instance, the third term of the current year (2015) shows that 62 double-fail students (out of 530) who are officially dismissed, representing 11% of the cohort. Doing so, will not only offer more vacant seats for the new students but also increase and reinforce discipline between the existing ones.

AYP has failed to create “quantitative satisfaction” amongst CTE technical departments since it started in 2012 (see Figure 8). For instance, only 439 (31%) students were able to graduate from AYP out of 1,414 registered in the last three years. Before applying AYP, students were enrolled into their majors directly and the retention rate was almost steady. AYP has significantly reduced the number of students to the CTE departments by 69% due to the filtration process that takes place throughout this intensive year programme. Therefore, AYP comes under high pressure to meet the continuous requests from these departments that are looking for more students each term. These demands have led CTE to increase the class sizes intensely and that unfortunately becomes at the expense of the quality of learning. However, if the number of teachers had slightly increased by 30% (three teachers), this dilemma could have been settled completely.

There is a crucial factor that contributes to such a drop in the graduation of the AYP, besides inaptness of curriculum and pedagogy (as we will see later). The quality of input (i.e., students) is at a lower level as TVTC does not set specific criteria in admission as Higher Education does. Students are accepted based on their Secondary school certificates only while Higher Education takes the results of tests issued at National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education into account. For example, General Aptitude Test and Achievement Tests are weighted about 70% in admission at all Universities and Colleges, while the grades of secondary school are only given at 30%. This leniency in TVTC admission is to attract more students. It sets out its capacity to receive 25% of the total graduates of the secondary schools. However, this has not worked as up to 95% go to Higher Education (Al-Hayat, 2015). Therefore, TVTC faces real challenges in terms of quality and quantity at the same time that impacts its pre-set policy, learning mechanism, students competence, and shortage of graduated students.

Nevertheless, this study reveals that graduates of the AYP possess a high level of discipline and low attrition rate when they become officially enrolled in their department. According to CTE Registry Office, withdrawal rate was 41.3% in 2011 (before applying AYP) and this number is dramatically reduced to only 9.2% in 2015. This self-discipline among students is a pattern of positive behaviour that has been acquired for a year during their study at the AYP. This is also observed even before students graduated from the AYP as most of term-three students pass and only few of them fail due to attendance or bad grade. Thus, the longer students stay in the AYP, the higher the level of discipline and progression in their future study.

**Numerical Tracking of Progression**

The following Figures 9–15 show how much progression one intake made after students spent an intensive year in authentic English environment. It is a linguistic indicator that shows, in number, the average result of diagnostic and exit exams for the seven intakes. This quantitative approach uses the numerical tracking of students’ progression from the diagnostic exam (given day one) to the exit exam results (after graduation from AYP). On the other hand, the qualitative method is also used to reference to participant’s perceptions towards AYP. The obtained results do not merely measure students’ progression, but they also reflect the suitability and efficiency of other related elements such as pedagogy and curriculum.
Figure 9. Diagnostic test vs. exit test.

Figure 10. Diagnostic test vs. exit test.
Figure 11. Diagnostic test vs. exit test.

Figure 12. Diagnostic test vs. exit test.
Figure 13. Diagnostic test vs. exit test.

Figure 14. Diagnostic test vs. exit test.
The above figures show that all average diagnostics scores are less than 61%. Most of the results are very close to each other except in the first intake as it displays the lowest average score 33.44%. This might be due to the fact that such a test was executed for the first time in CTE’s history and students had not experienced or prepared for this before. Moreover, some students reported that they deliberately underperformed during the test so as to be placed in the lowest level. They thought that the purpose of the test was to place them at a certain level (placement test), while the test was to diagnose their current level only (diagnostic test). This diagnostic assessment is meant to help teachers to adapt teaching techniques in class and furnish suitable materials for students’ present needs. Hence, students have to be told about the purpose of the test in advance to avoid such misunderstanding.

Interlink has also misnamed the “exit” exam. It is better to be not called exit, but “progressive” since it combines the functions of proficiency and achievement exams (hybrid exam). It is “proficiency” because it measures students’ linguistic performance in general, and it is “achievement” in that it aims to see to what extent the pre-set objectives of the course have been met by students results or not.

The results of the exit exams seem to be consistent for the first three intakes (year one) only. They were all in the 80%. Later, they went down to 60% in the second and third years’ intakes (Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7). Consequently, this resulted in the overall linguistic development that students have accomplished throughout their study in the AYP. For instance, the average improvement for the first three intakes is 47%, 21%, 22% (Figures 9, 10, and 11) while in the later four intakes decreases to 7%, 7%, 11%, 17% (Figures 12, 13, 14, and 15).

The average improvement for all AYP results is certainly disappointing and much worse in the second and third year. If we exclude the result of the average achievement scores for the first intake (47%), none of these intakes exceeds 23% in the average improvement scale for the three years of this programme. This failure means
that the course of Interlink does not meet the target level on CEFR, A2, for its graduates from AYP. However, the failure should not be merely attributed to Interlink, but also to TVTC. In the following discussion, we will highlight the possible causes behind this dilemma

**Causes of Failure in the AYP**

Firstly, research has shown that Saudi students are not properly motivated to learn English. In AYP, motivation is a vital determinant of students’ failure. They are mostly driven by extrinsic motivation not intrinsic. They study the course for the sake of passing (with any grade) instead of being fully integrated in the learning mechanism. The average student works merely to maintain stipend rather than mastering the language to acquire further opportunities and training. As a consequence, this has undermined efforts to motivate student learning. It has negatively resulted in the students’ overall linguistic improvement (see Figures 9–15). In addition, the extrinsic motivation lacks behind students’ weak desire to learn and low self-discipline. For example, almost 70% of one intake fail to complete the AYP.

Secondly, improving students’ passing rate by increasing class size in the second and the third year has had the opposite effect. Class sizes were raised from 24 to 43. From a pedagogical view, instructors were forced to change their approach from student based to teacher based. It also reduced of CTE learning resources. For instance, the use of computers, language labs, and individual class work was deterred in the AYP classes due to the large sizes. Instructors on the average had less than two minutes to teach, then verify student’s learning in one class. Moreover, students were not given sufficient time to understand and use the language taught. As a result, large classes have played a fundamental role in the overall failure of the AYP students at CTE.

The third reason for such failure is the absence of placing students in their proper level according to the placement test results. Simply, students are misplaced in the AYP classes. This test seems to be executed without a clear purpose or any forthcoming consequences. Large mix-abilities classes are not conducive to creating a proper learning environment especially with low level students or those who might lack study skills. Teaching materials also becomes problematic with the mix-ability class.

However, this is not the case in GYP as it implemented independently. English is the only taught course and students are placed according to the results of the placement exams at GYP. They are also not distracted by other courses unrelated to English language. At AYP, there are two compulsory courses taught in parallel with English each term with a total of six hours contact. These courses affected AYP from being freely situating students based on their current level each term, as applying such procedures means coordinating all the CTE departments to set up each student’s schedule manually. So, it is rather difficult to move or place students accordingly in AYP.

Lastly, exit exam looks like placement exam as both have no clear educational outcomes in the AYP. Students are requested to do it in less restricted conditions after the final exam in term three. They are not penalised or rewarded for this test, and students do it to meet the requirements of Interlink policy. In addition, Interlink has not used the test results as an indicator of how efficient is the programme on the learning and teaching process. Certainly, this ambiguity would affect the practicality and validity of the test. Although the results drawn from this test may not meticulously reflect students’ real performance, this paper uses the exit exam results as one of the main tools that measure the efficiency of AYP on students’ linguistic competence as it is shown earlier (Figures 9–15).
Suitability of the Syllabus

Interlink came to CTE in 2012 with its distinctive philosophy that was based on class-generating materials and textbooks-free approach of a so called “negotiated syllabus”. Teachers and students autonomously discuss and agree upon how some aspects of the course materials will be adapted and conducted in the class. However, this can happen implicitly through teacher’s analysis of his students’ needs without direct negotiation with the students. This syllabus, however, has come under criticism as it lacks standardisation in terms of quality and intensity for the selected materials.

Accordingly, Interlink started to amend this and adopted the textbook-based approach from the second year, 2013. The textbooks are only chosen based on CEFR scale without real analysis of the AYP students’ current needs. From course designing perspective, these textbooks (named *Touchstone* level 1, 2, 3) are designed for a particular domain somewhere else and may not necessary meet the target students. The classification of CEFR imprecisely reflects CTE students who might also have extreme-mixed level in one class. Thus, the suitability of the adopted textbooks is arguable.

The adoption of CEFR has become ordinarily at the expense of grammatical, lexical, and phonetic materials that teachers used to adapt with their student’s present interests. This sharp transformation of Interlink methodology has led to students’ linguistic failure from the second year on, since it omits the main principle of designing EFL courses which is based on the analysis of students’ needs.

The syllabus of the adopted textbooks, on the other hand, is designed to be process-oriented not product-oriented (see Appendix B). It gives more attention to learning process and focuses on what students should do during a lesson rather than their outcomes. This syllabus is set to be a top-down process or what Johnson (1989) called a “specialist approach”, because it is purely designed by a specialist, given to a teacher and taught to students. However, this process might have a mismatch between what is assumed to be successful and what is known to be successful to the students since it is not intentionally designed to meet the needs of one specific group.

Specifically, the scope and sequence of the contents are mainly task-based syllabus. The presented linguistic knowledge in each unit requires students to be engaged in series of graded tasks to promote language usage instead of providing them with knowledge only. Examples of these tasks are: identifying family relation, describing health problems, saying, writing, reading, asking, completing, discussing, etc. The thematic content of this syllabus relies on authentic topics such as leisure activities, technology, contemporary issues, and food. Pedagogically speaking, a task-syllabus offers an appropriate environment for applying a communicative approach because tasks work encourages students to interact, exchange, reform, and use the language. Nonetheless, tasks are considered to be constructive if 50% of students are almost 50% successful (Prabhu,1987), otherwise this syllabus becomes impractical with low level students as those in AYP. Regardless of how well the course is designed, it is the language competence and usage that promote learning and indicate how suitable is the syllabus for EFL students.

Participants’ Perceptions Towards AYP

The previous Figures (9–15) showed students’ performance by comparing their diagnostic exam results with exit exam results. Similarly, AYP is assessed from students and teachers’ perspectives based on their experiences
and observations via the distributed questionnaires (see Appendices C & D).

In Table 1, teachers and students generally possess positive attitudes towards the impacts of AYP on teaching, learning development and students’ behaviour. For instance, 47% of the Saudi staff (who are mostly Master holders from native English countries) strongly agree or agree to teach in English instead of Arabic to the AYP graduates. This language shifting has been applied because 54% of these teachers (see statement 5) strongly agree or agree on that graduates’ good level of English helps them to use English as a language of instruction. Students, on the other hand, believe that their language skills have improved (by 68% in writing and 77% in comprehension and speaking). However, these optimistic perceptions towards their learning may not match the humble linguistic improvement that they have made on the exit exams (see Figures 9–15). It seems that students have placed great emphasis on their overall progress more than the numerical grade they earned.

Interestingly, the impact of AYP on students’ behaviour appears to be more positive than any other influence. For example, 79% of the students, as in statements 11, believe that their punctuality and learning discipline have improved as a result of AYP rules. Also, more than half of the teachers refer to this point positively (see statement 3). Likewise, 78% of the students (strongly agree or agree) confirm that their motivation to learn English has increased. An overwhelming majority of students also believe that their motivation to do cooperative learning activities has improved (54% of teachers agree). Finally, the attitudes towards the continuation of AYP for CTE new students is almost the same amongst all participants: 71% of the teachers (strongly agree or agree) and the students 69%. However, the students show higher levels of opposition against AYP (16% disagree or strongly disagree) to be carried out in the future, while only 3% of the teachers disagree.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cooperative learning has increased amongst graduated students from AYP.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. AYP encourages me to use English as a medium of instruction instead of Arabic.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. AYP graduates possess high level of discipline and punctuality.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. AYP enhances students’ motivation and curiosity in learning.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. AYP graduates are capable to cope with ESP English through comprehending technical English genres and terminology.</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I recommend AYP for all future students at CTE.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I can write meaningful sentences about any topic with few mistakes.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My understanding and speaking skills are increasingly improved.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. AYP helps me to be more engaged in learning practices such as group and pair work.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. AYP increases my motivation and commitment to learning English.</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. AYP rules boosts my discipline and Punctuality.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I recommend AYP for all future students at CTE.</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following patterns address the main observed challenges and advantages of AYP from students and teachers’ standpoints (see Table 2 & Table 4). They are arranged qualitatively into larger categories tagged as “Students’ common observed challenges and advantages” (see Table 3), and “Teachers’ common observed challenges and advantages” (see Table 5). This analysis is a reflection of teachers and students’ open questions (see 7th question in Appendices C & D).

Table 2

**Students’ Open-Question Responses to the AYP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common observed challenges (coc)</th>
<th>Common observed advantages (coa)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>coc1 Textbook is not suitable.</td>
<td>coa1 Can understand general English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coc2 Lack of using E-learning</td>
<td>coa2 Can make effective presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coc3 Teacher talk is short.</td>
<td>coa3 Become good English speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coc4 Class size is large.</td>
<td>coa4 Do more group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coc5 Variation among teacher’s level</td>
<td>coa5 Speak English without fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coc6 Inconsistent teaching method among teachers</td>
<td>coa6 Can assess/help/participate in daily class tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coc7 Student-centred approach is dominant</td>
<td>coa7 Become more enthusiastic to learn English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coc8 Less input VS. more required output</td>
<td>coa8 Prepared for future learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coc9 Whole intake is placed in one level each term.</td>
<td>coa9 Help to imitate authentic English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

**Students’ Patterns Reorganised Into Larger Categories Under “Common Observed Advantages” and “Common Observed Challenges”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common observed challenges</th>
<th>Pattern type</th>
<th>Common observed advantages</th>
<th>Pattern type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical challenges</td>
<td>coc2</td>
<td>Linguisitc competence</td>
<td>coa1 coa2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coc3</td>
<td></td>
<td>coa3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coc6</td>
<td>Behavioural competence</td>
<td>coa5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coc7</td>
<td>(Integrated motivation and confidence)</td>
<td>coa7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum challenges</td>
<td>coc1</td>
<td>Educational competence</td>
<td>coa4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coc8</td>
<td>(Cooperative learning)</td>
<td>coa6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative challenges</td>
<td>coc4</td>
<td></td>
<td>coa8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coc5</td>
<td></td>
<td>coa9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

**Teachers’ Open-Question Responses to the AYP Graduates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common observed challenges (coc)</th>
<th>Common observed advantages (coa)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>coc1 Lack of writing skills</td>
<td>coa1 Students are very punctual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coc2 Other Arabic taught courses (math, physic.) may distract AYP students.</td>
<td>coa2 Committed to college rules and regulations such as uniform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coc3 They do possess good English, but very weak in their major.</td>
<td>coa3 Their English is better than those in the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coc4 They’re hyperactive and sometimes hard to be controlled.</td>
<td>coa4 Capable to cope with terminology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coa5 Curious to learn and debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coa6 Dedicated to their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coa7 Adaptable to any amendments in learning or teaching styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coa8 Fascinated to team work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coa9 Enthusiastic to have more information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coa10 Productive than receptive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

**Teachers’ Patterns Reorganised Into Larger Categories Under “Common Observed Advantages” and “Common Observed Challenges”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common observed challenges</th>
<th>Pattern type</th>
<th>Common observed advantages</th>
<th>Pattern type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum challenges</td>
<td>coc1</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>coa1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coc3</td>
<td></td>
<td>coa2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coc4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative challenges</td>
<td>coc2</td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>coa4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment &amp; Curiosity in learning</td>
<td>coa7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coa5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coa6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coa8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coa9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coa10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reason for categorising the above challenges to be pedagogical, curriculum or administrative is to help policy makers at TVTC and Interlink to take into consideration all of these concerns when it comes to designing curriculum that is suitable for students’ needs. TVTC is responsible for the administrative issues while Interlink is in charge of pedagogy and curriculum design.

The administrative challenges from both students and teachers’ perspectives are centralised on class variables and quality. However, student are more specific when they address the issues of staff performance, misplacing of students and limitation of teachers’ talk.

Increasing class size started from the second year (4th intake) and became unavoidable option for CTE to overcome the huge shortage of graduated students in its technical departments due to the filtration process implemented by AYP. For instance, one teacher used to have a class of 24 students while later on the number doubled to an average of 43.

In addition, all admitted students are placed in one compulsory batch despite the rate of individual level or the development of language skills. The reason is that English course (20 contact hrs./week.) is taught along with other two Arabic courses (6 contact hrs./week.) and they are systemised in TVTC as one requisite slot. Thus, it is difficult to manipulate or adapt AYP English courses to cope with students current needs unless modifying these two courses as well. Additionally, one academic term at TVTC is a duration of 13 weeks. The first week is an administrative week (drop in/out) while the 13th one is assessing week. As a result, the actual instruction time is 11 week long and any modifications in students’ schedules may cause instability.

Up until now, we have addressed the issues related to AYP from different angles such as discipline, competency, syllabus, participants’ believes. In the following discussion, the primary focus will be on how students perceive authentic language practices and pedagogy (which is mainly student-centred approach).

**Authenticity and Pedagogy**

According to some literatures, the weaknesses of EFL learners have been chiefly attributed to various sociolinguistic factors (attitudes, educational system, and cultural norms) or linguistic factors (motivation, aptitude, and personality). However, such weaknesses may be caused by how the language itself is consumed in a classroom.
As mentioned earlier, Interlink has brought authenticity to CTE through a team of native English staff, authentic-based materials, and pedagogical tools to increase class communication. The Interlink curriculum has been changed from teacher and student self-generation approach to textbook-based, at the beginning of the second year (2013). Though, teachers can intermittently adopt, modify, and teach any materials that they think is suitable for their students’ current level.

In AYP, the teaching methodology is predominantly student-centred approach. The teacher monitors the learning processes and is seen as a facilitator only. This new unique philosophy of teaching has never been experienced by Saudi students before or even assessed at any EFL context. The following Figure 16 reveals how students in six groups perceive such authenticity and methodology in EFL programme at CTE (see Appendix E).

The above figure shows that students appear to like the teaching practices at AYP. Though, this is less than expected. The average percentage of the six groups shows that only 62% have positive attitudes towards Interlink methodology in terms of vastly adopting student-centred approach and portfolios (ongoing production of materials and reflection of progression that students have/not made). Similarly, 63% of students possess positive perceptions towards language authenticity (native English teachers and language-using tasks). These two similar findings disclose the close interrelation between methodology and authenticity in EFL context.

This unwelcoming feeling towards such an authenticity or methodology appears to be consistently dominant amongst students as no one group exceeds 75% at the satisfaction scale. Each group, as in Figure 16, has two columns: One measures students’ satisfaction towards methodology and the other measures authenticity. In all groups except group C, students appreciate authenticity more than methodology. This group also shows the lowest level of satisfaction towards authenticity 41% in comparison to the highest level 74.5%, group B. Additionally, group C has attained the second lowest level of satisfaction towards methodology 58.4%. This confirms the strong relation between methodology and authenticity as they both go in parallel and gain the same the level of satisfaction positively or negatively.
There are several reasons behind students’ reluctance to accept the notion of being the core element of learning process through a student-centred approach or accepting authentic practices. Firstly, this approach has been rarely experienced in their previous studies (as the teacher-centred approach is predominantly observed in the Saudi educational context). Hence, applying such an approach means dramatic change in students’ learning style since the emphasis will be shifted from teacher focus to student focus. This shift in focus may impede their engagement in learning. It might be that students need more time to get used to such a new methodological approach to learning.

Secondly, the student-centred approach requires a satisfactory level of English competency to help students to autonomously rely on themselves in executing class tasks such as interaction, explanation, and reflection. Unfortunately, CTE students have not reached this level and most of them possess very low English according to the placement test results. For instance, the average result of the diagnostic tests for the seven intakes is only 51%, which means they can only comprehend basic English.

Thirdly, some teachers pedagogically misunderstand their roles in applying such a method by heavily shifting much of the work on students’ shoulders with less preparation, clarification, and direction. Additionally, the minimum requirement of content or linguistic knowledge that teachers should present prior to students getting involved is sometimes missed. According to class visits, it was observed that students struggle with many learning situations due to the teachers’ lack of understanding of the practicality of this method. Students were asked to do some tasks about a certain topic from the beginning of the lesson with a lesser explanation from their teachers or even presenting them with enough materials to get them started. The mechanism of the teaching process requires not to rely on one technique or ignoring other interrelated variables that impact teaching methods such as students’ current linguistic level, readiness to be autonomous learners, and familiarity of the taught subject.

Finally, possessing opposing attitude towards authentic English may have resulted in how this authenticity is delivered in an EFL situation. Interlink mostly hire staff from three native English countries: America, Britain, and Canada. Teachers in AYP, since they come from diversified backgrounds, will implement different World Englishes in EFL instructions. This variety of “Englishes” would be confusing to those who have been exposed to Saudi English only. It might also get worse with low level students (as reported a lot from AYP students). For example, some teachers intensely adhere to their local form of dialect instead of using the standard English. This diversity is not only monopolised to the linguistic factor, but prolonged to other related domains such as teachers’ culture, qualification, and previous training.

To summarise, such an authenticity and methodology cannot by themselves guarantee success for AYP students unless the aforementioned challenges are addressed. However, this cultural diversity will become linguistically and instructionally advantageous at any EFL domain if it adapts with all variables of the target discipline. Jenkins (2006) indicates that there is a need for EFL students to be exposed to different “Englishes” to be ready to communicate with the speakers of these various dialects. In addition, assimilating more varieties may have a constructive influence on the student’s ability to learn English since it will increase his adaptability (self-confidence) and stimulate him to communicate to a wider audience in the target language (Cook, 1999).
Recommendations

This paper has endeavoured to identify the implications of adopting intensive-authentic practices in EFL context. Interlink as an English educational company in SA has encountered some sociolinguistic, curriculum, and pedagogical challenges that lead to inconsistency on both learning and teaching process at CTE. Thus, the following proposed recommendations are set to overcome these issues:

Even though it is really challenging for TVTC to receive good students due to competition with large and more established colleges and universities, TVTC has to revise its standards of admission to increase the quality of its inputs. Unfortunately, the superiority of quantity over quality has been seen as an indicator of accomplishment in all TVTC affiliates. Having a huge number of students in an EFL class is unquestionably at the expense of the language usage and tasks. Moreover, decreasing number of enrolled students according to this filtration has economical dimensions. If we have low number of students, this will decrease the expenditure of the monthly stipend as well as daily learning services and maintenance of English labs, technical workshops, and classrooms occupation.

The policy of dismissing second failed-students has to be continued at AYP in Jeddah CTE and applied at Riyadh and Yanbu as well. Doing so, it will create a universal format and constructive consequences on the learning process and students’ behaviour. For example, the level of students’ commitment and performance could be boosted in addition to offering unoccupied seats each term for new students.

Large class size is seen as a major hindrance to the entire instructional process. The good quality of EFL learning has rarely existed in a large class. The time needed to be allocated for teaching practices such as clarifying, assessing, giving feedback tends to be minimised in proportionate to class size. Since EFL classes require high level of involvement with students, class size should not exceed 20 students under most circumstances.

Using native English and adopting authentic materials cannot alone assure language improvement for EFL students. AYP teachers must have a greater educational understanding beyond any university degree and an EFL certification. Most specifically, teachers need to be versed in many types of assessments tools, teaching methods, and learning approaches which allow them to reflectively teach more effectively.

Indeed, a student-centred approach can promote learning engagement, self-confidence and involve students on “how” to learn instead of “what” to learn. However, these benefits may not be achieved in EFL classes especially with low level students who lack the minimal linguistic competency and are still in need of teacher’s support and guidance to move forward due to little to no study skills and lack of academic expertise. Study and classroom learning skills should be the focus of the first two terms to prepare students to adjust from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach and learning involvement.

Although students are exposed to an intensive English learning environment for a year, the quality and quantity of AYP graduates have been unsatisfactory. It seems that the amount of linguistic knowledge presented in the adopted textbooks as well as the way the syllabus is designed is also responsible for this failure. Even though task-based syllabus has a benefit of promoting linguistic knowledge, it requires an adequate level of English and ongoing progression from students to cope with the current and upcoming tasks. CTEs’ students rarely meet these two requirements in most situations due to their language incompetence. Hence, students need
more intensive linguistic inputs that include grammar forms, more authentic genres and lexical chunks to help them produce the language. Long and Crookes (1991), state that without such emphasising language forms in a task syllabus, students might fail to sustain their linguistic improvement.

Since one type of syllabus cannot comprise all the linguistic and pedagogical aspects, a combination of both of a task and negotiated syllabus on what is called “hybrid syllabus” is recommended for the AYP context. Each of these syllabi has its own advantages as referred to earlier. Hybrid syllabus, however, must be a reflection of students’ needs to increase its practicality to EFL students. Larsen (1974) states that course designers have to take into account a utility approach to the syllabus. This means that the syllabus should be based around what is needed, beneficial, and urgent for the students in terms of authentic materials and sequencing learning tasks accordingly. It would be better for Interlink to design its own syllabus that takes all of these concerns into account rather than to adopt something set for dissimilar domain and become sometimes difficult to adapt.

The employment criteria and in-service training for AYP staff need to be revised completely. The need for native English teachers goes in parallel with the need for hiring well-qualified staff who possess relevant qualification and experience in an EFL domain. Some of the AYP’s teachers degrees have no educational background in their Bachelors or Masters, and the only qualification they are hired for, in addition to obtaining any University degree, is a short training course in teaching methodology such as CELTA, TEFL, and TESL (lasts from one to three months). Thus, recruiting native EFL instructors should take these requirements into account: (1) university degree in Education or linguistics; (2) any University degree with minimum six months of teaching certification such as Delta (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language); (3) being a class observer for one semester prior to teaching; and (4) applying incentives such as bonuses and rewards for distinguish teachers.

Conclusion

The economic factor seems to be the main reason for introducing English into SA in the early 1960s. Subsequently, this presence has greatly expanded either as a medium of instruction or means of communication. Since then, English is primarily implemented for these two instrumental functions. Standard American English appears to be the dominant variety of English in most aspects of Saudi daily life. Historically speaking, the dynamic of EFL usage in SA indicates that the English language has not presented a feasible threat to Islam or the national identity in which Arabic is deeply rooted. Thus, EFL is religiously, socially, and politically welcomed in the Saudi context.

Exposing EFL students to an intensive learning environment becomes less useful if the other interrelated issues are not addressed such as large class sizes, unqualified teachers, and a very low level of students. TVTC is responsible for settling the administrative challenges while Interlink is in charge of the pedagogy and components of curriculum. AYP is not to blame for the low number of graduates. The fault lies in the unsuitability of the syllabus to the students’ current needs.

Unexpectedly, the graduates’ linguistic competence is somewhat disappointing as the average progress for the seven intakes is almost 19% only. However, AYP generates positive impacts in terms of increasing students’ learning curiosity, discipline, and motivation. This paper acknowledges a strong relationship between authenticity (using native English speakers) and methodology (student-centred approach) in the perceptions of
EFL students at the AYP. The students possess the same the level of satisfaction towards them positively or negatively.

AYP is certainly a weeding out process for not only itself but the training programmes that feed from it. The number of graduates in three years is 439 out of 1,414 (31%). Failures have been attributed to several factors. These are class size, aptness of syllabus, and AYP teaching methodology. Raising admission standards might remedy some of these issues by lowering the number enrolled. Decreasing enrolment may reduce the AYP management cost as well.

Most importantly, since TVTC receives the lowest 5% of academically achieved students, the challenges to these students in the AYP are unique and require a supportive environment that caters specifically to their needs. Ultimately, unless the situation described in this paper is addressed decisively to revitalised AYP, its future success seems at best dubious.

References


Appendix A: CEFR Levels

The number of hours during which a learner is in a formal learning context (such as a classroom) is referred to as the guided teaching hours. The number of guided teaching hours per CEFR level recommended by the Association of Language Testers of Europe (ALTE) is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALTE</th>
<th>Teaching hours</th>
<th>AYP in TVTC</th>
<th>Teaching hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Approx. 90–100 hours</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Approx. 200 hours*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Approx. 180–200 hours</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Approx. 200 hours (Meets the recommended No. of hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Approx. 350–400 hours</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Approx. 200 hours (Meets the recommended No. of hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Approx. 500–600 hours</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Approx. 400 hours total (Meets the recommended No. of hours)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*200 hours = 1 semester = 200 minutes x 5 days x 12 weeks instruction.

Table A2

Classification of CEFR Levels in Comparison to the Other International Testing Bodies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English level</th>
<th>CEFR</th>
<th>IELTS</th>
<th>TOEFL iBT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starter</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>2.0–2.5</td>
<td>0–39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>3.0–3.5</td>
<td>40–56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower intermediate</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>4–5</td>
<td>57–86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B: Sample of AYP Syllabus

### Touchstone Level 1 Scope and sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Functions / Topics</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Conversation strategies</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 1</strong>&lt;br&gt;All about you&lt;br&gt;pages 1–10</td>
<td>- Say hello and good-bye&lt;br&gt; - Introduce yourself&lt;br&gt; - Exchange personal information (names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses)&lt;br&gt; - Spell names&lt;br&gt; - Thank people</td>
<td>- The verb be with I, you, and we in statements, yes-no questions, and short answers&lt;br&gt; - Questions with What’s ...?&lt;br&gt; - and answers with it’s ...</td>
<td>- Expressions to say hello and good-bye&lt;br&gt; - Numbers 0–10&lt;br&gt; - Personal information&lt;br&gt; - Everyday expressions</td>
<td>- Ask How about you?&lt;br&gt; - Use everyday expressions like Yeah and Thanks</td>
<td>- Letters and numbers&lt;br&gt; - E-mail addresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 2</strong>&lt;br&gt;In class&lt;br&gt;pages 11–20</td>
<td>- Ask and say where people are&lt;br&gt; - Name personal items and classroom objects&lt;br&gt; - Ask and say where things are in a room&lt;br&gt; - Make requests&lt;br&gt; - Give classroom instructions&lt;br&gt; - Apologies</td>
<td>- The verb be with he, she, and they in statements, yes-no questions, and short answers&lt;br&gt; - Articles a, an, and the&lt;br&gt; - The and these&lt;br&gt; - Noun plurals&lt;br&gt; - Questions with Where ...?&lt;br&gt; - Possessives ’s and ’s</td>
<td>- Personal items&lt;br&gt; - Classroom objects&lt;br&gt; - Prepositions and expressions of location</td>
<td>- Ask for help in class&lt;br&gt; - Respond to Thank you and I’m sorry</td>
<td>- Noun plural endings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 3</strong>&lt;br&gt;Favorite people&lt;br&gt;pages 21–30</td>
<td>- Talk about famous people&lt;br&gt; - Describe people’s personalities&lt;br&gt; - Talk about friends and family</td>
<td>- Possessive adjectives&lt;br&gt; - The verb be in statements, yes-no questions, and short answers (summary)&lt;br&gt; - Information questions with be</td>
<td>- Types of famous people&lt;br&gt; - Basic adjectives&lt;br&gt; - Adjectives to describe personality&lt;br&gt; - Family members&lt;br&gt; - Numbers 10–101</td>
<td>- Show interest by repeating information and asking questions&lt;br&gt; - Use Really? to show interest or surprise</td>
<td>- is he ...? or is she ...?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Touchstone checkpoint Units 1–3** pages 31–32

| Unit 4 | Everyday life<br>pages 33–42 | - Describe a typical morning in your home<br> - Discuss weekly routines<br> - Get to know someone<br> - Talk about lifestyles | - Simple present statements, yes-no questions, and short answers | - Verbs for everyday activities<br> - Days of the week<br> - Time expressions for routines | - Say more than yes or no when you answer a question<br> - Well if you need more time to think, or if the answer isn’t a simple yes or no | - s endings of verbs |
| **Unit 5**<br>Free time<br>pages 43–52 | - Discuss free-time activities<br> - Talk about TV shows you like and don’t like<br> - Talk about TV-viewing habits | - Simple present statements, yes-no questions, and short answers | - Types of TV shows<br> - Free-time activities<br> - Time expressions for frequency<br> - Expressions for likes and dislikes | - Ask questions in two ways to be clear and not too direct<br> - Use I mean to repeat your ideas or to say more | - Do you ...? |
| **Unit 6**<br>Neighborhoods<br>pages 53–62 | - Describe a neighborhood<br> - Ask for and tell the time<br> - Make suggestions<br> - Discuss advertising | - There’s and There are<br> - Quantifiers<br> - Adjectives before nouns<br> - Telling time<br> - Suggestions with Let’s | - Neighborhood places<br> - Basic adjectives<br> - Expressions for telling the time | - Use Me too or Me neither to show you have something in common with someone<br> - Respond with Right or I know to agree with someone, or to show you are listening | - Word stress |

**Touchstone checkpoint Units 4–6** pages 63–64
Appendix C: Teachers’ Questionnaire Towards AYP

1: Cooperative learning has increased amongst graduated students from AYP
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

2: AYP encourages me to use English as a medium of instruction instead of Arabic
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

3: AYP graduates possess high level of discipline and punctuality
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

4: AYP enhances students' motivation and curiosity in learning
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

5: AYP graduates are capable to cope with ESP English through comprehending technical English genres and terminology
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

6: I recommend AYP to be continuously implemented in CTE for all admitted intakes
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

7: List the main observed challenges or advantages of AYP: ____________________________
Appendix D: Students' Questionnaire Towards AYP

1: I can write meaningful sentences about any topic with few mistakes
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

2: My understanding and speaking skills are increasingly improved
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

3: AYP helps me to be more engaged in learning practices such as group and pair work
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

4: AYP increases my desire and commitment to learning English
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

5: AYP rules boosts my discipline and punctuality
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

6: I recommend AYP to be continuously implemented in CTE for all admitted intakes
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Average
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

7: List the main observed challenges or advantages of AYP: ____________________________
## Appendix E: Students’ Perceptions Towards Authenticity and Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I believe that portfolio helps me to learn English</td>
<td>methodology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I prefer daily-classes materials to solid textbooks</td>
<td>methodology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The amount of assessments and homework is sufficient</td>
<td>methodology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>In-class activities are adequate and help me to use English</td>
<td>methodology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I feel comfortable with student-centred approach</td>
<td>methodology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I understand teachers’ talk easily</td>
<td>authenticity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Daily tasks encourage me to use English in/out the class</td>
<td>authenticity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Class materials are suitable to my current level and they represent the daily situations of the language usage</td>
<td>authenticity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Teachers are concerned about cultural, social ideological issues</td>
<td>authenticity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I feel better with native English teachers than non-natives</td>
<td>authenticity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>