

The role of the Saudi youth represented in EFL university students in achieving the expectations of the Saudi (2030) vision

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Abstract

This study attempts at investigating the role of EFL university students in achieving the goals of what is officially known as the Saudi (2030) vision. Recently a vision bases on three pillars that represent the unique competitive advantages is announced. First, the vision is seen as a key for building a country that will play a leading role as the heart of Arab and Islamic worlds. Secondly, the vision aims at building a country with an investment power to create a more diverse and sustainable economy in the upcoming future. Finally, through this vision Saudis will make use of their strategic location to build their role as an integral driver of international trade and to connect three continents: Africa, Asia and Europe. It is common that perspective nations usually build themselves by making the best use of their youth. However, achieving such goals also require skillful, well trained and qualified human resources. Therefore, this study is attempting to shed a light on how Saudi EFL students can play a positive role in building their beloved country and in achieving its trajectory vision. Through a quantitative method the necessary data has been collected to undertake this study. A questionnaire was distributed to (27) EFL students at Qassim University. The aim of the questionnaire was to gather the necessary data as related to the learners' attitudes towards the positive role EFL university students can play in achieving the Saudi (2030) vision. The result of the study shows that university students are still in need for English language to meet the market needs base on the expectations of the vision. It is also found that many parents are aware of this need therefore they regularly send their sons abroad for better English language education. Additionally, the study found that teaching English in higher education institution is done via lecturing which appears as teacher - centrist rather than learner - centrist.

Keywords: Saudi vision, market needs, youth, population, English language proficiency

1. Introduction

The Saudi (2030) vision seems as vital for both the decision makers as well as the entire nation, simply because the vision draws a road map for the future of the kingdom. For instance, the following quotation available on: (<http://vision2030.gov.sa/en>), shows the exact words uttered by the deputy crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, who is also the Chairman of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs:

It is my pleasure to present Saudi Arabia's Vision for the future.

It is an ambitious yet achievable blueprint,
Which expresses our long-term goals and expectations
And reflects our country's strengths and capabilities"
All success stories start with a vision,
And successful visions are based on strong pillars.

Base on three pillars: (1) a vibrant society, (2) a thriving economy and (3) an ambitious nation the Saudi (2030) vision is recently declared. Accordingly, each pillar needs some important tools to come true. For instance, building a vibrant society is vital for achieving a strong economic prosperity. As stated by the vision, what makes the Saudi society special is that its members live in accordance with the Islamic principle of moderation. Saudis are also proud of their national identity and their ancient cultural heritage. Additionally, they enjoy a good life in a beautiful environment that is protected by caring families and are supported by an empowering social and health care system. The vision also states the importance of the economy for the future of this nation. For instance, it is

stated that a thriving economy can provide opportunities for all by building an education system aligned with market needs. Therefore, the country needs to develop its investment tools to unlock its promising economic sectors, diversify its economy and create job opportunities. The country will also grow its economy and improve the quality of its services. However, the researcher believes that achieving the highest goals of this vision require skillful and qualified who are competent enough in English language. Truly speaking, we cannot build a powerful nation as well as a strong economy without acquiring the fundamental skills of the language that drives them in today's global world. It is a phenomenon that English is a language that drives big businesses, communications, and stock markets all over the world. Therefore, Saudi youth in general and university EFL students in particular have to meet the market needs through acquisition of various skills. However, English language proficiency comes on the peak of the skills required in this stage. And that is why this study endeavours to investigate challenges faced by EFL university students in Saudi Arabia, particularly it studies the case of EFL students in Qassim University.

2. Statement of the problem

During the academic year (2015- 2016) the English head department and the staff members in college of Arts, Qassim university, have met students in an open face to face discussion. Students were asked to speak freely on issues regarding their fears after graduation as well as stating their view points around the staff members' performance. The most

important complains reported were on the limitation of time given to EFL students in practical speaking classes, thus, students leave colleges with very limited speaking skills. Weaknesses regarding writing skills were also confirmed by some students. It seems as if these challenges and many other more have resulted in poor EFL students who are not qualified enough for the requirements of the market needs today. For instance, stories such as having a “BA’ holder who may simply break down in a short dialogue in English, or he/she might not neatly write a brief Curriculum Vatae to apply for a vacancy are heard today. And that is why some wealthy parents send their sons and daughters abroad during the summer vacation for more interaction and communication, to name some English speaking countries (USA, UK and Australia). However, those from poor families will face the same challenges mentioned above since universities are not providing enough programs for improving their speaking and writing skills. This study is particularly addressing the importance of the EFL university students’ rehabilitation as future generation who will act as effective tools, through which KSA will achieve its (2030) vision.

3. Study Questions

1. To what extent EFL students can play a positive role in making the Saudi (2030) vision comes true?
2. What tools do EFL students require to achieve the highest expectations of this vision?

4. Study Hypotheses

1. EFL students can play a positive role in making the Saudi (2030) vision comes true.
2. English language proficiency is among the tools required by the EFL students to achieve the highest expectations of this vision.

5. Literature review

The literature review shows that population is dramatically growing in Saudi Arabia and that the majority of its population are youth. The country has witnessed a tremendous population increase from the early dawn of 1970th. Statistical figures displayed by the Statistics Bureau and Ministry of Economy and Planning shows that, Saudi Arabia organised partial population censuses on different occasions (1974, 1992, 2004 and 2010). There are other important facts connected to the population in Saudi Arabia. In 2005, FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) reported that until the 1960th most of the population was nomadic or semi nomadic. However, due to rapid economic and urban growth, more than 95% of population in the kingdom now is settled. Official data displayed by the statistics bureau also shows that young population in Saudi Arabia is growing at 2.34 per cent annually. Additionally, six out of 10 people in Saudi Arabia are under the age of 40. It is also found that 60% of the population is under the age of 40 according to data collected by the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation a state

– owned education body based in Riyadh.

Descending from this national fortune, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has announced its upcoming overall development vision known as (2030) vision. The vision is extremely comprehensible through which a huge improvement of different fundamental institutions such as healthcare system, economy, energy, investments as well as education are targeted. Through this vision, the issue of rehabilitation of the youth is also taking seriously. Thus, topics such as providing young generations of the kingdom with necessary tools and skills for production is seen by the vision as vital for the future of the entire nation. To sum up this section we can say that, the above mentioned factors are alone attractive enough to make the Saudi dream comes true.

In a study conducted by Saskia1, the author states that young generations require better education in order to become better citizens of tomorrow. Saskia1, also adds that in order to do the job required by their country’s economy, young people need to learn a number of skills. For instance, they need to write and read however, in today’s world we believe that they particularly need to learn English simply because it is English that drives the word economy today.

Aniefiok, Ukommi, found that through various programmes ranging from empowerment, services and advocacy efforts much has been done around the word to enhance the youth abilities and skills for nation building. Saudi Arabia is not an exceptional case in this regard, in fact considerable efforts have presented to enhance the Saudi youth with appropriate production tools. However, via its trajectory vision, it seems that the government is looking forward to make the best use of the youth as well as the strategic location of the kingdom. However, the dream won’t come true unless decision makers turn their words into actions descending from the old saying “actions speak louder than words”

6. Material and Methods

A descriptive method is used to undertake this study. The data was collected through a quantitative method in which a researcher has conducted and distributed a questionnaire to a sample of EFL Students, currently enrolled as undergraduate students at Qassim University. The aim of the questionnaire was to gather the necessary data as relates to the learners’ attitudes towards whether university EFL students are qualified enough to achieve the Saudi prospective through what is officially known as the Saudi (2030) vision. Thus, a questionnaire of (15) items was distributed to a sample of (30) EFL students who were randomly selected. In order to check the apparent validity of the study questionnaire and the validation of its statements according to the formulation and explanation, the researcher organized a pilot test. After collecting the data, the researcher also managed statistical calculation to analyse the data collected. The statistical calculation and the results analysed, confirmed the validity of the hypotheses. To analyse the data collected the researcher used the Microsoft excel sheets as shown in these figures.

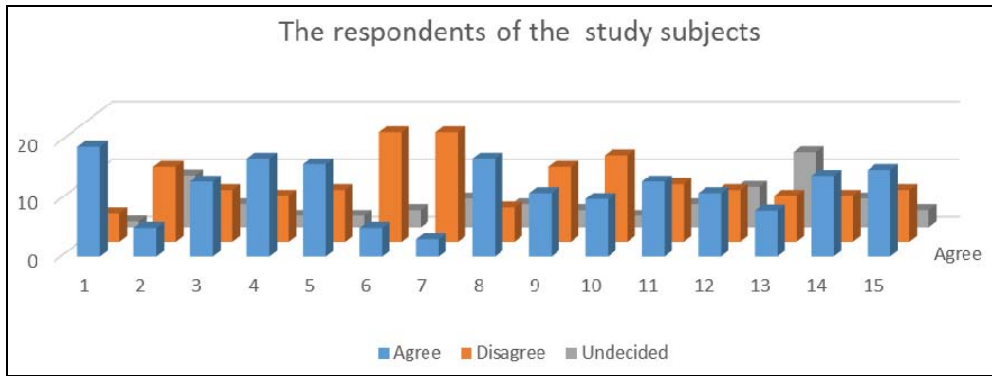


Fig 1: The frequency distribution for the respondents' answers about the entire questionnaire items

The figure shown above is clearly illustrating the frequency distribution for the respondents' answers about the (15) items of the questionnaire. To sum up, we can say that the above figure illustrates some findings, the most important of which are as follows: First, the majority of the respondents agreed that English is required by many EFL students to meet the market needs, as shown in item (no.1). Additionally, the study subjects responded positively on issues such as the importance of going abroad for studying in English speaking countries. This is clearly shown in items (4, 5). The respondents also

claim that Saudi parents are financially willing and able to support their sons and daughters going abroad, particularly during summer vacations. Moreover, the respondents think that in most higher education institutions in KSA, university professors are still doing lecturing while teaching, due to lack of language materials and laboratories. As assumed by many linguists today, this situation has resulted in poor EFL students with limited English proficiency, particularly when it comes to speaking and writing.

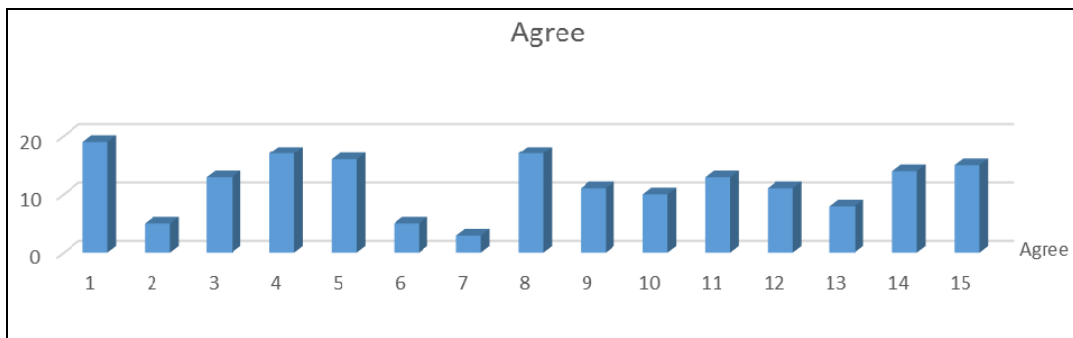


Fig 2: The frequency distribution for the respondents' agreements on the questionnaire items

The second figure shows the percentage of the respondents' agreements on the entire questionnaire items. It is remarkable that the majority of the respondents fully agreed with items (1, 4, 5, 8, 14, 15) where they confirmed the market needs for the English language proficiency in KSA. Therefore, Saudi parents are willing and able to send their sons and daughters abroad because they are fully aware of the vital requirements

demand by companies such as the Saudi Aramco. Moreover, the figure illustrates the traditional teaching methods maintain by many university professors in KSA today. As confirmed by the study subjects, English teaching methods are mainly lecturing ones where professors control the talking time while learners are just passive listeners.

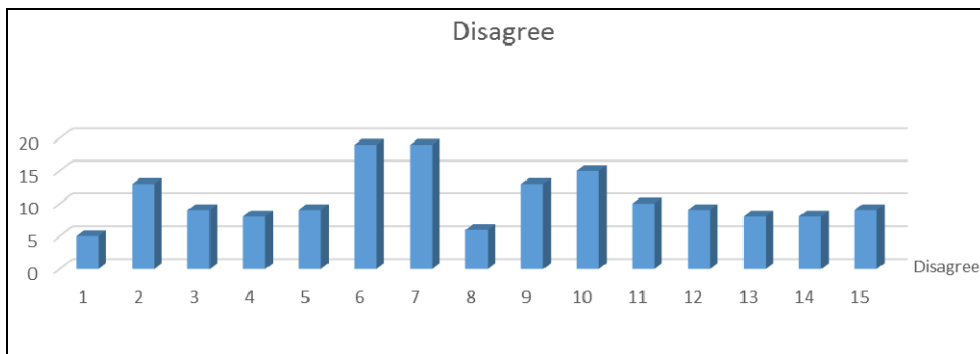


Fig 3: The frequency distribution for the respondents' disagreements on the questionnaire items.

Figure 3 is clearly showing the respondents' disagreements on some questionnaire items. It is remarkable that the majority of the respondents are fully disagreed with items (6, 7, 10). In these items the respondents disagreed with claims such as being disqualified in writing. For instance, they still believe that they can write a short paragraph or a curriculum vitae

neatly in English. They also disagreed with claims that EFL students find it difficult to communicate with others additionally, the majority disagreed with item (no.10) which states that students feel shy to speak in front of their peers in EFL classes.

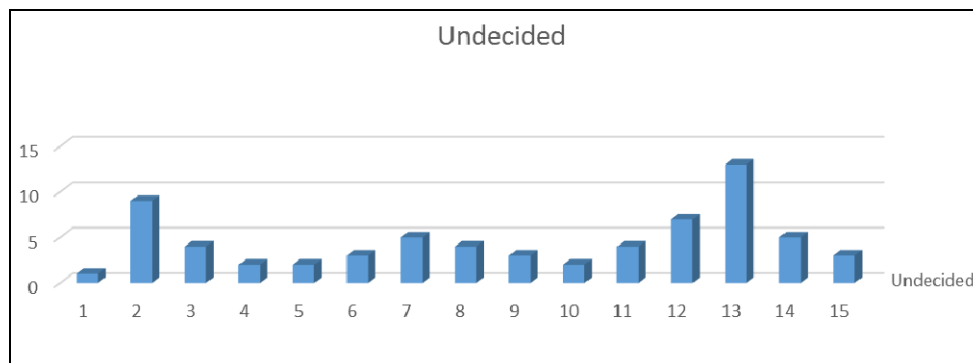


Fig 4: The frequency distribution for the respondents' undecided questionnaire items.

Some questionnaire items are undecided as shown by the above figure. It is remarkable that the some respondents find it difficult to decide items no. (2, 12, 13). For example, the question whether they are competent enough in English speaking and writing is undecided. They also found it difficult to decide the impact of seminars on EFL students' performance and whether they regularly participate in classroom discussions or not.

7. Finding

The data analysis for the current study resulted in some findings the most of which are as follows: first, English is seen as a gate for the success particularly in hunting jobs, simply because of its role in the market needs. The respondents believe that parents are aware of this reality therefore, they send their sons and daughters abroad to some English speaking countries for more proficiency in language skills. Additionally, the respondents agreed that teaching English in Qassim University is done through the traditional lecturing method, where professors act as good English speakers and the learners play the role of passive listeners. Although teachers and parents are regularly complaints against the poor outcome of the EFL gradudators, however, some of the respondents rejected these claims. Finally, the respondents found it difficult to decide whether seminars have any impact over their performance or not.

8. Recommendations

In the light of these findings the researcher recommends the following.

- Teaching English via lecturing won't enhance EFL students to act positively with the Saudi (2030) vision.
- There is a massive need to adopt communicative approach in higher education base on learner centrism.
- Effective and practical writing classes as well as speaking forums are extremely important to be considered from the elementary stage in KSA.

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