English Language Curriculum Change in an EFL Context: Shallow Scope and Marginalised Professionals

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Abstract

The centrality of teachers' views about curriculum change has long been established to exert a powerful influence in implementing educational reforms. Whilst abundant research has evidenced this, the perceptions of teachers of English as a foreign language about curricular changes is an under-researched topic in Saudi Arabia as a country undergoing relentless reforms. This small-scale qualitative study aimed to bridge this gap and contribute more broadly to our understanding of how teachers' voices of the agendas of curriculum change reflect the complexity of the implementation of the intended reforms especially in an EFL contexts. The study utilised semi-structured interviews and employed qualitative data analysis. The findings showed that teachers denounced the change due to its narrow scope to word-for-word implementation of 'textbooks'. Consequently, teachers faced a number of challenges, developed negative images about themselves and as a result resisted the change. Recommendations pertained to curriculum research methodology and curriculum change stakeholders.

Keywords: perception, curriculum, implementation, change

1. Introduction

Teachers' views about curriculum change (henceforth: ELCC) have long been established to exert a powerful influence in implementing educational reforms (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Fullan, 2007). The educational literature on teachers' leadership has indicated a limited engagement of teachers in decisions regarding curriculum design (Handler, 2010). A resultant reported finding is that change which requires teachers to adopt 'imposed professional ideologies' can threaten teachers' morale and impede successful implementation of the desired reforms (Helsby & McCulloch, 2002). In TESOL, there is a growing evidence that suggests a lack of teachers' awareness of and voice in curriculum change (Elyas & Picard, 2013; Alwan & Troudi, 2010; Wedell, 2003) which leads to perceived failing reforms (Assalahi, 2013; Al-Mohanna, 2010). Critical educationalists, e.g. (Giroux, 1988; Pennycook, 1989), point to the importance of teachers as social constructionists in decision-making processes regarding curriculum design/implementation and decry the technical-rational view where teachers are subsumed as objects of change. Hence, there is a growing appreciation of viewing curriculum change as a manifestation of the varied philosophical underpinnings of the change process implemented in different contexts. In what follows, I will overview the meaning of the curriculum change in the given context, the different stances it offers for the implementation of reforms and how it impinges on teachers' professional autonomy and discretion.

1.1 Curriculum Change

Curriculum innovation, change, and development, although retain specific characteristics, are interrelated terms that denote change in all curriculum components (Fullan, 2007). It is worthwhile to commence with defining curriculum which is often conflated with 'syllabus' as though they are not mutually exclusive. Among educationalists, however, syllabus is only one facet of curriculum and is influenced by our assumptions about it. Robertson (1971) clarified this confusion by assigning the term curriculum a broader function that includes "the goals, objectives, content, processes, resources, and means of evaluation of all the learning experiences planned for pupils both in and out of the school and community through classroom instruction and related programs"(p. 566). A syllabus, as Newby (2000) views it, is "the specification of aims and the selection and grading of content to be used for planning foreign language, or any other educational courses" p.590.

My understanding of curriculum in relation to the context of this study refers to all the experiences that students engage in within or outside the school based on their needs analysis, aided by teachers' active roles, through the use of the available materials and harmonized assessment. My vision of curriculum as a process-model bears on my understanding of ELCC. Hence, I adopted Mackenzie and Lawler' (1948) definition of change as the process that "changes the factors that shape or influence the learners' experiences" p.274. They also recognize that change should bring about alternations in people's values, understandings, and skills. ELCC process, for Nation and Macalister (2010), should follow three approaches. The first, 'power-coercive', takes a top-down approach and regards teachers as recipients of change. The exigencies of top-down reforms impose a one-size-fits-all agendas irrespective

of the peculiarities and the different needs of the teachers or the context in which they teach. Unfortunately, this ideological coercion has proved to be a total failure as teachers mostly resist the intended change (Fullan, 2007). In the second type of change, the 'rational empirical', the capacity of power-relation is partially reduced and mitigated by justifying the change. Hence, teachers are presented with reasons about why the change should be implemented. Again, this approach might instigate teachers' understanding and belief about change, but teachers are likely to resist such reforms since they are already excluded (ibid). The third approach, the 'normative-re-educative', is the most suitable and potentially successful process since teachers are negotiated from the beginning of planning change through discussions and involvement (Fullan, 2007). It is driven by a bottom-up approach that takes teachers roles, beliefs, understanding, background, professional development, and resources into consideration and develop them further to lead a foreseeable change.

Nonetheless, ELCC is described as a complex process (Fullan, 1993) which involves "loss, anxiety and struggle" and that any innovation "cannot be assimilated unless its meaning is shared" (Marris, 1975; cited in Fullan, 2007, p.21-22). This meaning-sharing process entails deliberation of ELCC by all different stakeholders. Moreover, Fullan (2007) draws our attention to the multidisciplinary nature of the innovation process and that any attempt to marginalize any stakeholder would result in an undesired implementation. The implementation process of ELCC takes two approaches; the 'fidelity' and 'mutual-adaptation' perspectives (Fullan, 2007). The former suggests implementing the change 'faithfully' as it was proposed, and the latter implies possible adaptation by implementers (ibid). Fullan and Park (1981) (cited in Wang, 2006) note that change is likely to occur in curriculum materials, teaching approaches, and beliefs or understandings about the curriculum and learning practices.

1.2 Teachers' Roles and Perceptions

Change in curriculum is often paired with "practice change" or alternation in the "existing practice to a new or revised practice, in order to achieve desired learning outcomes" (Fullan and Park, 1981; cited in Wang, 2006, p.10). Teachers, have been acknowledged as key *de facto* agents of ELCC and curriculum experts usually equate teachers' inclusion in or exclusion from the change process with its success or failure (Fullan, 2007; Barrow, 1984). This equation has been highlighted elsewhere in ELCC literature (Elmore and Sykes, 1992; Markee, 1997; Widdowson, 1993). This weight given to teachers in ELCC, however, did not occur in a vacuum, but rather due to the capacity of their beliefs and prior experiences which influence their decisions about curriculum implementation within their school and classroom settings (Assalahi, 2013). Without teachers' involvement in innovation, the intended change is useless and will not be fully enacted and translated into intended practice (Fullan, 2007). Change process can be facilitated and efforts concerted only if there are sincere efforts form curriculum stakeholders to cater for teachers' attitudes, background, experience, needs and professional development (Morris & Scott, 2003). Teachers' marginalization by the ELCC would cause their resistance to the change, no matter what developmental steps are taken (McLaughlin, 1987; Carless, 1998; Smith, 2005).

The significance of teachers as agents of ELCC process goes beyond their traditional roles as passive implementers of top-down change. As experienced professionals, they can advise other curriculum stakeholders on the needs of the learners, the contextual circumstances that surround the learning/teaching experiences and methodological choices that fit their situations (Holly, 1973; Elliot, 1994; Brown, 1995; Webb, 2002). Hence, teachers can contribute to the ELCC process via a bottom-up approach which starts from needs analysis up to syllabus and material design. Curriculum stakeholders, also, have a crucial role to play with regards to teachers' disciplinary knowledge (Hope and Pigford, 2001). In this sense, professional development and guidance should be prominent among the wider scope of curriculum change (Desimone, 2002).

2. Previous Studies on English Language Curriculum Change

As regards the context of this research study, a number of curriculum studies were carried out on teacher's perceptions about the ELCC. Of particular interest and importance, Troudi and Alwan's (2010) qualitative study focused on EFL teachers' perceptions about curriculum change in the United Arab Emirates. The data collection methods involved semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The findings revealed contradictory affective feelings ranging from accustomed positive apprehension on the one hand, and substantial number of teachers who voiced low morale due to marginalization in ELCC process. The study recommended teachers' involvement in curriculum development as a warrant against negative psychological feelings about change.

McGrail's (2005) qualitative study focused on English language arts teachers' perceptions about the curricular change of integrating technology in middle and high English classrooms in Atlanta, USA. Findings from the semi-structured interviews uncovered the complex nature of change implementation as teachers expressed different attitudes related to the benefits of technology to their students. The rationale-empirical approach of the change 'positively' influenced teachers' perceptions led to successful implementation. Nonetheless, dilemmas about and worries of the change emerged and impinged on teachers' bewilderment of change actualization. Wang (2006) conducted a mixed-methods approach study to explore the implementation of the mandatory national college English curriculum within a Chinese tertiary context. Data collection methods involved interviews with policymakers and administrators as well as survey questionnaires and classroom observations with EFL teachers. The study revealed that although the type of change was 'normative-re-educative', teachers were frustrated because middle level managers in universities restricted the meaning of ELCC to its traditional version, and emphasized exams over learning experiences. This situations left teachers undecided about the new curriculum policy. Power-relations played greater role in teachers' compliance with the change. Teachers followed their principals' mandates, who had control over incentives, rather than the new policy guidelines. The study concluded that contextual factors can impede change implementation.

Assalahi (2013) conducted a qualitative study to explore three EFL teachers about their perceptions of grammar teaching in Saudi intermediate schools. The study revealed negative teachers' attitudes towards the proposed curriculum change.

"Despite the mandated communicative language approach and accompanying training programs, teachers reported dominant forms-focused (traditional) grammar instruction which was for the most part informed by consistent beliefs and influenced by prevailing contextual factors" p.589.

Al-Mohanna (2010) conducted a qualitative study to explore Saudi teachers' perception and implementation of the communicative approach of English language syllabuses in the secondary stage. Data collection methods involved interviews, observation and content analysis. The study revealed a mismatch between the theoretical orientations of the communicative approach and actual teaching practice (Grammar translation and audio-lingual methods). This overlap was in part due to teachers' conflicting beliefs about change and other factors such as the managerial culture, lack of time and materials and student-related issues. However, although the study considered teachers' voices to a certain extent, their opinions about their roles in ELCC per se were not fully unpacked. Al-Yousef (2007) used a mixed-methods research design (content analysis, questionnaire, and informal interviews) to evaluate 3rd year new English course book (CB) in Saudi Arabia. The study revealed that the effectiveness of CB depended highly on teachers' beliefs about learning/teaching practices which were evidenced by the micro-evaluation results. Teachers' belief system was dominated by a traditional approach to language teaching (grammar-translation) which overlapped with the communicative approach of the CB. This mismatch, according to Al-Yousef, was due to many factors, among which the lack of teacher training was prevalent. In the same vein, and apart from Al-Yousef (2007), Al-Mohanna (2010) and Assalahi (2013), curriculum studies in Saudi Arabia (e.g.; Al-Hijailan, 1999; Al-Amri, 2008) were underpinned by the positivist paradigm and used mainly questionnaires as data collection methods where participants' voices were also unheard. However, they all reported remarkable gap between the intended and the implemented curriculum change.

To conclude, the previous research conducted so far on teachers' perceptions about the ELCC revealed their resistance to change due to teachers' negative feelings of alienation and marginalization by curriculum policy makers. Yet, little is known about the extent to which the affective factors impinge on curriculum implementation. Additionally, where most of the studies in Saudi Arabia focused on the evaluation of new textbooks, teachers' voices about change were partially heard. Therefore, this study sets out to bridge these gaps.

3. Problem of the Study

My interest into teachers' perceptions about ELCC was aroused by the seminal findings in mainstream research, and mainly following the findings of my study on teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching (Assalahi, 2013). I found out that teachers chose the form-focused approach to teach grammar in accordance with their beliefs, experience and in response to the wider contextual realities. Teachers' affiliation to their beliefs about teaching was against the new communicative oriented syllabus mandated by the ministry of education (henceforth: MOE). This study, therefore, is a response to my curiosity to explore how teachers perceive the ELCC initiated by the MOE since 2004. More importantly, the study contributes to the scholarly debate about teachers' active roles in curriculum change against the ingrains of

global performativity.

4. Context of the Study

The MOE, represented by the English language curriculum department, is in charge of curriculum planning, design, and evaluation of the English language curriculum. As such, it is a centralized curriculum which is informed by a top-down policy that mandates specific syllabi and textbooks to be implemented by teachers throughout the school year for elementary, intermediate and secondary stages; i.e. year 11 through 17. Teachers must abide by such textbooks and are supported with teachers' books as criterion-referenced that detail lesson plans, evaluation and testing. Teachers are held accountable for breach of content or teaching approach. The English Language curriculum in Saudi Arabia underwent a number of innovations since 1970. Although such developments aim at endorsing the communicative competence among learners, many researchers doubt the satisfaction of this aspiration and contend that the curriculum is still rooted in the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods (Al-Ahaydeb, 1986; Zaid, 1993; Assalahi, 2013). The new change, which was initiated in 2004, is underpinned by the communicative approach of language learning and teaching. It commenced with the intermediate stage to overcome previous shortcomings (Al-Mohanna, 2010). Yet, little is disseminated to teachers about the curriculum per se, apart from highlighting in the blurb of the textbooks the worldly status of the English Language. Teachers' books also contain teaching methodologies and strategies that could help teachers transmit the content to their students. This remarkable absence of teachers' roles in planning or designing the curriculum is further indicated by curriculum stakeholders in the MOE. They contend that supplying teachers with teachers' books is sufficient enough to train them to comply with the intended change (Alshumaimeri, 1999). This contention objectifies teachers' knowledge as trainable and transferrable commodity. The focus of the current study was on the intermediate stage curriculum which received the lion's share of the ongoing reform from 2004. Students study four lessons a week, each lesson is 45 minutes long. Students and teachers are supplied with students' books/workbooks and teachers' guide respectively.

4. Conceptual Framework

My stance of conducting this small-scale study was informed by a number of theoretical underpinnings. First, as I indicated earlier, this study is a stretch of my previous research study about teachers' beliefs which ultimately influence teaching practices (Assalahi, 2013). Teachers' beliefs also influence teachers' attempts to implement the intended change and their decisions of accepting or resisting curricular reforms (Allen, 2002). My understanding of 'perceptions' is influenced by Alwan's (2006) definition which refers to "teachers' constructions of reality in areas related to the educational contexts" (p.45). McGrail's (2005) definition is also of interest here as it relates perceptions to the "implementation of school-wide initiatives" (p.7). Hence, I view teachers as partners of decisions related to curriculum design rather than only policy implementers (Richards, 2003; Fullan, 2007). Second, I personally believe that teachers should have a major role in ELCC because "change in practice depends on their willingness and ability to modify their teaching through professional study and deliberation" Tannar & Tannar (1990) (in Yeager, 1997, p.36). Third,

ELCC is more subtle than just jotting down objectives and imposing certain types of syllabuses and textbooks to prospective implementers. Rather, as Miel 1946 (in Yeager, 1997) highlighted, "to change curriculum of the school is to change the factors interacting to shape that curriculum"(P.37), in which teachers play the most significant part (Carless, 1998). Fourth, ELCC goes beyond *technicalization* of education as a product-oriented that can be objectively introduced and measured. Rather, ELCC is more complex and includes the subjective experiences of learning and responds to the needs of learners and teachers (Fullan, 1999). In the product-oriented curriculum, "'accountability' through behavioral analysis, system management, and so on become hegemonic and ideological representations" of dominant groups (Apple, 1990, p.8). The inevitable outcome would be incongruent with the intended change (Carless, 1998). The last stance of my theoretical framework pertains more closely to the methodology of this study which reflects teachers' articulation of their declarative and procedural knowledge about the ELCC through dialogue (Freeman & Richards, 1996).

5. Questions of the Study

Given the importance of teachers' involvement in ELCC processes as agents of change, the study aims to answer the following questions:

(1) What are the EFL teachers' perceptions about their roles in ELCC?

(2) What are the challenges that EFL teachers face in implementing the English language ELCC?

(3) What are the perceived effects of the ELCC change on the teaching and learning process?

Such questions cover teachers' views on different issues within the change process. These include their perceptions and understandings about the intended change, how they go about implementing it, whether they see themselves as part of the change, and how the orientations of change imping on their teaching practices.

6. Methodology

This research study was underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm. As a phenomenological research, the researcher attempts to understand the participants' lived experience about a phenomenon (Patton, 2001). This calls for the researcher to view reality as subjective and socially constructed (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, this study aimed to explore three EFL teachers' perceptions and experiences about curriculum change in an intermediate school.

6.1 Participants

The participants were three male Saudi EFL teachers of English in public intermediate schools. They all majored in English language teaching and their teaching experiences ranged from 10 to 12 years. My approach to choosing this number was based on convenience sampling, a process of selecting participants based on availability, ease, speed, and low cost (Marshal, 1996). Since the three teachers opted to participate voluntarily in the interviews, this number was also convenient to the purpose of my study, as it was exploratory and did not

aim to generalize the findings. Research ethics were fully adhered to. In this sense, the respondents were briefed about the purpose of the study and their freedom to participate or withdraw at any time. Prior to conducting interviews, the participants' informed consents were obtained and they were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Finally, for confidentiality and anonymity, the recorded interviews were digitally stored and were destroyed at a later stage.

6.2 Data Collection Method

A qualitative research method was employed in order to uncover the research phenomena under investigation. The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method. This was based on the assumption that the participants would be able to express their views about ELCC in a friendly and open-ended manner. An interview protocol was prepared (see appendix) so as to guide to the interview. The protocol comprised four elements with 13 questions to gain a deeper insights about the informants' experiences with the ELCC. These were:

(1) Demographic information about the participants,

(2) Teachers' perceptions about their roles in ELCC.

(3) The challenges teachers face when implementing change.

(4) Teachers' perceptions about consequences of change on the teaching and learning process.

The interviews were conducted via voice over internet (VOI) by using Skype program and phone calls.

6.3 Credibility and Trustworthiness

Unlike quantitative research which calls for verification of the phenomenon by using statistical measures, "qualitative methodology is not completely precise" (Holloway & Wheelr, 2002, p. 8). However, as a systematic attempt, this small-scale research study took into consideration the credibility and trustworthiness issues in terms of research focus and data analysis. Since emergent data drives the directions of the research, I must make my readers aware of how credible and trustworthy this undertaking is. This will be detailed in the next section.

7. Data Analysis and Findings

The interviews produced a large quantity of very interesting data in relation to questions of the study. However, for the purposes of this research study and bearing in mind the word limit, I intended to focus on teachers perceptions about their roles in the change process, consequences of change on learning and teaching, and challenges of change implementation. The underlying assumption of undertaking this approach to data analysis was the principle that data should derive my research theory. This principle was achieved through the inductive approach of data analysis, which was undertaken to "allow for themes to emerge direct from the data" (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p.4). I employed this method to make my data

analysis trustworthy, credible and far from bias (Golafshani, 2003). The inductive approach to the data analysis was used in an attempt to theorize the essence of the phenomena. This was accomplished through transcribing the digitally recorded interviews, reviewing the transcriptions, followed by focused reading for theme generation processes. Analysis started by highlighting, coding and then categorizing recurrent themes und sub-themes under certain clusters or categories. Finally, two steps were followed to maximize the reliability and trustworthiness of the data analysis. A member check was followed where the informants reviewed the transcribed interviews and research findings to check for conformity. Additionally, a peer-checker was recruited to confirm that the coded themes reflected the highly recurrent themes in the transcribed data.

7.1 Perceptions about Change

Teachers' perceptions about change reflected a number of encountered challenges in their day-to-day teaching situations. These challenges reciprocally affect their self-image and in turn impinge on their reactions to the change and its potential failure. Such perceptions will be introduced in what follows.

7.1.1 Shallow Change

The participants depicted in a very negative tone their perceptions about change. To start with, they all condemned the shallow and narrow scope of the current ELCC. The short-sighted change presented great challenges on both the intellectual and ontological levels. The latter pertains to the objective nature of change and will be discussed further under the next category "teachers; the missing agents". By virtue of the former, teachers noticed that the textbook was the ministry's paramount goal of change at the expense of other more crucial, yet underdeveloped elements. Although teachers acknowledged the need for change, and praised the ministry's ambitions for development, meanwhile they denounced the remarkable gap in the English Language ELCC process.

"The problem here in Saudi Arabia, is not curriculum. There are many factors or elements. Number one, the lack of sufficient training program for the English Language teacher. Number two, the lack of English Labs which are very important for teaching, especially the listening skills. Three, the classrooms are very crowded. Four, the English teachers are not qualified. Five, the absence of students' motivation. The buildings are not suitable for teaching in general" T1.

Having said that, this teacher articulated a broad definition of curriculum which encompasses all the aforementioned elements. The perceived deficit in the current change was stressed by another teacher who allegorically described the policy makers as failures because "…they went to the wrong direction" T2. He cynically opposed the ministry's narrow scope of change which is limited to the way "they change the publisher, they change the cover of the book, and they change the content …." T2. He went on to emphasize the missing parts of the current change other than the textbook that needed change:

"We should change our policy, we need to change our daily routine, we need to make research, and we want to read. All of these things are very important" T2.

Another criticism relates to issues inherent in centralized change that focuses on the textbook and neglects teachers and other agents of change. The ELCC venture by policy makers was described as spontaneous, and lacking "plan… (and if any) they are timely plans" T3. This judgment of the spontaneity of changes was justified by retrospectively commenting on the current textbook series' change processes:

"When the ministry introduced year six elementary curriculum (year 7), we thought that there would be a concurrent and simultaneous step; changing the first intermediate curriculum on par with it. But, unfortunately, they didn't… They (textbooks) are not in harmony with one another. ..But, what we can see is that every curriculum is going aside (divergently). They are not on par with one another" T3.

Teachers' perceptions of the change as superficial appear to have led them to develop a negative image about themselves. This negativity and low-morale emerged as a distinguished theme in the data and these will be discussed below.

7.2 Teachers: The Missing Agents

Moving on from teachers' perceptions about the change which was described as shallow venture for development by the MOE, the informants perceived themselves as mere compliant followers and implementers of the change because they "don't have freedom" T1, "were ignored and totally neglected" T2, and "don't have a place to move" T3. This perception of helplessness and low morale represents the ontologically objective orientations of the change which looks at teachers as recipients of rather than participants in reforms. At first, teachers felt a sense of powerlessness with regards to their rights to contribute to the change. This perceived powerlessness was in part due to feelings of loss and despair which relate to their undefined entitlements and rights as professional teachers. T2, for example, wanted to " … know what (he is) expecting to do, and what (he is) expecting you (the ministry) to give" T2. He opposed the current profession status that is perceived to position them as workers rather than autonomous professionals.

"We are human beings. When they [head teachers] write directives, they write them in a very authoritative language; we want you to do this, to do that …etc.   Our principals see us as workers not teachers, we are inferior" T2.

This state of inferiority tells us much about teachers' ignored privileges to know even the basics of their profession such as making teachers aware of the agendas of change and their roles in ELCC process. This sense of marginalization was also reported by T1 who had no idea about the rationale of the change because curriculum policymakers "did not tell" them about it, and that" teachers teach only without knowing anything" about the intended ELCC (T2). This situation appears to have led teachers to voice their concerns about the educational culture at their workplace. Their pursuit to be entrusted autonomous professionals emerged as a recurring theme in the data. Teachers' aspiration to "independence" T3 and "freedom" T1 through "consultation and involvement" T2 seem to be indicative of the authoritative top-down change policy that left teachers struggling to cope with it. Teachers reported their negative feelings about the centralized reforms that deprived their professionalism. They

believe that curriculum stakeholders claim to know all about curriculum and impose it from the "tower to the field" T3. Teachers suggest that the only way to successful implementation of the intended reform is to recognize them at the heart of the ELCC.

"How can you neglect them (teachers)? You should always involve them by giving questionnaires. Always when you want to change, go back to the field. ….See what the difficulties and problems are like." T3.

Teachers reported and praised movements elsewhere (such as in the UK) where teachers are treated as autonomous professionals in ELCC "in other countries" where "it [change] is successful…" T1. Although T1 was not straightforward in explicating his viewpoint, T3 proclaimed that:

"Teachers are in the field, they know everything. In my opinion, and I think you have it in England, I don't want textbooks. Just tell me the objectives and let me achieve them. Give me the chance to create my own materials, exercises.... "T3.

To sum up, teachers voiced negative perceptions and feelings about the superficial change process that focused on textbooks and marginalized teachers. Given the passive roles that teachers had to adopt in a top-down ELCC process, a number of challenges emerged during implementation which negatively impinged on the enactment of the intended ELCC. This will be discussed under the following category.

7.3 Challenges of Change Implementation

The informants reported several challenges that they face when trying to implement the intended change. The first hindrance relates to the administrative norms within the school environment. Head teachers present a challenge to the teachers as they focus on managerial matters such as preoccupation with documented lesson plans and total compliance inside the classroom. This focus was at the expense of other professional dimensions that teachers need to pay attention to such as teaching quality and enhanced achievement.

"What I feel is that our principals want you to come early, come on time. The achievement is not important. ….. They want you to prepare lessons, with posters...Uh if you enter your class on time uh...These are their goals, I swear, they don't want anything about teaching" T2.

The principals' focus on managerial rather than pedagogical or educational issues present a concurrent challenge such as demanding documented lesson plans. Teachers are required to write up a rigid lesson plan for each lesson to be approved by the head teacher every day. This seemed to be a perceived hindrance to teachers' autonomy because it exhausts teachers efforts and time, but at the expense of teaching quality.

"Teachers complain about the lesson plans ….. It is more demanding. What teachers usually do is stick with written plans for years, they do not want to change or practice new teaching methods" T1.

This complaint is indicative of informed apathy which is shaped by administrative pressures that made teachers overlook their abilities to generate, create or at least adopt the textbook to

overcome challenges. Consequently, teachers' submission to their principals was at the expense of enacting the intended change.

Another recurring challenge to faithful implementation related to the perceived conflict between the culture of the students and its misrepresentation in the new ELCC. It seems that when the lesson content is at odds with the culture of the students, teachers perceived it as a threat to the prime goal of education. For example, in a conservative education which is gender-segregated, the textbooks are the same in both girls' and boys' schools. This conflict presents a challenge to teachers as this negatively impacts their students. Teachers referred to this conflict as "a violation of students' culture" T2, and deemed it incompatible with the "environment of the students". T3, and "needs of the society" T1.

The difficult content of the textbook presented yet another challenge in curriculum implementation. The informants reiterated their inability to teach the third-grade textbook. It is a challenge since "it is a hard and tough curriculum (textbook) because of too many new vocabularies, difficult reading passages and conversations" T3. Teachers are baffled with highly challenging content which demanded sound professional and pedagogical knowledge to deal with it. It seems that it is "too challenging that teachers are struggling and sometimes escape to teach this class." T3.

The lack of teaching resources was a recurring themes that teachers reported as one of the main challenges to faithful implementation.

"Unfortunately the ministry, especially in teaching English, developed the textbooks without supplying teachers with teaching aids [and] resources" T3.

This lack of teaching materials appeared to have deprived teachers to implement the intended change. T1 for example tried his best to stick to the textbooks, but he gave up due to the lack of audio-cassettes to teach conversations.

"Actually, sometimes I am not satisfied that this (ignoring conversations) is successful. But, what can we do? We do not have any aids, there are no alternatives, no support, no materials or resources to teach this conversation. The absence of cassettes is an example, we do not have them" T1.

A final recurring theme concerned contextual factors such as time and workload which were perceived as obstacles that prevented teachers from actualizing reforms. This burnout was deemed a deficit of the change process since the MOE did not take such elements into consideration when planning ELCC.

"The workload is also another problem which makes me hate teaching. When I come to school bearing in mind that there are five lessons, that is 6 hours, I am extremely disappointed" T2

Yet, the consequences of having to cope with such challenges were perceived to be 'severe' due to the ELCC' focus on 'textbooks' rather than the curriculum per se. This was reflected in teachers' classroom practices as they bluntly resisted the change.

7.4 Resistance to Change

As teachers lost their patience to confront the challenges of curriculum implementation, they deviated from the textbook guidelines that dictated how they should teach. This deviation was reflected in their resistance to implement the intended change faithfully in a number of ways. To start with, one resistance aspect related to the teaching method and was attributed to the lack of teaching aids. In this regard, although the textbooks contain communicative tasks for language learning, the absence of teaching aids and resources led teachers to just neglect most of the content and teach only what they perceived important. For example, the conversation part of every lesson which was meant to bring about authentic situations for communication activities was often abandoned by teachers. Themes such as "I delete some parts, read the conversation only" T1, or "change the direction of the lesson, skip it or let the students read it without listening" T2, reflect teachers overt resistance to change. These are telling episodes of the potential challenges the ELCC bring with it such as "the lack of labs" that teachers cannot stand anymore because they lack adequate support which "make the new change difficult for teachers to implement" T1.

Teachers' resistance to comply with the communicative approach did not occur in a vacuum. It was informed by their perception of the content of the textbook which "is higher than the students [linguistic] level" T1. This belief was behind teachers' "complaint about the difficulty of the textbooks" T3. Another reason of teachers' resistance to the reformed curriculum could be attributable to the "gap in our [teachers'] knowledge" T2. One manifestation of teachers' resistance, which appeared as a recurrent theme, was evident in resorting to the traditional grammar-translation methods when teaching grammar for example. In other words, the textbooks' difficulty required certain knowledge about teaching by teachers that could have been achieved through training. But since the change "lack(s) sufficient training programs for the English language teachers" they "teach in a traditional way..." T1, and "resort to teaching grammar, because it is something easy for teachers and students" T3. The trouble that teachers experienced due to the difficulty of the content was attributed to "lacking experience and educational preparation" which caused "some problems" T3. These problems, though, could have been avoided had "the curriculum policy makers prepared students and teachers for the change before implementing it" T1, because teachers "need training, (and) need to develop" T2. Therefore, teachers did not seem to endorse the suggested teaching approaches because they lacked professional development initiatives within the reformed curriculum.

7.4.1 Useless Change; Deviance and Resistance

Teacher's deviance from the intended change prompted their own judgment of the change as useless and fruitless. Insofar as teachers acknowledged the need for change, they were hopeless and desperate about its advantages and positive effects in improving English language learning within their school. Teachers paired the 'idealistic' orientations of the change with the 'pragmatic' side of language teaching and learning. This comparison was to indicate the uselessness of the change and their informed defiance against it. In this regard, T2 acknowledged that "in terms of methodology, it (ELCC) is great, but we implement only

20 per cent of the textbook. So, what is the point of this methodology?" T1 echoed similar concerns and admitted that "the students will not benefit from this change". T1. A further detailed viewpoint about the impact of the current ELCC on 'fidelity' implementation was described as follows:

"Actually, when we look at the book outside the classroom, it is a good book. The topics, they are good topics, the pictures, illustrations, they are good. But, when we come to implementation, the real teaching situation, uh… I'm afraid the change is useless" T3

An interesting view is worth introducing here as it depicts the logic behind teachers' predictions of the failure of change to see light.

"You know, when we are ignored, when we lose our rights, when they do not consult us, when they bombard us with many idealistic directives rather than realistic, of course the result would be affected. We will give as much as we get" T2.

This metaphoric equation represents teachers' informed deviance from the change on the grounds that they are at the margins of the change. A hopeful reform could take place if the ministry rekindles the relationship with the teachers as *de facto* agents of the ELCC change.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

The study revealed that teachers' perceptions of the ELCC were characterized by negative apprehension about the 'curriculum implementation' due to their absent roles in the ELCC and the consequent challenges which lead teachers to resist the proposed change over time. The findings of this study were consistent with the outcomes of previous research which indicates the impact of teachers' perceptions on the implementation of the ELCC (e.g. Troudi & Alwan, 2010; McGrail, 2005; Wang, 2006; Al-Mohanna, 2010; Al-Yousef, 2007). However, what was unique about this study was that teachers defined the success of ELCC by means of precision, depth and breadth of curriculum connotations. Hence, besides denouncing textbooks-oriented change, teachers emphasized that change should include learners' needs, efficient plans, teachers' professional development and considerations of cultural and environmental boundaries. Teachers also abhorred the intentional marginalization by curriculum stakeholders to their roles in curriculum planning and attributed the failure of the change initiatives to this abandonment. Therefore, it was no wonder for teachers to face a number of challenges that made them resist the change and deem it unsuccessful. This is what Fullan (2007) referred to as the multidisciplinary nature of ELCC and warned that any missing part would render the change challenging and hence a failure.

It could be said that teachers viewpoints were informed by "a sense of ownership" (Kinndey, 1986: 168) which "[...] is tantamount to real change" Fullan, 2007; 61). This could have been attained via a "bottom-up approach" or" [...] simultaneous bottom-up/top-downness" (ibid: 86) in the least. Nonetheless, teachers in this study reported feelings of disappointment of exclusion and low self-esteem. In this regard, it is no exception to Troudi and Alwan's (2010) study in which they reported that EFL teachers voiced similar feelings. Additionally, teachers voiced their concerns about challenges of implementations with more emphasis on administrative and materials related boundaries. In this sense, head teachers and the lack of

teaching aids presented great challenges for teachers to implement the intended change. This is in line with the findings of McGrail's (2005) study which reported that teachers articulated negative concerns about the managerial culture due to the ambitious agendas set by their head teachers as well as the scarcity of technological devices. Wang (2006) reported similar findings with regards to teachers' submission to the authority exercised by their managers rather than to the change. The difficulty of the content of textbooks was deemed another challenge that discouraged teachers to comply with the change. This was attributed to the lack of knowledge and could have been met through training and ongoing development. Although the issue of difficult content was not articulated in previous research, teachers' need for training and professional development were emphasised in similar studies (Troudi & Alwan, 2010; Al-Mohanna, 2010; Wang, 2006).

Teachers' resistance to change related to the new teaching approaches as well. This resistance manifested in teachers' adherence to methods-based teaching with a certain focus on grammar rather than communicative orientations of the ELCC. Teachers' belief in the traditional approaches of teaching (as discrete set of skills) could be attributed to the fact that communicative language teaching methods do not work in their context either because the content of the textbook was ideal and hence challenging both to students and teachers, or because of teachers' lack of adequate knowledge and support or training. Teachers' resistance to the ELCC was also reported in a number of studies (e.g. Troudi & Alwan, 2010; Al-Mohanna, 2010; Wang, 2006; Al-Yousef, 2007; Al-Ahaydeb, 1986; Zaid, 1993). It is also relevant to mention that teachers' perceptions about the change bear on their beliefs, with regards to grammar teaching, which was dominated by traditional teaching approaches as reported elsewhere (Assalahi, 2013). This supports the idea that relationship between perceptions and beliefs are inseparable as the latter influences the former (Allen, 2002). Therefore, the change under investigation could be described as, to quote Nation and Macalister (2010), 'power-coercive' and hence it was no wonder to see due challenges and negative feelings expressed by the informants of this research study. Consequently, teachers' resistance to change was informed by teachers' perceptions of marginalization and powerlessness to overcome the concurrent challenges.

8.1 Concluding Remarks

This study sought to explore teachers' views about an ongoing curriculum change in a Saudi intermediate school. The marginalization of teachers by the educational reform had impinged negatively on their implementation of the intended reforms. Additionally, teachers voiced their negative concerns about the way they were positioned as compliant rather than activist professionals. The study has clear implications for ELCC research and methodology. I would argue that teachers' perceptions influence their actualisation of the ELCC. Therefore, any change initiative should sincerely acknowledge and take into consideration teachers' views of the intended reform. These include the potential threats to the change process and how to help teachers learn to overcome such challenges. Taking teachers on board national reform initiatives enhances teachers' sense of ownership which would mitigate and lessen the negative feelings as well as potential challenges. Among the reported threats unearthed in this research study were the adverse contextual factors, and lack of teaching resources and

professional development support. It is hoped that curriculum stakeholders of the new educational era in the Middle East find this study useful as it provides insights into helping teachers voice their concerns about their roles in the ELCC.

With regards to the methodology, this study provided insights for the ELCC research. The qualitative design of the study allowed for 'thick description' of the complexity of the ELCC. The findings reflect the peculiarity of the context of this research study in which the centralised reform was negatively experienced and led teachers to resort to their own beliefs about curriculum which influenced their perceptions and actualisation of ELCC. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that this study did not aim to generalize the findings beyond its context. Additionally, within the time frame and circumstances of this research study, the number of participants is comparatively small. Finally, triangulation at the level of data collection methods could have yielded deeper insights.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Interview protocol: English Language Teachers' Perception about Curriculum Change

What are your views on the following?

1- What does English language curriculum mean to you?
2- What does curriculum change mean to you?
3- Who/What is meant to change?
4- What are your views about the current change in curriculum?
5- What are teachers' roles in the change process?
6- What are the effects of this inclusion/exclusion?
7- What impact does this change have on classroom practice?
8- What impact does this change have on students' learning?
9- What are the potential obstacles to successful change?
10- Are teachers resistant to change? Why?
11- What are the contextual factors that can impede change?
12- What are your perceptions about the textbooks and teachers guidebooks?
13- Is there anything they would like to add?

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