

Contents

- Series Editor’s Preface v
- Introduction ix
- 1** The Individual as a Context 1
- 2** English Language Teaching and Learning
at the National Level in Saudi Arabia..... 5
- 3** English Language Teaching and Learning
at the Local Level in Saudi Arabia 13
- 4** My LTO 17
- 5** A Day in the Life of a Teacher in My LTO 25
- 6** A Day in the Life of a Learner in My LTO 31
- 7** The Big Picture 35
- 8** Reflections 39
- References 41

Introduction

In 1980, the British Council published one of its *English Language Teaching Profiles* on Saudi Arabia. At the time, as the writers of the 24-page booklet explained, “in Saudi Arabia as a whole, there are currently about 150 British staff engaged primarily in English language teaching and/or materials production” (p. 1). They go on to note that “since very few of the Westerners and Asians working in Saudi Arabia have knowledge of Arabic, English is the medium of communication, and the ability to converse in English is likely to be helpful to the Saudi seeking employment” (p. 1).

Many things have changed in the landscape of English language teaching in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the 25 years since the British Council published that booklet. Therefore, this book will present readers with an up-to-date summary of the current situation for English language teachers and learners in what is now referred to as KSA (without the definite article).

Much more recently, Afnan Masaoud Ahmad (2014), at the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, pointed out that “the Saudi teaching system has specific characteristics (e.g., teachers are often encouraged to make connections between teaching and Islam)” (p. 98). According to Ahmad, English language teaching in Saudi Arabia relies on “traditional teaching methodologies and banning use of first languages in classrooms. As a result, these traditional teaching practices produce less proficient learners who have limited knowledge about proper linguistic use” (p. 96). In her conclusion Ahmad also acknowledges one of the fundamental assumptions of this English In Context series: that English language teaching “all over the world has distinctive instructional traditions and preferences that differ from one context to another” (p. 107). She notes that “the Saudi EFL teaching context has characteristics important for understanding it” (p. 99), and it is that context that this book focuses on.

A revealing and relevant example of linguistic and cultural contextual differences and the “connections between teaching and Islam” (p. 98) appears in the Acknowledgments section at the end of Ahmad’s (2014) article, in which

she states, "I would like to thank Allah, first of all, then my parents, my siblings, my supervisor, Dr. Sivell, my husband, Rashad, and my son, Yosef, for inspiring me to accomplish this project" (p. 108). Whereas the mention of a supervisor is not unusual at the end of an academic paper, first-name references to family members, as well as parents and siblings, are not as common, and references to divine powers are relatively rare. Ahmad's acknowledgment is, then, an illustrative example of the complex relationships between language and culture in different contexts, and one of the reasons why this English In Context series was created.

In Chapter 1, Dr. Christopher Hastings explains that KSA is where he met his future wife and where his son was born, which gives him particular insights into what it means to be a nonlocal, living and working as an English language teacher in KSA. As Dr. Hastings puts it, "I feel a deep connection to Saudi Arabia and its people, and I hope that this book can honor those I've worked with and share some insight with teachers who may be considering going there" (p. 3).

In Chapters 2 and 3, Dr. Hastings presents a clear and concise account of the rise of English language teaching and learning in KSA, at the national and at the local level, from when the nation-state was first established in the early 1930s to the present day. One of the distinctive features of this particular language teaching and learning organization (LTO), which is described in Chapter 4, is that it is a military setting, which means that some details, such as its exact location, are not revealed.

To help readers get as deep an understanding of the local language teaching and learning context as possible, each book in the series has a short chapter on A Day in the Life of a Teacher and A Day in the Life of a Learner in the author's particular LTO (Chapters 5 and 6), based on composite characterizations. In Chapter 7, on the Big Picture, Dr. Hastings notes that "while the cultural differences are many and may often require some patience and acceptance, living and working in KSA offers teachers an opportunity to interact with and learn about an often misunderstood and misrepresented culture" (p. 35).

In the eighth and final chapter, reflecting on what he learned from having researched and written this book, Dr. Hastings shares with the readers the fact that, "having studied Arabic (albeit still unsuccessfully), taught Saudi cadets in Jeddah, and written my [doctoral] dissertation on foreign teachers in KSA, I have been fortunate to gain some insight into Saudi culture and education" (p. 39). In addition to those experiences, Dr. Hastings has also worked with students from KSA in different tertiary institutions in the United States, which enables him to present, in a single and relatively short book, many illuminating and important aspects of life and work as an English language teacher in KSA today.

It is also important to note that English for specific purposes (ESP) has become one of the largest and most diverse fields in the world of English language teaching and learning, which has resulted in a continuum from more general ESP at one end to the more highly specialized ESP at the other. At the general end could be, for example, aspects of English for academic purposes, in which

students learn academic writing and reading skills, such as the construction and deconstruction of argumentative and persuasive texts. Although such language skills are for specific purposes, they can be applied to all academic areas, making them also more general. This book is toward the more specialized end of the ESP continuum, focused on what could be referred to as “English for peace-keeping purposes,” as all the learners are employed in the Saudi Defense Forces.

Andy Curtis, PhD

Graduate School of Education, Anaheim University, California, USA

References

- Ahmad, A. M. (2014). Kumaravadivelu’s framework as a basis for improving English language teaching in Saudi Arabia: Opportunities and challenges. *English Language Teaching*, 7(4), 96–110.
- British Council. (1980). *English language teaching profile: Saudi Arabia*. London, England: British Council, English Language and Literature Division.