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Teachers' role in the development of EFL curriculum in Saudi Arabia: The marginalised status

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Abstract: Teachers' participation in curriculum development is an area of research that has not been given adequate attention in the context of Saudi Arabia. This critical exploratory study investigated the issue of teachers' marginalisation in the curriculum development process with the aim of problematising power relations in Saudi Arabia's education system and raising Saudi teachers' awareness of their current status. Interviews were conducted with six Saudi male EFL teachers and the data was thematically analysed keeping in mind the study's critical agenda. The data revealed that the participants were greatly marginalised from the decision-making in general and in curriculum development in particular. The study also showed that the Ministry of Education (MOE) consider the teachers as mere implementers of the curriculum while the participants held the view that they have the capability to participate in the curriculum development process. Furthermore, the data revealed the teachers' frustration from this current situation which may also affect their teaching performance. In addition to marginalisation, the data shed light on the boundaries and limits imposed on teachers whereby they are required to follow whatever programme has already been designed by the MOE, which may affect their professional creativity. The study concluded that problematising the power relations and changing this current situation is a task that needs time and effort; hence, the study attempted to raise teachers' awareness about their current situation as this is the first step towards transforming this oppressive reality. Moreover, further recommendations to empower the teachers were made.

Subjects: Development Studies; Education; Social Sciences

Keywords: curriculum development; critical theory; critical applied linguistics; power relations; teachers' marginalisation

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am an English Language teacher in Saudi Arabia. I have a bachelor degree in English Language from Umm Alqura University in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. I also obtained an MEd in TESOL from the University of Exeter in 2014. I am now completing an EdD in TESOL at the University of Exeter.

My research interests are focused around curriculum and syllabus design and development. Also, I developed a particular interest in the area of EFL students motivation and focused on this topic for my MEd dissertation. I am also interested in the area of teacher professional development in general and lifelong learning for EFL teachers in particular.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This paper reports the findings of a small-scale critical study conducted in the KSA among Saudi EFL government school teachers. The study investigated the issue of teachers' marginalisation in the curriculum development process with the aim of problematising power relations in the KSA education system and raise Saudi teachers' awareness of their current status. It is hoped that the current study can be effective in raising teachers' awareness on the issue of marginalisation and also trigger further critical scholarship in this issue as critical studies have seldom been conducted in the context of the KSA.

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1. Introduction

The teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) was first introduced in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) schools in 1925 and the English department of the Directorate of the Curriculum that directly depends from the KSA Ministry of Education (MOE) developed the first EFL curriculum (Liton, 2013). The KSA education system is known for being rather centralised around the MOE and teachers are generally excluded from the decision-making process. According to Alajroush (1980), in the KSA, the MOE takes all the important decisions with regards the curriculum at all stages of the education system. In fact, the situation mentioned by Alajroush thirty-six years ago, has, to this date, still not evolved. This, in my opinion, relates to one of the major obstacles facing the development of the education system in Saudi Arabia today: the marginalisation of teachers in decision-making in general and in curriculum development in particular.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the issue of teachers' marginalisation in curriculum development since research on this topic is non-existent in the KSA context. Based on this, the paper first presents the research problem and its critical agenda, then, the theoretical framework and the literature review are highlighted. In addition, the methodology including the methods of data collection and analysis are briefly discussed. Finally, the paper presents and discusses the main findings of the study.

2. Research problem

In the KSA, nearly all plans and strategies pertaining to the field of education are enforced in a top-down approach. Owing to this, with regards EFL, such a centralised system of curriculum development can be seen as the cause for not achieving to design an effective EFL programme. For Al-Sadan (2000, p.147), "schools performed better when teachers worked with a group-planned curriculum", which in turn, grants teachers and educators a greater "sense of belonging and involvement" in the education process and ultimately enhances education.

As pointed by Kumaravadivelu (2003, p. 9), "creation of new knowledge or a new theory is not the domain of teachers; their task is to execute what is prescribed for them", which seems consistent with the reality of teachers in the KSA. For instance, drawing on my personal experience as an EFL teacher in the KSA, I never took part, directly or indirectly, in the process of curriculum design but merely implemented a curriculum already designed "from above" by the MOE officials and curriculum specialists who never involved or consulted teachers in their decisions. As a result, in my view, the current curriculum policy greatly marginalises teachers who are considered as mere implementers of plans and strategies coming from the top. Having taught EFL in the KSA for eight years, I have been able to observe that a great number of teachers "are the end-point of educational reform—the last to hear, the last to know, the last to speak. They are mainly the objects of reform, not its participants" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, based on this, I argue that a curriculum can only be effectively implemented if teachers are part of the processes of development and implementation (Oloruntegbe, 2011).

As far as I am aware, almost no studies investigate the issue of the marginalisation of teachers in curriculum development from a critical standpoint in the KSA. According to Mullick (2013, p. 40), "literature on this topic is seriously underrepresented in the Middle East" and most studies on curriculum issues in the KSA generally focus on curriculum evaluation or investigate teachers' views about, for instance, textbooks or assessment.

Nonetheless, Mullick (2013) is one of the rare critical studies that dealt with the issue of teachers' voice in curriculum development at university. His exploratory study adopted a critical approach to investigate teachers' voice in curriculum development in a university preparatory year programme in the KSA. Based on data collected by means of open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured face-to-face interviews and document reviews, the study concluded that the lack of teachers' voice in the curriculum was directly related to power issues such as oppression. He also noted that this could be attributed to cultural reasons and a managerial conception of education whereby the organisation

is seen as the focus of social structure and prevails over the individual. In addition, the study high-lighted the teachers' great lack of involvement in terms of curriculum development despite a certain sense of empowerment when being involved in the curriculum development process. Finally, the study shed light on the fact that the strict hierarchical structure of institutions was the cause of teachers' feeling of oppression and disempowerment. As a result, teachers felt that their role in the curriculum was reduced to that of mere implementers and executors of top-down decisions.

3. Research agenda

Because critical researchers should start their research with a well-established agenda, it is essential to articulate the broad aims of this research study. This critical research does not simply seek to describe the current situation in terms of teachers' marginalisation; rather, it aims at changing this situation for the better as critical research is about "changing and improving the social conditions of people's existence" (Troudi, 2006, p. 8). Based on the research problem, this study aims to critique and problematise the top-down policy that marginalises teachers in designing the EFL curriculum in the KSA. As, I believe, teachers are the cornerstone of the educational process, they should have a role in this process and their voice should be heard. The educational process should be collaborative; therefore, if teachers are granted a greater role in designing the curriculum, it can certainly be improved.

Nevertheless, in certain circumstances, despite the need for transformation, changing a situation can be a lengthy process, especially in a context like the KSA. Therefore, before attempting to radi-cally change the situation, it is crucial that the critical researcher precedes this change by taking some sort of action such as, for instance, presenting his/her research in conferences and disseminat-ing the results through all possible channels. Research has the potential to convince people and, most importantly, to empower teachers who are "the most marginalised members of the educa-tional world" (Troudi, 2006, p. 10). As a result, the current research aims to empower teachers by raising their awareness of their rights so that they do not "accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 304).

4. Theoretical framework and literature review

This study is broadly informed by the tenets of critical theory and, more specifically, based on Critical Applied Linguistics (CALx) principles. From a critical paradigmatic position, "the researcher's agenda is to critique, challenge, change a particular situation, expose problems and limitations of an educa-tional policy or a pedagogy" (Troudi, 2010, p. 316). From a theoretical aspect, CALx is informed by critical theory, which does not aim to merely describe the social reality in a meaningful way but seeks to uncover issues and beliefs within the social world that are the source of injustice and lack of freedom or democracy and ultimately change that unfair situation (Scott & Morrison, 2005, p. 47).

CALx emerged as an approach that seeks to critique and problematise mainstream applied lin-guistics by linking the classroom with socio-political and ideological issues. In the preface of his book, Pennycook (2001) identifies several limitations with applied linguistics while dealing with is-sues relating to language. He clarifies that his initial movement towards CALx grew "out of the frustration as a graduate student with the paucity of politics and possibilities in applied linguistics for dealing with major concerns of difference and disparity in relation to language" (Pennycook, 2010, p. 2).

One of the important aspects of CALx is its desire to change challenging situations. For Pennycook (1999), it is also essential to include in this critical approach to applied linguistics the possibility of change, that is to say, the transformation of inequitable social relations into equitable ones. Thus, this study aims to problematise power relations within the education system in the KSA that margin-alises one of its most important elements: the teacher.

In my view, the idea of changing a situation tends to differ from one context to another. Pessoa and Urzêda Freitas (2012, p. 2) identify that we cannot "assume that individuals are completely free

to change inequitable social conditions". In certain contexts, educators, for example, have the freedom to problematise the *givens* and change the situation accordingly; they also have the freedom to design or participate in curriculum development. In contrast, in other contexts like the KSA, according to my experience, teachers are "curbed by managerial leadership" (Troudi, 2009, p. 62).

Despite the constraints teachers encounter in certain contexts in changing a particular situation, teachers' awareness can be raised in terms of their status as a marginalised body within the educational landscape through disseminating research, presenting at conferences or other possible channels. Due to the constraints in certain contexts, raising awareness can be "an initial step in the process of change" (Pennycook, 1999, p. 8). Pennycook mentions in the preface of his book (Pennycook, 2001), when shedding light on critical issues, that he faced resentment and anger from others. Indeed, certain similar contexts to Pennycook's experience "moved from a state of awareness toward a state of awakening" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 75) whereas in other contexts, where freedom is limited, it is our duty as educators to raise awareness of such critical issues and try to work forward to obtain our rights as professional teachers who can actively participate in curriculum development.

4.1. Teachers and power relations

In the KSA, the issue of power is crucial in the education system and is a key factor in the exclusion of individuals. Mullick (2013, p. 39) highlights that "power relationships play a pivotal role in Saudi Arabian society". One of the aims of this study is to problematise the power relations between teachers and policy-makers to give teachers a greater role in curriculum development. Throughout my experience, I noticed that the status quo of marginalisation of teachers is due to the power of a hegemonic group: policy-makers. As pointed by Akbari (2008, p. 276), "people who have the power to make decisions in society at large are the ones who also have the power to design and implement the educational system". The education system in the KSA considers teachers only as implementers or transmitters of what has been decided by policy-makers.

Carl (2005, p. 223) identifies that among the different role-players in curriculum development, teachers are the most important ones; therefore, it is crucial to problematise these power relations to empower teachers and grant them a higher status as professionals. To enhance teachers' creativity in terms of curriculum development and act as professionals in "developing and delivering curriculum", the power relations between teachers and administrators must be changed (Acker-Hocevar & Touchton, 1999, p. 240). It can be said that in the KSA, "teachers are often considered powerless" (Webb, 2002, p. 47) while they should be treated as professionals and have more autonomy; they "want to be free of political favouritism and to be consulted on matter of policy and practice" (Bangs & Frost, 2012, p. 27).

4.2. Teachers and curriculum development

The call to involve teachers in curriculum development is well established in the literature. Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) argue that educational improvements are vain unless teachers become valued actors and take part in the overall process of education. The importance of teachers' involvement in curriculum development was first addressed in 1928 (Handler, 2010), as a result of teachers being "always in touch with the curriculum in classes" (Saracaloğlu et al., 2010, p. 2428). Teachers know what is actually happening in the classroom and can perceive what policy-makers cannot. Due to their close, direct contact with curriculum issues, teachers can see the usefulness and weakness of any given curriculum. In that regard, Banegas (2011) claims that what policy-makers' plans may not always be exactly implemented by teachers, which may impact negatively on the learning process.

In some contexts, policy-makers have realised the importance of teachers' participation in curriculum development. According to Erss et al. (2014), Eastern European countries and a number of Eastern Asian countries grant a certain amount of freedom to teachers in terms of curriculum decisions. In reality, as pointed by Troudi and Alwan (2010, p. 108), "the more teachers are involved, the more effective the curriculum". In the KSA context, the issue is that teachers are greatly marginalised and do not enjoy any degree of participation. While Brown (1995, p. 179) emphasised on the

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"importance of teachers in the curriculum and the necessity for meeting their needs, as well as the needs of the students", in terms of needs analysis for instance, which is one of the important elements in curriculum design, teachers are not consulted. Due to the fact that teachers in the KSA are being neglected, policy-makers failed to design an appropriate curriculum after all attempts of reforms (Mahib ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). For example, in 2012, the MOE replaced the "Say it in English" textbook by a Greek course book without prior consultation with teachers. As a result, judging by my experience, the new textbook became the target of heavy criticism from teachers for being beyond the level of the students. In addition, this change of textbook was done without any previous notice despite the fact that it is crucial for teachers "to be clear about what is a head of them" (Troudi & Alwan, 2010, p. 118).

To this date, Saudi teachers have not been given any real opportunity to take part in curriculum design and development unlike in other contexts. They just need to be given the chance to collaborate with other responsible bodies within the education system to produce an appropriate curriculum as "teacher involvement in matters of education is not unique to Western contexts" (Troudi & Alwan, 2010, p. 118).

Banegas (2011) conducted an action research in Argentina and collaborated with teachers to develop a new curriculum and by the end of the project, they designed a new curriculum to be implemented in 2012. Banegas concluded the following:

> Teachers themselves would be both the "reform-doers" and "reform-implementers" which may also signal teachers' perceptions of their roles in curriculum development and a shortcoming of the top-down approach.

Another study conducted by Zohrabi (2014) in Iran identified the effective role that teachers can play when given a chance to participate in curriculum development. Zohrabi conducted a study to design a new syllabus in collaboration with five teachers and their students. After one year of semi-structured interviews, discussions with students and instructors, field notes, journals and diaries, they produced a new syllabus based on their needs. Zohrabi (2014, p. 2033) concluded that teachers "can become more than consumers of other designers' works and instead become skillful and able in developing their own curriculum". According to Bacharach et al. (cited in Ho, 2010), based on many research findings, teachers want more freedom in curriculum development. It can also be said that "if teachers are given choices and asked for their views on various educational issues, they will cooperate while marginalisation will alienate them further" (Troudi, 2009, p. 65).

5. Research questions

(1) To what extent do teachers have a role in the curriculum development?
(2) What are teachers' views on the top-down policy implemented in curriculum development?

6. Methodology

I opted for an exploratory methodology with a critical agenda to critique and problematise the top-down policy that marginalises teachers in curriculum development. The study aimed to empower teachers by raising their awareness of their current status as marginalised agents and "provide a voice for these participants, raising their consciousness and improving their lives" (Creswell, 2013, p. 26). This study is broadly informed by the tenets of the critical paradigm. Unlike the positivist and the interpretive paradigms, critical research "seeks to analyse [social relation] critically in terms of structural inequalities in society" (Sapsford & Jupp, 1996, p. 304).

6.1. Methods

Most critical studies in the field of applied linguistics employ qualitative methods (Talmy, 2010, p. 129). For the purpose of this study, and due to the time constraints of this research, only semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data as it is a widely used instrument in qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007). Regarding the order of the questions, semi-structured interviews allow a

certain flexibility, which helps respondents express their thoughts and opinions in greater details and thus provide researchers with in-depth information on the phenomena they investigate (Denscombe, 2010). For this study, the interview protocol contained thirteen items including questions and sub questions. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007, p. 351), an interview "involves the gathering of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals". Furthermore, interviews enable discussions of interpretations and allow participants to express their opinions on a particular topic. They are usually composed of a series of questions and prompts that help the researcher investigate issues that cannot be observed. Moreover, during an interview, researchers have the possibility to probe in order to gain a deeper understanding of the respondents' thoughts, perceptions or feelings. In the course of an interview, the researcher seeks to shed light on the participants' account of a particular situation as it has been experienced (Wellington, 2000).

6.2. Sample

This study utilised a sample comprising of six Saudi male EFL teachers employed in government middle schools in the KSA. Due to the ease of access and because of time constraints, the participants were all selected form the city of Makkah where the research was conducted. Their teaching experience ranges from seven to sixteen years, two teachers hold a master's degree while four of them hold a bachelor's degree. Emails were sent to potential participants by the local English language supervisor explaining the purpose of the study and six teachers agreed to participate. The reason for choosing participants with more than five years of teaching experience is that it was assumed that, after such a period of time, they may have experienced and been familiar with the issues raised by the study in terms of teachers' role in curriculum development in the KSA. Consequently, I opted for a purposefully selected sample which "best helps the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (Creswell, 2009, p. 178) because, it seemed that teachers were in a position to provide answers to the research questions.

The sample of the study was quite small as most qualitative studies often employ a relatively small number of participants given that qualitative research is more concerned with gaining in-depth knowledge rather than generalising results to a larger population (Creswell, 2008). Moreover, because access to female participants was difficult given that strict gender segregation operates in the KSA education system, the sample of this study is exclusively constituted with male participants.

6.3. Ethical considerations

Participants were informed of the aims of the study and signed a consent form. In addition, they were all informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any reason. Also, they were assured that their anonymity would be strictly guaranteed by the use of pseudonyms and that their real identities would not be revealed to anyone.

6.4. Data analysis

To ensure that participants could fully express their opinions and thoughts with confidence, as per the participants' request, interviews were conducted in Arabic—the participants' and the researcher's first language. They were recorded and then transcribed in Arabic not to lose meaning and quality when analysing the data. They lasted between thirty and thirty-three minutes. The data analysis was conducted in several consecutive steps. The first step involved reading the written transcripts several times to immerse myself in the data and gain a general idea about the views and ideas of the participants. The next step consisted in reading the transcripts again and making a list of codes that were generated. After that, I assigned codes to the relevant quotes and then translated the quotes into English. In order to ensure transparency, my translation of the quotes was checked by a PhD student fluent in Arabic and English who approved it with minor amendments that had no effect on the meaning. The final step involved combining the codes into overarching themes. As a result of this analytical process, four themes emerged from the data under which participants' ideas and quotes were reported.

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7. Findings and discussion

7.1. Teachers' marginalisation

One of the recurring themes that emerged from the data was the marginalisation of teachers in decision-making in general and in curriculum development in particular. The data strongly suggested that marginalisation takes different forms such as, for instance, teachers' lack of voice, teachers' comments being ignored by the Ministry, the centralisation of the decision-making and the absence of teachers' participation in this process.

All the participants expressed the view that their role as teachers was greatly marginalised. For example, Naif reported the following view: "teachers do not have a role in curriculum development; even for the last curriculum reform, all of the decisions were from the MOE and teachers were not consulted". Similarly, Yasser mentioned that "in general the teacher's role is only inside the classroom" and that "teachers' participation in general does not exist". The findings revealed that teachers do not have a role in curriculum development even if a teacher has extensive experience or is highly qualified with a postgraduate degree. For instance, Fahd reported the following view:

> I have sixteen years of experience in teaching English; I do not remember that once the MOE ever asked me to participate in curriculum development, and ever, at least, just took my point of view in any decision-making.

Viirpalu, Krull, and Mikser (2014, p. 65), who conducted a study among Estonian teachers, found that their participants' "involvement in the development of the curriculum depended on their teaching experience". They added that 65% of novice teachers mentioned they had a significant impact on the development of the curriculum. With particular respect to the context of the study and the obtained data, it appears that in the KSA, teachers are not involved in curriculum development and their valuable experience is not appreciated.

Another participant, Khalid, expressed the following idea:

> There are many qualified teachers but no one allowed them to participate in curriculum development. For example, I have a Master's degree in curriculum and English language instruction but no one asked me to participate until this moment.

The lack of teachers' voice is another issue revealed by the data. According to Ali, "teachers in general do not have a role in decision-making [and] do not have rights in decision-making". Ali went on to report that their voices as teachers were "not heard". With regards the issue of voice and decision-making, Naif expressed a very similar view: "our voice is not heard because everything comes from the high authority". One of the main issues that teachers denounced is that the MOE does not listen to teachers, as pointed by Yasser: "not having our voice heard by policy-maker may be the main obstacle in our job".

In addition to the lack of teachers' voice in curriculum development, teachers' voices are not taken into consideration; according to the participants, if teachers try to express their opinions and suggest ideas, their voice is not heard and the MOE neglects them and does not take their points of view or comments seriously. For instance, Sami reported this view, as illustrated in his following statement:

> Even if you want to say your comments, they will not be heard. Sometimes I tell my supervisor about some comments I have and he tells me that the MOE will not care about my comments.

Furthermore, Fahd provided a concrete example of this problem based on his personal experience:

> We send comments to the MOE and they ignore them. I can recall that in the textbook there was a page for teachers' comment and if we have any comment we can send it by email. I sent to the MOE some comments about some mistakes in the textbook but I was surprised that the same mistakes have been repeated in the following year without any changes.

Neglecting teachers' views and not taking them seriously has a negative impact on the educational process, as reported by Saracaloğlu et al. (2010) who found that in Turkey, the ministry of education does not deal with the views of teachers seriously, which affects the quality of the educational process.

The participants emphasised that there should be organised channels between teachers and the MOE to convey their voice in a transparent and trustworthy manner. This view was reported by Khalid who mentioned that "the teachers' voices should be raised and decision-makers must open channels of communication between them and the teachers so that we can design a curriculum based on participation". A Similar view was expressed by Ali: "in each educational area there should be a department which deals with teachers' points of view". Naif harshly criticised the MOE system and described it as "dictatorial and authoritarian toward teachers"; however, he believed that "if channels of communication were opened, it might help improve this situation".

The study revealed that Saudi EFL teachers are marginalised in decision-making in general and curriculum development in particular. This finding confirms Mullick (2013) who found that university teachers in the KSA were showing a great lack of involvement in terms of curriculum development and that their voice was not heard by policy-makers. Participants asserted that teachers should have a say in curriculum development, which is consistent with Oloruntegbe (2011) who found that 95.7% of the participants believed that teachers should be involved in curriculum development.

The above findings suggest that teachers were aware about their marginalisation status, which is a very important step towards problematising power relations. As mentioned before, raising awareness is the first step in the process of change; thus, conducting research like this one to convey teachers' voice to people in power is essential in order to obtain more freedom in our educational environment. Pennycook (2010, p. 2) argues that "if we are concerned about the manifold and manifest inequities of the societies and the world we live in, then I believe we must start to take up moral and political projects to change those circumstances".

7.2. Teachers as mere implementers

The findings revealed that all the participants believed that the MOE considers teachers as a tool to convey what the MOE had already designed, which affects teachers' identity as professional agents in the educational landscape. As reported by the participants, the data strongly suggested that teachers were not satisfied with their current role as mere implementers of what was prescribed by the MOE and that they had a readiness to take part in curriculum development. An illustration of this view is the following quote from Fahd:

> Our role is only to implement not to decide. The decision is taken only by authority. I believe that the role of the MOE should be to supervise but regrettably, they are the only one to decide and teachers should implement.

Sami reported a very similar view: "the approach of the MOE is that teachers only do what is required of them." Sami added that he did not know why the MOE did not "take into account the opinions of the teacher"; for him, the MOE had "no convincing reason to do so". According to the data, the MOE views the Saudi teacher as "simply a technocratic implementer of policy" (Brain & Reid, 2006, p. 412).

The data also revealed that teachers felt that they were forced to strictly follow the MOE guideline without negotiation. Ali clearly identified this situation in this statement: "the centralisation makes the teacher as an implementation tool and this makes the teacher feel as if he is a servant and

obliged to do what is required". Furthermore, Naif critiqued the MOE perception of the teacher that he described as "superficial". For Naif, the MOE considered that "the role of the teacher is to teach only [and] just to accomplish what the MOE prescribed". In addition, according to the data obtained, following the MOE guidelines seems more important than creativity or improving the learning process. Khalid clearly expressed this idea in his following quote:

> One of the main obstacle that the teacher encounters is that he must cover the topics of the textbooks as stipulated in the timetable. The headmaster and the supervisor will see and ask you first about this, regardless of your creativity.

Another participant, Yasser, also talked about the control exerted by the MOE over the teacher: "the curriculum is designed by the MOE and it is given to the teacher to implement; the teacher is obliged by a certain plan and the headmaster and the supervisor will check this plan".

The participants believed that teachers should have a role in curriculum development and that they should not be treated as implementers only. They expressed the view that the process of curriculum development is a participatory process and that they should have an active role in it. Fahd, for example, reported the following view:

> The main goal in education is to form good students and how can the MOE reach this goal without the involvement of the teacher? They must deal with the teacher as a partner not as a tool of implementation.

According to Khalid, the prevailing notion in the KSA is that the experts decide while the others implement; he further clarified this idea in the following quote:

> this notion must be changed; if this notion is changed, a positive participation will occur because many teachers have a desire to participate and many teachers have postgraduate degrees.

The idea that curriculum experts are the most effective curriculum designers confirms the statement by Banegas (2011, p. 429) who identified that the authorities usually believe that designing the curriculum "should be left in the experts' hand" whereas, according to him, teachers are capable to participate actively in curriculum development. Similarly, Sami advocated the following idea:

> The curriculum is designed by the MOE and they see themselves as the most capable to design it and the teacher should implement it. The officials must know that the teacher is a very important agent in this process.

It is clear from the data that the participants considered teachers as very important agents in curriculum development because they are the ones who deal directly and practically with the curriculum. The following quote from Naif is an example of this view: "the teacher, through his close contact with the curriculum, can perceive its weaknesses; the teacher is the one who practices in the field so his participation is important". Likewise, Ali insisted on the central role of the teacher: "on a practical level, the teacher is the one who deals with the curriculum; he can see the unseen elements [and] he is the key in the implementation of the curriculum". In the same vein, many participants confirmed that teachers possess a greater understanding of what suits their students' needs as mentioned by Fahd: "what suits the students who live in cities may not suit the students who live in villages". Likewise, for Sami, "the teacher is the closest to his students and knows what benefits them". Finally, Yasser described the teacher as "the link between the ministry and the student". This finding revealed that teachers can perceive the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and identify the needs of the students. This is consistent with Oloruntegbe (2011, p. 448) who asserts that teachers are "on field and know what and where change is needed". Furthermore, Webb (2002) states that teachers know more than policy-makers about the students' needs.

According to the data, teachers are considered merely as implementers of what has been prescribed to them by the MOE. This confirms Troudi and Alwan (2010, p. 119) who found that in the United Arab Emirates "teachers' involvement in the curriculum decision-making process and changes was mostly non-existent. Teachers were implementers of change". However, based on the data, the participants expressed readiness to play a role in curriculum development. Zohrabi (2014), through his study based on the design of a syllabus with teachers in Iran, confirmed that teachers can develop their own curriculum rather than being implementers of another designer's work. The two above-mentioned studies, conducted in the Middle East, in a similar context to the KSA, showed that decision-making is authoritative. However, as pointed by Zohrabi, when teachers are given a chance to participate in curriculum development, their involvement impacts positively on teachers' satisfaction and results in teachers' and students' needs being met.

Based on the above, it can be derived from the findings that the teachers strongly believed that they should have a greater role in curriculum development. Also, although they view themselves as mere implementers, they asserted that this situation is due to their absence of choice rather than their inability to participate in curriculum development. As result, this marginalisation may have a negative impact on teachers' professional development. According to (Carl, 2005, p. 228), considering teachers as mere implementers, may impact negatively on "nurturing the personal and professional growth of the teacher".

7.3. Frustration
A sense of frustration was a recurring theme that emerged from the data due to the marginalisation of teachers in decision-making. The participants declared that marginalisation lead to a sense of frustration among teachers, which may have contributed to producing passive, rather than creative teachers. In this regard, Khalid affirmed that "there is a gap between the MOE and the teachers". According to him, teachers feel that "no one listens to them and that their right is taken away". Fahd confirmed this general feeling of frustration among teachers: "I wish that the MOE consult us; through my meetings with teachers, there is a dissatisfaction towards the MOE". Naif also reported the view that the issue of lack of voice and marginalisation lead to frustration among teachers: "I feel disappointed because teachers are marginalised; the teacher is already frustrated". In addition, according to Ali, "marginalisation makes teachers feel frustrated".

The data also revealed that marginalisation impacted negatively on teachers' performance. Likewise, the neglect of teachers' views, the lack of appreciation for their hard work and the imposition of authoritarian orders all impacted negatively on teachers. For instance, Yasser described this situation in the following statement:

> Because of some imposed, dictates decisions on the teacher, there may be a backlash and the teacher may become frustrated and he will not be positive in his work. Some decisions may be unreasonable and therefore may not be carried out by the teacher.

This view was widespread among the participants; for example; Sami expressed that "the neglect of the MOE makes some teachers not care about playing a role in the development of the educational process". Similarly, Naif was vocal in denouncing this situation: "this system forced us to be hypocrites; for example, they ask us to do something but we do not do it in our work". According to the data, marginalisation and neglect frustrated teachers to engage actively in the educational landscape. In this regard, Fahd mentioned: "even if I am the best teacher, what is the benefit if the MOE neglects me? At the end of the year, there is no difference for them in appreciation between the good teacher and the lazy teacher". Ali posed a very similar question: "if you have many useful ideas, what can you do if you do not have a voice?". According to Khalid, "some teachers say: 'do not bother yourself, just do what the MOE wants and do your best'."

The data showed that this current status impacted on teachers' morale, which lead to a feeling of frustration. It also appears from the findings that marginalisation alienated teachers (Troudi, 2009). As a result, because of this feeling of marginalisation, some teachers may not be doing their best in teaching, which may impact negatively on students' learning. If teachers are involved in curriculum development, it may foster teachers' satisfaction with the curriculum. Erss et al. (2014) found that a major indicator of satisfaction with the new national curriculum was teachers' involvement in curriculum development. Furthermore, Saracaloğlu et al. (2010) claim that the involvement of teachers in the decision-making process positively impacts on their job satisfaction. According to the obtained data, neglecting teachers' views leads to frustration, which might affect teachers' performance in schools. The centralised nature of the curriculum decision-making process could also make "teachers deprived from exercising their professional discretion" (Ho, 2010, p. 618).

7.4. Limits

The findings of this study showed that teachers had very limited freedom to put in practice what they believed was best in teaching. Such limited freedom to practice what they believed might threaten them because it is in contrast with what has been prescribed by the MOE. For example, the data revealed that the participants could teach a certain topic in two days rather than in one day and could omit some content from any topic of the syllabus. An example of this view is the following statement from Fahd: "I can abbreviate two pages in one page; there are some elements of the lesson from my point of view that are superfluous that I can delete". Similarly, other participants identified the same limited freedom they had such as, for example, Khalid who mentioned that he could teach "a particular topic in two meetings instead of one meeting". Sami also described his limited freedom: "the only thing I can do, for example, if I feel some parts of the lessons are not necessary, I can skip them." Likewise, Sami expressed that he "can omit one or two topics" and Yasser declared that he could omit "some parts of the lesson."

Despite the teachers' limited freedom, the findings showed that participants could do what they decided but without the knowledge of the MOE. For example, Sami held the view that he "can do some things, provided that […] the ministry does not know." He added that "the supervisor will follow your work according to what is required of you according to the plan". Naif and Ali stated that they had to follow the general outline of the curriculum, but could do certain things without the knowledge of the supervisor. This is confirmed by Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (1999, p. 240) who found that teachers in Florida State "resist covertly" the control of authority and make their own decisions in class by, for instance, selecting additional resources that are adapted to their students' needs.

Moreover, any attempt to improve what is already prescribed in the curriculum in order to respond to their students' needs is another issue with a constraint. For instance, Khalid remarked: "freedom to make a decision in the curriculum based on what I think is beneficial is limited; if the teacher wants to develop something, he must go to the officials to obtain their permission". Fahd declared that he "cannot choose the kind of exam [he] wants because the MOE gives guidelines [he] should follow". Similarly, Naif mentioned: "the supervisor may visit the school at the time of the final exam and I may be under the responsibility if I do not follow the MOE exams model".

According to the data, teachers were not given the opportunity to implement the curriculum in a flexible manner based on their teaching needs. This confirms the findings of Albedaiwi (2014, p. 231) who found that teachers in the KSA "need to follow the course materials that are provided by the MOE […] and the desire of some course supervisors (MOE representatives) for teachers to not modify the course beyond a small degree". Whereas Albedaiwi specifically refers to the decisions teachers cannot make in the textbook, the findings of this study suggested that teachers cannot make decisions with regards most aspects of the curriculum such as the examination guidelines used to assess their students.

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8. Conclusion

Because of the critical nature of this study, it was essential to not only critique the issue of teachers' marginalisation, but also provide suggestions to change this unfair state of affairs and find ways to help teachers empower themselves. Therefore, after presenting the findings and discussing them, one fundamental question needs to be raised: how can the problem of teachers' marginalisation be changed?

In fact, since the introduction of the English language in the KSA curriculum in 1925, its design has been centralised by the MOE; therefore, it could be expected that due to this long period of time, the educational bodies in general and teachers in particular would be satisfied with the current role of the MOE and take the centrality of curriculum development as naturally granted. Hence, this study tried to critique an issue which has not been investigated and critiqued enough in the KSA in order to change this current situation and give teachers more room in decision-making.

Changing the current situation and problematising the power relations is not an easy task. Although one of the aim of this study is to problematise these relations, it cannot be assumed that the status quo of teachers' marginalisation can be changed in such a short time; rather, it may take a long time, especially in the KSA where teachers have no voice. Hence, in order to change the current situation; various actions, such as critical research or any other attempt of this kind, should be taken to move towards the first step of problematising power relations. We need critical research that problematise issues like teachers' marginalisation in the context of the KSA in order to empower teachers by allowing them to convey their voice and raise their awareness about their own condition in terms of curriculum development, and in turn, find ways to change and improve this situation. In this respect, Creswell (2013, p. 48) identifies that "we conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories [and] hear their voices".

The study recommends that the MOE should give teachers a greater role in curriculum development. As mentioned before, despite the many attempts to reform the curriculum, due to the centralised nature of the KSA education system and the neglect of teachers' roles in curriculum development, the MOE has hitherto failed to design an appropriate EFL curriculum. Hence, it is highly recommended that the MOE take into consideration the importance of involving all educational stakeholders in general and teachers in particular. Likewise, teachers should attempt to take the lead to empower themselves and take part in curriculum development. For instance, teachers can establish unions to raise concerns about educational issues like marginalisation and the lack of voice to demand their rights. Also, nowadays social media, such as Twitter, are powerful tools to voice their concerns, convey their opinions and create a healthy atmosphere to discuss issues like these. Furthermore, research has the power to convince people; therefore, teachers should take the initiative to conduct research and demonstrate their ability to be creative bodies, not merely passive individuals so that they can convince policy-makers that they can participate actively in curriculum development.

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Citation information

Cite this article as: Teachers' role in the development of EFL curriculum in Saudi Arabia: The marginalised status, Sultan Klaib Alnefaie, *Cogent Education* (2016), 3: 1240008.

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