



EFL TEACHERS' RESPONSE TO THE ECOLOGICAL EXPECTATIONS OF THE TEACHING CONTEXT AT A SAUDI UNIVERSITY

 **Ragia Magdeldin Youssef¹**

 **Nadia Shukri^{2*}**

^{1,2}English Language Institute King Abdul Aziz University Jeddah, KSA

¹Email: royoussef@kau.edu.sa

²Email: ndshukri@gmail.com



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

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This paper presents the analysis of a case study on EFL experienced teachers in the English Language Institute of King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The aim of the study is to investigate if the expectations of the environment affects the intentional activity and the agency of the teachers in their classrooms. The focal area of the study is to identify ways intentional classroom activity of the teachers have changed according to the expectations of the different agents within the mentioned EFL ecological context despite the contradiction of this change with the teachers' cognition coming from their earlier education and practical experience. As for the research method, it is a case study where two semi-structured interviews were conducted with two experienced teachers. The results of these interviews demonstrate a positive correlation between the contextual expectations of the educational institution environment with all its constituents and the agency/the intentional activity of the teachers even if this intentional activity contradicts with the teachers' former knowledge and practice. Further studies using varied research tools is required to investigate into how teachers' practice is influenced by the expectations of the educational ecological setting.

Contribution/Originality: This study is one of very few studies which have investigated the relationship between the contextual expectations of the educational institution environment in Saudi Arabia with all its constituents and the agency/the intentional activity of the teachers even if this intentional activity contradicts with the teachers' former cognition and practice.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is gaining prominence in Saudi Arabia; a kingdom spending sufficient money on the development of education (Rahman and Alhaisoni, 2013). Teaching English is one core area which needs a lot of improvement in the Saudi educational system. The world's main foreign language carries a myriad of undeniable benefits to the young Saudis preparing for a globalized world, yet, English also holds numerous cultural elements which make many Saudi teachers and students abstain from embracing most of the cultural aspects included in the language beyond the surface level (Fareh, 2010; Khan, 2011a;2011b;2011c).

Governmental universities in Saudi are adopting a Foundation/Preparatory Year Program, PYP, where English is placed as a principal subject (Liton, 2012). King Abdul Aziz University is a Saudi governmental university offering an English language Program- ELP/PYP via its English Language Institute the mission of which is to: "help students in the Foundation Year to achieve an Intermediate Level of proficiency in the use of the English language; provide appropriate pedagogical methods, value faculty scholarship and service and provide a progressive and

structured curriculum, enabling students to graduate having demonstrated achievement of essential learning outcomes in listening, speaking, reading, and writing"(ELI Mission).

Despite the importance of the ELP, the ELI academic year is frequently interrupted by all sorts of teaching breaks due to adopting a modular system. The modular system allows students' movement from a beginner to an intermediate course level within one academic year: a mandated requirement of accreditation. Thus, each level lasts 6 to 7 weeks. However, the ELP modules do not conform to the whole university semester system. This inconsistency creates gaps where time is wasted in non-teaching weeks during which students sit tests for other foundation year subjects. During the end-of-module English exams, non-teaching-weeks also occur when students wait for their results. This takes place three times per academic year occasionally interrupted by other religious and academic vacations too (Shah *et al.*, 2013).

The expectations of the KAU/ELI program stated in the objectives and the strong anticipation of the students to pass the test and finish the Foundation Year safely within one academic year is simply unrealistic. The time frame of the program is too short to match with the majority of those students' initial English language level and previous English language related societal and educational cultures. This ironically diminishes the expectations and the intentionality of the teachers to employ their best practice techniques that they came with and directs them towards a quantitative rather than a qualitative teaching approach (Shah *et al.*, 2013).

Teachers come to the language classroom with their beliefs of how teaching should be like and perceptions of their mission as language instructors. This cognition, in turn comes from their studentship time during their schooling; afterwards in under graduate, graduate and post graduate studies or during their internship and later their professional experience as teachers (Freeman, 2002; Borg, 2006). Freeman (2002) also includes institutional and social context as constituents of teacher perceptions.

1.1 The KAU/ELI Context

A recent study conducted by Shah, Hussain & Nasseef discusses the EFL situation in KAU/EL. They emphasize that KAU/EFL teachers may act against their perceptions and beliefs of best practice to adhere to contextual imperatives. The different socio-cultural and institutional constraints redirect and reframe teachers' methodologies (Fareh, 2010; Rahman and Alhaisoni, 2013). They mention that in Saudi EFL classes, teaching practices are compromised by constraints enforced by institutional authorities. Teachers are not independent to decide on their teaching methods. They explain that EFL teachers "are bound by social conventions, learners' expectations and school and ministry's policies about how to teach and what methodology to follow" (Hall, 2011). For these reasons, teachers constantly switch between pedagogically and socially oriented behaviors and try to meet the learning and social needs of the learners (Shah *et al.*, 2013).

In this study, the views of two ELI teachers about their practices in the KAU/ EFL classroom will be examined. Their teaching experiences before and after coming to the KAU/ELI through investigating how the context of their current program and institution have combined to change their teaching views and practices by the effect of ecological expectations will be explored. Subsequently, in the later stage of the study the researchers plan to relate ecological expectations to propose a more practical teaching paradigm where teachers and the institution offers the students what they expect to use in their future careers through an instrumentally motivating paradigm within which both the agency of the students and the teachers get enhanced via responding to valid expectations. Thus, the research question for this study is:

How does the expectation of the Saudi environment of the KAU/ELI affect intentional activity/ the agency of the teachers in their classrooms?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Relationship between Teachers' Cognitions and Teaching Practices

Teaching a language does not only depend on inducting the representational symbols of script, sounds, and words or the syntax and it does not take place in vacuum. It happens within features that have an effect on both the teacher and the learner. One feature that has a great impact on teaching a language is teacher cognition. Borg (2006) identifies teacher cognition as “what teachers at any stage of their careers think, know, or believe in relation to any aspect of their work, and which also entail the study of actual classroom practices and of the relationships between cognitions and these practices” (p. 50). This definition affirms the influence of teacher cognitions on classroom practices. According to Kagan (1992) teacher cognition embraces their perceptions about teaching and their beliefs about learning, their students, classrooms and even about their own performance. There is evidence suggesting that the experience of teachers as students, their teaching experiences and their classrooms' ecological factors all have an impact on their cognition (Johnson, 1994; Woods, 1996; Borg, 2003).

2.2. The Relationship between Teaching Practice and the Ecological Context

Many studies have investigated the intertwined relationship between what a teacher believes, her classroom practice and her classroom contextual features (Burns, 1996; Golombek, 1998). In 1996, Burns examined the beliefs and thinking of experienced teachers and how these beliefs influence teachers' classroom practice. She found that teacher thinking comprises of three interacting ecological levels: thinking about the language, the learning process and the learners; thinking about instructional activities and beliefs about institutional culture. She emphasized “the intercontextuality of thinking and beliefs, and teachers' implicit, personalized ‘theories for practice’ which form the motivating conceptual frameworks shaping what teachers do when they teach” (p. 175). Burns' inter-contextuality did not stop at the micro-ecological level; she also suggested the presence of “networks of intercontextuality” (p. 158, 1996) where she moved to macro-ecology. She affirmed that teachers' beliefs are multifaceted and composed of various inter-related levels of influences. These influences go beyond the level of the classroom. She proposed that the highest level influencing teachers' cognition is the institutional culture within which teachers conduct their teaching after interpreting to institutional ideologies and philosophies.

2.3. Teachers' Cognition is Context-Sensitive and Situated

Other researchers also supported the theory that teachers' cognition is context-sensitive and situated (Putnam and Borko, 2000; Tsui, 2003; Borg, 2006). They affirmed that the cognition of teachers is context situated and involving the teachers understanding of the teaching concepts, the context, and the culture in which the teaching takes place (Hall and Grisham-Brown, 2011). This theory is emphasized by Putnam and Borko (2000) who emphasized the effect of the particular physical and social contexts in which the teaching takes place. In short, the situated perspective of language teaching and of teacher cognition affirms the inseparable relationship between what the teacher thinks and does and her surrounding physical and social ecology. Breen (2001) stresses the necessity of drawing attention “to significant social and psychological variables which we seem to be neglecting in our current research in language learning” (p.134).The social construction and contextualization of teachers' beliefs and cognitions are emphasized by Tsui (2003).

2.4. Altered Classroom Practice due to the Expectations of the Context

Interestingly, some researchers emphasized that the teaching context may prohibit teachers from practicing their beliefs and cognitions. Basturkmen *et al.* (2004) reported the mismatch between L2 teachers' previously stated beliefs regarding form-focused instruction and the practices observed in their classrooms. Farrell and Kun (2008) gave an explanation for this discrepancy after conducting a study in a Singaporean primary school on two experienced teachers. The study affirmed the mismatch between the teachers' beliefs and their classroom practice

due to barriers imposed by the context. Contextual barriers to the practice of teachers' beliefs was reported by [Orafi and Borg \(2009\)](#) after conducting a study in Libya on EFL teachers cognition and on their communicative language teaching. Though the teachers expressed their conviction of using the communicative approach, they conducted their classes in a very teacher- centered manner, teach-for-the-test way due to the contextual expectations of the test.

2.5. Ecological Effects on EFL Teaching Context Internationally

Research from different parts of the world establishes findings about difficulties faced by EFL teachers trying to implement pedagogical practices which challenge the societal and institutional culture of the teaching context. China and Korea are among countries where the communicative approach, emphasizing the interactional value of the language, is not supported by the Chinese or Korean cultures nor by the societal norms, let alone the organizational imperatives of the offered English classes and curricula. EFL teachers in such a context suffer as they try to challenge the contextual features surrounding their practice. Like in the study by [Orafi and Borg \(2009\)](#) in Libya, among the problems which challenge teachers' cognition of best practice are classes with mixed abilities, odd contact hours, limited instructional time, high expectations on the part of students and parents despite the initial low proficiency of the students and the background culture of both teachers and the students ([Li, 1998](#); [Zeng and Murphy, 2007](#); [Peng and Woodrow, 2010](#); [Yang, 2010](#)). The situation is very similar in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi context is not different from the Libyan or some other international contexts as to the constraining factors played by societal and educational cultures.

2.6. An Ecological Perspective Supporting the Effect of Expectations on Intentional Practical Activity

According to [Stelma and Fay \(2014\)](#) ecological perspective on research education, there is an effect exerted by the expectations of the environment on individuals. This is demonstrated in Figure 1 below which shows that the expectations from the surroundings lead to developing intentional activity on the part of the individual which is shaped towards the fulfillment of the expectations of the context. Stelma's and Fay's model illustrated in Figure 1 is based on researchers doing their master's degrees in the UK. It displays that there is a direct relationship between what the context expects on the intentional action of the agents within this context. Simply individuals act according to what is expected from them within a certain context. They will even shape their intentions to fulfill what is expected. Extending the model from research to language teaching which may explain why and how the intentional activity of the KAU teachers in their classrooms changes to take the form of teach-for the -test which "surprisingly" challenges most of the beliefs those teachers came with in the first place.

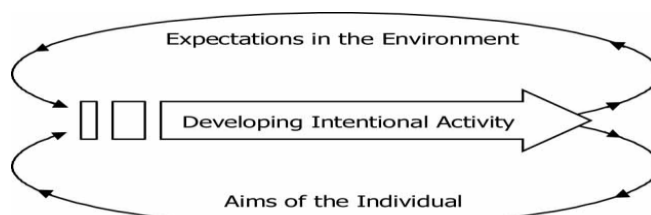


Figure-1. Stelma and Fay (2014) Intentionality Model

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Method

In order to investigate the KAU/ELI teachers' perceptions, expectations and change of practice related to the ecology of the KAU/ELI teaching context it was found that the most applicable way was to ask those teachers questions and to analyze their answers. Indeed, surveys are considered the most frequently employed descriptive method used in educational research ([Cohen and Manion, 1985](#)). The two most common ways for gathering survey

data are interviews and questionnaires (Nunan, 1992). Conducting interviews in a form of a case study was a suitable tool. Kvale (1983) defines the qualitative research interview as "an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (p.174). This is the aim of the researchers: teachers answering in detail about their personal perceptions and expectations before teaching at the KAU/ELI and how their expectations were modified due to the existence in the new teaching context with all the related institutional, curricular and even the students' requirements. In addition, case studies also provide researchers with information that goes beyond the quantitative statistical results and allows them to understand behavioral conditions through the agents' perspective. Case studies also help clarify the processes and the outcomes of phenomena through observing, reconstructing and analyzing of the cases under investigation (Tellis, 1997). The main aim was thus to explore the case and understand the probable causes of the phenomenon.

Semi-structured interviews were used as a data collection tool as they were better suited for the purpose of gathering suitable information. The interview questions were revised by a TESOL expert and the interview itself was divided into two parts; the first is biographical mainly directed towards knowing the type of experiences which formed a main part of the recruits' perceptions and beliefs. The second part includes questions about the different sets of expectations that interplay at the KAU/ELI whether those teachers had initial expectations before they started work; whether they were recruited according to certain expectations; whether there are other sets of expectations in the KAU/ELI context and what expectations have been confirmed or changed due to the context.

Two teachers were given pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. The first participant is named Jane and the second is Julie. The interview questions and scripts can be retrieved from the appendices.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Based on the research question: *How does the expectation of the Saudi environment of the KAU/ELI affect intentional activity/ the agency of the teachers in their classrooms?* themes were derived from the interview data. These themes may be described in the following:

4.1. Teachers' Background: Implications on Teachers' Expectations of Best Practice

In an answer to a question asking about the teaching philosophy of the interviewees, the responses were:

Jane... *"I like to think of the classroom as a shared space where we both: myself and the students, meet and create magic whatever way and form that might take."*

Julie: *"Well, it has evolved over the years from just communicating knowledge. to becoming facilitators and to helping students or learners to understand ... it has now evolved into becoming a learning experience both ways".*

As can be understood from the two answers, both teachers, in their cognition believed that the classroom is an organic shared space where shared communication and interaction takes place. For Jane, the classroom is a common environment where both the students and the teacher work towards the common goal of creating magic which has to be equally manufactured and appreciated by both parties: teacher and students. Julie was understandably taught during teacher-fronted classes and has undergone the change of the methodologies until she became a "facilitator" rather than a disseminator of knowledge. She has even "evolved" to viewing herself as a person who shares in the learning process herself. The cognition of communication, of sharing knowledge, of the give and take of the teaching/ learning process exerts an effect on teachers' classroom expectations. One may conclude that the interviewees have arrived to the KAU/ELI with the expectations of knowledge partnership. However, in Saudi Arabia, the broad context of education creates a humongous obstacle for EFL teachers expecting knowledge partnership. The learning culture in the Saudi schools generally emphasizes memorization. Memorization fulfills the demands of the tests which aim at examining lower order thinking skills (Allamnakhrah, 2013). English as a foreign language is, nearly never solely used in the classroom nor is it used communicatively or interactively

among teachers/ students or students/students classroom exchanges in the English lesson (Allamnahrah, 2013).

4.1.1. Recruiters' Expectations and Implications on Teachers' Pre-Practice Expectations

Jane stated that prior expectations of change to her teaching style came before arriving in Saudi and getting exposed to the socio-cultural and educational environment:

Jane: *"Well, I knew that I would have to change my whole teaching style that much was for sure."*

Whereas Julie mentioned that she had never had expectations of the teaching/learning context at KAU/ELI. She affirmed that she was shocked, even frightened by the level of the students. It is true she was teaching in Saudi Arabia but she was teaching in the British Continental School, an international school in Jeddah following an established international curriculum with very modern instructional policies:

Julie: *"When I came I had a postgraduate diploma in TESOL actually. I felt that I was fully equipped.... During the interviews, I was not really given any idea about what they were expecting and I was not even sure about the level of the students..... To be honest, it was quite a shocker, the first day when I found those twenty something students', unable to understand English; ...It was quite a frightening experience and I felt challenged in many respects."*

Perhaps the mismatch between Julie's expectations and the KAU/ ELI ecology started when individuals who conducted interviews and did the screening for job candidates at the ELI did not express prior expectations of the recruits.

However, recruiters for the ELP do not explain to the potential candidate what they are expected to do. All what they are looking for is, as emphasized by the two interviewees, is a "teacher of English" with suitable qualifications and/or experience.

Recruiters only asked about logistical issue like what to do with big number classes or what the teacher thinks of going home late. These are questions that demonstrate expectations on a very basic level: a teacher, who can teach English- as expressed by Jane-, can handle big numbers in the classroom and does not mind going home a bit late.

No higher expectation levels on the part of the recruiters are detected in the two interviews within the realm of, for instance, training students who come from a rote memorization system on a more interactive/communicative pattern or what the teacher thinks of grammar-based- teaching/ using L1 in the classroom or teaching with media.

No questions on the part of the recruiters were asked about using procedures like seminar patterns, movies, discussions, debates, student presentations or other techniques aimed at training on critical thinking. These modes/channels of instruction are explained plainly in the two candidates' realm of previous experience during the interview. Both candidates mentioned that no questions posed, probed on the past experience of the teacher which forms most of her cognition and affects her classroom activity.

Jane: *"Just looking for teachers... They, asked me about what I would do in such a situation...ahhmm... How would I handle big classes...what I feel about staying late ... you know ... things like that, but nothing that really explored who I am personally as a teacher."*

Julie: *"During the interviews, I was not really given any idea about what they were expecting...."*

There is no trace of the particularity of the Saudi context or particular expectations associated to it. Recruiters' questions-demonstrating areas of interest- were related to the possibility and the practicality of certain logistical issues.

4.1.2. Actual Expectations of the Different Agents in the Program Leading to Change of in-Practice Teaching Methods

In Saudi Arabia, English is constrained to the classroom for explication purposes and for the opportunity to employ the language in their daily life in the Saudi society is inconsistent for school students. Additionally, the most extensively common methodology of teaching the language is the Grammar-Translation method where the

main focus is on grammar teaching and the translation of vocabulary items to Arabic- a method that guarantees good marks to students. Consequently, the students, and their parents who want them to pass tests for sure, do not expect nor accept any other educational system later when they join university especially if a new system means less secure results. In a question about whether students and parents expect conformity to the system, Jane affirmed:

Jane: *"Yes ... that is definitely the expectation here... I cannot come here with my highfalutin ideas and think that I can influence these girls... They are not gonna have that..."*

Julie emphasized the same expectations of students and parents:

Julie: *"I think the two things that govern this: the expectations of the students and parents, one is definitely passing the course and getting a degree and the other is speaking That is the end of the courses that we have here. There is nothing beyond that."*

Questions related to the teacher changing her teaching ways to achieve conformity in response to the requirements of the students', the parents and the system were answered positively:

Jane: *"Well, I knew that I would have to change my whole teaching style that much was for sure."*

Julie: *"It is definitely teacher centered and the weaker the students, the more teacher centered it is. ...Students in this place at least, do not expect you to leave them on their own. They are expecting a lot of control. They want you to be in control."*

Related are the questions associating with the previous teaching experience of the two teachers. Questions were posed to investigate in what ways their previous teaching methods have changed. Answers rotated around not using debates, seminars, discussions and movies except simply to clarify a grammar point and sticking to very direct teaching.

Also the issue of security and playing safe to respond to the societal norms of what is acceptable /unacceptable was strongly pointed out:

Jane: *"Well...the acronym is called PARSNIPS, and I knew about the three basic things I could never bring up in the classroom..."*

Julie: *"Conformity... what are the advantages and disadvantages of the mobile phone? That was all right, but to talk about something that goes against the grain, for example driving..., I had a very strong group at one point but I had to debunk the idea totally".*

Justifications to changing methods and playing it safe were given. Both teachers confirmed that they were doing what they were required by the societal and educational context to do. Jane mentioned that every place has its rules and people running the place expect conformity; whereas Julie mentioned that catering to the expectations in terms of teach-for-the-test methodology for instance satisfies the students and leads to some learning as this was the only teaching strategy students were trained to follow:

Julie: *"I definitely do that because it satisfies them and I am ...I am satisfied myself because to my mind, I think that some learning is taking place."*

The logistical and organizational institutional constraints of "time" and "exams" were also mentioned as justification for teaching-for-the-test adopted methodology.

5. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Methods, books and teachers are not only transmitting language content. They need to be addressed both on the micro and macro-ecological levels to better comprehend the number of factors which influence the process of language teaching/learning.

I had started this study with the conception that recruiters hired the teachers who were mostly expected to change the ecology of teaching English and the background methodologies students were trained to during their schooldays. However, this concept was not verified in the data. The expectation of the recruiters was finding

suitable instructors in terms of qualifications and experience to teach English regardless of the particularity of the Saudi case/context. The teachers of the ELI are being recruited depending on expectations of best practice based on those candidates high qualifications, confirmed modern ways of teaching, proven ability to positively communicate with the students and prospect to establish a controllable and safe teaching/learning culture among those students the majority of whom come from a very traditional schooling system.

Teachers respond to the micro and macro ecological expectations of the KAU/ELI teaching/learning environment by changing their teaching methods in spite of the fact that neither their previous cognition, nor their concepts of best practice support their action. Thus, the data analysis offers another explanation as to the substandard outcome of the ELP program at KAU/ELI. The effect of the myriad of ecological expectations on the practice of the teachers is another factor leading to a replication of an outdated system rather than implementing a more practical teaching paradigm leading to real, mind-provoking and stimulating teaching/learning.

A recent study sponsored by the KAU Deanship of Scientific Research describes the ELI mandatory curriculum as a leading teacher agency in the way of becoming "reliant on curriculum-centered and teacher-centered classrooms." The study describes the mandatory book series taught at the KAU/ELI – as one of the most significant features of this educational context, as neither gender nor age appropriate for the Saudi students. It mentions that the series has been adapted only in the areas of names and places which makes relating it to the lives of the students superficial. Furthermore, it is based on a skill-and-drill, behaviorist rote-memorization approach rather than a constructivist approach allowing learners to build and base their own understanding on their own world experience. The program is also described as one which does not promote critical thinking, problem solving let alone creativity. In short, the program diminishes the agency of the students as it does not allow them to be active agents in their own learning or to move towards autonomy. The study affirms that the current program is failing to equip learners with the desired level of English language suggests a new approach for teaching the mandatory books after some training for the teachers on the new way (Aburizaizah, 2013).

Though all the previous is true, it overlooks a most significant factor. The educational process in any educational setting may not only refer to exchanging information between teachers and learners but also to abide by a set of conventions. These conventions are constructed by the cultural and the social standards in that particular context. Tudor (2001) affirms the critical role played by the social context as he states "...classroom is a socially defined reality and is therefore influenced by the belief systems and behavioral norms of the society of which it is part"(p. 35). These behavioral and social norms indicate the unique complexities of any classroom.

For example, the expectations and beliefs of institutional managers, policy makers, parents, and the relations among participants in the classroom are all decided by the sociocultural values of a specific context which impacts the classroom environment, and makes it more diverse and complex. For language teaching, Stern (1983) confirms that 'society and culture are more than background and even more than context', what takes place in the language classroom cannot be separated from its sociocultural context (cited in Hall (2011)).

Perhaps Saudi Arabia; a very unique and culture specific setting is one of the most suitable contexts in which the effect of the socio-cultural and the educational ecology may be analyzed in relation with teaching/learning EFL. Ecological factors lead to the near failure of EFL as a communicative tool in the globalized world (Fareh, 2010; Rahman and Alhaisoni, 2013; Shah *et al.*, 2013). Teaching/learning EFL in Saudi governmental schools and universities is done like any other subject and the value of communication is just ignored. At the KAU/ELI expectations emerge from:

1. The previous educational culture promoting grade races, teaching for the test, memorization, the lack of critical thinking abilities, lack of learner autonomy and the need for the teacher to be in control.
2. Logistical factors, the timing of the course and the exams.
3. Cultural factors prohibiting the involvement in the language on the part of the Saudi teachers and the students due to previous colonialism, and non-Islamic attitudes

4. Cultural amendments including the reworking of books towards the Saudi culture, unsuitability of teaching the language from natural contexts, the unsafety of teachers to exercise autonomy or even to express concepts freely among other factors reshape the intentionality of the teachers in the Saudi EFL classroom. Inviting non-Saudi instructors from different parts of the world to teach the young Saudis a FL curriculum involves a lot of ecological factors. Those ecological factors play a role in re-directing the cognition of those teachers which have taken years to form and accumulate leading to a mismatch between teachers' cognition and classroom practices as apparent in the interviews. The realities of the program and its logistical setting /requirement force those very teachers with totally different beliefs to use direct instruction methods, emphasize a rote memorization paradigm while they employ a -teach -for -the -test policy. Even the "mandated" LMS technology based component is used by those teachers as a proof for achievement rather than a tool for engagement with the language. Donato (2000) encourages language teachers working in unfamiliar contexts to adopt a sociocultural standpoint, and acquire contextual knowledge which will improve the context-specific ways of practice expected of them in an educational institution, both within and without the boundaries of the EFL classroom.

The previous conforms with a socio-cultural, ecological perspective affirming that teaching involves understanding of the dynamics and relationships within the classroom, the rules and behaviors specific to a particular setting (Putnam and Borko, 2000; Tsui, 2003; Borg, 2006). It conforms to studies indicating that a great part of the teachers' cognition is formed through their own experience as teachers within certain contexts. Ironically, it also justifies why teachers act against their "best practice" prior conceptions when they are faced by different ecological expectations such as in Basturkmen *et al.* (2004); Farrell and Lim (2005); Orafi and Borg (2009).

Tudor (2003) proposes what he calls "contextual negotiation" to tackle possible ecological constrains in the language teaching/learning context. The conception of contextual negotiation encompasses the ideologies from student, teacher, methodological, and socio-cultural rationalities. Seeing language teaching as some form of contextual negotiation, Tudor (2003) affirms that context is a multifaceted phenomenon which necessitates the negotiation of its two main constituents: pragmatic and mental: "The pragmatic context of teaching relates to the objectively observable features of the language teaching situation. The mental context of teaching arises out of the attitudes, beliefs, behavioral expectations, goals and aspirations which participants bring with them to the classroom" (pp. 1-2) which have the power to redirect the agents' attitudes and practices. Stelma and Fay (2014) intentionality paradigm related to directing the deliberate activity of individuals towards certain directions in response to the expectations of the context offers a confirmation to Tudor (2003) and an explanation to the change of practice of our interviewees, let alone their conviction of making the right choice by conforming to what the context expects regardless of their recognized beliefs.

Therefore, another perspective that has to be addressed when analyzing teaching/ learning EFL at KAU/ELI in Saudi Arabia is the background socio-cultural, educational and ecological contexts and the very expectations of all the agents involved in this context and how these expectations evolve lead to a better understand of teaching/learning as affirmed internationally in (Li, 1998; Zeng and Murphy, 2007; Peng and Woodrow, 2010; Yang, 2010; Stelma and Fay, 2014) and in (Fareh, 2010; Rahman and Alhaisoni, 2013) and Shah *et al.* (2013) in the Saudi context.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper presents the analysis and the findings of a case study on EFL experienced teachers in the English Language Institute of King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah. The aim of the study is to investigate if the expectations of the environment affects the intentional activity and the agency of the teachers in their classrooms. The focal area of the study is to identify ways intentional classroom activity of the teachers has changed according to the expectations of the different agents within the mentioned EFL ecological context despite the contradiction of this change with the teachers' cognition coming from their earlier education and practical experience. The study

sheds light on the teaching practice at the ELI of King Abdulaziz University and how the agency of the teachers related to their previous training and best practice may be altered by the imperatives of the teaching context. It gives insights as to how powerful the ecological factors of the teaching context are and how these ecological factors may alter the performance of the teachers against what they believe as best practice no matter how learned and experienced they are.

7. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the fact that the study may have raised awareness regarding EFL teaching practices in the particular context it was conducted and might have offered valuable insights in the areas of the ecology of language learning that needs to be taken into consideration, further investigations need to be conducted within different contexts in order to verify that teachers may change their agency according to the educational setting in which they are situated. Accordingly, further studies using varied research tools are required to probe further into how teachers' practice is influenced by the expectations of the educational ecological setting. Research within this area in the Saudi tertiary education context is surely going to shed more light on the effect of the context on classroom teaching practice in Saudi universities.

Meanwhile, the educational institutions in Saudi Arabia need to put into consideration that teachers' who are recruited from different educational contexts around the globe may bring in better experiences as to teaching the language to their Saudi students than what they had been used to in their scholastic systems. Those teachers need to be given a freer hand to teach in a way that would promote critical thinking and would enhance higher order thinking skills. The logistics of the programs they are working within need to be modified in order to enable those teachers to give the students better experiences rather than just teaching for tests. This cannot be done except with real cooperation among those recruited teachers and a system which exhibits more understanding to the imperative of introducing more challenging teaching models into the classroom.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are two limitations regarding this case study. The first limitation is the generalizability of the findings. It is true that qualitative research produces thick and rich descriptive data, but generally applying the findings on other cases and in other settings may not be valid (Simons, 1996). Perhaps conducting more studies with different tools may "lead to better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases" (Stake, 2005).

The second limitation is related to the insider position of the researchers. This might have influenced the analytic distance of the data. Belonging to the community we were investigating offered familiar conditions and many pre-conceived ideas of which were verified. Nonetheless, the insider position also gave us an edge as we could find candidates who trusted us and easily collaborated with us for data collection (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions

Part 1: A Teacher's Biography

1. How many years have you been working as a teacher/ instructor of English at Secondary/ University level?
2. How do you feel about teaching English? How would you describe your / please talk about your teaching philosophy?
3. What type of courses have you taught before you started teaching at the KAU/ELI?
4. What type of English courses do you teach at the Foundation Year Program?

Part 2: Expectations/Realizations

1. What do you think the recruiters' expectations in terms of teaching strategies are when they hire teachers for the KAU/ELI?
2. So you suppose you were hired according to those expectations?
3. What about your own expectations?
4. Are there other expectations as well from e.g. parents, students, others?
5. To what extent do these different sets of expectations match?
6. Based on your experience at the ELI, to what extent do you think the different sets of expectations (yours, the recruiters, parents, students, others] have been realized?

7. Can you give specific examples of classroom teaching to show how the expectations of different agents (you, the institution, the parents, the students, etc.) have been realised?
8. Have you changed your methods to bridge the gap among the expectations of the different agents in the educational environment of the ELI?
9. What did you do?

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