

# Can We Teach our Children English Language without Affecting our National Identity

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## Abstract:

Teaching English for children in Saudi Arabia, as an Arab Muslim country is a matter of debate these days. A team of educators think that it is not recommended to teach English for young children because this may have a negative effect on our Arabic and Islamic identity, which may in turn result in dangerous social effects in the future. However, the novelty of the present study lies in its being against such deeply rooted beliefs, which shaped our orientations towards English as a foreign language. The present study aims at ending the debate relevant to teaching English language for small children. This can hopefully be carried out throughout the study by submitting *social, psychological* and *linguistic* solutions which are to be employed as scientific and logical analysis for the origin of such ancient beliefs and a guide to the way to modify them.

**Key words:** Teaching - English language –national identity.

## Introduction:

The present study is an attempt to mitigate the concern relevant to the issue of teaching English for children and its expected side effect, the negative effect on our national identity in Saudi Arabia, which is the main aim of this study. Therefore, it is useful to start by clarifying the real reasons which made learning English language a very important orientation these days. Such reasons explain why English language is an international language as well as a means of communication among different communities. Globalization then made studying English a prerequisite for our students. Cook (2008:1-3) explained the importance of language in general that it is a means for constituting both our social and individual identities. The importance of language lies in its importance in achieving essential goals in life such as social, educational, religious as well as business and career. He added that it also helps us to remember the past and plan for the future. Language helps us also to communicate and exchange ideas and points of view as

Learning another language may also be useful in fulfilling similar objectives in other societies. Therefore, learning English as a foreign language for example may benefit in communication and exchanging ideas with other people who belong to other societies. For (Cook, 2008), knowing another language may mean: getting a job; a chance to get educated; the ability to take a fuller part in the life of one's own country or the opportunity to emigrate to another. Such rare chances may not be available without knowing a second language as he called, which we will call a foreign language. Learning a foreign language may also be useful as an expansion of one's literary and cultural horizons when he reads the great works of literature composed by famous authors and scholars of the foreign language. Another benefit of learning a foreign language lies in the expression of one's political opinions and religious beliefs. This can be fulfilled by using the foreign language in order to publish a certain thought , points of view or one's ideology relevant to the politics of his own country to let other societies recognize our regimes for example and to compare ours with that of other societies.

Hence, learning a foreign language to serve Islam is a valuable aim also in trying to spread Islam by means of an international language such as English. This may benefit in helping many people from other countries who speak different languages to convert to Islam, since we can communicate with them only by means of English. We can hence find that (Cook,2008) believes that "helping people to acquire second languages more effectively is an important task for the twenty-first century because a second language affects people's careers and possible futures, their lives and their identities" (ibid.).He considered the concept *second language* applicable to learning any language apart from the native language. For example one may study or acquire a second, a third, a fourth or any number of languages and hence all of them are considered in the place of *second language*.

Then, we are approaching the perspective which sees learning English language as a foreign language (EFL) a way to enhance our link to our Islamic and Arabic identity and not the reverse. Out of this very perspective, we expect such a valuable benefit to Islam from learning English and not the reverse. At least, it will help us to be acknowledged with the West's point of view about Islam and Arabs. Moreover, we will be able to submit appropriate replies, in English, against any negative ideas about Islam. This will in turn let the West be acknowledged with our Islamic and Arabic identity by transferring our thought to them by means of English

Language. Learning English then becomes not only a regular requirement, but also it amounts to being a prerequisite to enable us to fulfill such noble aims.

## **1. Helpful perspectives to deal with the concern of teaching English to children in Arab countries**

The present section of this study submits logical solutions for teaching English language without any negative effects on our national and Islamic identities. It also explains the source of concern and negative orientations towards teaching English in general in the kingdom and how to avoid them. Then, the researcher introduces a solution which disseminates any concern from the social, psychological and linguistic perspectives.

### **1.1. From the social perspective**

#### **1.1.1. The components of national identity of a community**

It constitutes a matter of importance to understand the components of a national identity in general which goes for both Arab and foreign countries. According to (Clark, 1990; Huntington, 1997), national identity has relatively unique components which sets culture apart and enables it to exist. Such unique components differ from a community into another and it distinguishes the behavior of a certain group of people who belong to a certain community from another group of people who belong to another community. If we apply that to compare Islamic and western identities, the difference will be clear because the components of a western culture are completely different from the components of Islamic culture. This constitutes one of the basic reasons behind concern relevant to teaching English language to Saudi children; the fear originates from the probability of transferring certain non-preferred elements from the components of western community to Muslim children in our Saudi community especially in childhood.

Smith (1991:14), stated that national identity has distinguished features which can be summarized as follow: "1. an historic territory, or homeland 2. Common myths and historical memories 3. A common, mass public culture 4. Common legal rights and duties for all members 5. a common economy with territorial mobility for members." . National identity was also defined by Keillor et al (1996: 58) and Keillor and Hult (1999: 67) as a "set of meanings owned by a given culture that sets it apart from other cultures.". Further it was considered by Keillor et al( 1999: 67) as "a 'sense' of culture" . Keillor et al. (1996) also defined national identity as "set of meanings owned by a given culture that sets it apart from other cultures", which is similar to the preceding definition.

Considering these definitions of *national identity*, we can look at the national identity out of the definition of the two components of the very expression *national identity*, which is *nation* plus *identity*. First, *a nation* is defined according to Oxford dictionary (1933:30) as "An extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent, language, or history, as to form a distinct race or people, usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory." As well as the definition of a nation, it is useful also to recognize the definition of *nationalism* according to Oxford dictionary (1933:31) as "A form of socialism, based on the nationalizing of a country". Smith (1991:71) stated that *nationalism* "invents nations where they do not exist". This relates nationalism to a psychological point of view which is useful to an individual and his relationship with the community in which he lives. According to Bloom (1990:59) "it actually benefits the individual, in terms of psychological security, to make identification with the nation." Identity then can be defined according to Olson (2002) as having certain distinctive attributes which " make you unique as an individual and different from others"

#### **1.1.2. The components of Islamic identity is different from Western identity**

We can, therefore, say that national identity for any country, in any area in the world, basically includes each of the following three components; *Religion, language and culture*, represented in social traditions, in addition to other components. We selected such three components for their being essential for any national identity in any community as well as to our study relevant to English language as a component of other community's national identity. Therefore, it is clear now the reason for which there is a common concern relevant to teaching English language. Because English language belongs to another community with a different culture which has no similarity to others, we are probably worried that any components of such culture, the western culture may be transferred to our children especially if English is taught to them in such young age. Such concern is logical because western culture may be acquired by our children and negative results of such kind of culture are predictable .This, in turn, may constitute a considerable problem which may grow with our children until it becomes out of control in the future. But if we contemplate such issue more carefully, we will find out that English as a foreign language, belonging to a foreign culture of a different community with a different national identity, constitutes only a fragment from such foreign culture.

However, teaching English to children proved to be very important especially in young age. A child, then, can master English language better than an adult. It may be because of the longer duration of time he was exposed to the foreign language. Therefore, it is better to teach English in childhood if we wish to have our students master it better in the future. We can then plan to behave against the concern relevant to the acquiring the foreign culture for the children in the future. This can be achieved by extracting English language from the components of the Western identity and adapting the learning environment to our Islamic culture. In other words, we can deal with the English language only by bringing it to our Islamic environment without any other relevant components of the foreign culture. We can put all our emphasis on teaching English language only and exclude any components relevant to the foreign undesired culture. This way, we may be able to save our national identity together with teaching our children English language, which is essential to cope with the current changes of the modern world. However, this aim requires a certain strategy in order to be carried out successfully the way we desire.

### **1.2. From the psychological perspective:**

In this perspective, applying the idea of *SCHEMA* may be a good solution for the problem. *SCHEMA*, the plural of *schemata*, first introduced by Piaget (1926), as a cognitive development for children that takes place in stages. It can be useful in this respect to explain another side of the concern and negative orientation relevant to teaching English in childhood. Achieving such goal may lead to a balanced solution for such issue. Schema is defined on <http://ibpsychologynotes.wordpress.com/> as “cognitive structured (mental templates or frames) that represent a person’s knowledge about objects, people or situations”. It deserves mentioning that schema is used to “to organize our knowledge, to assist recall, to guide our behavior, to predict likely happenings, and to help us make sense of current experiences” (ibid.). Schema is simplify reality and it is also claimed that “Schemas are assumed to operate in a “top-down” way to help us interpret the “bottom-up” flood of information reaching our senses” because they came originally come from our past experiences and knowledge.

Schema is also defined on [http://sites.wiki.ubc.ca/etec510/Schema\\_Theory#Definition](http://sites.wiki.ubc.ca/etec510/Schema_Theory#Definition) as “an abstract structure of knowledge, a mental representation stored in memory upon which all information processing depends”. It was also defined simply in a similar meaning on <http://www.alleydog.com/cognotes/schemas.html> as the “generalized knowledge about situations and events” and it is described also as “a guide to our recognition and understanding of new information by providing expectations about what should occur” (ibid.). Schema also may represent knowledge at different levels, e.g. cultural truths, linguistic knowledge or ideologies. Schema also is said to be such mental templates that represent a person’s knowledge about people, situations or objects, and which originate from prior knowledge or experiences.

On the other hand, schema was defined as a negative belief acquired in a certain situation. According to David C. Bricker & Jeffrey E. Young on <http://www.davidbricker.com/clientsguideSchemaTherapy.pdf> as “an extremely stable, enduring negative pattern that develops during childhood or adolescence” and it is also believed that such schema is “elaborated throughout an individual’s life” (ibid.) and the important point about schema is that “we view the world through our schemas”. It is acceptable then that “Schemas are important beliefs and feelings about oneself and the environment which the individual accepts without question” (ibid.). But the problem arises for negative schemas when they occur in a special background in certain circumstances. This may end in composing faulty schemas, which may regard for only a side of the situation apart from the whole.

A simple example about the possibility of this typical change or the modification of a schema in children can be given to approach this idea; a child may have a schema in mind about anything that is round that it is the ball with which he plays every day. Therefore, if he sees a watermelon, a cantaloupe or any round fruit, he will say that this is a ball and he may start playing with it, according to the schemata in his mind about any round object until he receives any modification to such schemata that a watermelon may be round. Then he starts to make new schemata about the new object with its new characteristics which distinguishes it from any similar object.

Schema is closely related to the components of national identity. Schema includes any beliefs relevant to our culture, language or religion. Those three elements inevitably constitute our personalities and common social attitudes which distinguish our society from other western societies and our schema as well. Such schema consists of cognitive units we acquire unconsciously through generations. I.e. our identity includes Islam, Arabic language and eastern culture. Similarly, the identity of any western society includes also the same three components but in a different kind of components; Christianity, English (or European languages) and western culture. The origin of such concern relevant to teaching Saudi children English language therefore arises from the possibility of acquiring such western culture as mentioned above. But if we could manage it and exclude only the very (English) language out of the other western identity components, it would be a good achievement. It

would also be more successful if we could achieve a degree of reconciliation between English language and our national identity and the schema relevant to it, represented in Islamic culture in specific.

Putting all the previous definitions in consideration and applying the concept of *schema*, we can say that we, as Muslims, might have composed a typical faulty schema about English language because of the cultural circumstances surrounding English language, especially when such schema are proved to be “self-perpetuating, and are very resistant to change” (ibid.). If we are convinced that we have gained such faulty schema about English language teaching for children because of relating learning English as a foreign language to its source culture a long time ago through generations, we will be able to conclude that this is the very reason behind such concern. The source of this concern originates from a desire to preserve our national identity from any external elements which may spoil it. We can, therefore, suggest a treatment to fix such deeply rooted schemas relevant to such foreign language belonging to an undesired identity, by modifying such schemas about teaching English to children in specific. Such schemas are deeply rooted and they are strongly biased to protecting our children from foreign cultures to maintain their high Islamic morals and enhance our national identity. But we should be more flexible towards the issue of English as a foreign language only for the global importance of English. In other words, we should look at English from the perspective of its global importance in isolation of its original culture. This requires applying certain modifications on these deeply rooted schemas. Such modification may be performed successfully if they are performed with care. Such care is very important in teaching our children English as a foreign language without exposing them to the negative side of foreign culture or any negative components belonging to the foreign culture.

If we apply the possibility of modifying schemata on the situation of teaching English language, we may be able to solve the problem and the debate relevant to the clash between teaching English to children and national Islamic identity. We can accept such modification to cope with the changing world around us and to pace its urgent requirements. English is now used as a global language to relate a vast number of countries in business, culture and politics. We have no time to wait for the movement of translation to let us know what is going on in the world. We need to teach our children English language to prolong the duration of time in which they study English. This will enable them to master English language and use it smoothly in the future for researching and discovery. This will benefit our community in all domains in the future.

### 1.3. From the linguistic perspective

It is very important to consider some important linguistic concepts in order to evaluate the outcomes of learning English in our Islamic and Arabic community. Such deep understanding with clear differentiation between some linguistic concepts, which may be confusing, might have a positive effect on our orientation towards teaching English language for children. We should put our emphasis on answering basic questions; what is the difference between *foreign language* and *second language*? What is the difference between *language learning* and *language acquisition*? What is the difference between *competence* and *performance*? And to ask if there is any clash between first language acquisition and second language learning.

#### 1.3.1. The difference between a foreign language and a second language

Many people may assume that second language is the same as a foreign language in order to simplify the issue of language learning. But in spite of the fact that they are extremely similar, there is a slight difference between them. Such difference is seen by (Cook, 2008) in the comparison he held “a second language is for immediate use within the same country; a foreign language is for long-term future use in other language”. Therefore, learning a second language may be imposed on the nationals of a certain society because of its urgent use in the society for communication. On the other hand, a person may decide to learn a foreign language for a benefit in the future or for a career. (Halliday, 1975), cited in (Cook, 1998), distinguished between learning a first language as “learning how to mean” (ibid.) which is relevant to acquiring the methods that make a person capable of expressing what he feels in order to communicate with others. People who decide to learn a foreign language or a second language on the other hand “already know how to mean” (ibid.). This is a very important point in distinguishing between acquiring first language and learning second language.

A foreign language then is the language which is to be studied in educational institutions only and not to be used in communication in society. Therefore, we can say that English is taught in Saudi Arabia as a foreign language and not as a second language. The use of English in Saudi Arabia then is enclosed in some textbooks and limited hours per week in schools or Universities. There is no clash then between learning English as a foreign language and acquiring and learning our mother tongue, Arabic language. Hence, there will not be any probable interference between our mother tongue, Arabic and learning a foreign language.

### 1.3.2. The difference between language acquisition and language learning

In order to differentiate between English as a foreign language and English as a second language in a more extensive way, we should distinguish between *language learning* and *language acquisition*. I.e. *language acquisition* is relevant only to our mother tongue, Arabic language in Saudi Arabia and all Arab countries. Infants learn a native language unconsciously and store its sounds and meanings in mind since birth time until the time they will be able to speak when their vocal organs become mature. *Language learning* on the other hand is a completely different story. It deals with exposing our children to a formal setting of learning, i.e. in schools in order to learn a *foreign language*. We should then pay attention to the fact that children are to be admitted to schools around the age of six years old in which they can master their mother tongue, Arabic. Therefore, there may not be any concern towards the issue of the probable interference between English, as a foreign language and our native language, Arabic language.

Educators differentiated between *language learning* and *language acquisition*. Language acquisition as mentioned above is relevant to native language while language learning is relevant to a foreign language. Second language also can be acquired in certain societies side by side with the native language. In other words, the nationals in certain countries are to be bilinguals if they acquire two languages at the same time, one of them is the native language and the other is the second language. Second language also is being learned in schools later exactly like the native language, apart from acquiring this language in childhood. For example, in Canada, there are two official languages; Canadians are able to speak both English and French. Both languages are to be taught in schools officially. In Saudi Arabic as well as in any Arab country, we study Arabic language in official educational institutions although it is our mother tongue.

At that point, we may be approaching a very important resolution for the confusion between a foreign language and a second language. A *foreign language* is clarified above as the language we may teach to our children in formal institutions at a certain age. In addition, we do not use it at home or in streets among the members of our community. A *second language* has a different story. It occupies a different status in the society comparable to native language. A second language is used in a certain society side by side to the mother tongue. It is used everywhere in the society. A child *acquires* it exactly like his mother tongue. He masters it unconsciously since early childhood. Mastering a second language does not require attending classes in schools i.e. Canadian speak English as their mother tongue but they can master French also as a second language. Therefore, we can conclude that teaching English for small children who can master their native language, Arabic, will never constitute any matter of concern if this is the case. A foreign language will be learned and not to be acquired or put in a competition with the native language.

Krashen (1981:40) claimed that many studies relevant to teaching second language agreed about the presence of two linguistic environments for teaching a second language; one of them is the formal or artificial environment, which is found in the classroom and the other is informal or natural, which is found in the community for communication purposes. (Krashen and Seliger :1975) noted that the language learning environment in adults is distinguished by certain characteristics. These characteristics are summarized in *rule isolation* (i.e. using activities in which linguistic rules are presented) and *feedback* (i.e. error correction). This is different from the acquisition environment for young children. This means that language learning takes place on the conscious level while language acquisition takes place on the unconscious level. Again, this refers to a lack of interference between a native language and a foreign language.

### 1.3.3. The difference between competence and performance

It is useful in the current study to differentiate between *competence* and *performance*. It helps those who study language to distinguish between casual errors of language learners and errors resulting from lack of knowledge about this language. In order to give a clearer approach such differentiation between competence and performance, it would better to understand the meaning of the concepts in general. In [http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Language\\_competence\\_and\\_performance](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Language_competence_and_performance), competence is defined generally as the “ability to do something, or knowledge about something, to a certain required or acceptable standard” and performance as “actually doing something, i.e. using one's ability or knowledge to do something”. Hence language competence can be defined as “the ability or knowledge to do something by using language”. For example we use language to speak, write, read what others have written or to listen and understand the speech of others.

Chomsky (1965) defined *competence* as “the knowledge you (subconsciously) possess about how to speak a language” and performance as “the real world linguistic output”. It is logical then to say that performance can reflect competence effectively. On the other hand, performance of any speaker of a language may contain linguistic errors in grammar or pronunciation. This may take place even for native speakers. These errors may be

casual and as a result of slips of the tongue or generalization of rules to irregular cases. For example, an English speaker in the middle of his speech may say *comed* instead of *came* or *childs* instead of *children*, and so on.

We can benefit from the distinction between these concepts in class by pressing on both of them in certain situations we find appropriate in class. For example, we put all our emphasis on enriching the competence of English language learners. Then we test their performance in the very knowledge we added to their competence. For example, we can teach our students the rules of plural and tenses and then we test them in written and oral performance for this new knowledge added to their competence. That is to say, we acknowledge the way they use their knowledge (competence) about the language in application (performance). We can also have higher level of expectation of the learners' performance according to their competence, the knowledge we taught them about the language.

It is useful then in our teaching English classes in Saudi Arabia to apply a kind of balance between competence and performance. The teacher should teach grammar and vocabulary for example and then try to find out their reflection in the performance. This means that theory (i.e. competence) is not enough in teaching English language. Practice (i.e. performance) is also important to teach the foreign language in a complementary way. Performance can also be more important in certain linguistic situations such as speaking and conversation because it reflects a considerable level of competence.

#### 1.3.4. English language and linguistic imperialism

In Collins advanced English dictionary *imperialism* is defined as "a system in which a rich and powerful country controls other countries or a desire for control over other countries", which is a general definition for the concept. In this sense, linguistic imperialism then can be understood as the control of English language speaking countries on the other countries out of the methods of teaching English as a foreign or second language in these countries. Such control, from the linguistic side, may also go beyond the methods of English teaching. It can amount to political and commercial dominance as well. (Robert Phillipson:1992) called this '*linguistic imperialism*' (Caltung:1980), cited in (Cook:2008), added that the relationship between the country which owns the language and the other countries which use this language '*a dominant center*' by which he means the powerful western countries and '*dominated periphery*' by which he means the under-developed countries. In this type of relationships, the dominant country forces the periphery countries to use its first language for business purposes. It is clear then that this seems a form of political dominance because "language is not politically neutral" (ibid.) . It deserves mentioning that UK affords a lot of money for teaching English in the form of English course books or scholarships for studying in English in the UK.

However, our main area of concentration in what is meant by linguistic dominance lies in the control on the methods of teaching English as a foreign or second language from the side of the native speaker. At this point we can ask a very important question; Does English language in a certain Arabic country such as Saudi Arabia may amount to the level of imperialism such as the dominated countries?. To answer such a question, we should determine the reasons for which English language is taught in Saudi Arabia for sometimes "as a legacy of colonialism, the original speakers of an international language feel that they have the right to say what it should be or how it should be taught"(ibid.). Some countries prefer teaching foreign languages to their people by native speakers only. For example "the Alliance Francaise in London claiming French taught by French nationals only; the Eurolingua Institute, lessons are given by experienced and fully qualified mother tongue teachers...etc" (ibid.).

It is suitable in Saudi Arabia for example to use native speakers in teaching English as a foreign language. They will give the students a real experience and correct pronunciation for their mother tongue. On the other hand, teaching English in a certain country does not always mean dominance. Each country should determine what is right for its nationals. In Saudi Arabia, for example, only Saudis can decide what is right for Saudis in or outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We can benefit from the Chinese experience relevant to learning English in China. A Chinese spokesman said that "For China we need a Chinese method" (ibid.). Therefore, each country can decide and select what is good and useful for its people. For Saudi Arabians, such political or commercial dominance has no existence at all. (Cook: 2008) added that 'setting aside political or commercial motivations, the responsibility of international languages has passed out of the hands of the original owners" (ibid.). This means that the language will be used for its benefit as an international language for interaction between countries for definite purposes determined by such countries. Then he added that "the right to say how something should be *taught* is even less a right of the native speaker than the right to say how something should be *said*" (ibid.).

If we consider this fact, we may feel free to compose the curriculum which suits our culture according to our needs in our country since we are free from both political and commercial dominance. Moreover, some countries

which are dominated by a dominant center, the dominated periphery which are obliged to use English language for political and business reasons, can themselves make business together using the language of the dominant center without reference to such country, which originally owns the language.

## **2. Learning English as a foreign language, the correct way**

The present section constitutes an essential complement for the first. Its importance lies in its reference to the process of mastering English language in the correct way. In order to master English well, we should consider the methods of teaching English from the perspective of its native speakers. The current section, therefore, deals with the best ways to learn English as a foreign language in general and in a way that fits our Islamic identity in specific. This represents a logical solution for the concern relevant to English language and it can also find out a correction for certain points of view relevant to the avoidance of teaching children English as a foreign language. This can be clarified and fulfilled through the following points:

### **2.1. Basic skills in learning a foreign language.**

As mentioned above, educators differentiate between language learning and language acquisition. We understand also that language acquisition cannot be equal to learning. Language acquisition takes place only in childhood while learning for both native language and second language takes place at the school age. When a child acquires his native language or a second language, he will be able to use it in communication. He will be able to speak his mother tongue and understand anybody speaking this native language. On the other hand, this ability to speak and listen does not mean a complete mastery of the language. Although the child can speak and listen to his mother language, he may not be able to read or write in pre-school stage. English illiterate people can speak English and listen to English well, but they cannot read or write and so does a native illiterate Arabic speaker. They lack two basic skills of their mother tongue, reading and writing. To be able to read or write, a child must be in a certain age around five or six years old and he should LEARN the rest of the language skills, *reading* and *writing* formally in a school.

Therefore, we can say that any language in the world has four basic skills; *listening, speaking, reading and writing*. Learning takes place for a native language as well as for a foreign language in formal institutions. The difference appears in the timing only. We start learning our native language following to acquiring it. We join schools to learn *reading* and *writing* (i.e. unconscious level) following to acquiring the language through *listening* and *speaking* (i.e. conscious level). Conversely, in learning a foreign language such as English, we start in reading and writing. This is a common method of teaching a foreign language in most of educational institutions in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, listening and speaking become marginal or optional in the class for volunteers only. This inevitably creates a generation of English learners who master reading and writing for example and score high marks but they are unable to communicate or listen to an English speech well.

#### **2.1.1. Four skills are required to learn any language**

In order to master any language in the world as mentioned above, four basic skills are required; *reading, writing, listening and speaking*. When any infant acquires his mother tongue, he listens first to the language spoken around him, internalize all the sounds and then he speaks as soon as his vocal organs become mature and capable of pronunciation. He is capable though of speaking in correct grammar unconsciously without learning the grammatical rules of his native language. Therefore, he speaks spontaneously and the language is proved to be natural. This is applicable also for Arabic infants acquiring Arabic language in Saudi Arabia and in any other Arab country. It is also applicable to English infants who acquire English language since childhood without learning English grammar.

In Saudi Arabia, we suffer from the low level of English language learners in preparatory and secondary schools as well as for many students in Universities. The origin of the problem lies in the methods of teaching them English, not the level of the students themselves. Therefore, if we modify the methods of teaching English for the current generation of learners, we may enjoy of highly-qualified Arab students who master English language well. The problem in our schools in teaching English is concentrating only on writing and reading English (the competence), together with ignoring listening and speaking English (the performance) in most classes for the majority of students. However, English as a foreign language cannot be learned or transferred to learners in its natural form without being listened or spoken.

We can also find that most students in Saudi schools cannot pronounce or speak English properly. The teacher who is qualified with the mission of teaching English tends to apply traditional methods of teaching English, which he was accustomed. The result is poor English users though they can read and write English well. Many students can score high marks in English exams, but they are incapable of using English properly in its real-life situations. So that, we can conclude that our students are good and capable of learning English well, but they need to be exposed to the correct environment which will help them to master English well and enables

them to use it properly. (Krashen:1985) described that as “acquisition poor environment’ when the environment of learning a foreign language lacks basic skills such as speaking and listening. Therefore, we can benefit from all that and teach our student English in a learning environment similar to acquisition environment. We can use all our potentials and use native speakers’ pronunciation to create an English learning Environment which is not opposing to Islamic principles.

### **2.1.2. The importance of determining the goals of learning English**

It is very important for the language learner to determine the goals for which they are to learn English. English learning goals may vary from a country to another. Therefore, we should determine exactly the goals for which we want our children to learn English now in an earlier age in Saudi Arabia. For example, one of the goals of English language teaching is to achieve the benefit of brain training on using more than one language which is supported by (Landry:1974) who claimed that “people who know two languages think more flexibly than monolinguals”. (Cook: 2008) also thought that learning a language helps people to think better in a more logical way. Another goal of teaching English may be the communication of English learners with other English speakers in other countries. Another goal of English language learning is the “appreciation of serious literature; the student’s increased self-awareness and maturity; the appreciation of other cultures and races.

It is useful also to benefit from the experiences of other countries with English language learning by understanding their underlying goals behind teaching their students English. For example “English is not learnt in *China* because of its usefulness inside China” (Cook:2008). In other words, Chinese people do not learn English to use it with each other in different Chinese communities. They do not aspire for converting Chinese students to bilinguals for example. Instead, English is taught in China as a second language in “the educational system because of the benefits it brings from outside the home country” (ibid.). We can conclude here that learning English in China is useful for the Chinese for international purposes for an instance. Such benefit, therefore, may extend to learning other languages to have more international benefits for China. These benefits may vary from a person to another as they may be educational, cultural, scientific, cultural, political...etc. for an individual who decides to learn a second language for example. This is considered a useful goal to benefit in Saudi Arabia because “any language may be taught with the aim of promoting relationships with other countries that use it” (ibid.).

A similar goal of learning English as a second language can be found in *Israel*. In this country English is learned carefully to the Israeli people because it is seen as “the customary language for international communication and for overcoming barriers to the flow of information, goods and people across national boundaries” (English curriculum for all grades, 2002), cited in (Cook:2008). That is to say, Learning English language in such country may be useful economically and politically as well. Both of these purposes are very important for any country in the world and not only Israel because it is good to have international relationships with other countries by means of sharing one international language such as English. It is useful then to benefit from such economic and political goals in Saudi Arabia as well as in any Arab country. Such goal should be formulated according to the requirements of each country .In Saudi Arabia for example; such economic and political relations with a variety of countries may developed positively and succeed by means of teaching Saudi children English language well, in their capacity as representatives of our future in the kingdom. The goal of the new English curriculum in Israel is summarized in four domains; access to information (i.e.to interact effectively in a variety of situations) ; presentation (i.e. obtaining and making use of information from a variety of sources and media as well as the ability to present information in an organized manner) ; and appreciation of literature and culture , and language (i.e. to appreciate literature and other cultures and the nature of language). (ibid.)

In some countries, Saudi Arabia is one of them; many languages are used by non-nationals who work in these countries. Nationals may be unable to communicate with workers and contractors from other countries. Therefore, learning English in such context should be a one of the most important objectives. In Saudi Arabia for example, some contractors who are from Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, Yemen...etc. have no problem in communication with Saudi as they share the same native language, apart from a variety of dialects. But those who are from different countries, in which Arabic is not used, are many, such as those contractors from Asia such as India, Pakistan ,Bangladesh...etc. who represent a very large number especially as workers or others from European countries . In Pakistan for example, people speak four languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, Balochi and Sindi . On the other hand, “Urdu is used all over the country, as in Arabic countries for religious purposes. In addition, English is an official language” (Cook:2008). In Saudi Arabia also other nationalities are found from all over the world with different languages, French, German, Italian...etc.. Those occupy a considerable number of posts in all sectors in the Kingdom, educational, health... etc. Saudis therefore, need to communicate with these people for the development of the community. English language learning can be a good solution for



smooth communication with different nationalities inside Saudi Arabia. Again, this will be productive for the development of the future of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in all domains.

(Cook:2008) also summarized other goals for learning a second language, for us in Saudi Arabia English is considered a foreign language more than a second language. We selected such goals which seem to be suitable for us in Saudi Arabia. *One* of these goals of learning a second language is the ability to communicate with native speakers. This is useful especially if a Saudi citizen has to deal with English native speakers in business or had to travel abroad for a business or study. *Another goal* of learning English makes it good for its speakers when they are short-term visitors to another country. *A third goal* of learning a second language is a private goal which is summarized in the ability to communicate with spouses, siblings and friends when they are non-Arabs and speak English as their native language. *A fourth goal* for learning English as a second language is using the second language for specific purposes such as; the ability to write articles of opinion in an English journals or newspapers as well as for international business...etc. *A fifth goal* of learning English as a second language is the ability to convey education through such second language. Medicine and science is being taught in English in many countries. Finally, English is being taught in schools and Universities as a part of a curriculum for its global importance. Some careers require learning a second language such as being an English teacher, a translator, researching require learning a second language as well. There are also individual goals for learning a second language such as the desire for an individual to understand foreign cultures by reading these cultures in their original language.

## **2.2. Modern trends in learning English as a foreign language**

Modern trends in learning and teaching any language is based on considering a language as a living being, which may continue alive if used by people and die if no more used. Therefore they try to put all the emphasis on the way native speakers use the language to be taught. They try to direct the learners and teachers' attention towards natural methods of language learning. That is by creating learning situations similar to live situations in the life of its native speakers. In other words, native speakers' way of acquiring their language is to be considered the standard of learning a foreign language such as English these days. We should pay attention to the fact that learning a foreign language in the way a native speaker acquires or learns it does not constitute any danger for our native language. We will only benefit from the way they learn it in their formal or natural situation. Our learners of language also will learn it on the conscious level as well. (Howatt:2004) for example encouraged using second language in the class instead of first language or mother tongue as a modern and natural method of learning a foreign language. Such usage is considered a good practice for our Saudi learners of English since teacher will try to create an artificial environment for practicing English inside the class. Such revolt in language teaching originally took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as mentioned above, in opposition to the "stultifying methods of grammatical explanation and translation of texts which were then popular" (ibid.). Therefore, we can conclude that it was a revolution against traditional methods of language learning which produced learners who are supposed to master the language but in fact they are incapable of using it properly. Those learners might have mastered the foreign language theoretically but not practically.

### **2.2.1. Four common assumptions for English language teaching**

We can find out such orientations in the four assumptions common for the past 120 years, which are represented by Cook (2008:4-5). We may find some of such assumptions logical and useful if applied and we may find others require certain modifications to be applied. *Assumption 1* claims that: *The basis for teaching is the spoken, not the written language.* Such assumption came as a revolution in language teaching in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because its advocates were phoneticians. However, such assumption was opposed by other linguists who believe that writing also has its own distinctive characteristics. Their opposition was based on Halliday (1985:91) that "writing is not speech written down, nor is speech writing that is read aloud". Although assumption1 shows the importance of speech in the process of language learning, but it's better to consider writing also for its importance (i.e. native and non-native speakers suffer from spelling mistakes which cannot be corrected by speech alone).

*Assumption2* claims that: *teachers and students should use the second language rather than the first language in the classroom.* Such assumption is proved to be acceptable and successful as a modern method for teaching a foreign language. It came originally as a revolt to the traditional methods of teaching a foreign language such as the translation of texts in the classroom. It was acceptable in England as claimed by (DES, 1990:58), cited in (Cook: 2008) that "The natural use of the target language for virtually all communication is a sure sign of a good modern language course". It is also admired in Japan according to (MEXT, 2003), cited in (Cook: 2008), who claimed that "the majority of an English class will be conducted in English. If we applied such assumption on our learning environment in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we will find it a useful method in the process of

mastering English as a foreign language. (Harmer, 1998:129) also agreed with that opinion. According to him “The need to have those practicing English (rather than their own language) remains paramount”.

Although a considerable level of concern may appear on the way of achieving such assumption of using English in class instead of Arabic in communication, we can say that using English in communication in a class of learning English may not constitute any concern because our Saudi children have already mastered all the skills of their mother tongue, Arabic. They master Arabic listening, speaking, reading and writing. At this stage of mastering all Arabic skills as a native language they acquired since childhood, and meantime they do not have any idea about the skills of English, there is no concern towards their learning the skills of another language. English language will not be a second language to be acquired together with the native language. English will be taught to our children as a foreign language. They will be learning its four skills in an educational environment and they will use it in communication inside the class of teaching English only. English will not be used outside the class except in rare situations. Therefore, the purpose of using it in its natural form is only for academic purposes. Therefore, it is better for our children to use English in class instead of Arabic as a part of the learning process in order to master the language well. That is to expose them to a correct environment of learning language. Such situation can be compared to exposing learners to a scientific environment by carrying out Physics, Chemistry and Biology experiments in front of them in order to understand more and to be familiar with their subjects. Therefore, we can help English language learners to be familiar with English language by exposing them to real language situation exactly as we do in teaching them science.

*Assumption3* claims that: *Teachers should avoid explicit discussion of grammar.* This assumption also is considered a side of the revolt against traditional methods of teaching language. This assumption may be very useful if it used in a parallel way with the preceding assumption. In other words, if the language used naturally in communication inside the class room, there will not be any requirement to teach grammar first. The grammar then will be used unconsciously like native speakers and then the grammatical rules are to be explained later. On the other hand, the traditional methods of teaching English language, when the grammar is taught first, the learners will not be able to produce any sentence spontaneously. They will rather tend to think carefully in the structure of any sentence prior to producing it.

*Assumption4* claims that: *The aim of language teaching is to make students like native speakers.* Assumption4 then considers the native speaker is a model which any English learner should try to be similar to especially in pronunciation, grammar and speaking according to (Cook:2008). David Stern (1983:341) agreed clearly with that point of view that “the native speaker’s ‘competence’ or ‘proficiency’ or ‘knowledge of the language’ is a necessary point of reference for the second language proficiency concept used in language teaching”. Most linguists tend to agree with that assumption because the coursebooks as well as the real-life situations are designed originally for native speakers. Moreover, they are taken from the real environment of the native speaker to be taught to language learners in its naturalness. On the other hand, other arguments attack that assumption because they think that the model of a native speaker is “not appropriate for all circumstances and is unattainable for the vast majority of students” (ibid.). For us in Saudi Arabia, the model of a native speaker should be in front of us from the linguistic point of view only. In other words, we should do our best to master the skills of English language; reading, writing, listening and speaking provided that we should avoid any hints of Western culture. For example, it is recommended to let a native speaker tell stories or make conversations or listening situations which agree with our Islamic culture. This way, English language will be used in its naturalness in such appropriate conditions.

### **2.2.2. Krashen’s hypothesis in teaching English as a foreign language**

(Krashen, 1981) referred to the importance of considering two hypothesis in teaching English language for adults and children and he presented also the resulted of some studies which followed such hypothesis. They are summarized in the following points:

1. The informal environment can be efficiently utilized by the adult second language learner.
2. Formal study, or its essential characteristics, is significantly more efficient than informal exposure in increasing second language proficiency in adults.

Then he referred to the conclusion of Carroll’s study which supported the second hypothesis by referring to the fact that those who studied foreign language early achieved better scores and those who studied the foreign language in high school achieved better scores than those who studied the foreign language in college. (Carroll:136), cited in (Krashen, 1981) explained the finding of such study that “the attainment of skill in a foreign language is a function of the amount of time spent in its study”. Krashen, 1981 referred to the issue of adult learner’s proficiency relevant to language learning, commenting on the two hypothesis, that “when the effects of the ‘exposure’ and formal instruction are compared, it is reliably the case that more instruction means more high proficiency, while more exposure does not necessarily mean more proficiency in ESL”. The term

'Exposure' mentioned by Krashen was defined by Krashen and Seliger, 1976 as "the product of the number of years the student reported having spent in an English speaking country and how much English the student said he spoke every day". Krashen's studies therefore seem to support hypothesis II which showed the importance of spending more time in studying a foreign language to achieve proficiency in English, apart from existing in an informal environment. In other words, proficiency in English can be achieved in Saudi Arabia by studying English as a foreign language in a complementary way and it is not necessary to live abroad to be proficient in English.

In Saudi Arabia we can benefit from such hypothesis by making a kind of contribution between formal and informal environment for ESL. Krashen (1981) referred to the possibility of achieving both learning and acquisition of ESL, on the conscious level, in class provided that "the informal environment must be intensive and involve the learner directly in order to be effective" (ibid.). Krashen then found that it is important to distinguish between two important concepts; 'exposure -type' informal environment and 'intake-type' environments. He concluded that only the 'intake type' "provides true input to the language acquisition device". We should put all our emphasis on developing the quality of ESL learning in our classes by concentrating on the intake and creating exposure environments whenever it is possible. Such principle requires a higher-quality planning in the methods of teaching and curriculum designing by specialists

### **2.2.3. Content -based philosophy**

This method of language teaching is considered one of the most modern methods of foreign language teaching. Stryker and Betty Louver (1997) considered this method a new philosophy of learning a foreign language. They compared learning a second language to learning to ride a bicycle or learning to play tennis or to play a musical instrument. In other words, practice is important to learning a foreign language exactly like its importance for these skills. They aim at helping language learners to use the language from the first classes "as a real means of communication" (ibid.). Then they added another aim relevant to content-based philosophy that "Furthermore, the philosophy of content-based instruction (CBI) aims at empowering students to become independent learners and continue the learning process beyond the classroom" (ibid.) and they compared those who do not master the skills of using English well to a bird who left the nest before being able to fly.

This method may be useful if applied especially for higher classes since it constitutes a departure from traditional methods of teaching to focusing on a subject matter through which language is to be introduced. It is summarized by Stryker and Betty Leaver (1997) in three points; 1) it is based on a subject matter core. 2) It uses authentic language and texts, and 3) it is appropriate to the needs of specific groups of students. This method therefore is based on a top-down approach of learning language since it concentrates on the meaning rather than the form. Stryker and Leaver (1997) criticized the traditional bottom-up approach common in most curriculums that it "rarely spark student interest and motivation and have often created frustration and anxiety". It is useful then to recognize how Swaffer (in Krueger and Ryan 1993), cited in Stryker and Betty Leaver distinguished between the two approaches; in the *top-down approach* of CBI, the students are asked first to look first at the overall meaning of the subject matter before looking at the sentence level of vocabulary and syntax. *The bottom-up approach* of traditional language instruction on the other hand, focuses mainly on the words and syntactic structure within a sentence.

### **2.2.4. The interaction hypothesis**

Long (1983) originally based his *interaction hypothesis* in learning English as a second language on Krashen's *input* that the input of the second language should be comprehensible to its learners. But he added another dimension to Krashen's. He argued that "*modified interaction* is the necessary mechanism for making language comprehensible". By *modified interaction* he means not only simplification of the learning process to be comprehensible, but he aspires to another dimension which is giving the chance to the learners to interact with the teacher and with each other to reach to "mutual comprehension", Lightbown and Nina Spada (2006:43). Such interaction inevitably has a positive effect on the input process for "through these interactions, interlocutors figure out what they need to do to keep the conversation going and make the input comprehensible" (ibid.).

Long (1983) summarized this relation between modified interaction and language acquisition; 1) Interactional modification makes input comprehensible. 2) Comprehensible input promotes acquisition, therefore 3) interactional modification promotes acquisition. (ibid.). Moreover, Long's revised version of *Interaction Hypothesis* placed more emphasis on the importance of *feedback* to the interaction. Learners try to have more understanding of the linguistic issues, therefore they negotiate with their teacher relevant to difficult points and thus the input interaction becomes more comprehensible. Metchell and Florance Myles (2004) agreed with Long in the importance of feedback to the interaction as they see that "the more the input was queried, recycled and paraphrased, to increase its comprehensibility, the greater its potential usefulness as input"

Swain (1985) also referred to the importance of *output* when she proposed the ‘comprehensible output hypothesis’ in which the learners should express themselves and their understanding using the second language, the target language. She observed that “it is when learners must produce language that their interlocutor can understand that they are more likely to see the limits of their second language ability and the need to find better ways to express their meaning” (ibid.) . She referred also to the high importance of the learners’ production of the second language to the processing of grammar. Methcell and Myles (2004) claimed that in her opinion “only second language production really forces learners to undertake complete grammatical processing” which in turn leads to “the development of second language syntax and morphology” more effectively.

### 2.2.5. The noticing hypothesis

Schmidt (1990,2001), cited in Lightbown and Nina Spada (2006:44-45), referred to the importance of *noticing* issue in the process of language learning for although *noticing* alone does not result in acquisition but it is essential for learning a language on the other hand. He suggested that “nothing is learned unless it has been noticed”. Therefore, he proposed the “noticing hypothesis”. The idea of this hypothesis came to his mind as a result of a personal experience when he went to Brazil to learn ‘Portuguese’ as a second language. He discovered later following learning a considerable amount of the language that some features of the environment began to enter his second language system only when he noticed because they were brought to his attention in class. He also based a part of his hypothesis on the psychological learning theories. He hypothesized that “second language learners could not begin to acquire a language feature until they had become aware of it in the input”(ibid.) . It is useful then in our classes to be supplied with objects, pictures or any other elements which enhance noticing and hence the learning process.

### 2.3. Factors affecting language learning

Applying modern theories of learning English as a foreign language may be effective in a certain society and may not be effective in another. Therefore, we can use all our potentials to apply the best methods and theories of learning English, but still we may not attain our desired aims. Such fault may be explained by external factors to the English teaching program. A teacher should pay attention to such factors for their serious result on the language learning process. Such factors are relevant more to the learners themselves. They can be summarized in the age of the learners, the learners’ activity, motivation to learn the language, aptitude as well as the motivation in the class setting itself and their mastery of the spoken language. Lightbown and Nina Spada (2006) , cited in Candlin and Neil Mercer(2001)referred to the importance of considering such factors.

They think that the *age factor* is the most effective factor in the language learning in addition to the importance of *motivation* and *individual differences* in the success of the process of language learning. The problem of older learners is their having certain fixed beliefs about the correct method of learning in general and in learning a second language in specific. They may not accept modern methods of learning a second language and therefore not applying them properly. Therefore, applying modern methods of teaching English may be more effective for younger learners. Therefore, it seems more useful to start teaching English as a foreign language in younger age.

## Results and Recommendations

**This part** of the current study includes **recommendations** and **solutions** for effective and safe learning of English language in Saudi Arabian primary schools. Such recommendations can be summarized as follow:

- a- Effective language learning includes putting an emphasis on the four skills of learning any foreign language; reading, writing, listening and speaking. The problem is included in the English teachers’ continuous concentration only on the skills of reading and writing (the competence). On the other hand, listening and speaking (performance) may not occupy the same status of reading and writing. Exams on the other hand also put the majority of the emphasis of teaching a foreign language on the skill of **writing**, a single skill of a four-skill language. **Therefore**, new methodologies are recommended in primary schools in order to teach our children English language effectively. i.e. They should listen to real-life conversations made by native speakers in order to have real experience with language. They should also be given the chance to communicate together in English or with native speakers, to be employed in each primary school for this purpose.
- b- A special curriculum, which agrees with Islamic culture, is recommended. A team of professional translators and education experts should collaborate in order to carry out such task.
- c- Such curriculum is to be designed of a simple English translation of the stories of Quran as well as the tales of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions.

- d-** English literature and western culture should not be introduced to primary schools students. I.e. Shakespearean tales. They can be introduced in preparatory and secondary schools with care. I.e. Extracting any details which disagree with our Islamic and eastern culture.
- e-** Undergraduate English department students should receive high-quality training on the four skills of English in order to qualify them as perfect English teachers. I.e. language labs with modern software are essential.
- f-** **Extra** translation courses are recommended for English departments postgraduates in order to qualify them to join the team of curriculum translators.
- g-** **Translation project are recommended for graduation from English departments in the faculties of Arts. Such projects should reflect any side of translated or composed lesson plans or stories of Islamic values.**

#### **Conclusion:**

**The study ended to the following conclusions:**

- **Teaching English to children is a prerequisite these days because all modern inventions and discoveries are written in English. in other words, for a lot of reasons relevant to globalization**
- **Emphasis on the four skills of English, in the task of teaching English, must be made equally in any formal institutions for teaching English.**
- **Translation has an eminent role in the project of designing an Islamic curriculum.**
- **Modern methods of teaching English are essential in order to highlight the four skills equally.**
- **English Language learning can be used to serve Islam rather than being an opponent.**
- **Arabicizing sciences is not the solution to get rid of the effect of foreign culture. It is better to teach our students perfect English and then let them discover and depend on themselves.**

**Finally, we conclude that it is possible to teach Saudi children English without affecting national identity.**

Teaching English for children in Saudi Arabia, as an Arab Muslim country is a matter of debate these days. A team of educators think that it is not recommended to teach English for young children because this may have a negative effect on our Arabic and Islamic identity, which may in turn result in dangerous social effects in the future. However, the novelty of the present study lies in its being against such deeply rooted beliefs, which shaped our orientations towards English as a foreign language. Moreover, we can reply to such assumptions that our children are now surrounded with other circumstances which may have extremely dangerous effects for the future of the whole community more than merely learning a foreign language; Satellite channels, open access to the internet and modern cell phones with modems and so an easy and fast internet access. Such cell phones became like toys in the hands of very young children in primary schools and even younger. They should, therefore, constitute a higher level of concern. Unlimited access to the internet through cell phones and laptops and now some videogames (PSP-Wii...etc) is a source of danger which threatens the future of our children, especially with lack of control and censorship on the data received by cell phones and computers. The concern becomes worse when we discover the fact that some parents have no idea about the true components or limits of such technology to which their children are exposed. Sooner or later, those parents will suffer from negative changes in their children's behavior.

This indicates that learning English should not always be considered the only source of concern or danger for our national identity. In contrast, we should call for teaching English to our children and also for helping them to master it in childhood for academic reasons. We can teach them English language in a way that fits our social identity. Therefore, it is important to mitigate such concern by trying to find appropriate solutions for the problem, which may be social, Psychological or linguistic. Hence, we may change our negative orientation towards learning English as a foreign language and ,therefore, accept the idea of teaching English to children especially when it is framed safely in accordance with Islam and our social traditions. One more reason which may be logical for the importance of teaching English in general is its being in some situations "the only language that can be used almost anywhere on the globe between people who are non-native speakers" (ibid.). This situation may be in emergency, in wars, in a business mission, in legal situations...etc.

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#### Online resources

- 1- <http://www.brandingasia.com-natid.pdf>
- 2- <http://www.unet.univie.ac.at/~a0102141/downloads/National%20Identity%20-%20NATID.pdf>
- 3- <http://www.alleydog.com/cognotes/schemas.html>
- 4- [http://sites.wiki.ubc.ca/etec510/Schema\\_Theory#Definition](http://sites.wiki.ubc.ca/etec510/Schema_Theory#Definition)
- 5- <http://www.davidbricker.com/clientsguideSchemaTherapy.pdf>
- 6- <http://ibpsychologynotes.wordpress.com/>
- 7- [http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Language\\_competence\\_and\\_performance](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Language_competence_and_performance)

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