



Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: Transnational Practices in the Saudi TESOL Teacher Education Landscape

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Abstract

In the age of mobility—a mobility of knowledge, languages, cultures and practices—hundreds of female TESOL teachers from Asian, African, American, and Arab neighbouring countries and Europe are now teaching English language in Saudi higher education institutions. These teachers often join Saudi public and private schools with different language pedagogies and ideologies as well as various forms of capital (e.g., symbolic, economic, linguistics). Conceptually, these transnational teachers have created a learning environment in which transnational discourses have been deeply penetrated into the TESOL policy, curricula, and classroom pedagogical practices.

Through a 14-week ethnographic study, this paper critically examines the ways in which a number of 15 female pre-service teachers or student-teachers from the Department of Applied Linguistics at Union University (a pseudonym) negotiate, enact and justify their classroom pedagogical practices during their practicum course at public schools, where curricula, students, and teachers are all local (i.e., Saudis). Throughout the course of this study, the portfolios are utilized to document the empirical record of student-teachers' attitudes, teaching strategies, material design and management, and course expectations. Classroom observations, semi-structured interviews coupled with analysis of weekly experiential journals, bi-weekly reports, e-portfolios and reflective essays are utilized to further explore the underlying assumptions behind their classroom pedagogical practices. Before the analysis, this part of the study argues that due to the conflicting discourses between the transnational TESOL curricula these students had received at their university and the national English language teaching (ELT) curricula they are required to teach at public school, they have been put at multiple crossroads, including tensions, contradictions, paradoxes, ambivalent positions and other state of mind. It also highlights several inconsistencies between the student teachers' performance and the real-life teaching practice and models. Based on this paper a chapter will close with pedagogical implications for TESOL teacher education in the transnational world and some critical questions for the TESOL teacher education community.

Keywords: TESOL, ELT, Transnational.

Conceptual framework

In the dynamic globalized social milieu of present times, the survival of the fittest tends to take precedence when it comes to the efficacy and remodeling of pedagogical designs. Hence, not merely a national income generator, higher education is also an indispensable tool for promoting intellectual exchange of international collaborators, whereby asserting and integrating 'shared cultural identities and values' (Mok, 2012). With highly proprietorial quotient of higher education in the realm of education without borders, transnational higher education (henceforth, TNHE) seems to be the 'the most visible manifestation of the globalization and trade liberalization'. (Caruana, 2016).

Traditionally, transnational education has been ascribed to be 'an umbrella term 'that transcends many international educational platforms such as 'distance education, online education, collaborative education, for-profit education, and satellite campus teaching.' (Banner, 2016). Though TNHE remains to be rooted in international educational campuses and more often, foreign teachers with international experience or indigenous educators with international academic exposure, Knight (2016) contends to formulate a universally applied definition of transnational education (henceforth, TE) as transnational students should not be taken only for international students studying away from their respective countries of origin. Kasun (2014) attempts to define transnational learners as those who do not confine their learning to any geographical and political boundaries.

Transnational educational mobility and the power of English

The nexus between English language and the scope of international and transnational education has long been documented by the extensive body of research as being indispensable as lingua franca and 'the ' link to connect the various stimulations and dots of intellectual authority. It is not the magnitude of the speakers who make a language global but the vocation and communicative purpose



of the speakers of any language create the most intimate link between the assertion of a language's dominance and economic, technological and cultural power (Crystal,1997) . Hence, drawing towards a singular language as the language of international education , Robertson (2003) identifies English as the significant tool in the homogenization and modernization mission, that evolved as ' a new mantra' in the United States and the UK after WWII to modernize former colonies and allies Since , for the institutes of higher education, the key to internationalize is to modernize, where internationalization stands for the trajectory to reciprocate the impact of globalization in their respective educational areas. Since the aim of the 'borderless education ' is to help prepare global citizens, which refer to "a type of graduate required in the global world" (Maringe & Foskett, 2010), the learner needs to respond to the deregulated, hyper-competitive, post-industrial, and globalized new economy (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996).

Crystal(1997) investigates why so many countries selected English an official language or chose it as their principal foreign language in schools, presents a variety of reasons why English has emerged as ' a favoured foreign language'. The first reason registers the impact of historical tradition and political expediency, as manifested by the colonization during the 1900s, and the second explanation is the wish to engage and integrate with the economic, social or scientific power blocs and think tanks. Hence, it can be observed that the 'presence ' of English in the transnational circuits of higher education, is contingent with the scope to which respective governments are inclined to give adequate financial support to a language-teaching policy. If the environment of is a well-endowed in terms of dedicated resources through language access centers, media, libraries, schools, and institutes of higher education, there is a burgeoning of the number and quality of teachers able to teach the foreign language, which is in this case, English . language. Conversely, if there is a lack of government led initiative, and if books, tapes, computers, telecommunication systems and all kinds of teaching materials are not readily available, the achievement of language -teaching goals will be delayed.

Transnationalism and TESOL teacher education

Koch (2014) surveyed a joint case study of the King Abdullah University of Science Technology (KAUST) and Nazarbayev University (NU) to illustrate higher education projects in two progressive economies, Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia, respectively. These two resource-rich countries are symbolic of a broader movement across Asia to move toward 'a state-initiated model suitable for global competence. After drawing on an array of qualitative methods and through the examination of local discourse to promote knowledge-based economies, she argued that the cases of Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia are 'mirrors' of recent internationalization programs undertaken by 'elite' Western universities. Moreover, she highlighted the role of geopolitical context that created Saudi and Kazakhstani educational policy makers' planning to o invest so heavily in these world-class university projects. In a similar vein, Yang & Cheng (2018), with the critical and cultural analytical perspective, reason that for the current state and future direction of scholarship on modern industrialization and higher education, the training of methods of delivery in English hold supreme significance.

In present times, it is vital to be having a certain level of English competence to be qualified as a citizen of the globalized economy with access to the most recent information and knowledge to have access to social and economic development. Therefore, the English language teaching (ELT) business has become one of the major growing businesses around the world after the 1950s. Consequently, there is a snowballing call worldwide for skilled English teachers and for more operative methods to their training and professional advancement (Richards, 2008). The coinage of the term TESOL, standing for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, now encompasses what used to be called TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language).

Understandably, there is a massively expanding globalized need of a student body to undertake training in TESOL as more and more individuals worldwide are choosing to pursue postsecondary educations in English. For students whose former schooling has been in languages other than English, this would mean that it is imperative that they take courses in academic English before they embark on starting their formal postsecondary studies. With on-site, ,blended and online programs that would vary from diploma courses, to post-graduate taught and research degrees, the academic training of TESOL teachers has been evolved with much larger force since the late 1980s and early 1990s. The learners of such programs are required to participate successfully at the postsecondary level by acquiring additional knowledge and expertise in content, specialized vocabulary, grammar, discourse structure, and pragmatics. They are trained to negotiate a new range of sociocultural



situations such as student contact situations, intercultural harmony, team work, public presentations, and local and international deployment.

Transnational female TESOL teachers in the Saudi Higher education context

According to the current statistics on the website of Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia, there are 30 state universities, 13 private higher education universities along with 42 private higher education colleges. These public and private educational enterprises offer a diversified array of academic disciplines ranging from engineering, medicine, social sciences, arts and humanities. The universities and other institutions of higher education offer a wide array of courses, such as engineering and medical services among others. There have been competitive reforms in the educational policy of the kingdom to align with the global needs of the intellectual and academic community. (Al Shannag et al., 2013). English is the only taught foreign language by the means of a universal preparatory program across all the state and private institutions of higher education of the kingdom to strengthen the proficiency and competence of the target language.

Al-Nasser (2015) catalogued two challenges that are faced by an English language teacher in Saudi Arabia, where the former relates to the interference of Arabic language system with that of the target language in terms of orthographic, phonetic, semantic and metaphoric distinctions. The latter, that claims the clauses of cultural preservation as a reciprocator force, notices natural resistance towards learning English language albeit the reformation in education policy, curriculum and course syllabi. However, Faruk (2014) contests that during the current decade; the Saudi higher education system considers English as the language of modernity and liberation as the reigning requirement for the integration of global and local social discourses.

There are a number of native and non-native female English language teachers who provide a transnational experience of education to the female higher education students across the kingdom. According to the statistics issued by the Ministry of Education in 2015, Saudi women constitute 51.8 percent of Saudi university students, where there are 551,000 women studying bachelor's degrees compared to 513,000 men.

In tandem with the rise globalization, the burgeoning influx of native and non-native English language teachers enriched the transnational experience in the traditional higher education context of Saudi Arabia. Alharbi (2019) draws from the studies of Zohairy (2012), Rahman & Alhaisoni (2013), Al-Seghayer (2014, 2015), and Sofi (2015) to establish the trajectory of need analysis that reported the inadequacies in the preparatory programs for Saudi EFL teachers. The principal conclusion by this recent body of research advocates the implementation of systematic approaches to facilitate Saudi English language programs with emphasis on 'disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and technological pedagogical knowledge.' Hence, this aforementioned 'systematic approach' calls for a need-based in-service training and development of potential English teachers to equip them with confidence and the additional sociocultural skills required to manifest linguistic proficiency and competence.

The context of the study

A university college located in one of the two industrial cities that are found to lead the industrial future of Saudi Arabia has been started as human investment in the population of the city; the future generation of the Saudi students, which later expands to offer degrees in applied sciences to the students of the city itself and the neighbouring cities. Since the start in 2005, the English department has been the first academic department that has been framed as an academic department and a service provider to teach English courses in the foundation year. A proposal to develop the program to be Applied Linguistics; which is focused more on TEFL and Linguistics has been approved in 2014. During the four years, students build their theoretical knowledge in the field of Language and Learning, the science of the language itself, language acquisition, and TEFL and TESOL. Union University College, Women's Campus (henceforth, UUCW) is an affiliate of Union Industrial College, Saudi Arabia. After its inception 2006, UUCW has offered four major programs of specialization. Following the North American style of higher education, the terminal degree of Bachelor of Science is conferred upon the successful students at the end of a four-year-long study plan.

For the entry of the mostly Saudi national female high school students in UUCW, a standard entry-test is administered two times a year for the intake in Fall and Spring semesters. A two-tiered year-long prep-year program is the first milestone of the prospective students before they can commence their study plan in their respective departments of speciality.

The workforce of UUCW is a constitute of a diverse body of internationally qualified professionals of higher education. Though it is provisional that the teacher, learner and the course book may represent



distinct social and cultural backgrounds, the transnational learning context of the students not only gets enriched but become wider (Hall, 2011). In tandem with the rise of globalization, the burgeoning influx of native and non-native English language teachers has enriched the transnational experience in the traditional higher education context of Saudi Arabia. Alharbi (2019) draws from the studies of Zohairy (2012), Rahman & Alhaisoni (2013), and Al-Seghayer (2014, 2015), to establish the trajectory of need analysis that reported the inadequacies in the preparatory programs for Saudi EFL teachers. The principal conclusion by this recent body of research advocates the implementation of systematic approaches to facilitate Saudi English language programs with emphasis on 'disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and technological pedagogical knowledge.' Hence, this aforementioned 'systematic approach' calls for a need-based in-service training and development of potential English teachers to equip them with confidence and the additional sociocultural skills required to manifest linguistic proficiency and competence.

A four year journey of transnationalism at YUC

Before the initiation of a formal degree program in the department of Applied Linguistics, the students having completed a year long, need a point of departure of academic listening, speaking reading, and writing skills, along with a tacit introduction to the field of Applied Linguistics. With the core linguistics and applied linguistic courses, such as semantics, introduction to linguistics, discourse analysis, psycholinguistics sociolinguistics, translation studies, TEFL Methodology for both young and adult learners, students culminate their study plan by taking TESOL practicum and undergraduate dissertation. By the end of this four-year-old journey, the graduates of the Applied Linguistics Department of YUCW are able to fulfill the roles of pre-service teachers as they take refresher courses designed for them, partake in practicum teaching experiences by teaching a ten semester duration at Saudi public schools in Yanbu, and carry out experimental research in their respective pre-service teaching roles for their undergraduate dissertation.

Transnational TESOL teacher education

For students whose former schooling has been in languages other than English, this would mean that it is imperative that they take courses in academic English before they embark on starting their formal postsecondary studies. Hence, for a career in TESOL or TEFL, the students from the department of applied linguistics have an edge if compared to their counterpart from Colleges of Education, that offer degree programs in affiliation with the Ministry of Education, Saudi Arabia. The students who graduate with the bachelor's degree in applied linguistics are required to participate successfully at the postsecondary level by acquiring additional knowledge and expertise in content, specialized vocabulary, grammar, discourse structure, and pragmatics. They are trained to negotiate a new range of sociocultural situations such as student contact situations, intercultural harmony, teamwork, public presentations, within the context of transnational higher education.

The practicum students are first inducted in three- week long orientation program where they receive workshops in the following domains: to design lessons based on the orientation provided by the schools with respect to instructional content, learners' profile (date provided after diagnostic testing and need analysis), to manage classroom effectively at primary, intermediate and high school levels, and to design and carry a research project based on the sample of the target learners

Assessment

In order to achieve a pass grade, a typical practicum student has to go through rigorous ongoing formative assessment modules, which are evaluated by an assigned Practicum supervisor. The salient items on the evaluation rubric are constituted of the following criteria:

I. Classroom management (Evaluation by the Practicum Supervisor):

- a. To demonstrate the ability to select and implement appropriate management procedures to minimise prospective problematic "group" behaviours .
- b. To demonstrate competency in teaching and effective organization and management of the classroom resources using approaches supported by research, best practice, expert opinion, and learners' different learning needs.

II. Online teaching portfolio:

- a. To provide the quality and scope of the lesson plans, observation feedback, and assessments created and/or administered.
- b. To develop appropriate instructional objectives and select materials related to planned units of study and based upon target learners' indicated ability levels and cultural backgrounds.



c. To design curriculum-based assessments that will allow ongoing monitoring of learners' progress after consulting the data from diagnostic testing and need analysis for the respective classes.

III. Post-teaching reflective essay (Self-evaluation):

a. To document how the teaching methods and techniques were modified after need analysis over the course of the practicum.

b. To project how the learners in the taught classrooms progressed following the practicum student's instruction and assessment.

IV. Reflective Log:

a. To document his/her perceived effectiveness (instructional and interpersonal) and the success of attempted modifications/ differentiated instruction

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