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Current English Language Policies in Saudi Arabian Higher Education English Departments: A Study Beyond the Domain of the Classroom

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Abstract: This paper reports on a mixed-method study on English Language Policies (ELPs) in Saudi higher education English departments. It examines the current ELPs at English department level (outside the domain of the classroom) in a country where Arabic is the official language. The topic of Language Policies (LPs) in Saudi Arabia has been attracting increasing attention in recent years, and the investigated area has not been tackled so far. Staff members with different academic degrees and ranks and from different regions responded to six online survey questions ($n = 210$). Additionally, seven department chairpersons and one vice chair from different regions participated in semi-structured long-distance interviews and responded to four questions. The findings of the study show that not all English departments in Saudi Arabia have ELPs. It was also found that most current ELPs are verbal (i.e., non-official), and only partly written (i.e., official). The paper also reports on how ELPs are created in Saudi English departments and how they can be developed. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations for English departments in EFL contexts, such as calling for macro-level ELPs, which would maximise the chances for English practice and include non-Arabic speaking staff members.

سياسات اللغة الإنجليزية الحالية في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية التابعة لقطاع التعليم العالي السعودي: دراسة خارج نطاق الفصول الدراسية

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الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم العالي، السياسة اللغوية، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية،
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية.

ملخص البحث: يقدم هذا البحث دراسة كمية ونوعية في سياسات اللغة الإنجليزية بأقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في المؤسسات التعليمية السعودية التابعة لقطاع التعليم العالي، تتنصي فيها ممارسات السياسات اللغوية الإنجليزية المتبعه خارج الفصل الدراسي وفي نطاق الأقسام الأكاديمية في دولة تعد اللغة العربية فيها هي اللغة الرسمية. اكتسبت السياسات اللغوية التربوية في المملكة العربية السعودية في الآونة الأخيرة اهتماماً كبيراً من الباحثين وصناع القرار. قامت هذه الدراسة على ستة أسئلة جُمعت من جميع مناطق المملكة، شملت أعضاء هيئة التدريس (عدهم ٢١٠)، برتب علمية ومتخصصات مختلفة. كما أجريت مقابلات مع سبعة رؤساء أقسام ووكيله قسم، جميعهم من مناطق مختلفة وأجابوا عن أربعة أسئلة. وأظهرت النتائج أنه ليس كل أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية لديها سياسات لغوية إنجليزية. كما ظهر أيضاً أنَّ أغلب السياسات الحالية شفهية (غير رسمية)، مع وجود بعض السياسات المكتوبة (رسمية) لدى بعض الأقسام. توضح الدراسة أيضاً الإجراءات التي اتبَّعتها الأقسام في رسم السياسات وكيفية تشكيلها. كما خُتِّمت الدراسة بتقديم عدد من التوصيات لأقسام اللغة الإنجليزية ومنسوبيها في الدول المتحدثة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، كالتوصية بوجود سياسات لغوية عليا تدعم استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في تلك الأقسام، مما سيسهم في زيادة ممارسة اللغة الإنجليزية من قبل منسوبيها، وسيسهم في دمج الأعضاء غير المتحدثين بالعربية بدرجة أكبر.

Introduction:

In Saudi Arabia, English is taught as a foreign language in more than 25 Saudi public and private universities. Students can also specialize in the English language by taking bachelor of arts programmes in English departments which offer courses in English literature, translation, and/or linguistics. Since English is hardly ever used outside the domain of these English departments, both the students and those staff members who are non-native speakers of English are in urgent need of a ‘territory’ in which English is practised more often. This goal can be achieved by creating and implementing micro-level English language policies (henceforth ELPs), according to which members of staff and students are required to communicate in English only. More exposure to the target language is believed to accelerate second language acquisition and help people maintain proficiency in the target language (DeKeyser, 2007; Munoz, 2012; Robinson, 1996). Given the importance of creating micro-level ELPs, the purpose of the study referred to here was to investigate whether or not English Departments at Saudi higher education institutions have ELPs that govern language use outside the classroom and within the department. For those departments which have ELPs, the aim was also to identify the type of policy—whether it is officially written down or just agreed upon tacitly by the department members. We also sought to determine how these policies were created.

Literature Review

Definitions

Having policies governing the status as well as the use of languages and language varieties has been an ethos for various societies across the globe since ancient history. One example for the ancient acquisition planning attempts dates back to the Pre-Islamic era (around 500 A.D.). During that time, Arabian tribes in Mecca used to send their infants to Bedouin tribes surrounding Mecca, such as Bani Saad, because they thought that this would make them acquire a ‘purer form of Arabic’ (see Mubarkfuri, 1995). Yet, there are tensions surrounding the definition of common terms related to the theory and practice of language planning policy. More specifically, whether some of the practices and beliefs about languages or language varieties are ‘language policies’ is a matter of controversy among theorists and researchers in the field. As Johnson (2013) puts it, “if so many concepts, phenomena, and processes are considered ‘language policy’, the question may arise: what *isn’t* language policy?” (p. 9). Although resolving this debate is beyond the scope of this paper, it is indeed necessary to discuss the definitions of some terms, concepts and phenomena to show how they were perceived in the current study.

The first item worth discussion in this part is *language policy*. It seems that this term has undergone changes in terms of how researchers view it. These changes resulted mainly from identifying the powers that were initiating, propagating and implementing language policies. While older definitions of language policy emphasized the role of governments in creating language policies (i.e., macro-level policies) and neglected micro-level policies (e.g., Kaplan &

Baldauf, 1997; Tollefson, 1991), more recent definitions seem to pay more attention to the role of communities, schools in particular, in the creation and implementation of language policies, as well as the ways in which macro-level and micro-level policies interact: for instance, Spolsky’s (2004) definition of language policy, advocated by Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) and—to a lesser degree—by Johnson (2013). Spolsky (2004) views language policy as having three components: (1) practices related to the selection of language varieties, (2) beliefs about these varieties, and (3) any efforts to modify or influence these practices and beliefs. Indeed, this definition takes into account the fact that language policies can be written in official documents or practised by communities.

In the current study, we advocate the definition given by Johnson (2013) in particular, which states that “a language policy is a policy mechanism that impacts the structure, function, use, or acquisition of language...” (p. 9). On the basis of this definition, we define ELPs at the department level as all accepted/practised policies or regulations (either official or non-official, written or verbal) concerning when, where and how English is used.

Other terms that are worth defining here are macro-level and micro-level policies. The first describes policies set by governments at the national level, while the latter describes policies created, implemented and appropriated by local schools, teachers, parents, and other small-scale non-governmental agencies (Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008; McCarty, 2011). The English departments under investigation in our study are affiliated to the Saudi Ministry of Education. However, there is no ‘macro-level’ language policy for English use outside the domain of the classroom. Hence, we expected the ELPs to vary across these departments since they are created at the micro-level (i.e., the English department level). The next subsection tackles the need to draw a distinction between the different types of language policies.

Inconsistency Between Official and Unofficial Policies

It is crucial to distinguish between official and practised language policies for a number of reasons. First, not all official or macro-level language policies are implemented ‘successfully’ by communities or by individuals in an educational context. Recent research into educational language policy, for instance, has revealed that teachers’ interpretation of, as well as adherence to, macro-level language policies can lead to contradictory official and unofficial policies (c.f. Cincotta-Segi, 2011; Jaffe, 2011; Johnson, 2010). For example, the Lao official language policy states that the Lao language is the language of education. However, close observation of the practices of teachers revealed that teachers do not strictly follow this policy and that they allow the use of other indigenous languages, such as Kmhmu, in the classroom (Cincotta-Segi, ibid). Since unofficial languages can actually be used in official domains such as education as a part of micro-level language policies created by teachers, the term ‘official language’ can be misleading as it gives an impression that no languages other than the ‘official language(s)’ are given a high status.

This inconsistency between official and unofficial policies seems to exist in the Saudi educational context as well. For example, the Saudi Ministry of Education issued a decree in 2014 stating that Saudi teachers at public schools should use Standard Arabic only in the classroom and refrain from the use of regional dialects. Yet it appears that Saudi teachers are continuing to use Non-standard Arabic as the medium of instruction, see Bidair (2016). Another reason for emphasizing the importance of this dichotomous classification of language policies is that not all language policies are created by government officials. There are a number of instances where multilingual or monolingual language policies have been generated at community, school or even classroom levels. This can also occur both in the absence or presence of macro level policies. An example of a language policy created in the classroom level is described in Bonacina (2011), where a teacher at an induction school in France adopted a multi-lingual language policy in her classroom that was different from the French macro-level monolingual language policy. Similarly, Chimbutane (2011) reports that the educational system in Mozambique schools has long been monolingual (in the colonial language: i.e., Portuguese). Teachers, however, had started challenging this monolingual ideology by adopting multilingual language policies in schools. A list of similar language policies created at the micro-level can be found in Johnson (2013) and Liddicoat (2014).

Indeed, the fact that language policies can be engendered at the micro-level is relevant to the current study, in that both monolingual ELPs and bilingual Arabic/English language policies can be created within English departments in Saudi higher education institutions. The third reason for distinguishing between official and unofficial language policies is that not all government policies (i.e., macro-level language policies) are meant to be implemented. This is clearly the case in instances where top-down language policies claim to be multilingual and to support the rights of individuals speaking low-status languages, but in reality people who speak indigenous languages and other low-status varieties are left behind. For instance, Hult (2010) argues that Swedish television is used as an indirect tool to give a higher status to Swedish, to marginalize other local languages, and to give English a higher status in Sweden and this is also the case in Israel. Despite the fact that Arabic is considered an official language, in reality it is relegated to second position (behind Hebrew) in various aspects and domains, such as education, law and citizenship, (see Yitzhaki, 2010). Certainly, there can be 'hidden' language policies, where government officials declare one set of policies but implement another, quite different set of policies.

Hence, in light of all the arguments presented in this sub-section, we conclude our discussion here with the assertion that official language policies can indeed be misleading, as they do not tell us much about how language policies are actually put into practice. Researchers need to make close observations of communities in order to obtain a clearer picture of the interface between official and unofficial language policies, as well as of macro as opposed to micro language policies. This leads us into the discussion in the following sub-section regarding the implicitly high status of English in Saudi Arabia.

The Status of English in Saudi Arabia

Early work on language planning distinguished between three types of planning: status, acquisition and corpus planning (Cooper, 1989; Ferguson, 1968; Haugen, 1983; Hornberger, 2006). Among these three types of language planning, only the first two types were relevant to the study referred to here. In brief, *status planning* refers to the choice of a language as the official language of a country, while *acquisition planning* refers to the efforts to teach that language (Jones, 2015; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015).

The Saudi constitution (Chapter 1, Article 1) states that the official language of the country is Arabic. Although there is no mention of an official status being accorded to any language other than Arabic in the constitution, English is implicitly accorded a high status, both in terms of acquisition and status planning, even though Saudi Arabia is positioned in the expanding circle of Kachru's (1992) World Englishes model in this respect. There are a number of reasons for arguing for the high status of English in the country. First, acquisition planning for English is evident in the fact that it is taught as a core subject in both public and private schools (Alasmari & Khan, 2014). English is actually the only foreign language that is taught in general education (i.e., primary, intermediate and secondary). The recent inclusion of English courses in public primary schools, despite some opposing views by locals claiming that this might have a negative influence on the students' first language (L1), is evidence of the interest of Saudi authorities in giving English a high status in the country. Some Saudi families even take a further step by sending their children to international schools, where English is the medium of instruction inside the classroom and the medium of communication with teachers and other students outside the classroom. This is based on the assumption that more exposure to the target language accelerates its acquisition (see Bisson, van Heuven, Conklin, & Tunney, 2014; Paradis, 2010). This trend is obviously driven by parents' concern that their children will qualify for the job market when they grow up. The acquisition planning of English continues in higher education. Saudi universities require all students, whatever subject they are specializing in, to take general English courses, as it is believed that this will equip them better for the job market. The arguments raised in this paragraph suggest that the implicit covert multilingual language policy in Saudi Arabia is not predicted by its explicit overt policy (see Johnson, 2013, for the distinction between implicit, explicit, overt and covert language policies).

The second type of planning (i.e., status planning) can also be seen in various domains in Saudi Arabia. For instance, most public signs are bilingual (in Arabic and English). Similarly, the headings and logos of official documents are commonly written in Arabic and English. Furthermore, the Saudi Broadcasting Corporation, a government sector that is affiliated to the Saudi Ministry of Information, broadcasts an English Channel (Saudi Channel 2), where all news bulletins, and recorded and live programmes are broadcast in English. The Saudi Broadcasting Corporation also has an English radio station (Saudi Radio). Since it was launched, the number of broadcasting hours of this radio station has increased from only two hours per day to round the clock broadcasting

(Alshareef, 2013). No other foreign language has a position equal to English in the Saudi media, despite the fact that Saudi Arabia hosts a large number of Asian workers speaking various languages, such as Urdu, Malayalam, Pashto, Tagalog and Bengali. The high status of English in Saudi Arabia can also be seen in higher education institutions. For example, English is the medium of instruction in most scientific and medical departments. Furthermore, all colleges require their various departments to fill in quality assurance documents (e.g., course and programme reports) in English. This high status of English in Saudi Arabia calls for a clear language policy at the national level.

Significance of the Current Study

Since it is difficult to cover the general language policy in Saudi Arabia in one research project, our focus was on English departments in Saudi higher education institutions (i.e., universities and colleges). This paper provides a first report on out-of-classroom policies governing language use in English departments in Saudi higher institutions. These policies are normally enacted in situations where communication between individuals is established. In other words, out-of-classroom communication refers to any sort of communication between two or more individuals that occurs outside the domain of the classroom and inside the premises of the institution. For example, staff members in these institutions communicate with each other on various occasions which include, but are not limited to: department councils, instant messaging applications, email messages, committee meetings and departmental talks. The policy governing language(s) choice in these out-of-classroom communications in English departments in Saudi Arabia has, as far as we are aware, never been researched. Most of the current studies on English policies in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia have been concerned with English use inside the classroom (i.e., mainly for pedagogical reasons) (Alasmari & Khan, 2014; Alsuhaibani, 2015; Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017; Elyas & Badawood, 2016; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). A general feature of these studies is that they are influenced by the debate on the use of L1 in second/foreign language (L2) classrooms (Blair, 1982; Ellis, 1994). None of these studies, however, investigated staff-to-staff communication or staff-to-student communication outside the domain of the classroom, or the policies governing these communications. This is a gap that we have tried to fill through our study.

It would be interesting to see whether there is a policy governing use of the indigenous language (Arabic) and the foreign language these departments teach (English) in official meetings as well as informal contacts between staff members and contact between staff members and students inside and outside the classroom. Such micro language policies, if existent, are worth studying from different angles. For example, stakeholders' (e.g., staff members, students, administrators etc.) attitudes towards monolingual or multilingual language policies can be insightful for researchers interested in the creation, appropriation and implementation of language policies at the micro-level. Another interesting way to approach these micro-level language policies involves investigating the impact of English monolingual policies outside the domain of the classroom on the acquisition of English by the students in

the department. It might be worth investigating, for instance, whether the existence of English-only policies in all contexts (i.e., inside and outside the classroom) leads to faster acquisition of the foreign language. Owing to limitations of space, however, the focus of this paper will be on the questions of whether ELPs exist in the Saudi higher education institutions and if they do, what type of language policies do English departments have for English use inside and outside the classroom.

Method

The aim of the study is to investigate English language policies in Saudi higher educational English departments, and to explore the practices of departments in different regions for the purpose of obtaining a global picture of the phenomenon. The main purpose was to form a general perspective on how Saudi English departments use the English language outside the domain of the classroom and within the domain of the department. Since the official language in Saudi Arabia is Arabic, it is interesting to explore the stances on English use at department level (and outside the classroom). At department level, it is expected that English will be utilized in a variety of situations, such as different sorts of in-department communication.

The study adopted a mixed-method research design and employed quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The research tools were an online-survey and semi-structured interviews, as discussed below. Data were collected from different regions of Saudi Arabia, and from male and female staff members from different English departments. The survey targeted staff members of different ranks, specialist subjects and nationalities. The following research questions were developed for the study to determine which language policy types (see Johnson 2013) are implemented in English departments.

RQ1: *Do Saudi higher education English departments have English language policies at department level and outside the domain of the classroom?*

RQ2: *What type of policies do Saudi English departments have?*

RQ3: *How are English language policies created in Saudi English departments?*

Answers to these questions would help us to uncover the micro-level language policies created at these departments, and the type of ELPs (i.e., covert or overt, explicit or implicit, see the literature review section above).

Saudi Regions & English Departments

Saudi Arabia is divided into five main regions: Central, Western, Eastern, Northern and Southern. Each of these regions has many institutions (i.e., universities and colleges) where linguistics, literature and translation programmes are offered in English departments. For example, the central region has over six English departments, and there are usually over thirty members of staff in each of these departments. Regions other than the central are likely to have fewer English departments (2-3 departments), among which there are emerging departments with fewer members than other, older departments.

As these English departments are affiliated to the Ministry of Education, they have a similar administrative structure. That is to say, each department is expected to have male and female members; a male chairman who runs the whole department and a female vice chair for running female affairs in particular (since female members of staff and students are located in a different building). Additionally, there are several in-department committees concerning graduate studies, admission, students' rights, research groups and so on. Each department must have a department council where meetings are held on a regular basis to approve and discuss major department concerns. This council is the highest and most formal council at the department level, where decisions are usually taken.

Participants

An attempt was made to approach all English departments in Saudi Arabia and their staff members. Although it was relatively difficult to reach these departments and their staff, 210 members from different regions responded to the survey. Of those 210, 68.8% were female and 31.3% were male participants, all of them holding degrees in English language-related subjects. An additional seven male participants who work as chairpersons and one female vice chair were interviewed; therefore, the total number of participants in the study was 218. It should be pointed out here that reaching female interviewees was a challenge for us owing to cultural restrictions. Most of the participants were specializing in applied linguistics and literature. Others were specialists in theoretical linguistics and other English language-related subjects. Their ranks ranged from teaching assistants, language instructors, lecturers, assistant professors and associate professors to full professors. A very limited number of them held administrative positions in their departments such as head of the department, vice chair, head of committee, coordinator and so on. Participants' nationalities included both Arab and non-Arab nationalities; nevertheless, the majority were Saudi Arabians.

Research Tools

As explained earlier, this study utilized two research tools, an online survey and long-distance interviews. We sought to employ these tools in particular since they would provide sufficient evidence to answer the research questions, and because they would allow us to reach a larger population from a wider area. Each of these two tools is discussed below.

Before embarking on a description of these tools, it is necessary to describe how they were designed. The design of the survey and interview questions went through three main stages. First, after reviewing the relevant literature and designing the research questions, two sets of questions (survey and interview questions) were developed while taking into account, whenever possible, the key concepts mentioned in the literature (for example, language policy categories). Some of the questions correspond directly to the research questions. Second, the survey and interview questions were appraised by fellow experts in the field to verify the degree to which they responded to the research questions and so that they could make suggestions for improvement, if needed. Finally, the instruments were piloted on a small-scale sample to check for problems

relating to ambiguity, form and other concerns, if any. In conclusion, this multi-stage design process was thorough and yielded, to a certain extent, tools appropriate for investigating the phenomenon under study.

Online Survey

The researchers utilized the Google survey service. This service makes it possible for anyone to share survey links with everyone in any location through email, social media and so on. Participants can respond to the survey using any smart devices, laptops or other computers. The purpose of the study and the key words were explained at the beginning of the survey. A background section inquiring about gender, rank, specialist subject, and administrative roles (if any) was included. 210 participants responded to six items, see Appendix A.

Generally, answering these items was mandatory for all respondents, meaning that the survey tool does not allow respondents to submit their responses without answering all items provided in the survey. The only exception was for those who responded either 'No' or 'Not Sure' to the second item; they were exempted from answering the remaining items as they did not apply to them.

The survey was publicized to staff members of English departments around the country and was open to receiving responses for two weeks to allow sufficient time for participants to respond. It is worth mentioning here that the survey was piloted prior to its launch, a step that allowed us to overcome some weaknesses that were pointed out and to try out the efficiency of the online system.

Interviews

A semi-structured interview design was employed, a design that allows interviewers to seek more elaborations when necessary. The researchers targeted department chairpersons and vice chairpersons for interview, since it was likely that they would be more familiar with ELPs, if any existed, than other members of staff. The aim was to interview at least two department chairpersons from each region, and to include both male and female heads/vice heads. However, only eight interviewees volunteered to participate, one of them being female (refer to Table 1 below for their details). These interviewees came from the five main Saudi regions (central, northern, southern, western, and eastern regions). The interviews were conducted over the phone owing to the long distance between the researchers' and the interviewees' locations. Refer to Appendix B for a list of interview questions.

Table 1. Interviewees information.

No.	Interviewee Code*	Rank	Gender	Years of Experience as A Chairperson/Vice Chair
1	1A	Assistant Professor	Male	1 Year
2	1B	Assistant Professor	Female	4 Years
3	1C	Assistant Professor	Male	3 Months
4	2A	Assistant Professor	Male	3 Years

Follow Table 1. Interviewees information.

No.	Interviewee Code*	Rank	Gender	Years of Experience as A Chairperson/Vice Chair
5	3A	Assistant Professor	Male	2 Years
6	4A	Assistant Professor	Male	6 Months
7	4B	Associate Professor	Male	3.5 Years
8	5A	Assistant Professor	Male	2 Years

* The numbers in these codes refer to different regions, and the letters refer to different respondents in one region.

Results and Discussion

In this section the results from the interviews and the survey are discussed. For the survey results, frequencies and percentages are given. The presentation of the data from the interviews and the survey is formulated around the items/questions.

Interviews Results

- *Do you have English language policies in your department? If so, what type of policies are they?*

In response to this question, five interviewees stated that they had ELPs in their department (namely, interviewees 1A, 1B, 2A, 4B and 5A, (Table 1 above). Two of those five stated that these policies were written (1A and 1B), and therefore they were officially recognized by the department staff members. The remaining three explained that the ELPs were verbal and informal.

On the other hand, three interviewees (namely, 1C, 3A and 4A) stated that they did not have ELPs in their departments. They justified this by saying that it is easier to use the L1 (Arabic) in communication with others, that they are able to convey their thoughts more quickly, and that it is difficult to communicate with students in English owing to their low English proficiency. It was also stated that since the L1 of all staff members in their departments is Arabic, there is no need to use English. Overall, the majority of the interviewees reported that they did have ELPs in their departments, which were either official or unofficial (i.e., written or just verbal).

- *Have these policies been influenced by L2 research or were made based on a scientific rationale?*

In response to this question, three interviewees stated that their ELPs were made based on a scientific rationale and/or that they had been influenced by L2 research into using L1 in L2 contexts (1A, 1B and 4A). The interviewees explained that such policies can lead to more exposure to the language. They also explained that ELPs allow staff members to maintain their English proficiency levels, considering that opportunities to practise the language in Saudi Arabia can be very limited. Additionally, it was stated that English departments should have ELPs to meet their students' expectations. These findings suggest that the interviewees' departments recognize the importance of having ELPs and that they can have positive impact on the department as a whole.

The remaining five interviewees clearly stated that their ELPs were made without any relation to L2 research nor were they based on a scientific rationale. This may suggest that their departments do not appreciate the positive impact of having ELPs. It is possible that these departments are emerging departments and are still working on more important issues related to building their departments, such as recruiting members of staff, and are for the moment not prepared to focus on ELPs.

- *How important do you think having ELPs is?*

All eight interviewees responded to this question and expressed the view that it was important to have ELPs, providing several justifications for this view. It was explained that it is recommended that specific policies be practised in different department encounters, in order to ensure consistency regarding when to use English. It was also explained that ELPs are important to encourage members to use the English language more often; to create a suitable working environment; to create a suitable learning environment for students, and for staff members to maintain their English language proficiency. These findings suggest that all interviewees recognized the importance of having ELPs and that they believed they could have a positive impact on their departments.

- *When is English used in your department outside the classroom and within the domain of the department?*

In response to this question, five interviewees stated that English is used in a variety of situations (1A, 1B, 2A, 3A and 5A). Generally speaking, these situations were any type of department meeting. The situations they described were: communication through social media, any sort of in-department announcements, when communicating with non-Arabic speaking members of staff, contact via email with other members of staff and students, at council (department) meetings, at committee meetings, in office hours, with students outside the classroom, and in graduate admission interviews. This indicates that the majority of the interviewees used English outside the classroom and at department level in various communication situations. These situations were not limited to official or academic encounters only, so it appears that these participants tried to use English as often as possible.

On the other hand, the remaining three interviewees stated that English was used only in academic and official situations, such as in seminars and when giving presentations. It is possible that this limited use of English was owing to the fact that all members of staff were Arabic speakers, and that there was therefore no need for them to use their L2 (English).

Survey Results

- *My institution expects the English department to have policies (either written or spoken) regarding English language use.*

In response to this item, the majority of the respondents (69%) stated that their institutions expected their departments to have ELPs (see Table 2 below). This may indicate that the majority of institutions and staff members

have an awareness of the usefulness of ELPs in general. Additionally, it may indicate that ELPs are of importance to English departments.

Another considerable proportion of the respondents (23.3%) expressed their uncertainty regarding this matter. This may indicate a lack of awareness on the part of a relatively small number of English departments' staff members, and probably their perceptions of ELPs as unimportant to them or their departments. Only a small proportion of the participants (7.6%) stated that the institution did not expect their department to have ELPs.

To conclude, the questionnaire data suggest that the majority of staff members of English departments believe that the institution expects their department to have ELPs, either written or spoken. The data also suggest that there are members of staff who may not be aware of their institutions' expectations, nor do they have an interest in or think it important to have such policies.

Table 2. Institutions' expectations regarding having departmental ELPs.

Responses	Frequency	Per cent	Valid per cent
No	16	7.6 %	7.6%
Not sure	49	23.3 %	23.3%
Yes	145	69.0 %	69.0%
Total	210	100.0 %	100.0%

- *My department has policies on English language use outside the domain of the classroom.*

Table 3 below shows that a large proportion of the respondents (43.8%) reported that their English departments do have policies on English language use outside the classroom and within the domain of the department. On the other hand, a quite considerable proportion of the respondents (33.3%) reported that ELPs do not exist in their departments, which may indicate their departments' perceptions of ELPs as being unimportant. A smaller proportion (22.9%) stated that they were not sure whether or not these ELPs existed, which may suggest that it is unlikely that there are any in their departments. It could also suggest that these respondents were not aware of the concept of having policies on the use of the English language outside the domain of the classroom. Thus, the latter two groups (a total of 56.2% of the sample), who formed the majority of the respondents, do not have ELPs in their departments, or are not aware of the existence of these policies in their departments because, for example, they were not shared with them or they were not made official.

To conclude, the questionnaire data suggest that, in terms of ELPs, Saudi English departments can be divided into two quite different groups: one that has ELPs, and the other that does not.

Table 3. Existence of ELPs outside the classroom.

Responses	Frequency	Per cent	Valid per cent
No	70	33.3%	33.3%
Not sure	48	22.9%	22.9%
Yes	92	43.8%	43.8%
Total	210	100.0%	100.0%

- *What type of language policy outside the domain of the classroom do you have in your department?*

As mentioned above, 56.2% of the participants reported that they did not have ELPs in their English departments; therefore, this group did not respond to the remaining survey items. Therefore, all the percentages and calculations presented in this section and in the subsequent survey-related sections concern the remaining participants who reported having ELPs and who formed 43.8% of the total number of participants.

In the response to the type of ELPs English departments have, the participants reported having different types (see Table 4 below). First, 64.1% of those who reported that their departments did have ELPs stated that their departments had agreed upon non-written ELPs. This may indicate that their departments had set these policies and practised them as protocols, but did not want them to be set in stone, because there may be occasions when they had to switch to Arabic, in which case they would be breaking their own rules. A smaller proportion of the participants (33.7%) stated that their department did have written ELPs. This may suggest that their departments emphasized the importance of having ELPs to the extent that they had been made official, i.e., they existed in a written form. It also suggests that having written policies may have a positive impact on the learning process and on the flow of administrative work. Only one participant stated that his department only had spoken ELPs, and another stated that they had both written and spoken ELPs. It is suggested that these two participants may not be very familiar with their departments' policies and were being rather presumptuous on this matter.

To conclude, the questionnaire data suggest that a large proportion of Saudi departments have ELPs and that these ELPs are mainly non-official and agreed upon verbally. A smaller proportion of these departments have official, written ELPs. It also appears that English departments that have ELPs recognize their importance in an educational setting.

Table 4. Types of language policies.

Responses	Frequency	Per cent	Valid per cent
Non-written, but agreed upon verbally	59	64.1%	64.1%
Spoken	1	1.1%	1.1%

Follow Table 4.

Responses	Frequency	Per cent	Valid per cent
<i>Written</i>	31	33.7%	33.7%
<i>Written and spoken</i>	1	1.1%	1.1%
Total	92	100.0%	100.0%

- *The head of my department ensures that English policies are being put into practice.*

In response to this item, 88% of the respondents stated that the chairmen of their departments ensure that ELPs are being put into practice (see Table 5 below). This may indicate that these policies are formal in nature and recognized by these departments as important. It may also indicate that when ELPs do exist, staff members are aware of their importance. A small proportion (10.9%) reported their uncertainty that their chairmen ensured that ELPs were put into practice, which may suggest these participants' lack of involvement or awareness of ELPs. To conclude, it can be fairly said that the majority of Saudi English departments that have ELPs seek to ensure that they are put into practice by their staff members.

Table 5. Department head ensuring practice of ELPs.

Responses	Frequency	Per cent	Valid per cent
<i>No</i>	1	1.1%	1.1%
<i>Not sure</i>	10	10.9%	10.9%
<i>Yes</i>	81	88%	88%
Total	92	100.0%	100.0%

- *Current language policies have been adopted based on careful planning and a specific rationale?*

In response to this item, 78% of the participants reported that their departments' ELPs have been set based on careful planning and a specific (Table 6). This may indicate that these policies did not emerge randomly or coincidentally, and that they exist to serve a specific purpose. It may also indicate that these departments have positive attitudes towards English, since they had spent time and effort in thinking over and making the policies.

A small proportion (19.6%) stated their uncertainty regarding whether or not a rationale or planning were behind having/making the ELPs, which may suggest their lack of interest in ELPs. To conclude, it can be fairly said that, when Saudi English departments adopt particular language policies, it is likely that they have been adopted for specific purposes and that they have been carefully planned.

Table 6. ELPs have been set based on planning and a rationale.

Responses	Frequency	Per cent	Valid per cent
<i>No</i>	2	2.2%	2.2%
<i>Not sure</i>	18	19.6%	19.6%
<i>Yes</i>	72	78.3%	78.3%
Total	92	100.0	100.0

My department language policies:

- a) are agreed upon by the department council*
- b) are set by some members informally*
- c) emerged spontaneously*

As shown in Table 7 below, 71.7% of the participants said their ELPs had been created through official channels—i.e., they were made through the department council. This may indicate that this procedure is meant to make these policies official and to ensure that all staff members abide by them. It could also mean that the purpose of involving the council in making ELPs is to raise awareness of them and to involve other members of staff in making them, which may result in a more effective application of these ELPs.

A small proportion of respondents (14.1%) reported that the policies in their departments were set informally by some members of staff. This could indicate that in these departments some members of staff have the power to make policies, or that other members of staff are not opposed to changes in current practices and that they are open to change even if the change is unofficial. It may also suggest that, since they are not official, these ELPs are meant to be practised on a temporary basis—in other words, they are trends that last for a certain period of time which are likely to change over time.

An additional small proportion of respondents (14.1%) stated that their ELPs emerged spontaneously, which may suggest that careful planning and a rationale were not involved when they emerged. It could also suggest that staff members in those departments do not see any importance in having or even organizing these ELPs, and that their application may be altered or even cancelled at any time.

To conclude, the data suggest that that majority of the Saudi English departments that have ELPs have made these policies officially so members become aware of, and abide by them. The data also suggest that there are other departments that have set these policies outside the department council and by some members of staff in an informal manner, which may have resulted in a lack of awareness of the policies on the part of other members. Other departments have set their ELPs in a spontaneous, unplanned and unofficial manner, indicating a view that they are not important and a lack of awareness of their existence.

Table 7. Process of making ELPs.

Responses	Frequency	Per cent	Valid per cent
<i>They are agreed upon by the department council</i>	66	71.7%	71.7%
<i>They are set by some members informally</i>	13	14.1%	14.1%
<i>They have emerged spontaneously</i>	13	14.1%	14.1%
Total	92	100.0	100.0

Implications of the Study

In the previous section, we presented the results and discussed our interpretation of the data we collected for this study. There are a number of implications and recommendations that we can put forward based on our findings. These implications may be of help not just to English departments in Saudi Arabia but also to any institution where English is taught as a foreign language. The implications of the current study are listed in the following sub-sections:

The Potential for Macro-level ELPs

The findings discussed above revealed the existence of various types, practices and degrees of formality of ELPs among those Saudi English departments which have them. Yet if we look deeply into the data, we notice that a similar trend exists in all the investigated departments. For example, more than half of the total number of respondents (69%) claimed that their institutions expect their departments to have ELPs. Another agreement among the majority of respondents was also observed in the responses to the query about the type of ELPs, with 64% of the respondents reporting that their departments had ELPs that are not written. The majority of respondents also provided similar reports with regard to practices related to ELPs, such as ensuring the implementation of the ELPs by department chairpersons (88%), rationale-based policy creation (78%), and the fact that the ELPs were created by some members of staff (72%). These quite similar response rates suggest that a large number of English department members are aware of the existence and importance of ELPs. This suggests that these departments, and the staff members, are ready to implement macro-level ELPs if they are created by the Ministry of Education in the future. Such educational macro-level ELPs are expected to improve the quality of instruction and communication experienced by students in English departments in Saudi Arabia.

ELPs and English Practice

One of the most obvious reasons for having an ELP within an English as a foreign language (EFL) context as mentioned earlier in literature review is that it will lead to more exposure to English for both staff members and students. This can also be related to the respondents' answers to the third interview question. When they were asked about the possible reasons for having ELPs in their departments, most of the interviewees agreed that ELPs lead to the creation of an 'English environment'. Indeed,

the English department may be one of the very few places where staff members and students can communicate with other English language speakers. For staff members, ELPs can be advantageous because they will need to communicate with other English speakers who have relatively high competency and fluency levels. This challenge would encourage staff members to maintain and keep improving their linguistic proficiency. With regard to the students, ELPs can be linked to total immersion studies (see Carson & Longhini, 2002; Luan & Guo, 2011). There is no doubt that total immersion environments are more likely to be successful when backed up by written language policies that both staff members and students are convinced by and are willing to implement. Interviewee 4B even suggested that ELPs may contribute to the creation of an identity for English departments in EFL contexts. This identity is shaped by having English monolingual signs and announcements and English verbal communications, in addition to English classrooms. The majority of staff members (43.8%) reported that their departments do have policies for English use outside the domain of the classroom. This can be an indicator that English departments are ready to be an environment where EFL students and their instructors practice the English language. Having ELPs that govern English language use outside the domain of the classroom would certainly increase help EFL students for more practice of the English language.

Inclusion of non-Arabic Speaking Staff Members

The questionnaire revealed that the staff members of English departments who took part in our study came from different nationalities and linguistic backgrounds. For example, more than 50 respondents were from India, and there were also other nationalities (e.g., 15 Pakistanis, 4 Bengalis, 4 Hungarians, 2 Britons, 2 Canadians). It is more than likely that these respondents were not proficient in Arabic or did not speak Arabic at all. Sadly, English departments which use Arabic as the medium of communication in department councils, committee meetings etc. effectively prevent these non-Arabic speakers from taking part in official department meetings. This is also the case when there is a lot of code-switching, or when the minutes are in English but discussed in Arabic. Some departments, as mentioned by interviewee 5A, are aware of this, and hence avoid the use of Arabic at all times (even when expressing side comments and making jokes). This shows the humanitarian side of language policies in some cases, where vulnerable members can enjoy the rights they deserve with the help of language policies. The inclusion of non-Arabic speakers is therefore a strong argument in favour of having ELPs in the departments under investigation in particular, and in all similar multilingual workplaces in general.

Less Tension Between Staff Members

One interviewee, 3A, suggested that the absence of an ELP in their department has led to some tensions between staff members. The tension is particularly between two extremes: staff members who choose Arabic as the medium of communication at all times and other members who refrain from the use of Arabic. Having an ELP, 3A suggested, would create a 'rule' that every department member is required to abide by. The vast majority of respondents (78.3%) claimed that ELPs in their

departments were created based on a rationale. This indicates that staff members are actually aware of the reasons for their departments' ELPs. Indeed, reducing the tension between members – as well as allowing for more English practice—are valid reasons for having ELPs in English departments. As suggested by the following implication, raising the awareness of staff members who join the English departments of these justifications for ELPs would ensure the success and persistence of ELPs.

Increasing Staff Members' Awareness of Their Departments' ELPs

Table 5 above revealed that more than 50% of the respondents to the survey either claimed that their departments do not have ELPs or that they were not sure whether ELPs exist in their departments. This is not consistent with our interview data, with five out of eight interviewees stating that their departments actually have ELPs. One possible reason for this inconsistency between the data we obtained from the departments' chairpersons and the responses of the staff members is a lack of awareness of the existing ELPs on the part of ordinary members of staff. Hence, we recommend that department chairpersons and other officials in the institutions do not stop at the stage of creating a language policy, but also take the next essential steps of implementation and elaboration (Haugen, 1983). Indeed, it seems that most of the English departments we investigated have ELPs that are agreed upon verbally by the department members. The problem with such an approach is that new staff members join these departments every year. Unless the department chairperson, or the people who created the ELP, ensure that new staff members are familiar with their departments' ELPs (e.g., which language should be used in the department council, in committee meetings, in email exchange etc.), they will either be confused about this matter or will mistakenly assume that their departments do not have ELPs. In order that ELPs are known to all staff members, we also recommend that the arbiters of these policies have them written down, rather than just agreeing on them verbally. The 'verbal' ELPs are likely to be lost once the group of people who created them retire or transfer to different institutions. Hence, writing the ELPs is likely to guarantee that these ELPs are passed successfully from one generation of staff members to another.

Obstacles to the Implementation of ELPs

Although all the chairpersons we interviewed were convinced of the importance of having ELPs in their departments, some departments find it difficult to overcome some obstacles that prevented them from having ELPs. For instance, four of the interviewees (namely 1C, 3A, 4A and 4B) stated that the documents they need to process in department councils are written in Arabic and have to be responded to in Arabic. This is because most documents are received by and handed over to the college officials (who are not necessarily English speakers). Another obstacle is that some department members need to attend joint councils where not all members are competent in English. These obstacles are indeed factors that necessitate having written ELPs which govern the language choice (i.e., Arabic or English) in different domains. For instance, a newly arrived member of staff will find it very convenient if he or she is

provided with an ELP that works as a guide regarding those occasions on which it is expected that Arabic will be used, and the instances in which the use of English may be problematic. Yet, as revealed by the questionnaire, only 33% of the respondents claimed that their departments have written language policies. This indicates that the departments' language policies are mainly agreed upon verbally by department members. This, as argued above, does not guarantee the sustainability of ELPs.

Conclusion

The study revealed that a large number of the English departments we investigated had ELPs that are only agreed upon verbally by some department members. The majority of respondents believed that these ELPs had been created based on careful planning. Based on the data we collected through the interviews and the online survey, we recommend that having ELPs has many benefits that are expected to have a positive impact on the overall quality of English departments, such as leading to more English practice, inclusion of all staff members in administrative work regardless of the first language they speak, and less tension among staff members. We also suggest that having ELPs written down is likely to lead to successful implementation of these policies. Although the data we used in this study were collected from chairpersons of eight departments that represent all Saudi provinces and we collected data from more than two hundred members of staff, we believe that the data could be even more insightful if observation was employed as a data collection tool. Unfortunately, this is a limitation that we could not overcome owing to the fact that access to the department councils, committees etc. is restricted to department members only. This project can be pursued in future research by investigating the opinions of staff members about ELPs and the factors that lead to the creation of various ELPs across different departments.

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Appendix A (Online survey)

- 1- My institution expects the English department to have policies (either written or spoken) regarding English language use.

Scale: No, Not Sure, Yes.

- 2- My department has policies on English language use outside the domain of the classroom.

Scale: No, Not Sure, Yes.

- 3- What type of language policy outside the domain of the classroom do you have in your department?

a) Non-written, but agreed upon verbally

b) Written

c) Other:

- 4- The head of my department ensures that English policies are being put into practice.

Scale: No, Not Sure, Yes.

- 5- Current language policies have been adopted based on careful planning and a specific rationale.

Scale: No, Not Sure, Yes.

- 6- My department language policies:

a) are agreed upon by the department council

b) are set by some members informally

c) emerged spontaneously

d) other:

Appendix B (Interview Questions)

- 1) Do you have English language policies in your department? If so, what type of policies are they?
- 2) Have these policies been influenced by L2 research or were they made based on a scientific rationale?
- 3) How important do you think having ELPs is?
- 4) When is English used in your department outside the classroom and within the domain of the department?

