

# PROCEEDINGS

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**20-21**  
**May 2016**  
Bandar Lampung  
University, Indonesia

## 4<sup>th</sup> ICEL 2016

### THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE



# PROCEEDINGS

THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE

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**4<sup>th</sup> ICEL 2016**

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20 -21 MAY 2016



Organized by:  
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## **PREFACE**

The activities of the International Conference are in line and very appropriate with the vision and mission of Bandar Lampung University (UBL) to promote training and education as well as research in these areas.

On behalf of the Fourth International Conference of Education and Language (4<sup>th</sup> ICEL 2016) organizing committee, we are very pleased with the very good responses especially from the keynote speakers and from the participants. It is noteworthy to point out that about 80 technical papers were received for this conference

The participants of the conference come from many well known universities, among others: International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Malaysia, Hongkong Polytechnic University, Hongkong, Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU), China, Shinawatra Univesity, Thailand, University of Texas, Austin, USA, University Phitsanulok Thailand, STIBA Bumigora Mataram, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, STKIP-PGRI Lubuklinggau, Indonesia University of Education (UPI), Universitas Sanata Dharma, State Islamic College (STAIN) of Jurai Siwo Metro Lampung, State University of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa and Universitas Lampung.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the International Advisory Board members, sponsors and also to all keynote speakers and all participants. I am also grateful to all organizing committee and all of the reviewers who contribute to the high standard of the conference. Also I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Rector of Bandar Lampung University (UBL) who gives us endless support to these activities, so that the conference can be administrated on time.

Bandar Lampung, 20 May 2016

**Drs. Harpain, M.A.T., M.M**

*4<sup>th</sup> ICEL 2016 Chairman*

## **PROCEEDINGS**

The Fourth International Conference on  
Education and Language (4<sup>th</sup> ICEL 2016)  
BANDAR LAMPUNG UNIVERSITY  
Bandar Lampung, Indonesia  
May 20,21 2016

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## **Table Of Content**

Preface.....	ii
Steering Committee .....	iii
International Advisory Board .....	iv
Organizing Committee.....	iv
Table of Content .....	vi

### **Keynote Speakers :**

1. A New Voice in ELT: Planning Intensive Workplace Curriculum - Amporn Sa-mgiamwibool .....	I-1
2. Fostering The Use of Drama For English Language Learners in The EFL Classroom - Deri Sis Nanda .....	I-7
3. The Cultural Compatibility of Saudi EFL University Students in The UT Austin ESL Program - Lobat Asadi .....	I-11
4. Challenges For 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Learning In Indonesia – Hendarman .....	I-20

### **Paper Presenters :**

1. A Sociolinguistic Study of English And Javanese Kinship Terminology – Andrias Yulianto .....	II-1
2. Adapting Meg Cabot’s Princes Diaries in Teaching Writing – Pramugara Robby Yana & Zahara Ramadani .....	II-6
3. Analysis of Students’ Communication Strategies in ESP Class of Mathematic Study Program – Rizky Ayuningtyas & Hery Yufrizal .....	II-13
4. Authentic Literature and Technology Involvement in EFL Reading – Bastian Sugandi .....	II-18
5. Blog As Alternatif Media In Teaching Literature – Y. Satinem .....	II-24
6. Communication Theory: Ritual Constraints Used in English Classroom Interaction at Tenth Grade Students of SMK Yadika Lubuk Linggau – Maria Ramasari .....	II-29
7. Designing Instructional Materials For Blended Learning By Using Schoology For Speaking Class Of English Education Study Program Of Teacher Training And Education Faculty Of Bandar Lampung University – Margaretha Audrey S.C. & Dameria Magdalena S .....	II-34
8. Designing Lesson Activities Through Maluku Folklore For Character Education – Mansye Sekewael, Frida Pentury and Welma Noiija .....	II-46
9. EFL Teachers’ Belief On Classroom Management And Behavior As The Key Success Of English Language Teaching – Reti Wahyuni .....	II-52
10. English For Maritime – Lucia Tri Natalia Sudarmo, Heidy Wulandari, Marita Safitri, and Fransiscus Widya Kiswara .....	II-64

11. Error Analysis Of Aspirated And Unaspirated Consonant Sounds Produced By Students At English Club Senior High School Of Tri Sukses Natar South Lampung – Fitri Anggraini .....	II-68
12. ICT and Vocabulary Building - Bastian Sugandi & Eko Saputra .....	II-72
13. Improving Students’ Pronunciation By Using Audio-Visual-Assisted Text – Yanuaris Yanu Dharmawan & Mutiatas Saniyati .....	II-75
14. Informal Assessment for Language Skills: The Learners’ Perspective – Apsus Grumilah & Irfan Nur Aji .....	II-81
15. Learner Autonomy In Blended Learning Speaking Class – Ida Nahdaleni & Yanuaris Yanu Dharmawan .....	II-91
16. Learning Interaction In Web Based Learning In Speaking Ii Class Of English Education Study Program Of Teacher Training And Education Faculty Of Bandar Lampung University – Upeka Mendis & Arnes Yuli Vandika .....	II-98
17. Letter Tiles To Teach Spelling: How Does It Work? – Elita Elva Lintang Femila & Arliva Ristiningrum .....	II-105
18. Looking at English National Examination 2016 in Indonesia: A Prospect of Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy – Candra Jaya .....	II-108
19. Quipper School: How Do Teachers Bring it in the Classroom? – Asep Idin & M. Syahrul Z. Romadhoni .....	II-118
20. Scanning Of Students’ Learning Style At SMA Negri 7 Lubuklinggau In Academic Years 2015/2016 – Agus Triyogo .....	II-125
21. Society’S Attitudes Toward Indonesia And Perspective In Facing The Asean Economic Community – Nur Nisai Muslihah .....	II-131
22. Students’ Critical Thinking In Online Discussion Forum – Sela Fitriana & Helta Anggia .....	II-136
23. Students’ Perception In A Blended Learning Speaking Class – Desi Ike Sari .....	II-144
24. Teaching Reading Comprehension By Using Creative Thinking Reading Activities (CTRA) To The Eleventh Grade Students Of SMA Negeri 8 Lubuklinggau – Syaprizal & Yayuk Handira .....	II-152
25. The Application Of Cards In Teaching Grammar To Improve Students Writing Skill: A Teaching Strategy Development - Eroh Muniroh .....	II-157
26. The Application Of Problem Based Learning To Increase Critical Thinking And Metacognitive Grade XII Students At Senior High School (SMA) “XYZ” Makasar - Hildegardis Retno Harsanti, Khaterine & Niko Sudibjo .....	II-160
27. The Application Of Web Based Learning By Using A Blended Learning Approach In Speaking Ii Class Of English Education Study Program Of Teacher Training And Education Faculty Of Bandar Lampung University - Thea Marisca Marbun B.N & Arnes Yuli Vandika .....	II-170
28. The Critical Discourse Analysis On The Fame Of Oreo Wonderfilled Advertisement - Alfriani Ndandara & Frederika Mei Anggraeni .....	II-178
29. The Effect Of Using Pair Taping Technique Toward Speaking Ability In Descriptive Text Of The Second Year Students At A Private Secondary School In Pekanbaru - Intan Septia Latifa .....	II-186



30. The Effectiveness Of Scaffolded Reading Experience In Teaching Reading  
Viewed From Students' Intelligence - Aksendro Maximilian ..... II-191
31. The Implementation Of Flipped Classroom By Using Schoology In Speaking  
II Class Of English Education Study Program Of Teacher Training And  
Education Faculty Of Bandar Lampung University - David Ginola & Dameria  
Magdalena S ..... II-199
32. The Implementation Of Using Online Application In Increasing Students'  
Motivation - Dhia Hasanah ..... II-208
33. The Possible Causes Of Indonesian EFL Students' Anxiety In Speaking  
Impromptu Speech - Galuh Dwi Ajeng ..... II-216
34. The Use Of Authentic Materials In Speaking Class At The Second Semester  
Students Of English Education Study Program Of Teacher Training And  
Education Faculty Of Bandar Lampung University - Helta Anggia & Randi  
Setyadi ..... II-222
35. The Use Of Card Trick To Build Students' Vocabulary - Eny Dwi Marcela ..... II-229
36. The Use Of Hot Potatoes For Teaching Vocabulary At The Eleventh Grade  
Of SMA Bodhisattva - Ezra Setiawan ..... II-232
37. The Use Of Interactive White Board In EYL Motivation – Munjiana ..... II-242
38. The Use Of Podcast And Interpretive Tasks For Peer Assessment In The  
Extensive Listening Class - Delsa Miranty ..... II-248
39. Translation Shift Of Verb And Sentence Style From English Into Bahasa  
Indonesian - Diah Supatmiwati ..... II-257
40. Using Mnemonic Techniques In Vocabulary Learning - Ita Purnama ..... II-261

## **THE CULTURAL COMPATIBILITY OF SAUDI EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE UT AUSTIN ESL PROGRAM**

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### **Abstract**

Saudi EFL and Saudi ESL students were studied in university programs in Saudi Arabia and in the US in order to assess their cultural competency and any potential clashes that may cause blockages in learning English in either environment. Critical pedagogy was used as an overarching methodology to construct lesson plans and provided the ideological basis for the construction of these studies. Saudi Arabia hosts EFL teachers from Western countries to instruct EFL students from grades 4 and up. Yet, cultures clash and these sentiments hinder learning EFL due to the cultural power a teacher can assert, even without their knowledge. Monologic and dialogic behaviors can help or facilitate learning, based on the teachers' approach to topics and cultural dilemmas in the classroom. Having taught EFL in the women's campuses in the capital city of Riyadh for over 10 years at 3 different universities, namely Al Yamamah, Al Faisal, and Prince Sultan, combined, ideological, religious and cultural issues were noted between Western teachers and Saudi students on a daily basis. Focused research was in 2011 conducted at Al Yamamah University, women's campus in order to conduct teacher training and develop a framework of acceptable topics for use in the classroom. Further research including surveys, interviews and case studies of Saudi ESL students were conducted in 2015-2016 at the University of Texas at Austin ESL in order to assess Saudi ESL learners in an English immersion program. Guiding questions were developed to assess cultural competency, cultural clashes, identity issues and culturally habituated patterns from Saudi culture that were impacting Saudi learners in UT Austin ESL program.

*Keywords:* cultural competency, critical pedagogy, linguistic imperialism, intercultural communications.

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Having taught EFL in the women's campuses in the capital city of Riyadh for over 10 years at 3 different universities, namely Al Yamamah, Al Faisal, and Prince Sultan, combined, I worked with thousands of students and hundreds of teachers. At times I witnessed the Saudi female students I taught, as the Kingdom has segregated educational system, struggling with stereotypes and Western impressions of their country. At other times, I witnessed teachers struggling culturally with the restrictions placed on them as women and with the conditions with which Saudi women lived in general. Many of the female EFL teachers I worked with would complain daily about overwhelmingly strong Saudi perfume smells in the campus elevators and the fact that they despised that women were banned from driving in the country. Meanwhile, the Saudi female students we taught overheard these grievances and felt the sting of their harsh judgement about Saudi culture and lifestyle. Thus they were upset and even fearful of sharing their opinions or displeasure felt at topics presented in the classroom. These cultural clashes became so interesting and even distressing at times that I conducted research into the ideological, cultural and religious differences I witnessed and was dealing with myself as an American-Iranian in the country. Due to administrative support, I was able to provide subsequent training for other teachers on the cultural barriers that may hinder learning in the EFL we were teaching in. I found the admission of the realities we were faced with as Western females teaching Saudi females EFL very healing and the research I conducted in 2011 helped me heal and understand these struggles, oftentimes within myself as well as that of my colleagues.

Therefore, in 2015, I decided to study the Saudi students at UT Austin in the ESL program I had been teaching in. I anonymously surveyed 25 male Saudi EFL students about what topics they found appropriate for use in the EFL classroom for both male and female students. The UT ESL students were male because their scholarship was granted by a Saudi company that only provides scholarships to men to study in the United States. This investigation and interest was sparked by my former research in Saudi students and the cultural dilemmas they face both inside and out of Saudi Arabia. Having taught at the University of Texas at Austin for a few years, after teaching in Saudi Arabia for a decade, I could not help but contemplate how the Saudi students felt about their liberal environment and diverse student population. Thus, when I taught an EFL writing class comprised entirely

of Saudi men, I decided to study their attitudes towards the Western culture and assess their level of understanding and detect and potential deterrents to their education founded in cultural clashes and topics used in the classroom.

Furthermore, the UT ESL program is home to students from approximately 25 different countries with about 1200 students in the program in 2015, out of which 345 were from Saudi Arabia. It is interesting to note that the classes at UT Austin ESL have a diverse population and each class consists of several different nationalities. This allows for cultural exchanges and intercultural communication among people of various classes, educational levels, cultures and religions. Thus, in 2016 a survey, Cultural Compatibility, included students 19 students from various nationalities in the ESL program at UT Austin was conducted in May 2016 to assess their feelings about the variety of opinions and cultures they are exposed to inside and out of the classroom in Austin. The survey strived to uncover and gaps in cultural communication, understanding and assess the students' comfort levels with members of other genders and cultures as their peers. The students surveyed in the 2016 Cultural Compatibility survey came from a variety of different countries including Japan, Venezuela, Taiwan, Mexico, Spain and Saudi Arabia.

While the majority of students reported to be happy in the diverse learning environment at UT Austin, learning English as a Second Language in the United States asks students who come from conservative countries to be immersed in a cultural and educational environment very different than their own. For example, recently UT ESL students witnessed the passing of some controversial laws in the United States including the legalization of marijuana in 2 states and same-sex marriage laws. Women and men are in the same classroom, whereas they are segregated classes in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, people in Austin, Texas are extremely liberal and support democracy, diversity, freedom of speech, dress and the slogan "Keep Austin Weird" is stated with pride as a town motto. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, their country of origin, has very different laws that are rooted in Islamic tenets. These differences in lifestyle and belief systems may hinder students from the Saudi Arabia to comfortably merge with divergent cultures and beliefs in the US and specifically in a liberal environment such as UT Austin. Furthermore there are pedagogical differences that teachers employ which may cause confusion or create cultural clashes between Western teachers and Saudis. In addition, Saudi Arabia has been subject to a lot of media attention since 9-11 and Saudis have a harder time traveling due to visa restrictions as well as stereotyping and profiling. These circumstances may make it challenging for Saudis to study in the United States. Thus I found myself wanting to conduct research and shed some light on these topics so that I could understand these challenges and better instruct the Saudi students I came into contact with at UT Austin. In order to assess the cultural compatibilities of Saudi students outside of Saudi Arabia with other students and within liberal Western environments, these surveys and a case study were formed around cultural and religious barriers to learning. The research questions that guided this study were; 1) Is learning ESL in a liberal American university environment challenging for Saudi students? 2) Do Saudi students struggle with an identity crisis related to their ESL studies in the US? And 3) Do Saudi students face criticism and judgement from other Saudi people related to their education in the United States.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The remains of Orientalism, the globalizing agendas of dominant world powers and the effects of colonialism should be addressed in order to lay the groundwork for this research. In addition, English language planning and curricula are examined in order to understand the complexities of teaching English in Saudi Arabia. To demonstrate, Phillipson's theory of linguistic imperialism, which is defined as; "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstruction of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages," (Phillipson, 1992: 47) will be examined. Based on Galtung's (1980) imperialism theory (cited in Phillipson, 1992, p.47), which does not refer to linguistic imperialism specifically, can be seen as a sub-type of what he refers to as *cultural hegemony* or imperialism. "The theory operates with a division of the world into a dominant Centre, the powerful Western countries and interests, and the dominant Peripheries, the underdeveloped countries," (Phillipson 1992: 52).

Phillipson goes on to explain that *structural* refers to material properties and *cultural* to immaterial or ideological properties such as attitudes and pedagogical principles. Phillipson asserts that English propels global inequalities and refers to as *linguicism*, a concept created by Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) (cited in Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995) English linguistic imperialism is one example of linguicism, which is defined as; "ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources between groups which are defined on the basis of language" (Phillipson 1992:47). However, Holmes (1992: 77) disagrees with Phillipson that English is primarily motivated by imperialism, "For most of the world, it is bilingualism and multilingualism which is normal. In countries such as Zaire or India, the idea that you should stop speaking one language when you have learned another is inconceivable."

Likewise, the pragmatic view that the spread of English may be more practical and less political in nature exists (Crystal 2003, Ives 2006). Phillipson's assertion that the spread of the English language marginalizes groups of people who do not speak it in developing countries, thus causing economic strain, is not plausible claim Berns et al (1998) because there is no evidence that it is due to English. Similarly, English may be viewed as a pragmatic language to learn for people in post-colonial and other societies because it expands their repertoire maximizing their chances at success in a multilingual society. However, it need not be at the cost of traditional language and culture used at home (Bisong 1995; Crystal 2000, 2003). Yet, Bisong and Crystal do not examine the notion that the spread of the English language is primarily benefitting the economies of dominant global powers and their allies in the Middle East (Karmani 2005a; Benesch 2001). In fact, English language planning and international relationships have influenced the economic development of many nations in Asia and the Middle East. Thus, a divide has been created amongst English language speakers and non speakers (Tsuda, 2008; Canagarajah 2008, 1999, Kachru, 1986; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992). AlHaq and Smadi (1996) assert that English serves no unification purposes in Saudi Arabia and could have a divisive effect as the entire population does not speak it. They elaborate that some Saudis fear that English entails Westernization and may be a source of corruption to their religious commitment.

## **2.2 English as a Global Language**

History demonstrates that language can be used to oppress certain indigenous peoples and their culture, while elevating others. 1492, the year that Columbus set off for another continent, Queen Isabella of Spain was presented with a plan for establishing Castilian as "a tool for conquest abroad and a weapon to suppress untutored speech at home" explains Illich (1981) (cited in Phillipson, 1992, p. 31). To elaborate, the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1976) definition of neo-colonialism is "the use of economic, political, or other means of obtaining or retaining influence over former colonies" (cited in Phillipson, 1992, p. 71). Crystal (2003) explains that a language achieves special status when it has a role in every country, which English is developing. Furthermore, language is often used by governments and organizations to accomplish international missions of service, such as the United States' Peace Corps or the British Council's language institutions. However, there are countering opinions that using language learning as a means of transferring cultural preferences and norms, thus affecting the native people is an underhanded method of influencing people politically (Pennycook 1998; Pennycook, 1998; Tsuda 1997, 2008).

To illustrate both sides of the issue, in June 2002, after the attacks of 9-11 in which 11 out of the 19 hijackers involved were from Saudi Arabia, the US Congress placed pressure on Saudi Arabia to revise its curricula. Congress said the textbooks being used were fostering a "combination of intolerance, ignorance, anti-Semitic, anti-American, and anti-Western views" in ways that posed a "danger to the stability of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Middle East region, and global security" (H. Con. Res. 432). However, others suggest that the spread of English instruction may antagonize opponents while educating potential terrorists on the English language and its associated cultures (Glasser 2003; Prokop 2003; Oschenwald 1981). Regardless of these sociopolitical factors, English has retained its privileged position in the educational process on other continents including Asia and Africa, while local languages are increasing deemed less important to learn (Phillipson, 1992).

## **2.3 Cultural Hegemony**

Gramsci (1985) explains that every time the question of language arises in socio-political context it is due to linguistic attempt to develop cultural hegemony and is indicative of a need to govern relations between the government and general public. Similarly, Zughoul (2003) asserts that the English language has created a form of global culture based on worldwide trade markets and commercial interests are shaping this international culture. Phillipson explains this as linguistic hegemony of the globe through a process that he calls *nation building*. In fact, Crystal (2003) estimates that about a billion people have some degree of competence in English while Gradoll (1997) asserts that by 2015 two billion people will be learning English. Yet many insist that the English language is not a mere a conduit for communication. In fact, the political nature of global English is connected to broader global politics, making the spread of English guided by people in positions of power. Likewise, Zughoul (2003) explains that English is differentiated in its application based on whether it is used as a second language as in India and Pakistan or as a foreign language in countries such as German and France.

## **2.4 English and Islam - Irreconcilable Differences?**

Given that world powers are primarily native English speaking countries, English plays a powerful socio-political role in traditionally non-English speaking countries. The dominance of the English language is justified by the political security and civilization of its users versus the supposed inferiority and backwardness of the people who do not speak it. Phillipson (1992) not only explains that the English language has been established through the centuries as a language of the privileged classes and societies, but takes this one step further and links

English and superiority to Christianity and points to biblical references in order to demonstrate where the power behind the theory of one language, a monolingual world, still drives nations and people to spreading English. The added psychological motivation that the will of God is being spread gives ESOL teachers a feeling that they are doing the right thing by elevating their students not only linguistically but also socially and morally. This is particularly alarming for Saudi Arabia, the home of Islam. In fact, voices of opposition are coming from Muslims who believe that more English means less Islam (Karmani, 2005; Kazmi, 2004). However, Crystal (2000) claims that English can serve as a lingua franca that need not be at the expense of the native language. Yet, Pennycook (1998) explains that for some languages such as Arabic and Hebrew the language of the holy books are deemed sacred. Pennycook adds that since the English language has been used as a means to convert the unsuspecting language learner, its instruction raises questions about what is being done in English classrooms. Arabic being the language of the Quran, is unchangeable by religious edict, thus, the language is tied to the religion, Islam. Attachment to Arabic is both sentimental and instrumental as Arabic is the instrument of spreading Islam. However, many Quranic verses stress that learning is a duty of every Muslim explains Abu-Eshy (1998) (cited in AlHaq and Smadi, 1996).

## **2.5 Orientalism**

Crystal (2000) explains that the two respective languages have different purposes, one for identity and one for intelligibility, thus they do not need to be in conflict. Yet, emotions associated with identity, history and religion may cloud that view. Said (1977) pontificates over whether modern imperialism has ever ended since Napoleon's entry into Egypt. Said asserts that Orientalism is a concept produced in the Occident and purported by the relationship to the dominant culture surrounding it leading to different projections of Orientalism including linguistic. Holliday (2011, 2004) asserts that Orientalist stereotypes lead to *otherization*, which is a major inhibition to communication because people are stereotyped. In addition, Pennycook (1998) and Phillipson (1992) assert that the use of English language teaching has been used as a means of converting the unsuspecting language learner morally and politically. Due to stereotypes and otherization English teachers may impress their opinions in the classroom in direct and indirect ways through lesson plan choices, pointed questions, and overt expressions of their own opinions.

## **2.6 Critical Pedagogy**

While, Phillipson asserts that the relationship between the learning of languages in educational establishments and the use of languages for a range of societal purposes is complex, there are no specific solutions presented to resist linguistic imperialism. Canagarajah (1993) suggests resisting linguistic imperialism while teaching because he asserts teaching English should be a conscious process by which the teacher adopts a critical approach to pedagogy. Canagarajah (2008, 1993) asserts that cultural conflicts that arise in the classroom due to culturally inappropriate practices should be discussed and exposed, not ignored or changed. Kramsch (1993) explains that dialogue in the classroom is the key to the teaching of the language and culture in the classroom. *Dialogic pedagogy*, unlike *traditional pedagogy* is likely to question the social and political tenets of foreign language education, adds Kramsch. Kramsch also offers case studies and suggested methods of engaging students that are contextual and do not digress from the way students have been socialized to learn. Holliday (2004) suggests deconstructing otherization by using case studies and lesson plans as the pedagogical means of raising awareness in intercultural communication to both teachers and students.

## **3. CASE STUDY**

The first observation when analyzing the 2015 male Saudi EFL survey results was that when studying in the United States, some male Saudi students allow themselves and other male Saudi students around them to assimilate into their Western surroundings, but there may be cultural judgment from their country mates. As a result, the need to investigate the issue of compatibleness with other cultures and the ability to discuss and tolerate a variety of topics, some of which may have been uncomfortable such as common topics widely debated in the US media and legislature such as abortion and medical marijuana emerged. Thus, a case study of a Saudi male ESL student who appeared to be comfortable as a Saudi yet compatible with other students in the ESL program at UT. I chose to observe Haidar AlQutayfi as he was the sole Saudi in my communications class and he seemed very comfortable, although acutely aware that he was the only one representing his country in the diverse ESL class he shared with students from Taiwan China, Venezuela, Japan and Spain. This combination of smooth intercultural communication coupled with his genuine yet humble and non-critical nature seemed rare for a young Saudi male studying in the US. I kept track of his daily reactions to the various topics ranging from global warming to the US 2016 elections in a teacher diary. I interviewed him briefly on a weekly basis about his thoughts and feelings as they related to the topics used in class as well as his thoughts and reactions to the other students and their opinions. These observations culminated in a final interview where Haidar was asked

specifically about his identity as a Saudi after he had spent one year in the UT Austin ESL program and was faced with returning home for the summer.

Overall, it has been observed by teachers and administration that UT ESL students from Saudi Arabia are still generally concerned with the number of other Saudi students in their classes. Haidar explained this sentiment: "When I was in Houston, my friend used to sit by me and speak Arabic, because it felt weird to speak English because we had the same (first) language. It became embarrassing because other people think that you are talking about them." Perhaps this is because Saudi students in the US want to practice English with students who hail from other countries, but it is also because they want to feel free to discuss any topic with any person that happens to work within the class activities.

Students who display a desire to understand the American culture and relate to students from other countries like Haidar may face negative commentary when behaving so-called liberal manners. Students who are willing to tolerate differences in culture and lifestyle between Saudi Arabia and the United States may feel judged or restricted in expression when discussing ideological views with other Saudis also studying in the US. In fact, Haidar said he faced specific gender related scrutiny by a male Saudi friend and fellow ESL student at UT when he was seen talking to female students about classroom topics, homework or forming study groups with women present. I know a guy who when he saw me discussing assignments from class with other students who are girls, he said they are girls and you cannot talk to them. In my opinion, I don't want to embarrass anyone, but even in my religion, you can be friendly with all people, it's the right way."

While in a new environment that allows for freedom of speech, dress and religion, which many Saudi students studying at UT Austin seem to appreciate, their cultural habituation of educationally appropriate topics may still exist. In addition, Saudi students studying in the US may be utilizing tactics of cultural appropriation in order to fit in and appear more Western in origin than they are. This idea was expounded upon when Haidar was asked to speak openly about Saudis studying in the US. "I feel like most Saudis are hypocrites because they say things, like they are good people, but behind the scenes you see their problems, not all but most. And when they go back they face problems with their family because they have been doing wrong things here. So they go back and repeat this behavior and get into trouble. People ask a lot of questions if their daughter are getting married to somebody who studied in the US." This identity crisis may be enhanced when Saudi students who do fit in to the social category of tolerating differences while studying in the US may face deeper issues that impact their futures in Saudi Arabia. While employment options may be more open to Saudis who speak English well and or have earned degrees from American institutions, marriage arrangements as well as expressing sociological ideas that are against the norm, may be problematic.

It is possible that Saudi men try to appease Western queries and try to mitigate the American perception of the restrictiveness of the Saudi culture when compared to the American lifestyle. By insisting that Saudis are in fact liberal and open-minded or that the Western mindset has stereotypes about Saudi Arabia that are incorrect. Although many male Saudi students dress, speak and appear to have assimilated to the Western culture they are studying ESL in, they do not necessarily feel it is appropriate for Saudi female student to be exposed to the same liberal ideas. Haidar explained some of within Saudi interactions and beliefs when studying in the US. "Same-sex marriage for example is not OK to discuss with Saudi women. However, I know some students who do not care. Some Saudis think they are free here to whatever they want. I think it's not the right thing, but because it's not a society that I can control, I don't mind them doing this. Unless it's my country, then I would care. It happens in my country but not legally." This paradoxical behavior demonstrates that some Saudis feel they must simply accept what is happening around them in the US even though they do not feel it is the right moral action or that it should be allowed in their country.

#### **4. 2015 SAUDI MALE ESL STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS**

The insinuation that the diverse origins of students at UT Austin's ESL program all hail from the same cultural norms thus find the same topics are always appropriate is difficult, if not impossible from a pedagogic perspective. In fact, critical pedagogy, an instructional method best employed with diverse cultures impresses that individualized contexts and programs for students rather than a uniform approach cultivate the best learning environment (Canagarajah 2008).

Several of the male Saudi students surveyed in 2015 had expectations that their Saudi female student counterparts in the US should continue to abide by Saudi cultural norms. To illustrate, 6 of the 25 Saudi male ESL students surveyed made a distinct differentiation between appropriate topics for use in the classroom for Saudi men versus that for Saudi women. When asked about the use of various topics in class Haidar explained that most Saudi students don't have a lot of information about history of US for example, so they will not be able to comfortably participate in topics they do not feel well versed enough in . Furthermore, he elaborated "some topics should not be discussed, it depends on the person themselves, like same-sex marriage, which is forbidden (in Islam), so it might be harder to talk about."

To demonstrate this lack of knowledge or inability to recognize issues in Saudi society, an anonymously surveyed male student made reference to the hotly debated topic in Saudi Arabia of women driving, "It is inappropriate to ask us about women driving because it is a false dilemma." The student seemed to be tired of being asked about the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia and described it as a "false dilemma," presumably meaning that to Western audiences, the ban on driving is a concern, but it is not a concern inside of Saudi Arabia. However, the ban has in fact sparked protests and arrests within the country for over 30 years. This attempt at minimizing the issue within Saudi Arabia seems to be an attempt at saving face.

Furthermore, due to the gender division in the cultural surveying conducted among Saudi students, it is important to note that Saudi women have particular religious restrictions placed on them such as covering their hair with the veil (hijab) as well as their arms and legs as well as the socio-cultural expectations such as not going out alone, not riding bikes and the most notable, not driving a car. The latter ban on driving is particularly interesting as there are no laws that explicitly ban women from driving, however it is considered illegal. As a result, in order to uphold this cultural ban, historically Saudi authorities have arrested the closest male relative of women who were driving.

In addition, the Saudi male EFL students attempted to neutralize Saudi societal issues with vague yet emphatic comments to being similar, alike and uniform with Western culture on the surveys. To demonstrate, 3 out of the 25 students surveyed who stated, mostly in capital letters that they are "human." One of these students added; "we just like any other student" and added, along with the third of this group, that they want to be held to the same standards or topics used in the classroom as any other student, thus they do not want to have any observations of their cultural norms by their instructors. These students may assume that they were going to be missing some educational benefits by potentially restricted topics used in the classroom.

However, when asked what he thought about the educational system in the US when compared to Saudi Arabia, Haidar reacted with a very frank response that expressed concern over his ability to fit into his culture upon his return: In Saudi Arabia, we are required to do things, but sometimes we don't know why. Now that I am here I wonder about things that I was doing. If I go back and discuss certain things I would face a lot of arguments. Subjects about praying and eating halal. In KSA I was obligated, but here when I do it is from my desire. There in Saudi, they see the USA as a place for fun or for disaster, they don't see any other views. When I came here I figured out that you are not forced to drink or go to bad places. My family thought if I came here I would be a bad person, but you can avoid a lot of things. You have to have your own protection.

This candid response acknowledges the identity crisis that he may face when going back to reside in Saudi Arabia full time. Although linguistic imperialism seeks to change the culture of students through the use of language. Simply studying abroad and facing one's own collection of intellectual questions with honest curiosity can cause a shift in perspectives as demonstrated by Haidar's admission of his concerns and newly formed views on how to have his own method of navigating through liberal ideas, freedom of expression and a fully unrestricted range of options for all lifestyles and religions available in the US.

## **5. UT ESL CULTURAL COMPATIBILITY SURVEY RESULTS**

In May 2016, the Cultural Compatibility survey was conducted in order to assess the effects of living in an open, liberal and diverse city as well as inquiry into any cultural clashes the UT Austin ESL students may be facing. In fact the cultural survey was conducted right after a female UT student, Haruka Weiser, a first-year Theatre and Dance student, was murdered on campus. Tension was high on campus and students were concerned for their safety. Thus, I expected a very frank group conducting a survey about cultural clashes and comfort level in Austin and in the UT ESL program. Ironically, most of the 19 students surveyed said they felt safe on campus. Only one student surveyed anonymously expressed concern over safety. In addition, all but one student surveyed said he or she felt religious clashes with other students in the UT ESL program. The student responded by highlighting religious differences on the survey question and added that he or she did not feel like other students could understand his or her convictions.

This student who felt such acute religious differences may have been the Middle East because other students responded with comments about it as well. "Some students who come from Middle East have a closed mind, they couldn't accept or care about other people. They do whatever they want, they say whatever they want. They don't care about others. They also judge those who didn't wear clothes which seems covered enough.

While the Cultural Compatibility survey revealed some religious and cultural issues, the majority of comments were emphatic about enjoying the diversity in the program and on campus. One student anonymously said; "ESL program is awesome; I wish to study here one more semester. I really enjoyed this time with them and learned about another cultures. Especially my friend from Saudi Arabia; such a contrasting cultures, beautiful and interesting. My friend of China and his way to work with me made a very good team." Similar comments were repeated throughout the survey that highlighted the joyful experiences they shared when getting to know people from various cultures. However, several students said they expected and attempted to make friends with

Americans, but were disappointed when it was not as easy as they expected. One student spoke out about this displeasure and felt so strongly about it that he decided it was appropriate to speak on the behalf of others. "I have many friends from other countries but at the same time it is really difficult to get connect with native speaker as a friend. I did my best and I have lots of American friends also but it was so hard for me and I believe that for the other ESL students." Overall, was clear from the survey that the students came to Austin to meet Americans and learn English, but were happily surprised when they bonded with students from other countries. These intercultural connections trumped the ESL students' disappointing experiences when trying to befriend Americans and seemingly with other country mates at times. These positive experiences coupled with the bittersweet realizations about cultural clashes and the complexities involved therein will be a part of their foreseeable memories about studying ESL at UT Austin.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Students come to UT Austin from all parts of the world to experience American culture, learn English and realize their dreams. Based on their culture, religion and many other sociological and even financial factors, the students have different, but potentially equally intense experiences. When looking specifically at the students from Saudi Arabia we have to, arguably, factor in the fact that they have been habituated by certain socio-religious lifestyle tenets that may govern their experiences abroad in the UT Austin ESL program.

The research instruments used over the last year of an ESL Saudi male student survey, an ESL Cultural Compatibility survey of a variety of ethnicities and the male ESL Saudi student case study revealed a few different areas of tension. These tensions revolved around their identity, scrutiny over their social behavior and gender expectations as Saudis studying abroad. On one hand, it may be that the K-12 Saudi educational experience, which is based on rote memorization, has left these students with a sense that they must now be exposed to all types of freedom, even if the topic could hinder education or is deemed inappropriate by the instructor. On the other hand, Saudi students that do engage in all of the educational options they are presented with such as co-education, have to explain themselves because they face criticism, to both Saudis in the US and back home. Furthermore, differences in the gender role expectation that men and women behave the same way towards each other as they would inside Saudi Arabia created issues and potential learning barriers for Saudi ESL students.

While this research did not include the entirety of the UT ESL student body base, the sample group was diverse. In addition, the Saudi students were observed over the first year of my employment as a teacher in the UT ESL program, then studied the second year. The time I took in getting to know and acclimate to the program and specifically the expectations and behavior of the Saudi students was valuable because it allowed me to form observations that were not based in my expectations. Since I taught in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for a decade, I imagined that I would go into teaching Saudi students outside of the Kingdom in a similar way. I was cautious to not "type-cast" the Saudi students and I wanted to allow them to reveal themselves as students to me. While, I felt more comfortable engaging in social issues that I knew would be awkward for Saudi students outside of Saudi Arabia, I found the behaviors of the UT Austin ESL Saudi students similar in some ways to that of their counterparts in the Kingdom. Namely, the male Saudi students that placed restrictions on Saudi female students remained the same both inside and out Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the Saudis that were tolerant of gender and socialization with people not of their culture and or religion, such as Haidar, face harsh criticism and judgment from their peers. The same were noted among students I worked with inside Saudi Arabia. Therefore, while Saudi ESL students come to UT Austin, they often bring their cultural norms with them and may have a harder time than other students who hail from other cultures and possibly religions learning and functioning in the environment. Therefore, a study that includes religious values that is program wide and involves students from all nationalities and religions in the program may pinpoint the specific issues that are faced by Saudi and potentially other Muslim students. In addition, surveying Saudi male and Saudi female students in a university environment about the cultural clashes as well as gender-related issues they have noted would shed more light on the issues that are specific to gender roles and associated behavioral expectations that exist in the Saudi society.

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