



## THE ATTITUDE AND THE IMPACT OF THE AMERICAN ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE WITHIN THE SAUDI EDUCATION SYSTEM

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the impact of 9/11 on the educational system in Saudi Arabia. In particular, it discusses how this phenomenon took its course to influence the English teaching system in Saudi Arabia, and the attitude and the impact of this new phenomenon in the Saudi society, in light of the current debate between Arab linguists on the issue of more English less Islam. It also presents a case study on a group of Saudi freshmen students studying English at King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. A 12-item questionnaire, related to this topic was distributed to 65 Saudi students studying English in their second semester of the New English Curricula. The findings provide valuable data on how the youth feel towards Western ideology, learning English and Western culture. Although the findings are context specific, they indicate that the Saudi students agree (for the most part) that both the study of the English language and its culture are necessary in order to develop their English comprehension.

**Keywords:** educational system, September 11, culture, language, hidden curriculum, Saudi Arabia.

**Özet:** Bu çalışma 11 Eylül saldırısının Suudi Arabistan eğitim sistemi üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Özellikle, meydana gelen bu olayın Suudi Arabistan toplumu ve eğitim sistemi üzerindeki etki sürecini, Arap dilbilimcilerin daha çok İngilizce daha az İslam görüşü ışığında incenmesi hedeflenmiştir. Bu çalışma ayrıca, Suudi Arabistan, Cidde'deki Kral Abdül Aziz Üniversitesinin birinci sınıfında okuyan Suudi öğrencilerin katılımında yapılmış bir durum çalışmasını kapsar. Yeni müfredatla İngilizce öğrenen, birinci yılın ikinci dönemindeki 65 Suudi öğrenciyle ilgili konuya dair 12 maddelik bir anket uygulanmıştır. Sonuçlar, gençliğin Batılı ideolojiye, İngilizce öğrenmeye ve Batı kültürüne karşı duygularına dair önemli bulgular sağlamaktadır. Bulgular sadece ilgili örnekleme sınırlı olsa da görülmüştür ki, katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu İngilizce bilgilerini artırmak amacı ile İngiliz dili ve kültürünü öğrenmenin gerekli olduğunu düşünmektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** eğitim sistemi, 11 Eylül, kültür, dil, örtük program, Suudi Arabistan.

Global terror demands a global solution. ...America and our friends must move decisively to take advantage of these new opportunities. This is, then a period akin to 1945 to 1947, when American leadership expanded the number of free and democratic states. ... to create a new balance of power that favoured freedom.

Condoleezza Rice1

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

After the September 11 terrorist attacks and the revelation by the US Government that the 19 hijackers were Muslim Arabs, mostly from Saudi Arabia, “the editorial pages of American newspapers have been full of articles discussing Arab educational systems, and particularly Saudi schools” (Friedman, 2001). According to Freidman, these writers proclaim that the educational institutions in the Arab world foster a mind-set of intolerance and even hostility towards the West, so “these institutions deserve much of the blame for fostering anti-U.S. terrorism” (p. 13, 2002). This paper is divided into five sections: Section 1 will discuss the pressure immersed from this particular incident upon the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Saudi’s curricula and education system. Section 2 will report on the Saudi officials’ attitudes towards these claims and pressure by the White House. Section 3 will analyse the accuracy of these claims upon the Saudi curricula. Section 4 will look at and highlight the impact of 9/11<sup>2</sup> on the educational system in Saudi Arabia. In particular, it will show how this phenomenon took its course to impact the English teaching system in Saudi Arabia, and the attitude and the impact of this new phenomenon in the Saudi society will be discussed in some details, in light of the current debate between Arab linguists scholars on the issue of more English less Islam. Finally, Section 5 will present a case study on a group of Saudi freshmen students studying English at King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

### 1.1. Saudi Arabia Faces Questions and Suspicious on its Religious Regime

Since the dramatic events of September 11, 2001 in New York City, things were not the same neither for Arabs in general, or for Saudis, in particular. American politicians, the public eye, and the media were trying to figure out the main source and reasons behind this horrific act carried out by the 19 highjackers, 15 of them from Saudi Arabia, supposedly a strong ally to the United States. Since this highly unpleasant incident, the relationship between Saudi Arabia<sup>3</sup> and America is no longer enjoying friendly and close relations. According to Bahgat<sup>4</sup>, on the issue of the relationship between the two countries, he states that “the strong ties between Washington and Riyadh<sup>5</sup> have been intensely tested by 11 September terrorists attack against the United States” (2003, p.115).

Consequently, several commentaries and news reports were raising doubts on the role of the education system in producing Islamic extremists. The reason behind these doubts on Saudi religious education is mainly because these acts have been committed in the name of *Allah*,<sup>6</sup> and hence, in the name of Islam, the religion of Saudi Arabia, which is considered by many as one of the greatest religions in the world, with 1.2 billion followers. The Muslims present 22% of the world’s population, and the second largest religion in the world after Christianity<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, Saudi Arabia is considered to

<sup>1</sup> Condoleezza Rice is the 66<sup>th</sup> United States Secretary of State, and the second in the administration of President George W. Bush to hold the office. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Condoleezza\\_Rice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Condoleezza_Rice).

<sup>2</sup> The September 11, 2001 attacks (often referred to as 9/11) consisted of a series of coordinated suicide attacks by Al-Qaeda on that day upon the United States of America. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/9/11>

<sup>3</sup> Saudi Arabia is considered to be the world’s largest oil producer and exporter, esp. to the United States, its strong ally.

<sup>4</sup> Gawdat Bahgat is the director of the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, Department of Political Science, at Indian University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, Pennsylvania.

<sup>5</sup> Riyadh is the political capital and the largest city in Saudi Arabia, also it houses the sources of all political and religious verdicts in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

<sup>6</sup> *Allah* is the standard Arabic word for "God". The term is best known in the West for its use by Muslims as a reference to God. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allah>.

<sup>7</sup> CAIR (Council on American-Islamic relations)

all Muslims in the globe to be the cradle of the Islamic civilization. But, is the religious Islamic regime to blame for this horrific act? Since the act was executed in the name of *Allah*, Islamic religious followers were certainly the object of suspicion. According to Bar (2004) commenting on the 9/11 events: “this fact has sparked a fundamental debate both in the West and within the Muslim world regarding the link between these acts and the teaching of Islam” (p.1). Still, however, a suspicious legitimate cloud was hovering above the educational system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (K.S.A) looking for answers. Questions about what goes in the classroom; and what is embed in the textbooks were under the microscope by linguists as well educational analysts.

Therefore, because of these increasing suspicious beliefs in blaming the religious educational system and policy in the K.S.A., Karmani (2005) believes that “an extraordinary unparalleled degree of pressure has been escalating on Muslim government [by the United States of America] to reform its educational curricula, the underlying belief being that current educational system in place in the Muslim world was partly responsible for motivating the terrorist attacks,” (p.262) in New York and Washington, D.C. respectively. Interestingly, in the same article written by Sohail Karmani<sup>8</sup> on ‘*English, “Terror”, and Islam*’, he provides a concrete example on his claims from the Congress published in June 2002, (H. Con. Res 432), when a study “concurred that some of the textbooks being used in Saudi educational curricula were focusing what is described as 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.” Ironically; however, a study done in the same year in America by Rugh<sup>9</sup> stating: “the lack of sufficient information to make definitive statements about the effect of Arab schools on tendencies of graduate to become terrorists” (p. 396, 2002).

Nevertheless, because of such claims by numerous media services and politicians in the United States towards the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, “some organizations and individual researchers have made initial attempts [at that point] to review Arab textbooks [K.S.A. in this case] for political content,” (Brown, 2001) and contrary to these claims, according to Brown, on the same line of thought as Rugh: “no one has yet collected sufficient data in a systematic way, and analysed it dispassionately, on what Arab textbooks actually say, or what goes on in Arab classrooms” (p.15). Because of the conservative nature of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (the cradle of Islamic civilization and the birth of its Prophet Mohamed *pbuh*<sup>10</sup>) observing the classroom for a religious-political point of view can be regarded as offence and demeaning to its people. To be expected, it can only be done by locals or/and a trusted insider of the host country - K.S.A., which at that point was not accessible by the linguists and analysts. For instance, according to *Okaz*<sup>11</sup> “when a Saudi researcher published a serious study about the curricula, and about using astronomy [a science

<sup>8</sup> Sohail Karmani teaches in the English Language Centre at the University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. He is the founder of TESOL Islamia 9www.tesolislamia.org), a professional-academic organization concerned with the cultural, political, and economic ramifications of teaching in Muslim educational contexts.

<sup>9</sup> William A. Rugh is President and CEO of AMIDEAST. Previously he spent 30 years as a foreign Service Officer, with assignments at seven posts in the Arab world, including as Ambassador to Yemen and the United Arab Emirates.

<sup>10</sup> Peace be upon him (*ṣallā llahu alayhi wa sallam*, also transliterated as *sallallahu aleyhi wasallam* or *salallahu alayhi wasalaam*) is a phrase that Muslims often say after saying the name of a prophet of Islam.

<sup>11</sup> *Okaz* is a daily Arabic newspaper published in Jeddah, KSA. It concerns mainly with the local issues of the country.

that is regarded as against the Islamic beliefs] to observe Ramadan<sup>12</sup> moon, he was sentenced to thousands of lashes.” (2002). This incident clearly demonstrates that the K.S.A. takes its education privacy very seriously.

## 1.2. Saudi Officials Respond to the White House Demand

The international reaction was based largely on the U.S. criticism<sup>13</sup> of Saudi educational system. High ranking officials were trying their utmost best to defend their education policy and their nations' identity which relies mainly on Islam, while interviewed by several Arabic and English newspapers and magazines on that matter. Saudi curricula, hence, met with controversial and strong debate from its officials. For instance, the Saudi Minister of Interior, Prince *Naif Ibn Abd Al-Aziz* gave an interesting interview to the Saudi owned London based daily *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*<sup>14</sup>. In the interview, he spoke about the international and, more recently, local demand (which will be dealt with in the following pages), on changing the educational system in Saudi Arabia. He said: “We do believe in the soundness of our educational curriculum, but we never oppose development of educational methods in a manner that does not run counter to the country's deep-rooted principles” (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, 2002).

Furthermore, in the same week on October 20, 2002, Saudi Defence Minister Prince *Sultan Ibn Abd Aziz*, discussed the same issue with *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, and stated that: “We will never change our education policy, and there is no demand that we change it. Our country has a policy; ...and above all, religious curricula that must never be harmed. Any demand by another country in the world [meant the United States here] that Saudi Arabia changes its curricula is unacceptable interference in Saudi sovereignty”. Clearly, the high officials of K.S.A. took America's concern as interference on the country sovereignty and its stability. Furthermore, in *Al-Watan*<sup>15</sup> Newspaper, *Muhammad Al-Najimi*, a member of The Islamic Fiqh<sup>16</sup> Academy (IFA), said, “Some of the calls for curricular change harm national principles, and this threatens national identity. There are those who argue that our curricula contain *takfir* [accusations of apostasy against other Muslims], as there is a religious spirit to some

<sup>12</sup> Ramadan or Ramadhan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The word *Ramadan* is derived from the word *ramd* "to burn". Fasting in the month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. The month is spent fasting during the daylight hours from dawn to dusk. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramadan\\_\(calendar\\_month\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramadan_(calendar_month)).

<sup>13</sup> On October 22, 2001, in a statement addressed to the Saudi government before the Council on Foreign Relations, **Senator Joseph Biden, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee** said: "It's one thing to decide you're going to export *Wahhabi Sunnism*, by setting up Madrassas around the region. Okay, I get that. But what I don't get is setting them up where they have a third feature: that they're a hate-filled, anti-American breeding ground." **Senator Carl Levin, Chairman of the Senate's Armed Service Committee**, added months later that the U.S. should reassess its relationship with Saudi Arabia unless it reforms its schools. **Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abd Al-Aziz** replied to that statement on January 15, 2002, in a press release posted on the Saudi Arabian Embassy website, "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia prohibits the teaching of hatred and violence. Charges that Saudis fund schools that do so are baseless and lack an understanding of our society, culture, and laws... I have great respect for Senator Levin but I am surprised by his statement. If he has any concerns, I urge him to visit Saudi Arabia..." On October 18, 2002, **Congressmen Jim Davis and Douglas Bereuter** wrote an op-ed in the *Bergen Record* (New Jersey) titled "To Fight Terror, Fix Saudi Schools" which fiercely censured the Kingdom's education system for having "tolerated elements within its education system that promote and encourage extremism." The congressmen wrote "The religious curriculum is written, monitored, and taught by followers of the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam," who have permitted teachers to use "texts and lesson plans that encourage intolerance and antisemitic, anti-American, and anti-Western views, making some Saudi students prime recruiting targets for militant extremist groups." The congressmen also connected the Saudi education system to the U.S. war on terrorism: "If left unchecked, extremist influences could become a threat to the national security of not only the United States, but also of Saudi Arabia. If the United States wants to fight terrorism, it is past time that we take steps to publicly support reforms in Saudi Arabia to prevent extremism from infecting the country's next generation of leaders. It is past time for the United States to hold the government of Saudi Arabia to its promise to combat terrorism..."

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, is the main leading political Arabic newspaper for Saudis based in London.

<sup>15</sup> *Al-Watan* is a Saudi Newspaper concerned with the global, regional, and local matters in sense of conveying the religious, political, and social life of Saudi Arabia.

<sup>16</sup> Fiqh is a theological science in Islam teaching every aspect in the religion.

of the content, but the truth is that there is not a single word calling for *takfir* in the curricula, and the curricula adhere to Islam and not to any particular religious group.”

### 1.3. Saudi Arabia Promises to Reform its Educational Policy

However, despite this strong resistance from the Saudi officials, in July 2004, just less than two years from the above defensive attitude, Prince *Khalid Al-Faisal*<sup>17</sup> on his weekly program *Idhaat* on *Al-Arabiya* TV<sup>18</sup>, dealt with the ideological perspective presented upon the Saudi society and the educational system/policy. In the interview Prince *Khalid Al-Faisal*, on the issue of the school curricula said: “The school curricula constitute 20% of the issue [extremist and violence], but 80% is the hidden curricula and the way in which these ideas of violence and extremism are inculcated by those who are responsible for the students in the schools, institutes, faculties, and universities.” This bold statement by the Prince is a historical improvement in acknowledging the source of the problem and can be regarded as a major stepping-stone in understanding the issue involved in the Saudi curricula.

The issue of hidden curricula is a bit vague and was not clearly explained by the Prince. If one can understand the educational system in Saudi Arabia, what was meant by ‘the hidden curricula’ can be seen as *madrasah*<sup>19</sup> in the mosques, summer camps for young youths with interests in the Islamic religion, and possibly brainwashing by the actual teachers teaching the subjects. For instance, according to a report in the Saudi daily *Al-Watan*, a Saudi English teacher was fired after it was revealed that he had deviated from the curriculum and had devoted time to readings from the Koran instead of English studies. The report, also, claims that a few other teachers devote the time of English studies to another topic to avoid teaching in English. Clearly, we can assume that Education in K.S.A. is considered very sacred, and teachers are regarded as second to *Allah*.

Another remarkable interview in the West was conducted with Prince *Turki Al-Faisal*<sup>20</sup>. In his interview with *USA Today*, where he was asked about the Saudi textbooks and the steps that are undertaken by the government to combat the issue of extremism, he states that: “we admit we have people in our midst who are bigots, who are intolerant and who see the world through ‘us’ and ‘them’. Nevertheless, do we consider this acceptable behaviour? Absolutely not. Are we working hard to change mind-sets that encourage prejudice and intolerance? Yes, absolutely.” (*USA Today*, 2006). It took K.S.A. about 5 years to admit there is a fault in their educational system. This statement by the Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the United States is an acknowledgment of the need to reform the system and a promise of a new era for the future in the country.

<sup>17</sup> Prince *Khalid Al-Faisal* is the Royal prince and governor of the Southern Province in S.A. and one of the most influential member in the royal family. Also, he is the son of the former King *Faisal Al-Saud*, the King who stopped exporting Oil to the United States back in the 70’s.

<sup>18</sup> Working 24 hours, seven days a week, Alarabiya.net relies on teams of journalists and creative multimedia professionals to provide stories that combine the best features of fast and catchy TV news with the in-depth analysis & explanation of print news. <http://www.alarabiya.net>

<sup>19</sup> *Madrasah* (*madrasa* pl. *madāris*) is the Arabic word for any type of school, secular or religious (of any religion). It has been loaned into various other languages. It is variously transliterated as *madrasah*, *madarasaa*, *medresa*, *madrassa*, etc. In common English usage the word “*madrasah*” has been taken to refer to an Islamic religious school.

<sup>20</sup> Prince *Turki Al-Faisal* is Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the United States.

This recent and definitely changed attitude towards changing of the textbooks in K.S.A. occurred not long after the recently appointed King Abdullah's<sup>21</sup> interview on ABC News with Barbara Walters. The King states, when asked about the textbooks in Saudi Arabia: "I will not deny that such extremism existed in the K.S.A., but such extremism exists in almost every country in the world" (SUSRIS, 2006). In addition, on May 18, 2006, Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister *Saud Al-Faisal*, at a press conference with Secretary Rice following the U.S.-Saudi Strategic Dialogue meeting, was asked for an update about educational materials. He said: "the education reforms in K.S.A. go beyond textbooks rewriting, ... and they go into training, directions ...and so the whole system of education will be transformed from top to bottom. Textbooks are only of the first steps which have been taken by Saudi Arabia" (*USA Today*, 2006).

#### 1.4. The Ideological Ideas Presented towards the 'Others' in the Saudi Education System

Because the fear from producing more Islamic fundamentalists, and the fear of losing its strong connection with the White House, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has begun its first initial stage of introducing English and its culture to the primary schools (not previously taught at that stage). This introduction to the West is greatly needed as Dankowitz<sup>22</sup> (2004) in his article '*Saudi Study Offers Critical Analysis of the Kingdom's Religious Curricula*,' concluded in his study on the Kingdom's religious curricula finding that "there is a great defects in the curricula, particularly with regard to attitude toward the 'other'-that is toward anyone whose views are not in line with the Wahhabi<sup>23</sup> religion that is dominant in Saudi Arabia" (p. 1). According to Dankowitz, he stated that the researchers found that there was no attempt to inculcate in the students an legitimacy for civil values such as human rights and political awareness, and that there was much less discussion of social issues and civil values than of religious matters. Not only that, but they also teach them that any other public affairs and customs which are not similar to them are unbelief.

The researchers said that "after the curricula label 'others' as [belong to] the camp of *bid'ah*<sup>24</sup> without giving accuracy, they present rules for treating the people who commit *bid'ah* [rules which] contradict the principles of *Shari'a*<sup>25</sup> by stating "it is forbidden to visit with or spend time in the company of anyone who commits *bid'ah*"

<sup>21</sup> King Abdullah succeeded to the throne on August 1, 2005, following the death of his half-brother King Fahad. In fact, King Abdullah is loved by most if not all of the citizens of S.A. He brought prosperity and promising future for the youths of Saudi. Also, when he was first appointed he has raised the salaries of all the Saudis by 15%, first time increase since 1980.

<sup>22</sup> Aluma Dankowitz is Director of MERMRI (The Middle East Media Research Institute) Reform Project.

<sup>23</sup> According to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Wahhabiyya denotes "the doctrine and the followers of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab (1115-1206/1703-92)." Wahhabiyya was founded in the mid-18th century in the Arabian Peninsula. The core ideology of Wahhabiyya is based on the concepts of adhering to *tawhid* (monotheism) and fighting *shirk* (polytheism). Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab believed that Muslims throughout the world had become religiously ignorant and were no better than non-believers. In addition to gaining knowledge of *tawhid* and refraining from *shirk*, believers were expected to "combat... those who did not act according to the rules of *tawhid*, who were thus regarded as not being Muslims..."

<sup>24</sup> In Islam, *bid'ah* is any type of innovation. Though innovations in worldly matters are acceptable to an extent, innovation within the religion is seen as a sin in Islam, as Muhammad stated as such: "Whoever innovates something in this matter of ours [i.e., Islam] that is not a part of it, will have it rejected." In addition, the Qur'an (which Muslims believe is the word of God) states " ..This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bid%20E2%80%98ah>.

<sup>25</sup> *Sharia* ( transliteration: Šarī'ah) is the dynamic body of Islamic religious law. The term means "way" or "path to the water source"; it is the legal framework within which the public and some private aspects of life are regulated for those living in a legal system based on Muslim principles of jurisprudence. *Sharia* deals with many aspects of day-to-day life, including politics, economics, banking, business, contracts, family, sexuality, hygiene, and social issues. There is no strictly static codified set of laws of *sharia*. *Sharia* is more of a system of devising laws, based on the Qur'an (the religious text of Islam), *hadith* (sayings of Muhammad pbuh), *ijma*, *qiyas* and centuries of debate, interpretation and precedent.

(Dankowitz, 2004, p.2) In addition, the researchers further found that the curricula attempt to limit the types of relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims, to highlight aspects of enmity toward non-Muslim, and to refrain from underlining aspects of Shari'a that hold all humanity. Thus, for example, the curricula state, "It's forbidden for believers to love the polytheist and to form relationships with them-even if they were relatives [as translated from Al-Tawhid curriculum, third year high school]."

The curricula go great lengths to depict how polytheism is spreading, how Muslim world is being flooded with forbidden innovations *bid'ah*, and how society is suffering from moral disintegration. Some examples are following statements: "Most Muslims imitate infidels in forbidden innovation and polytheism"; [as translated from Al-Tawhid curriculum, third year high school] "Polytheism, destructive principles, and deviant cults have spread throughout the Muslim nation, and they have caused many people to leave the fold of Islam" [as translated from Al-Tawhid curriculum, third year high school].

Also, outside the schools arena, in an article published on May 31, 2003 in *Roz Al-Yousef*<sup>26</sup>, Al-Abrashi wrote: "A Wahhabi Saudi Sheikh issued a *fatwa*<sup>27</sup> by warning young people not to speak English and not to try to study it. He swallowed his saliva, wet his lips, and screamed: "This is the language of Infidels, to the point where it has the word 'blease' ['please'], which is derived from *Iblis*<sup>28</sup> [Satan]. This is the language of the devil." He may not represent all of the nations' ideologies and beliefs but still it may present some of the attitude towards English as a foreign language from a Saudi religious leader's point of view. More importantly, as a religious cleric, he is issuing a *fatwa*. To understand *fatwa* properly, Bar (2006) states that "one must recognize the centrality in Islam of law as a regulator of all aspects of life, and the link between the legalistic and casuistic methodology of Islamic jurisprudence and the moral issues they strive to regulate" (p. 1).

### 1.5. Introducing English into Saudi Primary Schools

As commentators have observed in 2003, Saudi Arabic government decided to introduce English into all primary schools (not previously taught at this level). In a study by Azuri<sup>29</sup> for MEMORI<sup>30</sup> (2006), he published an article titled '*Debate on Reform in Saudi Arabia*' which dealt with the current issues of Saudis, the Westernization in their society, and the educational system in Saudi Arabia. In his article, he cited an Islamist Saudi website<sup>31</sup>, which published a statement condemning the reformists in Saudi Arabia. The statement, which was signed by 61 Saudi Sheikhs, including university presidents, professors, attorneys, judges, educators and businessmen warned that a 'Junta'<sup>32</sup> had taken hold of the Saudi media and was acting in service of external enemies in order to 'Westernize' Saudi society-thus endangering

<sup>26</sup> *Roz Al-Yousef* is one of the most famous political newspaper in Egypt. <http://www.rosaonline.net/alphadb/index.asp>.

<sup>27</sup> In the early days of Islam, *fatwa* were pronounced by distinguished scholars to provide guidance to other scholars, judges and citizens on how subtle points of Islamic law should be understood, interpreted or applied. There were strict rules on who is eligible to issue a valid *fatwa* and who could not, as well as on the conditions the *fatwa* must satisfy to be valid.

<sup>28</sup> *Iblis* is the name given to the primary devil in Islam. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iblis>

<sup>29</sup> L. Azuri is a Research Fellow at MEMORI- The Middle East Media Research Institute.

<sup>30</sup> MEMORI- The Middle East Media Research Institute.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.islamlight.net>. An anti-form website dedicated mainly to the citizens of K.S.A.

<sup>32</sup> According to Oxford English Dictionary, A Junta is deliberative or administrative council or committee.

the Saudi society and its Islamic values. The statement called on the Saudi rulers to deny member of this 'Junta' positions of Influence, and called on religious leaders to prevent the Junta's plans. Furthermore, it harshly warns "the nation against junta, known for its deviant Westernizing tendencies, that has managed to influence decisions and to take over some institutions that have great influence on Saudi society's identity and future ...and cutting down the religious curricula in state and popular educational institutions" (cited in Azuri, 2006, p.1).

Nevertheless, because of White House pressure and the domestic attitudes towards the West, an immediate measure had to be taken. Subsequently, the Higher Committee on Education Policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (under this present pressure from the American Government) discussed a program to introduce English language studies at primary schools in the Kingdom in order to expose its youths to the idea of acceptance and tolerance of others, [USA and the West] introducing the concept living in harmony with the 'Others' or the 'West'.

Interestingly enough, in an article published by Arab News in 2003, a meeting was "chaired by Prince Sultan, second deputy premier and minister of defence and aviation, who in turn, adopted recommendations on the topic". Held by the second deputy and Minister of Defence gave it a political tone and send a clear message of the seriousness of such implantation of this program to both the citizens of S.A., and to the rest of the world, especially the United States. Moreover, in 2004, Dr. Abdul Iah Al-Mushrif, the director of curricula at the Education Ministry, has implemented this program. Also, because of this new trend, "K.S.A. had to recruit 935 English teachers from abroad to implement the program, but the Cabinet decided to postpone it until further studies are completed" (Arab News, 2003).

Also, the postpone of this program may require a huge amount of budget which K.S.A. was not ready for, at that time after coming out of the Gulf War. Although, Dr. Al-Mushrif in his interview with *Arab News*<sup>33</sup>: "emphasised 'both in the newspaper and TV interviews' that English would not be taught at the expense of other subjects such as Arabic and Islamic sciences taught to 5,837 primary schools from Class IV," (2002) according to the Islamic website<sup>34</sup>, the actual truth is far from that as "Islamic classes have been cut since 2003 to one class a day instead of four classes a day."

It is noteworthy to know that: "Scholars have estimated that within Saudi public school curriculum, Islamic studies make up quarter to a third of the students' weekly classroom hours in lower and middle school, plus several hours each week in higher school" (*Washington Post*, 2006). However, because of the "threat to U.S. national security interests, there were soon calls to cut back on the amount of religion being taught at schools, colleges and universities and to begin introducing 'broader, more secular based curriculum' in the Muslim world" (*Washington Times*, 2003). Consequently, more English less Islam.

## 1.6. More English less Islam: A Debate on the Current Issue

<sup>33</sup> Arab News is the leading English Newspaper in Saudi Arabia targeted towards the expatriates living in the country and highly educated Saudis.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.islamlight.net>. An anti-form website dedicated mainly to the citizens of K.S.A.



This new trend taking place in the Gulf, especially in the K.S.A., has provoked an anger and resentment by many Arabic and Muslim scholars notably Karmani and others. For example, Karmani's paper (2005) entitled '*English, "terror" and Islam*' proposed one of the most

astonishing formulas that has emerged amid these developments, and which concerns us directly as TESOL professional, is the resounding call these days to promote 'more English and less Islam', in the belief that such a position will somehow serve in eradicating the seeds of Islamic terrorist activity (p.263).

Karmani's conceptualization can be seen ensconced in the 'conduit metaphor' (Reddy, 1979), where ideas are objects, language is a container, communication is sending. Hence, according to Karmani, English is served in the Middle East, and especially in the Gulf States, as a container of ideologies which may results in reshaping the ideas impeded in it and, therefore, sending the wrong messages to the society in general. According to Argungu (1996), supporting Karmani's argument, the English language "apart from its central role in education, was (and still is) one of the major weapon with which the West launched its massive intellectual and cultural onslaught against the Muslims ...for not only is English strategic but it is also a catalyst in the Islamization process since it cuts across almost all disciplines acting as a conveyor of knowledge and culture" (p.331). According to (Phillipson, 2003) "it is the economic and political interest of the United States to ensure that if the world is moving toward a common language, I be English; that if the World is moving toward telecommunications, safety, and quality standards, they be American and that if common values are being developed, they be values with which the Americans are comfortable" (p.9).

As a consequence, Karmani believes that the teaching of English in this modern DNA age, as it has been practised in British Empire, serves as a tool for linguistic imperialism, cultural alienation, and in the case of Muslim countries a de-Islamization of a targeted nation. For example, in a *Washington Post* article, provocatively entitled 'Putting English over Islam', Susan Glasser (2003) observes that in wake of the post 9/11 educational reform debate, students in the conservative Qatar are now 'learning less Islam and more English', and in order 'to make way for more hours of English, classes in Islamic studies and Arabic are being cut back' (cited in Karmani, 2005, p. 263). Although Karmani made some interesting comments, his views on '*More English and Less Islam*' is mainly based on his self-made legitimate personal opinions and observations obtained from the Western media, and there has not been any kind of sociolinguist study that dealt with this new phenomenon as of now. His claims in diluting the Islamic culture by studying more English are unscientific and deny the place of English as medium for global communication.

Moreover, in TESOL Islamia<sup>35</sup> (2006) discussion forum, on the same token as of Karmani, Arab English teachers argue that

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.tesolislamia.org> A website which is dedicated in serving Muslim ESL learners and teachers worldwide.

the current designed English syllabus in the Arab world doesn't reflect the true aspiration of the Muslim Nation. It does not contribute to the right upbringing of a true Muslim generation. The English syllabus that we have in our educational institutions is completely based on the western culture which is totally different and far away from the Islamic teachings.

This debate goes on to call for the actual “syllabus designers in the Arab world to be inspired with their approaches in designing a syllabi “from the wealthy and glorious Islamic Heritage of this ‘NATION’ [capitalization emphasised in the original] and provide an outstanding syllabus that contributes to Islamic propagation to reflect the ‘GREAT Message of ISLAM’ [capitalization emphasised in the original].”

Also, another interesting study done by TESOL Islamia site is a poll: "Is the way English is currently taught in the Muslim World contrary to Islamic values?" The result of this study in 2006 was resounding 62% in affirmative. However, we need to acknowledge the fact that these results - obtained and accessed by highly educated English speakers in the Arab world (although the number of votes did not exceed 129) seem to reflect, possibly, the widely held belief that most EFL materials used in Muslim countries are produced from a mainly Euro/American-centred cultural perspective. However, is 129 a large enough number to suggest this belief? Does the website determine who access it? On the other hand, is this website devoted to, in favour of, more Islamization of English hence the name?

Interestingly, taking into consideration Karmani's (2005) view of new conceptualities of English and Islam, we can assume that this new trend in the role of the hegemony of English on the Islamic curricula may not be far from taking place in Saudi Arabia. For example, the Islamic sciences courses, indeed, have been cut from four courses taught regularly for five days to be encapsulated in one course a day. Not dissimilarly, in an article entitled “English as a Weapon to Fight ‘Terror’,” the editorial of *The Weekend Australian* (2002) reveals how “the U.S. Government is considering encouraging U.S. English teachers to work in the force against terrorism and Muslim extremists” (cited in Karmani, 2005, p.263).

One cannot help but question the legitimacy of such accusations, that so far only have only been dealt with by a few Muslim scholars, mainly Karmani who is a British Muslim scholar teaching in the United Arab Emirates. In fact, we need to question ourselves, as linguists and thinkers: Does Islam, the religion of forgiveness, encourage violence? Does even English call for more ‘English and less Judaism or Buddhism’? Are Arabs the only problem we are facing with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? We as researchers and writers ought not to fall into the trap of generalization of such matter. We could argue that such claims are utterly preposterous and only driven by Western extremists as much as any other extremists.

In his legit made self-defence of Arabic/Islamic culture and identity, Karmani (2005) in his narrative *‘More English and less Islam’* points out a classic belief that English, the language of modern day technology and humanitarian sciences (in sharp contrast to Arabic, the language of the 19 hijackers, Al-Qaeda, and suicide bombers in Israel) is exclusively endowed to promote the values of freedom, democracy, justice,

openness, and decency. Commenting on recent global events, the British historian Paul Johnson (2003) notes that in a globalised world, the United States now has to anticipate its enemies search out and destroy their bases, and disarm states likely to aid them. He suggests that there are compelling reasons why the United States is uniquely endowed to exercise this kind of global authority, having the language of the twenty-first century, and that a more secure world will be legislated for, policed, and adjudicated in English.

On the other spectrum of debate, having explored the concept of English and Islam by the Arabic scholar Karmani, Ahmed Kabel (an Arabic scholar from Morocco), in his paper entitled '*The Discourse of appropriation: a response to Karmani (2005)*', argues that although English can be considered as "putative hegemonic discourse as inhibitive and imposed encumbrance, we need to take into account how the language is constantly and unpredictable appropriated and creatively reshaped and expropriated to give voice to emerging agencies and subjectively" (p. 136).

Despite the fact that learners are exposed to a language 'embodying' values and ideologies of the West sometimes in conflict with their own and drawn by coercion or alluring fascination, it can be seen as a stimulating mind activity, and in turn, an opportunity to look 'outside the box' and appreciate differences between the two cultures. The idea of embracing someone else's values and ideologies can be very positive. Youssef and Simpkins (1985) found that Arabs who lived in a U.S.-dominated culture for a long time held a positive view of their ethnicity. Despite the fact that those Arabs were under daily exposure of the Western ideology, they still held proud of their own and did not suffer from so-called de-Islamization of their values. Thus, Karmani's (2005) view is highly questionable and not based on any study.

Moreover, in the same line of thought, Kabel (2007) proposes the idea of 'the power potential'. He strongly argues, drawing his analogies from Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, that "'the power potential' is latent in any language system, ready to be realized to construct, resist and reconstruct discourses and power of all sorts" (p.139). Language is a fluid concept can be shaped and reshaped according to its carrier. Learners of English (or any other language for that matter), Kabel argues "have a mind of their own," and can carry their own "hidden agenda" (p.139) in learning a language. Thus, according to his argument, Kabel believes that: "Reproducing and delivering ideologies that are in conflict with the views of our Muslim learners cannot be taken at a face value" (p.139).

Despite the fact that learners of English tend to carry the cultural influence of the English culture when speaking or writing, this can be easily manipulated and manoeuvred accordingly. As clearly can be witnessed in other corners of applied linguistics research namely contrastive rhetoric (Kaplan, 1966; Connor, 1996) and Interlanguage Pragmatics (Beebe et al., 1990; Kasper, 1992) cited in Kabel (2007, p. 138). Thus, drawing from Keble's argument, language can be at the service of its users. It shaped, reshaped, and reproduced effectively according to its surroundings and users. For this example, I like to use the term "the virtual language" (Widdowson, 2003, p.48). In his oft-quoted statement, Achebe (1975) has this to say:

I feel that English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be new English, still in communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings (p. 62).

Thus, drawing from Achebe's logical perspective on leaning of a new language, English in K.S.A. does not pose any danger to eroding the identity of its locals, but on the other hand, it can be served as a tool for modernization and a jet for a brighter new future of K.S.A. under its new King, His Highness King *Abdullah Al-Saud*. Also, *Al-Sheikha Lubna al-Qasimi*, U.A.E. economic minister stated in her interview with the CNN that she believes "in the co-existence of modern and traditional values" (CNN, 2007), and is at the same time drafting a new law to open economy to greater foreign ownership. Obviously, new changes will occur under the new King and many problems are being addressed in regards to education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and especially since ELT promises more doors to the economy and serves as a tool to 'brighten' youths mind as some claim.

### **1.7. The values of English**

Certainly English in Saudi Arabia plays a major role in their lives starting from work, daily life, and entertainment wise. For instance, there are TV, Satellite TV, Radio, Video Games, and popular Hip Hop which are taking Saudi youth by storm, and not to mention English is essential in the domains of science, technology and medicine. In addition, its importance is reflected in the large numbers of Saudis who study abroad in English-speaking countries. Although Arabic is the only official language of Saudis, it is usual for English to be used alongside Arabic in road signs and names of the shops. Printed materials in places such as Banks, Airports, Travel Agencies and Post Offices are usually both in English and Arabic. In fact, in the main shopping strip in the up-market shopping districts in Jeddah, names such as Toys'R'Us, Body Shops, Diesel, Starbucks, Next, Mother Care, are only written in English with Latin alphabet and without any kind of translation and became household names in the Saudi fabric. Fast-food restaurants, and not to mention the upper market restaurants scattered in cosmopolitan cities such as Jeddah, Riyadh, Teheran, Yun'bu, and Dammam are served by employees who speak English as a medium of communication with little Arabic. However, not all the population are able to speak it. It is considered sign of status and high privilege for the educated ones and the upper middle class who send their kids abroad to develop their English skills and locally to private schools where English is more emphasized there than in public schools.

Recently, with the economical growth, Saudi Arabia has gone through a huge process of modernization in all fields of life: from schools, hospitals, to way of life. This new trend of modernization required a transfer via westerns cultures and values where English is served as the medium of communication and carrier of the wave. It has also been found to be an essential tool in the modernization of K.S.A., besides its importance as means to propagate Islam among non-Muslims foreigners.

The new trends of western involvement taking place through the popular American media such as Hollywood movies and MTV, and the adoption of Western clothes and way of eating through the spread of McDonalds, KFC, Starbucks could not come

alive without a certain impact of the Saudi society fabric with their ideological perspectives on daily life. Not to mention that American graduates are usually hired by big companies such as ARAMCO, Shells, Western Banks, and Saudi Airlines. Also, English plays a vital role in the economy when dealing with the West, which Saudi Arabia heavily relies on.

## 2. RESEARCH STUDY AND FINDINGS

This paper cannot be complete without proving either points of Karmani's and Kabel's' in relation to the idea of *More English and less Islam*, to demonstrate the actual impact and attitudes towards this new trend of more English culture and ideology and less Islamization of English.

## 3. METHOD

In order to get a clear picture of the Karmani's and Kabel's claim, a 12-item questionnaire, related to this topic was distributed to 65 Saudi students studying English in their second semester of the New English Curricula at King Abdulla Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. However, only 47 questionnaires were completed and received at this point. The average age of the participants was 21. They were young Saudi who came from cosmopolitan Jeddah and remote villages around K.S.A.

The participants were asked to show the extent of their agreement and disagreement with each item on a five-point Likert scale questionnaire: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). However, since these students are only in their second semester, a translation of each item into Arabic had to be done carefully to convey the correct meanings contained in the questionnaire.

The questionnaires were distributed and returned to the researcher in the same day during a 130 minutes classroom time.

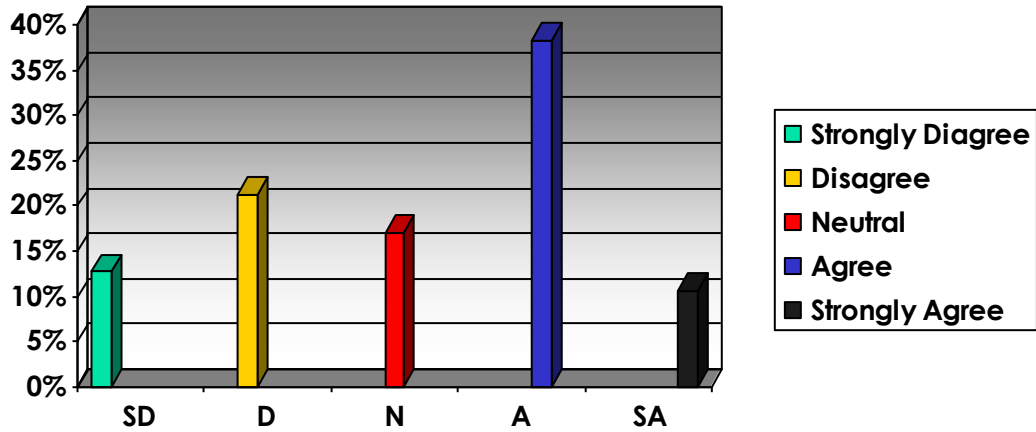
## 4. FINDINGS

The findings are presented in Table 1- 6a, followed by discussion of the findings.

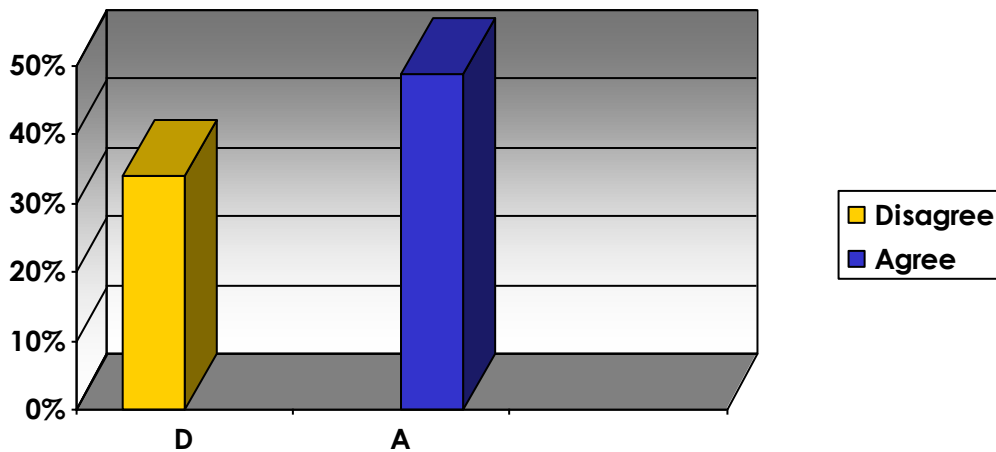
	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. My English textbooks contain some alien or taboo information.	6	10	8	18	5
2. I believe that the English culture should be separated from learning English.	17	10	4	10	6
3. I believe that there is imperialistic purpose in learning English in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.	10	31	3	3	0
4. The topics in the textbooks are important for my daily use outside my classroom.	12	10	8	10	7
5. The topics seem to be important for my advanced courses.	5	8	10	22	2
6. I believe that my English background is not good because of previous English educational system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (that lacks English culture).	2	6	7	11	21
7. My textbooks are above my limit and might be too complicated to understand.	2	12	7	16	10
8. Learning English language and culture is a must for an English major.	6	5	1	11	24
9. I have entered English Department to be a teacher.	13	12	6	4	11

10. I have entered this program to get a job as quickly as possible.	6	2	3	14	22
11. This program is the best at Faculty of Arts and Humanities.	3	2	2	15	25
12. I will have to take extra English courses outside the University.	2	6	1	5	33

**Table 1.** The number of the participants’ responses on the items, which are relevant to this issue and the new content of the textbooks Mosaic 1.

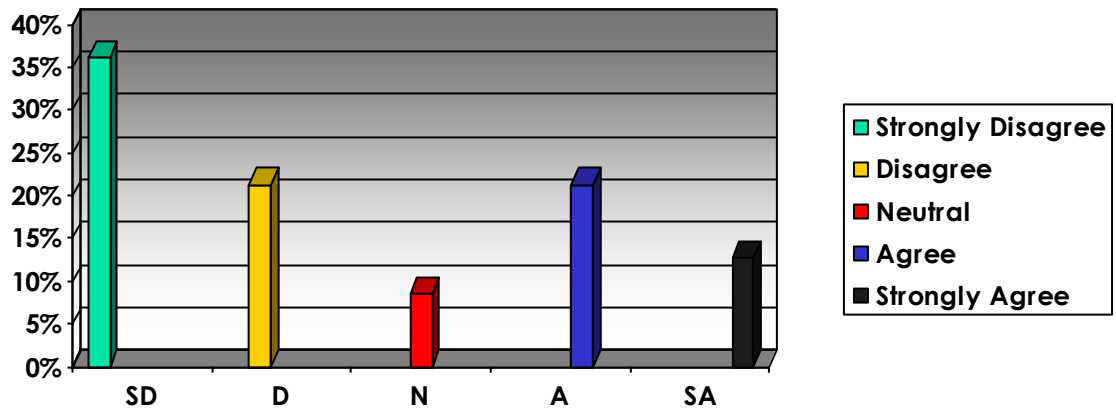


**Table 2.** The percentage of students who believe there is taboo/alien info. in the textbooks

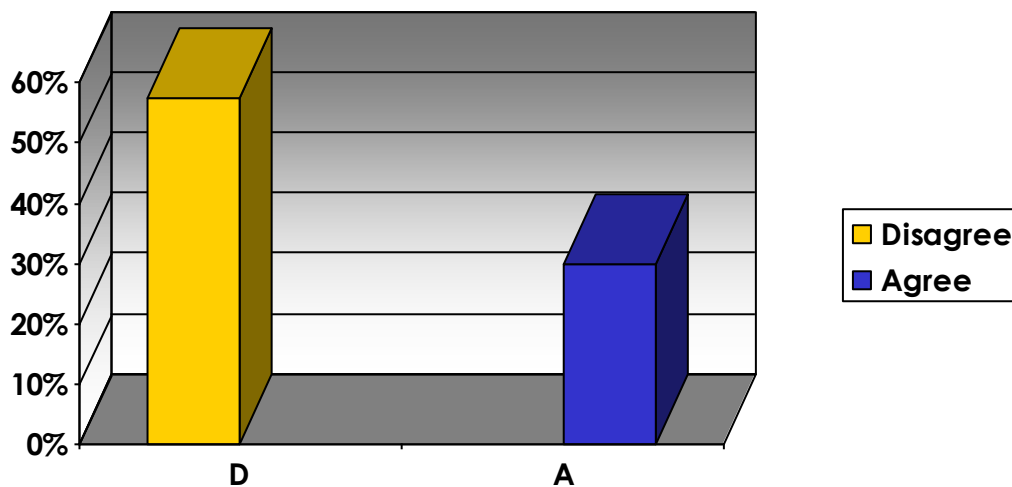


**Table 2a. The percentage of students who believe there is taboo/alien info. in the textbooks**

The findings from Table 2 an 2a indicate that more than a third of the number of students (37%) does think that alien/taboo information might hurt their Islamic identity while the next highest number (22%) shows those who think otherwise. Clearly, when neutral responses are ignored, still more than half (59%) remain, who think that there is taboo information which they prefer not to be exposed to in their English textbooks.

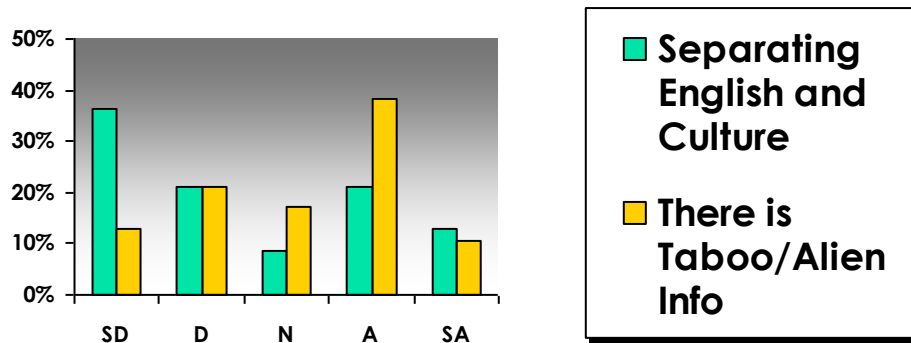


**Table 3: The percentage of students who support separating English and culture in their leaning process of English**



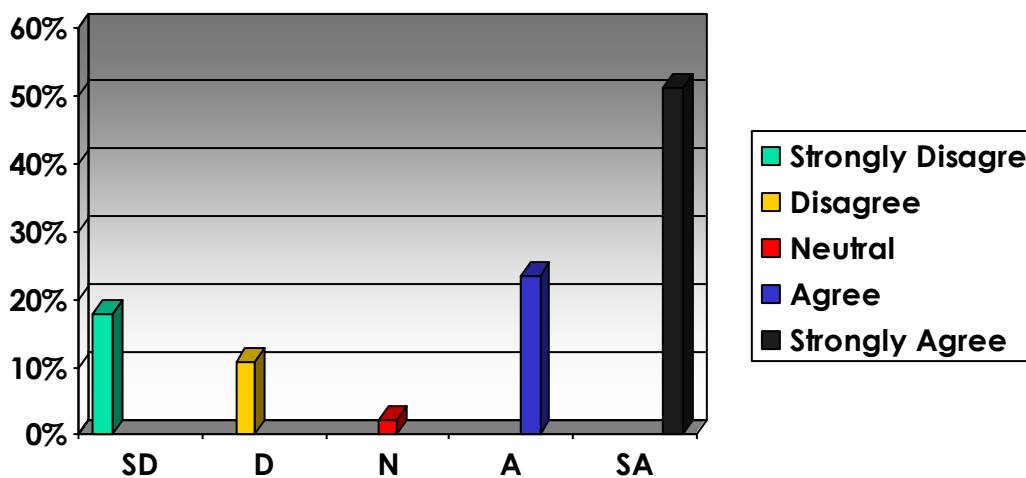
**Table 3a. The percentage of students who support separating English and culture in their learning process of English**

Interestingly enough, the findings in Table 3 and 3a indicate the majority of the Saudi students in this study oppose the idea of separating the learning of English and the culture of English. Culture, for these students, is meant here as simply understanding the ‘others’ without hurting their Islamic identity. Again, when we ignore the neutral responses, 68% remain who think that leaning English culture will not harm their Islamic identity, while less than half (40%) think otherwise.



**Table 4. The percentage of the first two tables combined.**

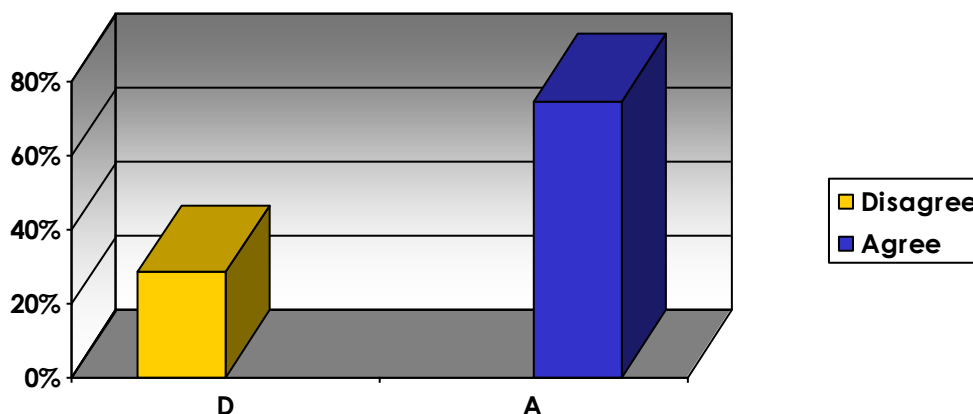
Table 4 compared Table 2 and Table 3. Here, we can observe that the highest graph shows (39%) the students who oppose the idea of taboo in the textbooks, yet approximately half of these students (22%) agree to the idea of separating English and culture.



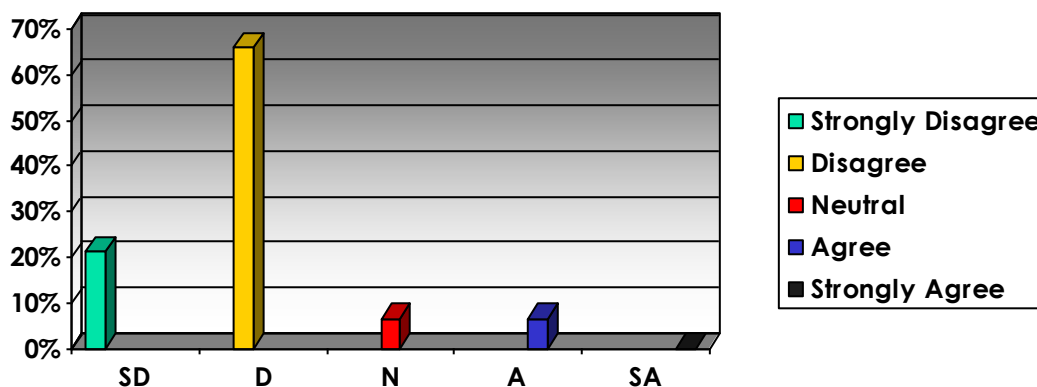


**Table 5. The percentage of the students' attitudes towards learning English language and culture as a must for an English major student**

In Table 4. after taking the data of Table 2, 2a, 3, 3a, 4, 4a, and 5 into consideration, I wanted to examine further the idea of English culture with the same group of students. Table 4 shows the students' attitudes towards learning English language and culture as a must for an English major student. Only (18%) of the who group believe that culture is not a must for their English learning process while (51%) strongly agree with the concept of learning English hand in had with the culture. Also, when we combine (SD+D) and (A+SA) we came up with a significant number of (83%) who believe that leaning English cannot be done without learning the culture of the language itself.

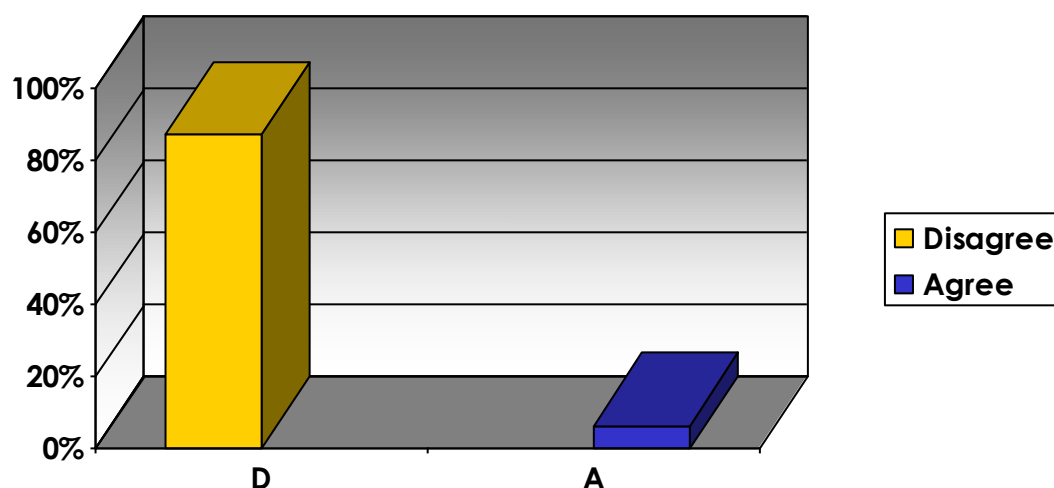


**Table 5a. The percentage of the students' attitudes towards learning English language and culture as a must for an English major student**



**Table 6. The percentage of the students who think/believe that there is/are imperialistic purpose in learning of English in KSA.**

In order to test this idea further, another graph was developed to test the students' understanding of the imperialistic purposes for learning English in Saudi Arabia. Interestingly enough, the majority of the students (66%) disagree and do not feel that the use of English has any imperialistic purpose behind it. Only (8%) think otherwise. Also, Table 6a shows that 95% of students do not feel that English is imperialistically imposed on them. It is interesting that in Islam the learning of another language is highly praised and looked upon as a quest for knowledge and not a method of brain washing. A Muslim scholar maintains that "The English language, therefore, has a crucial role to play in the achievement of the ultimate aim of Muslim education," (Shafi, 1983, p. 35) which is the spreading of Islam.



**Table 6a. The percentage of the students who think/believe that there is/are imperialistic purpose in learning of English in KSA.**

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In light of the debate of the role of English language teaching in the Arab world, a small scale study was conducted at King Abdul Aziz University. The findings of this study, though context specific, indicate that the Saudi students agree (for the most part) that both the study of the English language and its culture are necessary in order to develop their English comprehension. Thus, for these students, English does not appear to be an indication of an imperialistic purpose of Westernization of their Arabic identity. Although, about half of the Saudi students surveyed do not agree with the Western ideology which might contradict their Islamic and Arabic identity, they feel that learning English and the Western culture of their target language-English is needed to an extent that the Saudi Arabian cultural and Islamic identity is intact.

The demand for English is always going to be there, stronger than ever with increasing globalization. After 9/11, the need to learn English in order to understand what is being said and written about Arabs is present more than ever. Arabs cannot

stand still not knowing what the *Others* are thinking and presuming about them. Arabs need to know how to interact with the West. They need to understand the West better than anyone else. English is here to stay, but the people are reshaping, remoulding, and adjusting it to suit them best. Hence, it will be interesting to see whether the Arab world will adapt its own version of the English language, or embrace the present one together with its cultural and social norms.

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