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Unaddressed Journeys: Saudi Western-trained Scholars' (Re)engagement with Their Local English Language Teaching

الأبواب غير المطروقة: إعادة اندماج السعوديين المبتعثين بالخارج في المجتمع المحلي لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية

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Written by:

Maryumah H. Alenazi¹³⁸<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5250-7693>

Abstract

Western-trained scholars often come back to their countries of origin with a new set of knowledge, epistemologies, ideologies, language and classroom pedagogical practices. Upon their return and reentering academics at home, they often have to re-engage with the dominant local knowledge shaping English language policy, research, teaching and learning. This process needs more scholarly attention, particularly in language issues in comparative education. Through semi-structured interviews, this qualitative case study paper explores the ways in which two Western-trained Saudi professors re-engage with the English teaching and learning of their university in Saudi Arabia. It argues that the oscillation between (i) a strong desire for belonging to the global knowledge economy and becoming globally competitive, and (ii) a tension of preserving local knowledge and thoughts have led Western-trained Saudi professors to enter into multiple cross-roads, including self-negotiation, self-consciousness, and ambivalent positions throughout their classroom pedagogical practices. The paper concludes with some pedagogical implications and recommendation for further research.

Keywords: local knowledge, re-engagement, higher education, language, classroom pedagogies.

Introduction

Local knowledge in the context of higher education (HE), broadly speaking, is observed through language-in-educational policy, research activities, and teaching and learning practices constantly adopted by universities to preserve local language(s), knowledge(s), values, ideologies, religion, traditions, epistemologies

المستخلص

غالبًا ما يعود الدارسين في الدول الغربية إلى بلدانهم حاملين معارف ونظريات معرفية وأيدولوجيات ولغة وممارسات تربوية صافية جديدة. فعند عودتهم وانضمامهم إلى الأوساط الأكاديمية في بلدانهم، يضطرون غالبًا إلى الاندماج من جديد بالمعرفة المحلية السائدة التي تشكل سياسة اللغة الإنجليزية والبحث والتعليم والتعلم، وتحتاج هذه العملية لاهتمام علمي كبير، خاصةً فيما يتعلق بمسائل اللغة في التعليم المقارن. ومن خلال مقابلات شبه منظمة، تستطلع ورقة دراسة الحالة النوعية هذه طرائق مشاركة أستاذين سعوديين درسا في بلدان غربية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية وتعليمها في جامعاتهما في المملكة العربية السعودية. وتوضح هذه الورقة أن التذبذب بين (1) الرغبة القوية في الانتماء إلى اقتصاد المعرفة العالمي والمنافسة العالمية، و(2) المقاومة للحفاظ على المعرفة والأفكار المحلية، قاد الأستاذين السعوديين اللذين درسا في بلدان غربية إلى مفترق طرق متعددة، منها التفاوض الذاتي والوعي الذاتي والمواقف المتناقضة في ممارساتهما التربوية في الصفوف الدراسية. وتختتم الورقة ببعض التطبيقات التربوية والتوصية بإجراء مزيد من البحوث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المعرفة المحلية، إعادة الاندماج، الدراسات العليا، اللغة، الفصول الدراسية التربوية

and national cultural identities so as to contribute to local capacity building (see for example, Barnawi, 2018; Braine, 2010; Mahboob & Lin, 2016; Selvi, 2014). Nevertheless, under the neoliberal rationalities of English language teaching (ELT) in the global higher education market, things have changed quite drastically.

¹³⁸ Associate professor in English Language Teaching Northern Border University, College of Education and Arts, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

That is, as “society is in some ways simultaneously local, national, regional and global in terms of experience, politics, effects and imaginaries” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 64), local knowledge and language in ELT classrooms have also become mobile, dynamic in their effects. The local knowledge and language have been pushed and pulled to multiple directions and interests by different players including governments, local universities, teachers, employers, and other local authorities (see for example, Barnawi, 2018; Akena, 2012; Shahjahan & Morgan, 2016). With generous financial and academic support from the Ministry of Education, universities—both public and private—in Saudi Arabia have been incorporating Western models of knowledge production and consumption into their language-in-educational policy, research, and teaching and learning practices (e.g., Barnawi, 2018; Wilkins, 2016). This is evident if we observe, for instance, one of the nationwide projects in Saudi Arabia called ‘The King Abdullah Scholarship Program’ (KASP). This program has allowed thousands of male and female Saudis to pursue their higher education degrees (i.e., Masters and PhDs) in Western countries such as America, Australia, the UK, Canada, and New Zealand. While studying in these western countries, in addition to ELT, these Saudis—both males and females—have been exposed to various western oriented forms of education. Notably, building local capacity through global education (mainly western) was the primary goal of KASP, as shown below:

“In 2005, the late King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud responded to concerns about the sustainable development of human resources in Saudi Arabia by launching the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). Supported by the Saudi government and implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE), the KASP would become an important source of support for the Kingdom's public and private sectors by developing, qualifying, and preparing human resources. The program would achieve its objectives by sponsoring academically distinguished Saudi citizens to study in the world's best universities, in degree specializations that were selected in accordance with the needs of the Saudi labor market. Upon completion, graduates would be expected to return to the Kingdom and contribute to the country's development”¹.

What is evident in the above extract is that Saudis are expected to return (upon completion) and

contribute to the economic development as well as respond to the socio-economic needs of the country at different sectors, including the local higher education. Seen in this manner, local higher education (HE) institutions, organizations, employers, and the society at large have certain expectations from Saudi Western-trained scholars. At the same time, Saudi Western-trained scholars, who are returning to the country with packages of new knowledge, epistemologies, ideologies, values, classroom pedagogies, language skills, and aspirations, have to meet local expectations and demands.

King Abdullah Scholarship Program Source: <https://www.saudibureau.org/en/inside.php?ID=16>

This qualitative case study paper addresses two interrelated questions:

- 1) How Western-trained scholars negotiate the local knowledge and language-in-education in their academic workplaces?
- 2) What are the limits of negotiability experienced by these Saudi western-trained scholars in their everyday reality?

This case study is a sociological window into the analysis of the ways in which Saudi Western-trained Scholars (re)engage with their local knowledge and English language teaching in their academic workplaces, as I argue below. Specifically, building on Max Weber's idea of legitimate authority, Fanon's (1967) ‘zones of being/non-being’, and the debates on politics of knowledge and knowledge production in HE (Akena, 2012; Marginson 2010; Weiler, 2011), this article, through semi-structured interviews, frames and examines the ways in which two Saudi-Western trained professors negotiate the dominance of local knowledge and language-in-education in their academic workplaces. This article contributes to the current debates on the politics of knowledge production in HE by analyzing the ways in which the local knowledge, language and ideologies are validated and disseminated through the lens of legitimate authority, and also by unpacking what I term the *technologies of re-engagement* devised by returnees to negotiate the dominant local knowledge and thoughts in their academic workplaces. By *technologies of re-engagement*, I am referring to those different strategies devised by Saudi-Western trained professors to negotiate and respond to potential competing discourses underlying their dominant local knowledge, language and ideologies.

The findings show that the oscillation between (i) a strong desire for belonging to the global knowledge economy and becoming globally competitive, and (ii) an incessant tension of preserving local knowledge and language-in-education have led Western-trained Saudi professors to enter into multiple cross-roads, including self-negotiation, self-consciousness, tensions, and ambivalent positions throughout their classroom pedagogical practices. Strikingly, factors such as ‘readings of religious texts’, ‘power relations/structures’, ‘self-worthiness’, and ‘institutional expectations’ have enormously contributed to placing Saudi professors at multiple cross-roads in their academic workplaces. The paper concludes with some pedagogical implications and recommendations for further research.

Literature review

Legitimate authority and the politics of local knowledge and language in HE

The idea of ‘legitimate authority’ in the words of Weber refers to particular forms of power that certain groups of people possess and practice over others. Seen in this manner, the source of legitimacy is key to the notion of authority or power. For instance, “the important sources of legitimate authority in Islamic tradition includes religious texts (including the Sharia and Hadith), the Muslim community (ummah), and authority figures (including imam preachers, Islamic scholars, and the political head of state)” (González, 2013, p. 3). These sources have enormously influenced the intellectual and policy infrastructures of higher education in Saudi Arabia. This is also boldly reflected in the objectives of the HE policy in Saudi Arabia, which reads as follows:

The objectives of the Saudi educational policy are to ensure that education becomes more efficient, to meet the religious, economic and social needs of the country and to eradicate illiteracy among Saudi adults. There are several government agencies involved with planning, administrating and implementing the overall governmental educational policy in Saudi Arabia (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission).

Informed by the above educational policy direction, Saudi HE policy, curriculum, and pedagogies are always validated and legitimated through the lenses of religious texts and socio-economic needs of the country, and then strictly monitored by emblems of authority such as the

Ministry of Education, religious authorities, and the community. At schools, for instance, philosophies, until recently, and other controversial topics are not allowed to be taught; not all specializations/disciplines are available for women; genders are segregated in the HE realm, and the time allocated to Islamic education is 14%, to name a few points out (see for example, Abdel-Moneim, 2016; Barnawi, 2018). As Abdel-Moneim (2016) notes, “there is no problem with religious education per se, until its expansion comes into conflict with other classes such as mathematics and science for students’ time, which is the case in most Arab countries” (p. 73). Attempts to allow other sources and dimensions of authorities to come to life with the aforementioned main sources of authority in the Arab HE realm is always a challenge as I elaborate below.

Conceptually, recent HE policy reforms in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), which are evident in the efforts of internationalization of HE, the adoption of English medium instruction curriculum and pedagogies, the operations of college campuses by international institutions (under a project called Colleges of Excellence), and the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (Barnawi, 2021) are expected to open new spaces for multiple sources and dimensions of intellectual and pedagogical authorities (González, 2013) pertinent to vibrant knowledge production and consumption. This is not always the case, however, in the Arabian Gulf in general and Saudi Arabia in particular “where state, religion, and community are politically, theologically, culturally, and historically intertwined” (González, 2013, p. 16). The Ministry of Education, for instance, has ‘legitimate authority’, and it even enjoys inherent connection to, and support of, authority figures including state leaders. It is actively engaged with the discussions of what counts as local knowledge and valid local knowledge in the Saudi higher education realm in collaboration with other authority figures. This also echoes the symbiotic relationship between local knowledge and power; i.e., “knowledge legitimates power and, conversely, knowledge is legitimated by power” (Weiler, 2011, p. 210). Seen in this manner, it could be argued that unpacking the intimate relationship between legitimation of power and local knowledge is key to understanding the politics of local knowledge production, language-in-education policy (which is English) socio-cultural arrangements and paradoxes in a given social and educational context, as illustrated below.

In this age of mobility—mobility of knowledge, languages, ideas and culture— (Barnawi & Ahmed, 2020), HE institutions in Saudi Arabia are oscillating between (i) a strong desire for belonging to the global knowledge economy and becoming globally competitive, and (ii) an incessant tension of preserving local knowledge, language and thoughts. The strong desire for belonging to the global knowledge economy is evident in the KASP as well as the ways in which local HE institutions are now aggressively benchmarking their academic programs, competing for global rankings and international accreditations, importing ‘active learning pedagogical templates’ to their institutions (to borrow Shahjahan & Morgan’s 2016 expression) and adopting English-medium instruction curricula (Barnawi, 2018; Marginson, & Naidoo 2011). Indeed, these forms of competitions, as Shahjahan and Morgan (2016) note, “[are] not simply tied to market-based economic or political rationalities, but also operate under psychosocial dimensions interlinked with belonging in the international community” (p. 94). That is, Saudi HE institutions simply want to be recognized as players in the global HE market. On the contrary, the incessant tension of preserving local knowledge and frames of references of local universities are manifested in the ways in which educational policy (including language), research activities, quality assurance practices, accreditations as well as teaching and learning practices have been constantly regulated, validated and monitored by government bodies like the Saudi National Qualification Framework, and National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment Framework. In this context, the requirements of ‘The National Qualifications Framework (National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment, 2009)’ for HE reads as follows:

While individual institutions may want to develop special skills beyond minimum requirements and should be encouraged to do so, it is essential that all programs with particular qualification titles develop the level of learning outcomes expected regardless of the institution where studies were undertaken....Programs developed within this Framework should not only lead to the knowledge, generic skills and professional expertise normally associated with studies leading to comparable awards throughout the world, but they should also include particular knowledge and skills needed for professional practice in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and reflect

educational policies and cultural norms in this country. (pp. 1-3).

Evident in the above Saudi National Qualification requirements are the dual desires for ‘belonging and recognition’ (Shahjahan & Morgan, 2016) in knowledge production and consumption in the global HE realm on the one hand, and clear intensions of preserving local knowledge, language and culture on the other. Put differently, the framework shows the desires for belonging to the global knowledge economy on the one hand, and the efforts of preserving local knowledge and cultural norms on the other. Elements of local knowledge, skills, values and cultural norms are used as proxies for legitimating/validating local HE policy, curriculum, programs, and medium of instruction while also becoming epistemologically independent from the dominant Western knowledge production and consumption.

Indeed, from the geopolitics of knowledge perspectives, such dual desires are more likely to produce and reproduce epistemic, pedagogical and ethical tensions, conflicts and pressures within/between local players (e.g., Saudi scholars and their institutions) in the Saudi HE realm, as I show in this study. The contention is that these dual desires have ‘psychosocial dimensions’ (to borrow Shahjahan and Morgan’s, 2016 expression) which bring tensions pertinent to ‘western knowledge’ versus ‘local knowledge’ into life (Shahjahan and Morgan, 2016). Practices such as importing English language curricula, benchmarking academic programs, obtaining international English language teaching accreditations, publishing in top-ranked international journals, and competing for global rankings clearly reflect the desires to “be ‘acknowledged’ as a key player in the global knowledge economy. Yet, these practices or feelings of belonging to the international HE community “elevate not just Anglo-American Knowledge but the institutional missions, habits, and assumptions of the leading Anglo-American universities”, as Marginson (2010, p. 37) notes. Worse, these practices could clash with the efforts of preserving local knowledge, cultural norms, classroom pedagogical practices and values that are often sought by the Saudi National Qualification Framework.

From a policy analysis perspective, understanding the ways in which Saudi Western-trained professors—with packages of new knowledge, epistemologies, pedagogies, language skills and values—are responding to

such dual desires in their academic workplaces helps us move beyond structural neoliberal policy analysis of HE model in the Saudi context. Before I show how such dual desires were experienced and negotiated by two Saudi Western-trained professors, in the following paragraphs I present the background of the participants, the data source(s) and data analysis methods.

Methodology

The Ministry of Education (higher education) was established in 1975 (G), to supervise, plan, and coordinate KSA's needs in the area of higher education with a view to provide national cadres who are specialized in administrative and scientific areas and who would serve the national development objectives. Higher education has proceeded apace in most areas and the number of universities has registered 30 universities with high absorptive capacity. These universities are geographically distributed to the different regions of KSA.

(Saudi Ministry of Higher Education)³

The extract above shows that the Ministry of Higher Education supervises and manages all HE institutions across the country. It is also important to note that today English is the medium of instruction across local HE institutions; courses such as sciences, medicines, engineering and technologies are exclusively taught in English. Local HE institutions are competing among each other to internationalize their academic programs by importing various western products and services as well as seeking international accreditation to their academic programs. While this is all happening, the Ministry of HE supervises, evaluates and monitors all programs and qualifications awarded by local universities.

A case study approach was utilized in this paper to examine how two Saudi male Western-trained professors are negotiating what I call 'dual desires in HE policy direction'. These are (i) a strong desire for belonging to the global knowledge economy and becoming globally competitive, and (ii) an incessant effort of preserving local knowledge, language and thoughts in their academic workplaces, and the limits of negotiability they had been experiencing in their everyday reality. The case study approach is employed because it helps in investigating a particular "phenomenon, focusing on the dynamics of the case, within its

real-life context" (Teegavarapu & Summers, 2008, p.4).

The data were collected through a semi-structured interview in order to understand what I term *technologies of re-engagement* devised by each individual to negotiate the dual desires in belonging to their academic workplaces. After obtaining their consent forms, interviews were conducted in English with both participants. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analytical purposes. Each interview lasted for about forty five minutes to one hour. The interview questions focused on the areas of English language policy, classroom pedagogical practices, research activities, and other day-to-day teaching/learning practices and reality.

Both participants were recipients of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). They were all males, and selected based on accessibility. They had obtained their qualifications in the US.

- **Khaled** (pseudonym) completed his Bachelor's degree in 'English Education'; Master's degree in 'Educational Linguistics'; and PhD in 'Applied Linguistics/TESOL' from the US.
- **Emad** (pseudonym) had his Master's degree and PhD in 'Electrical Engineering' from the US. Both participants are currently working at two different HE institutions in Saudi Arabia.

The analysis of the data was informed by Fanon's (1967) idea of 'zones of being/non-being'. In relating Fanon's work to the contemporary global competition in HE realm, Grosfoguel (2016, p.12) states that:

Zones of being and zones of non-being exist at a global scale between Westernized centers and non-Western peripheries (global coloniality). But zones of being and zones of non-being also exist not only inside of the metropolitan centers (internal racial/colonial subjects in urban zones, regions, ghettos, segregated communities, etc.), but also within the peripheries (internal colonialism).

Examining the ways in which 'zones of being/non being' exist on different scales (e.g., external/internal, between/within, etc.) alongside the relationality of these scales could help us understand other sources and dimensions of legitimate authorities pertinent to 'local knowledge' versus 'Western knowledge' in a

given social and educational context. Importantly, such a line of inquiry could help us conceptualize the *technologies of re-engagement* devised by Saudi Western-trained professors to negotiate tensions and conflicts in their classroom pedagogical practices and the limits of negotiability they have been experiencing.

In this study, the experiences shared by the participants were coded, and then put into analytical themes representing the cultural politics of local knowledge in the areas of English language education policy, curriculum, research activities, and teaching and learning practices. In the following sections I present the findings and analysis of the participants' experiences in turn.

Results and Discussion

Case one—Khaled: From local knowledge to Western-based knowledge to (unattainable) transformative English teaching and learning

"حج وبيع سبيع"

The expression—حج وبيع سبيع—is commonly used in Arabic to describe dual desires and/or purposes during the Hajj season (Islamic pilgrimage to the city of Makkah). That is, people move to this holy city to perform Hajj and conduct business activities (metaphorically means to selling beads to earn money). Khaled (pseudonym) began his first journey to the US with the intention of improving his English language skills and traveling around the States. Yet, he returned home with a PhD in Applied Linguistics/TESOL—Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. As he narrated,

As we call it in Arabic—حج وبيع سبيع—was my primary purpose to travel to the US. I wanted to travel around the states and improve my language skills. Surprisingly, I returned with doctorate degree. (Khaled, Interview)

After working as a receptionist in one of the five stars hotels near the holy mosque in the city of Makkah for several years, Khaled traveled to the US in 2006, and began his first English class as a self-funded student in one of the English as Second Language (ESL) schools in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Nine months later, he finished all English language levels, and then moved to one of the two-year community colleges in New Jersey in order to further develop his language. While he was traveling between New Jersey and Philadelphia, he met some Saudi students who

later advised him to apply to the King Abdullah Scholarship Program. As narrated by Khaled,

I took the advice of my Saudi colleagues, and traveled to Washington DC to apply to King Abdullah Scholarship Program. Luckily, my application was successful. I was given a full scholarship to complete my Bachelor's degree at one of the top Liberal Art University in Philadelphia. Because I had not yet decided what to study, I enrolled in an undecided major program. After exploring several academic options at the University, my supervisor encouraged me to study for a BA in English studies where I had the opportunity to study psychology, literature, sociology, critical thinking, philosophy, theology and other liberal art courses. While I was there, I had had the opportunity to teach English language as a part-timer in one of the elementary schools in Philadelphia. Of course, I learned a lot and enjoy myself enormously there. (Khaled, Interview)

After finishing his BA in English studies at the Liberal Arts University, Khaled moved to an Ivy League University in Pennsylvania to complete his Master's degree in Educational Linguistics. As he reported,

My Master's program was unforgettable. I was studying and teaching students from the Middle East at Noon (pseudonym) English Language Center, as a part time teacher. I had also worked, as a part time teacher, in the United Communities where I taught ESL to refugees from different parts of the world. This gave me the opportunity to put into practice all what I had learned including second language learning theories, teaching strategies like task-based learning, communicative approach to ELT, and content and language integrated learning as well as different assessment practices. I had the freedom to design and develop different curricula, prepare assignments and exams based on my students' needs and freely select appropriate teaching and learning materials for my students. These unique experiences were the primary reasons for deciding to write my Master's thesis on 'Multilevel ESL Classes and Differentiated Instruction. (Khaled, Interview)

For Khaled, those unique experiences have made his PhD journey 'memorable' and 'fruitful' as well:

Do you know what? I can plainly say my PhD was memorable and fruitful because I had had the chance to teach some Islamic courses and Arabic language for Muslim inmates in Pennsylvania for two years as a part time teacher. Indeed, in addition to other countless benefits I gained from my PhD program, those inmates' classes helped me appreciate the pain of learning, and teaching other languages and cultures. They also helped me understand the importance of contextualization of classroom practices.... I can tell you my—*حج وبيع سبوح*—journey had exposed me to different modes of thinking, understanding, English language teaching and learning, systems, curricula, and ideological practices. (Khaled, Interview)

Paradoxically, the rich and unique experiences shared by Khaled above did not help him find job easily at home, nor did they make his teaching job smooth and transformative. Instead, he had struggled a lot before securing a teaching position in one of the local HE institutions located in the western region of the country. Khaled felt that his application had been rejected because “local universities often expect him to answer interview questions in specific manner. They do not want him to be too critical about some ELT methods and approaches during the job interviews”.

For him, “the current ELT regime in Saudi universities puts a lot of emphasis on assessment, drilling and rote learning. It also encourages teacher-center approaches, and promotes centralized curriculum”. He further adds that,

At my current university, those commercialized English teaching materials from National Geographic Publisher do not teach my students to think deeply. Instead, they encourage all my students to take note in the same way; read the same passages and answer the same multiple choice comprehension questions, and even study things that are not related to their immediate local context. So I often find that the English curriculum and the actual needs of my students are disconnected. I mean come on! Thinking deeply, creativity and reflection as methods of teaching have long been used in Islam and the tradition of our Prophet Mohammed Peace Be Upon Him. In the Holy Quran it says—*يتفكرون*—which means thinking deeply in order to understand the world.... we need to read and appreciate our local knowledge. (Khaled, Interview)

What is striking in the above responses shared by Khaled is that there were multiple sources of power available in the existing ELT regime in the Saudi HE system which had enormously influenced his classroom pedagogical practices. These sources include authority possessed by local universities (e.g., they often have legitimate power to impose certain practices on faculty members like syllabus, assessment regime, and rigid pacing schedule) as well as the authority vested in the international English teaching materials from National Geographic Book Publishing.

Nevertheless, the influences of these sources of authority on Khaled's pedagogical practices were not fixed. Instead, they are dynamic as evident in the ways in which he had been negotiating them in his workplace. Khaled acknowledged that it is hard to change the system at his university, for he has no power to “argue with the head of department”, and “all his colleagues (even native English speaking teachers) are happily following those international textbooks and curricula which were based on the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR). Simply, native English-speaking teachers in his workplace care about their contracts only. “It is sad that everything is justified by the CEFR”, Khaled argues. This suggests that ‘positional power’ is also a legitimate power (Handy, 1993). In the case of Khaled, the head of the English department at his university has the legal authority when it comes to the implementation of particular language curriculum, textbooks, syllabus, pacing schedule and assessment practices. In this context, Khaled had to devise several re-engagement technologies to negotiate the current influences of authority at his university. In the classroom, Khaled would “ask students to read and reflect on those short passages in the National Geographic Series”, and at the same time ask them “to respond to multiple choice questions” which are often imposed by the curriculum of his English department. He would also “ask students to practice creative writing and critical thinking in the classroom”, and “teach them descriptive paragraph structures required in the course syllabus”. Khaled justified his current classroom pedagogical practices alongside the intricacy of his English department system that restricts his autonomy as a creative teacher as follows: “If you cannot win someone to your way of thinking, you can never change his mind with all the logic in Christendom”. As such, “read and reflect” strategies, “creative writing practices”, and “critical thinking practices” are alternative ways for Khaled to negotiate the current status quo in

his English department. Such negotiating strategies further described by Khaled as follows:

I follow the rule if I do not have the power and necessary means to change the teaching and learning practices in my context. But whenever I have a means and power, I invade the classroom with my own teaching strategies that I believe are meaningful to my students. As a father, I can assess and understand what is good for kids and what is not. Your identity as a teacher is also very important. I should be given the chance to negotiate what is teachable with my students and enjoy the classroom with them. Not that we are all trapped in those trivial Western-based English language curricula. It is a serious challenge for me to creatively transform those English language theories, teaching strategies and assessment activities I learned in the US. But I am still making it. (Khaled, Interview)

What we could observe from the above responses shared by Khaled are the creative tensions between legitimate authority and the influences (as a dynamic element). These creative tensions put Khaled at multiple cross-road including self-negotiation, self-consciousness, and ambivalent positions throughout his classroom pedagogical practices. Evidently, factors such as 'power relations/structures', 'self-worthiness', and 'institutional expectations' had enormously contributed to placing Khaled at multiple cross-roads in his academic workplace, as shown above.

Case two—Emad: I am moving inside templates here! But I am also hawking every single opportunity to move outside the cell

In the case of Emad, authority is rooted in multiple sources of legitimacy in his workplace. These sources of authority are represented by local (NCAA—National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment Framework) and international accreditation bodies (ABET—Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology). The legitimacy of these sources of authority is manifested in the auditing culture of his school, accountability pressures and other bureaucratic practices that led him move inside rigid boxes (i.e., standards). Consequently, he utilized opportunities such as 'Senior Design Project', 'course/program revamping cycle' which took place every 4 years, and office hours to bring pedagogical innovation and move outside those boxes, as described below.

In 2007, Emad obtained his BA in electrical engineering in one of the technical colleges in Saudi Arabia. After working in the Saudi Electrical Company as an electrical engineer for 9 months, he decided to apply to the King Abdullah Scholarship Program to pursue his Master's degree and PhD in Electrical Engineering in the US. For Emad, family advice and employability coupled with upward social mobility were the primary reason for completing his further degrees, and later choosing the US as a final destination.

My father and two brothers are teachers at public schools. They advised me to complete my education. I also chose the US because it is more advanced in technologies and knowledge. Also, my two former professors at the Technical College recommended the US to me. Also, graduating from the US would help me get a better job here as you know. (Emad, Interview).

Guided by instrumental and pragmatic reasons, Emad stated that his journey was successful. He began his Master's program at one of the universities in Colorado State after finishing his "Intensive English Program" in a 9-month period. While completing his Master's degree in Colorado, his former professors in the Technical College in Saudi Arabia had been offering guidance and advice to him as well. As he explained:

My former professor told me to focus on a specific track in my Master's program, and not to choose courses randomly so that I could plan for my PhD in advance. That is why I did my Master's degree and PhD in Electrical Power. Both programs went smoothly for me. (Emad, Interview)

The above responses suggested that for Emad, his former professors are projected as legitimate sources of authority; i.e., he accepted and respected their recommendations and guidance. Through the courses of his study, Emad report that he had enjoyed different teaching and learning practices as well as research activities in his former universities where he completed his MA and PhD programs. Specifically, he felt that pedagogical practices such as 'active learning', 'project-based learning' (PBL), and 'take home exams' were informative:

Teaching strategies like PBL, take-home exams, researches and active learning were both challenging and rewarding. They allowed me to constantly participate in

classrooms without feeling the pressure of exams. Also, unlike Saudi Arabia, the relation between teachers and students is friendly. I always feel comfortable talking to my professors and visiting them during their office hours. Professors were friendly with students even outside classrooms. (Emad, Interview)

He further added that:

After finishing my Master's degree and PhD from the US, I must say that I had taken the right decision thanks to my former Saudi professors who advised me to study in the States. I had the opportunity to work in different sophisticated labs; I had had access to valuable resources and technologies; I learned many new teaching strategies; my English language has enormously improved; and I learned that education was not always about grades and exams. (Emad, Interview)

While the above responses indicated that Emad had armed himself with new ideas, knowledge and language skills throughout the courses of his study, he could not successfully transfer those acquired packages of knowledge, language and ideas into his workplace after returning home and securing the position of an assistant professor at one of the leading universities in the country, as shown below.

مَنْ سُئِلَ عَنْ عِلْمٍ فَكْتَمَهُ أَلْجَمَهُ اللَّهُ بِلِجَامٍ مِنْ نَارٍ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

"He who is asked about something he knows and conceals it will have a bridle of fire put on him on the Day of Resurrection".

Emad described his re-engagement journey with the current system of his university as moving inside templates and concealing knowledge on the one hand, and attempting to hawk every single opportunity to move outside the cell on the other. As he reported:

Well, as you know—مَنْ سُئِلَ عَنْ عِلْمٍ فَكْتَمَهُ أَلْجَمَهُ اللَّهُ بِلِجَامٍ مِنْ نَارٍ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ—. So, to be honest with you, rigid requirements of international and local accreditation bodies like ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) and NCAA (National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment Framework) had not only required us to teach, assess and work in specific ways, but they had also contributed to concealing knowledge in classrooms. They strongly encourage us to teach in English only, even if the students are struggling to

understand those technical terms in English. We should go beyond those accreditation requirements and their prescribed teaching standards if we are expecting rewards from God. (Emad, Interview)

Such responses are, indeed, indicative of the tensions in dual desires that I discussed earlier. Put differently, the strong desire for belonging to the global knowledge economy and becoming globally competitive (through gaining international accreditation for example) on the one hand, and the effort to preserve local knowledge and thoughts (through local National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment Framework) had produced and reproduced tensions in Emad's desired classroom pedagogical practices as an autonomous teachers on the other. Consequently, he exercised his moral authority to go outside those tensions in his classroom, guided by his readings of the religious text—مَنْ سُئِلَ عَنْ عِلْمٍ فَكْتَمَهُ أَلْجَمَهُ اللَّهُ بِلِجَامٍ مِنْ نَارٍ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ. The idea of moral authority is referred to as "that influence which imposes upon us all the moral power that we acknowledge as superior to us" (Durkheim, 1956, p. 29 cited in Pace & e Hemming, 2007, p. 7).

Emad further stated that "it is painful that you do not have the full authority to modify the syllabus according to your students' linguistic needs. We follow fixed grade structures. Giving an A to a large number of students in your classroom raises a red flag for the upper management. We spend our time mostly preparing course files, writing annual reports for ABET accreditations, submitting weekly reports and monitoring our annual business plan than doing something beneficial to our everyday teaching and learning realities". Interestingly enough, Emad is fully aware of the various legitimate sources of authority being manifested in his workplace due to the presence of local and international accreditation. Therefore, he had been using different strategies to negotiate the current conditions at his workplace. In classrooms, he would try "to encourage the students to focus on learning rather than exams". During his office hours, he would "give his additional techniques such as problem-based learning and take home exam to develop their thinking skills". In the Senior Design Project (SDP), he would "require students to read articles and books; ask them to practice paraphrasing and summarizing, negotiate the grades structures with students; and share with his students local and international samples of SDP every semester".

During the annual meeting for course revamping, he would “share his concerns with regards to the program structures, syllabuses, issues of English proficiency among students, and assessment practices” with peers including the head of department. Interestingly, Emad acknowledged that “I know office hours and Senior Design Project were not enough to bring pedagogical innovation and creativity into the system, but at least I can use those spaces to try on new pedagogical approaches. Also, the students’ language proficiency is a major problem for me”. He concluded that “it is possible for a group to dominate an individual, but it is difficult for an individual to dominate a group”. While the above strategies are indicative of the ways in which Emad had been negotiating and re-engaging with the current practices of his workplace, they had also shown the limits of negotiability he had been experiencing. As Barnawi (2020, p.133) argues, “the limits of negotiability in the context of HE are economically, socially, politically, and culturally constructed”. In the case of Emad, students’ poor command of English; power relations between Emad and the institution; and local as well as international accreditation’s expectations had limited the spaces for negotiating. In other words:

“...auditing practices often create managerial-corporate practices like annual business plans, operational plans, key performance indicators, and the like where speed is key.... [In this context], the room for negotiations is not only limited but also framed by the new norms created by the system.” (Barnawi, 2020, 136)

Consequently, at his workplace, similar to Khaled, Emad had been put at multiple cross-roads, including self-negotiation, self-consciousness, tensions, and ambivalent positions. Notably, factors such as ‘power relations/structures’, and ‘moral authority’ have enormously contributed to placing Emad at such multiple cross-roads in his workplace.

Conclusions and pedagogical implications

In this age of academic mobility (i.e., mobility of knowledge, languages, ideas and culture), examining questions such as “what counts as local knowledge and valid local knowledge” (Phan, 2017) through the lens of legitimate authority is key in understanding what I term the *technologies of re-engagement* devised by overseas-trained scholars to negotiate hegemony/politics of local knowledge and thoughts in their academic workplaces.

While overseas-trained scholars have professional authority represented in packages of new knowledge, ideas, language skills, epistemologies and values, local HE institutions also have their own sources of legitimate authority, as presented earlier. In this context, by juxtaposing Fanon’s ‘zones of being/non-being’ with multiple sources and dimensions of legitimate authority (and their dynamic influences) in a given social and educational context, one could understand what boundaries between local/valid knowledge versus western-based knowledge and the like are. The analysis of the dual desires in HE policy direction in the context of Saudi Arabia through the lens of legitimate authority in this article showed that overseas trained professors have been put at multiple cross-road, including tensions, self-negotiation and the like. Consequently, they have been devising different strategies to re-engage with dual desires created in their local context. I argue that re-engagement of western-trained scholars with the dominance of their local knowledge is also about constant reflection and transformation. The idea of transformation in this article is understood as:

“...creating spaces and possibilities for excluded and oppressed individuals, groups, and communities to define themselves, create/recreate and claim/reclaim their taken for granted and appropriated values, meanings, and purposes independent of any external ideological or cultural impositions.” (Wane, Kempf and Simmons, 2011, p.3)

Such processes of transformation help us read conflicts between/within zones of being/non-being in relation to multiple sources and dimensions of authority in a given social and educational context. I am convinced by Mahboob and Ling’s contention that:

“One of the crucial facts, often ignored in TESOL theory and methodology programs, is that students in our ESL/EFL classrooms already speak at least one other language. This gap in our teacher training programs implies that teachers, especially those who share their students’ local languages, do not always know if, when, or how to use students’ local languages in their teaching. The gap of this discussion also leads to confusion and varying positions about the purpose and use of local languages in the classroom.” (pp. 25-26)

In this article I attempt to empirically substantiate the above claims and at the same time emphasize the importance of examining tensions between local knowledge versus western knowledge in ELT programs through the lens of legitimate authority. I argue that further empirical studies are needed in order to explore questions such as why local knowledge are not well appreciated within local contexts in the contemporary English-medium instruction dominant higher education institution? What are the perspectives of academic leaders, students, and non-English subject teachers who are working in trans/internationally accredited universities about local knowledge versus western knowledge? Do current tensions occur due to the history of English as a foreign language teaching program in the Saudi context where methods such as rote learning, drilling, grammar translation and like were dominating the HE sector in the past?

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