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Putting out the fires : Supervisors' Experiences of introducing Primary English in Saudi Arabia.

Abstract

Teaching English to Young learners (TEYL) initiatives can represent an example of complex change (Fullan, 1992), whose classroom implementation implies those affected by the change learning new, or adjusting existing, practices and beliefs. Research (Levin and Fullan, 2008; Wedell and Malderez, 2013) suggests that if contextually appropriate versions of complex change outcomes are to become visible in the majority of classrooms, both the parts of the change system (e.g. materials and assessment), and the way in which the people affected (change 'partners') carry out their roles, need to be as consistent as possible with change aims.

Saudi Arabia introduced the teaching of English in the last year of primary level in 2004, and expanded it to the fourth year of schooling in 2011. This study uses the reported experiences of representatives from one key group of change 'partners': Saudi Primary English Supervisors, to explore aspects of the first six years of TEYL implementation. Their reports suggest widespread inconsistency during the first phase of implementation and little attempt to address the issues before launching the second phase. We suggest that acknowledging the value of these implementers' experiences and giving greater consideration to their suggestions, could help enable the second phase of implementation to become more consistent than the first.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia; TEYL; change planning, change implementation; regional supervisors;

1. Introduction

Today English is a subject in most state school primary curricula worldwide. The stated goal of many such curricula is expressed in terms of introducing new, more 'learner centred', approaches to teaching in order to familiarise children with the language and to be.g.in to develop their ability to communicate using it. However, Schweisfurth's recent (2011) study of the implementation of learner centred education across a wide range of contexts, and the OECD's 2009 report on its Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) both

suggest that visible evidence of widespread classroom changes in teaching approaches and learning outcomes remains limited.

This is not surprising since a substantial literature over the past 30 years (for example, Kennedy, 1988; Coleman, 1996; Markee, 1997; Nunan, 2003; Waters, 2009; Wedell, 2009, 2013) has discussed issues arising from the growing recognition that English language teaching (ELT) curriculum initiatives often represent a complex educational change (Fullan, 1992) for the contexts into which they are introduced. As discussed below, challenges are likely to be particularly acute when the teaching of English is being introduced across a country at an entirely new level of schooling. Within this literature, reports based on local participants' experiences of implementation remain under-represented. This paper explores aspects of how the first six years of trying to introduce English at primary level in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), was experienced by members of a key group within any change process; those officially acting as a link between national policy makers and school based implementers. In Saudi Arabia these are regional primary supervisors.

2. Literature review

Two main areas of the literature are touched on here, to provide a framework for consideration of the TEYL implementation process in KSA reported below. Firstly we provide an outline of some frequently occurring logistical and cultural challenges that can arise from a decision to be.g.in to teach English to young learners. Secondly we draw briefly on the educational change literature to discuss factors that may influence how prepared a context is to meet such challenges.

2.1 Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners

The many recent Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) initiatives represent what Johnstone (2009:33) calls 'possibly the world's biggest policy development in education'. In some cases, including KSA, the earlier introduction of English is a part of a wider educational reform seeking to make adjustments to teaching and learning practices across the education system as a whole (Rixon, 2011). Furthermore there is evidence (Rixon, 2011; Enever and Moon, 2009) that in a number of contexts, again including KSA, the introduction of national TEYL has been extremely rushed. The aim of TEYL initiatives is often expressed in terms of establishing positive attitudes to language learning (and/or othercultures) and be.g.inning to develop English communication skills. There is now a growing literature,(e.g.: Garton et al., 2011; Enever and Moon, 2009; Arnold and Rixon, 2008; Rixon, 2011) discussing factors that influence the de.g.ree to which initiatives are able to meet such aims :

these include teacher preparedness, teaching approaches, materials, and assessment, which are discussed briefly below.

Due both to the range of contexts and the speed with which TEYL programmes have been introduced, there is a worldwide shortage of suitably qualified young learner English teachers. In her recent survey Rixon (2013) found that only 17 of the 62 different contexts responding reported having sufficient teachers of English to cover the needs of all primary schools. Different countries have responded to teacher shortages in different ways. In some countries such as Hungary (Nikolov, 2000), China (Hu, 2005), and Indonesia (Nur, 2003) existing, experienced, primary teachers have been expected to add English teaching to their responsibilities, regardless of their personal English proficiency. In others such as Brazil (Gimenez, 2009), Turkey (Onat-Stelma, 2005) and also KSA, qualified secondary level English teachers without experience of working with young learners have been expected to work at primary level. Elsewhere, again including KSA, a new category of TEYL teacher has emerged, recruited from outside the country and not necessarily TEYL qualified (Rixon, 2011; Nunan, 2003).

Given the large number of primary school classrooms, and the limited teacher education expertise in TEYL, training provision to compensate for the shortages of existing TEYL expertise has been often been limited. Where available, it has usually aimed to introduce teachers to basic principles about how children learn (language), to the recommended teaching approach (according to Garton et al 2011, often some form of communicative or task based language teaching), and to techniques and young learner activities associated with the approach (for example, language games, role plays, singing, storytelling and drama). In many educational contexts (including KSA) such teaching approaches and learning activities represent a radical departure from existing 'cultures of learning' (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006).

Since the textbook is the de facto syllabus for teachers and learners in many TESOL and TEYL contexts, one means of helping to support teachers' implementation of new teaching approaches for young learners could be through the provision of supportive and appropriate teaching materials. However, as pointed out by Arnold and Rixon (2008) the novelty of TEYL and the speed of implementation has often meant that materials have been designed by textbook writers who themselves have little experience of TEYL, and are thus unable to produce learning materials that are suitable for young learners. For similar reasons of unfamiliarity and unpreparedness the development of appropriate assessment also poses problems. While TEYL curricula usually stress developing children's oral-aural

communication skills in particular, existing assessment formats frequently remain written and form focussed (Pandian, 2003).

Introducing the teaching of English in primary schools in a manner that is consistent with the stated aims therefore represents a learning challenge not only for classroom teachers, but also for teacher educators, materials and test writers and those who lead and manage them.

3.2 TEYL Programmes as examples of complex educational change

Introducing a new subject (English) at a new level of the education system represents a large-scale educational change for any context. Just ensuring that the most pressing logistical issues (see above) are dealt with requires careful planning. However, most TEYL initiatives also aim to introduce different teaching approaches and activities. This makes them more complex, (Fullan, 1992), since in most educational contexts implementation of the recommended teaching approaches implicitly requires teachers (and others listed above) to adjust aspects of their professional thinking and practices.

Recent research into the successful implementation of large-scale, complex, educational change suggests that it takes sustained effort by all parts of the education system and its partners (Levin and Fullan, 2007:291), for the change to become visible in most classrooms. For such sustained effort to be effective, the various 'parts' of and 'partners' in the change initiative need to be broadly consistent with each other (Wedell, 2013). It ought over time to be possible, in practice as well as principle, to plan for and develop consistency between the interdependent 'parts' of any subject teaching system: curriculum goals, teaching materials, assessment procedures, the content and process of teacher education. However establishing consistency in terms of the professional and personal behaviours of the human 'partners', (institutional heads, teacher educators/supervisors, materials and test writers, parents), as they carry out their (more or less direct) change implementation roles, is less easy, perhaps impossible, to plan for fully in advance.

The sustained effort needed to plan for and support implementation in a manner that maintains even a broad consistency across the 'parts' of and 'partners' in a complex educational change initiative is thus bound to be complicated to lead and manage. It also takes time. Birzea (in Polyoi et al., 2003) suggests that in cultural contexts where existing beliefs and behaviours need significant adjustment in order to enable change goals to be met, it may take up to a generation for large scale change to become part of normal classroom life in most schools. Fullan (2007) asserts that even where adjustments required are less extreme,

the establishment of new classroom norms can take 5-10 years. Few TEYL policy initiatives work to such medium to long term planning timescales. In the following section we discuss the rationale for, the debates about and the planning for TEYL in KSA.

3 . English and the introduction of TEYL in Saudi Arabia.

The official goal of education in KSA is to prepare citizens to reach their religious and secular goals and to contribute to the challenges and ambitions of the nation (Alajaji, 2002). Since 1960 the study of English has been considered part of this process, with English being taught as a subject in the public intermediate (junior secondary) and secondary schools for four 45 minute lessons a week.

While English remains a foreign language in KSA, the ability to communicate in English is increasingly important for most citizens. For many individuals it is a communication tool for trade, business and travel, and for interaction with the large number of expatriate workers in KSA coming from countries where English is a second language or lingua franca. At national level the economy has grown rapidly in recent decades, with ever greater international links. The Kingdom participates fully in international organizations such as the UN and the World Bank, and as a member of the G20. English is the main means of communication in support of all the above activities (Alshumaimeri 2010). Nowadays English is also beginning to be the medium of instruction for some subjects at tertiary level in education (for example, medicine, engineering, and computer studies), making English proficiency necessary for some of those wishing to study at higher degree level (Alshumaimeri, 2010).

From the 1990s on there has been a growing sense within Saudi Arabian society that those leaving the school system are failing to reach the expected level of proficiency in all subjects, especially English. A 2006 survey by Saudi Arabian newspaper Al Jazirah claimed that 87% of Saudi learners are leaving public high schools without the expected level of English language proficiency (Hannah, 2006). Consequently, as shown by the numerous articles published in the media of the period, for example (Alsweel, 1993; Al- Gaeed, 1996; Alhaweel, 1998; Al- Rasheed, 1998; Al-Torairy, 1998; Al-Hajjialan, 1999; Almaneea, 1999; Almulhim, 2001), throughout the 1990s the Ministry of Education, was under sustained pressure from society (learners and their parents) and the Saudi business and industrial communities to improve educational outcomes (including English).

In response to the widespread dissatisfaction, the Ministry developed a reform agenda for the whole Saudi educational system whose goal was “to provide students with 21st

century capabilities and attitudes that will help them grow into productive citizens who engage with the rest of the world positively." (Tatweer, 2011: 4). One strand of this reform was a plan to introduce English from the fourth year of English at elementary school (Alawwad, 2002). In some countries pressure from parents who believe their children will benefit from learning English has been a strong influence on national policy decisions to English at primary level (Enever and Moon, 2009; Gimenez, 2009, Brock- Utne, 2010; NCERT, 2006). However, in the complex religious and political context of KSA these plans re-ignited previous (1980s) debates among educational experts, the media and many levels of the general population about the desirability of introducing English earlier.

There were two main opposing views (Addamigh, 2011). The proponents of teaching English at an early age (Al-Rasheed, 1998; Mandoura, 1994) suggested that English should be introduced in the first grade of elementary school or in kindergarten. Their first reason was based on the belief , broadly linked to the ‘Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg 1967), that language is acquired faster and more easily at an early age. Their second was that since language can influence how people see the world, exposure to English would help broaden individuals’ cultural development from an early age. This would in turn enable Saudis to participate more fully in the globalizing world of the future, especially since English would help citizens to understand and be able to use ever more complex information technology (Addamigh, 2011).

Those taking the opposite view (Alshammary, 1989; Alshekhibi, 1991) argued that introducing English at an early age would have ne.g.ative cultural consequences. A thorough discussion of the strength of the relationship between culture and language is beyond the scope of this paper, however the main cultural argument against early English learning included the belief that the Arabic language must be taught and emphasized from the first year at the elementary level with no interference from other languages, because learning a language is crucial in building an individual’s identity (Addamigh, 2011; Alnofal, 2002). A related point raised was that since elementary students already face the problem of diglossia in their use of spoken Arabic (due to the coexistence of Colloquial [Saudi vernacular] and Classical Arabic within the context) the introduction of English would lead to confusion. Opponents further suggested that early English language teaching would represent a waste of government funds on a subject that learners did not need (Addamigh, 2011; Aljemhor, 2009; Alshethri, 2002).

After discussions, negotiations, and consultations with experts, the Ministry of Education first presented its recommendations for teaching English from the early level of primary

school in 2000 (Alrasheed, 2010). However, strong objections, highlighting possible negative effects on the teaching and learning of Classical Arabic, the language of religion, continued to be raised by some (Alrasheed, 2010, 2001). Eventually a compromise was reached and in 2004 the Supreme Council of Education Policy, recommended that English should initially be taught from grade 6, the last year of primary, for two 45 minute lessons a week, (rather than from grade 4 as originally proposed). This English teaching was to be considered an experiment, and the outcomes of this initial exposure would be thoroughly studied and evaluated before deciding on further expansion, (Addamigh, 2011; Alrasheed, 2010; Alshumaimeri, 2011; Dabas, 2005).

In common with experience in many other contexts (Enever et al. 2009) implementation was rushed. There were only six months between the Ministerial Council's decision and the start of teaching in sixth grade primary classrooms (Alrefaie, 2011; Alahaydib, 2008; Alzoman, 2004). Inevitably Ministry of Education planning often resorted to improvisation. In consequence the Ministry was again widely criticized by both educators and the public (Alkarood, 2009; Alahaydib, 2008; Alrefaie, 2011; Alsaad; 2004; Althunayyan, 2011).

To begin with the existing national English curriculum was not adapted to acknowledge that English now began one year earlier. However, a group of Ministry planners later added general aims for the primary stage (Addamigh, 2011; Alshumaimeri, 2011). These were to develop students' interest and confidence in English and to nurture their positive attitudes toward learning the language (Ministry of Education, 2004). Provision of teachers took a number of forms. Firstly, newly graduated Saudi English major teachers, untrained in TEYL were placed in primary classrooms (Alawad, 2002; Alrefaie, 2011; Alzoman, 2004) Secondly expatriate English teachers, many of whom had poor oral proficiency were recruited from, for example, E.g.ypt,Syria and Bangladesh. Thirdly some existing intermediate and secondary teachers were also required to teach at primary level (Alghadeer, 2008; Ali, 2007; Alzoman 2004). Continuing shortages meant that many of the above teachers were expected to teach in more than one primary school. Even so many schools in rural areas and some in cities still had no English TEYL teachers. In such contexts either teachers of other subjects were asked to teach English, or no English was taught in the early stages of implementation (Alrefaie 2011). Unsurprisingly given the time scale, limited training for teachers was available and where provided lasted for only one week.

Provision of teaching materials mirrored reports from elsewhere (Arnold and Rixon, 2008). To meet immediate needs a textbook was hurriedly written by a group at the Ministry who had no TEYL expertise (Alahaydib, 2008). Supplementary materials were then

developed over the first two years of implementation. These remained the only approved teaching materials throughout the period, despite complaints about their appropriacy from implementers (Alrafaei, 2101; Alshumaimeri, 2011). The assessment system similarly lacked the expertise to provide age and curriculum-aim-appropriate assessment. Written exams followed the format of those at higher levels during the first year. Thereafter a form of continuous assessment (novel in the KSA educational context) was developed by the Supervision Directorate, only to be criticised by supervisors and teachers as not consistent with the textbook (Alhadhan, 2006; Alahaydib, 2008; Al-Se.g.hayer, 2011).

Previous paragraphs suggest that here, as in so many contexts, the parts of the English TEYL system were not consistent with each other, and that there was little communication between educational planners and TEYL implementers. Nonetheless, without carrying out the prior evaluation agreed upon in 2004, in May 2011 it was officially announced that English would be introduced in the fourth grade as of the 2011-2012 academic year. In September 2011 English teaching in the fourth grade duly began in approximately 30% of primary schools around the country, (Almajdoai, 2011). One supervisor reports below that he understands it is an experiment for three years; however, to date there has been no official comment.

This study examines some primary supervisors' perceptions of the first phase of TEYL implementation and, in the light of that experience, their expectations for the wider implementation of primary English that is now underway.

4. Research Design

Data gathering in Saudi Arabia is not easy for reasons discussed below. Consequently there is virtually no internationally published, peer reviewed, research in English investigating language education to which to refer. The data for this study are drawn from two main sources. Firstly from a comprehensive document search of official documents and articles in the Saudi media relating to the introduction of English in primary schools, and secondly from interviews with a number of the Saudi TEYL supervisors who were personally involved in trying to support and enable the initial phase of TEYL implementation. The study tries to answer the following questions:

- What, in the supervisors' opinion, were the reasons for introducing English to grade 6 learners in KSA?

- What, in the supervisors' opinion, has been achieved after six years of TEYL implementation, and what factors have influenced the extent of any such achievement?
- What changes to the TEYL implementation process do supervisors believe would help support the expansion of TEYL provision to grade 4 learners?

4.1 Data sources

4.1.1 Documents

The document based data which helped inform the previous section came from two main sources. Firstly, official government documents relating to the introduction of TEYL, such as Ministry directives to local education directorates and supervisors, and the Supervisors' Guidebook provided a sense of some of the national planning efforts made as part of the TEYL initiative. Secondly articles and reports published in the Saudi media before and during the implementation process were consulted to provide a contextual background for the study, and to identify issues that were, and continue to be, salient among different sections of the wider Saudi society.

4.1.2 Interviews

The second data source for the study was a series of interviews with 16 regional English Supervisors, representing the 13 main General Directorates of Education in Saudi Arabia. 13 of these supervisors had been among two groups (totalling 42) selected by the Ministry of Education in 2001 to attend a 2-week TEYL training programme in the UK, to prepare them for leading the implementation of TEYL in their regions and cities (Alawwad, 2002). These supervisors were therefore aware of some of the principles and practices considered appropriate for the teaching of languages to young learners. All participants were volunteers, and they worked both in large cities like Riyadh and smaller cities and rural areas.

Supervisors were chosen to participate in this study since they have close contact with schools, teachers, and local officials on the ground, and so represent a link between schools and educational decision makers at the Ministry of Education. Some of their main roles as outlined by the Ministry of Education (1998) are

- visiting teachers in the schools, encouraging teachers to share experiences and helping those who need it,

- working with the principal to ensure equal workloads for teachers, organise records and verify the accuracy of exam results,
- preparing educational bulletins and distributing them to teachers,
- evaluating the curriculum, (Ministry of Education, 1998: 42-43).

Recently, perhaps as a result of national the context of educational reform their work has been more explicitly linked to generating support for educational reform initiatives. New responsibilities include

- encouraging those working in education to view educational change as positive and important for development, and trying to change ne.g.ative attitudes among local educational leaders, teachers, and students,
- keeping abreast of developments in ICT and its instructional use (Ministry of Education, 2008 : 12).

Given their close links to schools, and their increasing responsibility for supporting educational change initiatives, supervisors were felt to be appropriate sources of data for the study. In addition, since each supervisor is responsible for up to 70 English teachers, it was hoped that their responses would be based on a range of experiences across a number of schools.

4.2 Data collection process

The study of official and media based documents helped establish a context for the study by identifying apparently important issues that had arisen during official and societal discussions about introducing TEYL in Saudi Arabia, and also perceptions of the success or otherwise of the early stages of the implementation process.

Themes emerging from this phase of the study, together with others that were identified from a review of the literature, formed the basis for developing a draft set of questions to guide the semi-structured interviews with the supervisors. The interviews were piloted with four English supervisors who were not part of this study. The pilot provided an initial account of the implementation and the four supervisors' stories enabled more focused interview questions to be developed for the main study, (see Appendix A).

Access to supervisors was through the second author's personal and professional contacts. Few Saudi education professionals have experience of participating in

research and it was therefore difficult to find interviewees willing to discuss issues which could be considered 'sensitive' (since honest answers might show the working of the educational system in a less than positive light). Despite being assured of anonymity in terms of their names and place of work, five supervisors who had originally agreed to participate, changed their minds when they heard the questions, re.g.arding them as too sensitive to answer. Supervisors' reluctance also meant that during interviews it was sometimes not possible to probe for further information.

The interviews were carried out by the second author with the help of a local (to him) supervisor who coordinated the process. The interviews were conducted as informally as possible and in Arabic, to reduce tension and to allow the supervisors to speak more easily. They took place over a period of 4 months as individual arrangements needed to be made in advance for each interview. Some interviews, with supervisors in northern or southern re.g.ions of the country far from the interviewer's home, were conducted over the phone. The interviewer also attended the supervisors' semi-annual two-day meeting to conduct interviews. However, he was only able to carry out four interviews on this occasion since, for reasons mentioned above; many of the supervisors who attended were reluctant to participate, particularly in such a public setting.

The interview data deriving from each question answered were translated into English by the second author. Responses to each question were then coded (Dörnyei, 2007) and gathered into themes relating to the research questions. Inevitably some initial codes overlapped or proved redundant (Lichtman, 2006) and these were reanalysed, merged or allocated to new themes to provide the basis for the findings presented below.

Despite the relatively limited data that could be gathered from supervisors, due to the difficulties outlined above, it is felt that the data can be considered to be credible (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), and likely to be broadly representative of supervisors' experiences of TEYL implementation across KSA, for the following reasons.

- Interview questions were based on themes emerging from the Saudi document data and pilot interviews.
- Interviewees came from all over the country and represent 13% of the nation's primary supervisors, who between them were responsible for over 1000 teachers.
- Most participating supervisors had had some prior exposure to TEYL principles and practices, and so were able to understand the questions posed.

- Participating supervisors were those with sufficient self confidence to be unafraid of doing so, and so are likely to have reported their experiences reasonably candidly.

5. Findings

This section reports on the supervisors' responses to questions re.g.arding their experiences during the period (2005-06 to 2010-2011) during which English was first taught in the 6th grade of primary school. Direct quotes from interviews with supervisors are italicised followed by the participant number that the particular supervisor was allocated at interview.

5.1 Reasons for introducing TEYL

In the supervisors' opinion the reasons for introducing English at primary level, all more or less directly related to perceptions of the important role played by English in the world today. One supervisor stated, English is a world language and may be needed in many life aspects in the future (S13), while another expanded thus:

I think this is the way of development and be among the developed nations this is why the government was keen to make the primary stage as bases for the improvement of language outcomes and to prepare students fully to be good citizens and be up to the changes the world is seeing in terms of technology (S4).

Linked to the above was the expectation that beginning at primary level helps to prepare learners for the next stage (S10) and so helps them to get better outcomes from the English teaching in schools (S11). Most supervisors (12) agreed with the policy decision to begin teaching English earlier, but seven of these were disappointed with the results of the initiative. One said I thought the outcomes would be high but they are disappointing. It is not only me, other supervisors in different districts complain about the poor results (S9).

5.2 The outcomes of initial implementation, and factors influencing these

When asked what they felt the past six years of TEYL implementation had achieved their responses were mixed. Nine responded with statements such as not much or I am not satisfied, with some expanding.

I think it is not much. I think it is only few information about words that does not match the efforts and the money spent on it (S7).

I think it made a learning base, but it was not up to the expected level. It was not worth the millions paid for this (S15).

The remainder considered that there had been some benefits for learners, since TEYL forms a basis for some students (S4) or helps learners to pass the first hurdle of learning the language.(S2). Reasons for many supervisors' disappointment become clearer through exploring their reported experiences of the implementation process.

Most reasons for the perceived lack of success seem to derive from the speed of the implementation process outlined above. Implementation was called '*chaotic* (S6) it was too fast and surprising for us and those in the field (S10) and so schools were not ready (S8). As discussed previously, support for the 'change' was not unanimous, either within the education system or in the wider society. Unsurprisingly, given the speed of implementation, supervisors reported a lack of awareness about what was about to happen among school leaders and the population as a whole.

People and the society need awareness. The government must prepare society early through media and other means (S4).

Instead the Ministry took people by surprise, there was no awareness raising (S11). When asked whether they thought that public attitudes had changed over the six years of grade 6 implementation, supervisors reported that while there was now greater acceptance among parents and learners, there were still many school leaders and local educational administrators who see it as an extra subject and have ne.g.ative attitudes (S5) or who, bearing in mind the already crowded primary curriculum, think it is a burden on the school schedule (S8).

Other implementation problems referred to earlier were also mentioned:

There was no curriculum only the textbook. There were general aims for the stage but these were not reflected in the textbook (S11).

I did not know the goals myself until I searched for it and after that I taught the teachers about them. You read the textbook objectives and you found out that it did not match the content.(S15).

As a result, a supervisor reported that many teachers were not aware of the goals and do not work to achieve them (S2). In addition supervisors mentioned a shortage of qualified teachers (S1) and so parents and schools complained because there were no teachers to teach in many schools (S13). One response was to recruit foreign, unqualified teachers (from for example Egypt and Jordan) but there was lack of proper training for them (S7). Given the six month implementation planning window and limited local expertise, the lack of comprehensive TEYL-specific training provision is unsurprising. Where provided, mostly for expatriate teachers, it lasted for one week and supervisors were then supposed to follow it up during school visits. Consequently most implementing teachers remained unfamiliar with

approaches and activities appropriate for teaching young learners. This unfamiliarity, together with the lack of clarity about what they were supposed to be trying to achieve, and inappropriate materials meant supervisors found that most teachers stuck closely to the textbook, continuing to follow the traditional way (S9) of teaching using rote learning only (S11).

The teacher shortage meant that many teachers were expected to work in more than one school. All supervisors regarded this as a problem. In terms of practicality they reported that it was feasible in small urban areas because distances between schools were small, but less so in big cities where the traffic makes problems, and teachers arrive late and in a bad mood because of the traffic (S7) or in rural areas where villages are far apart and the delay causes problems in school schedules (S4). Regardless of location this policy had negative psychological effects on teachers who did not feel stable in one school (S1) and had feelings of not belonging to the school (S8). It also affected learners,

sometimes the teacher only goes to a school once a week so there is no after class communication to help the learners and follow them up (S1).

and the extent to which supervisors could support such teachers

Sometimes, you visit the teacher and want to discuss with him after the lesson. Then, he apologizes because he wants to go to another school. Here, you are cornered, if you leave him go, you do not achieve your visit goals. And if you meet him you affect the other school and the students.(S8).

Where the teacher shortage existed, it was thus difficult for learners and supervisors to have access to teachers after classes, teachers did not feel fully integrated into the schools in which they worked, and often had the additional pressure of trying to get from one location to the next, to meet the demands of the timetable.

The primary textbook which they were supposed to use arrived late in many areas, and some supervisors considered it to have been hurriedly designed by unqualified people (S8) who were themselves unfamiliar with approaches to teaching YLs. Consequently the textbook was a modified version of the year 1intermediate (junior secondary) with no clear goals (S14). It also did not link topics to the real world and developed too quickly (S3) and so was often too difficult for the learners. The introduction of a new approach to assessment added a further layer of complexity to the implementation process, since from the second year of the project teachers were expected to move away from the existing summative examinations to unfamiliar formative and continuous modes of assessment.

Teachers were not trained to use continuous assessment. The assessment procedures were not clear to them (S9).

Some supervisors also were not sure about what they were supposed to do,

most teachers and supervisors have problems with continuous assessment. The assessment form is difficult to carry out (S6).

They felt there was no guidance manual from the Ministry to show how to do it effectively (S7). However others did feel able to provide some support for teachers. For example one gave a workshop on how to use it and I also provided follow up visits. The Ministry role here is absent (S8) while in another's directorate

We sent leaflet to the teacher that includes the continuous assessment guide and objectives developed by us based on our experience. We sent to schools and I think most teachers who work with us know them. (S12).

Some supervisors reported that they had tried to communicate implementation problems to the Ministry

we sent reports to the Ministry about mistakes in the textbook and wrong sequencing – they did nothing (S9).

We wrote to the Ministry to change them (teachers), but they did not respond (S10).

When asked whether any of the issues mentioned had been addressed prior to expanding English teaching into Grade 4 of primary school, all supervisors reported that they had not.

The situation in the 4th grade is similar as we are facing the same problems. However, they are saying that it is an experiment and it will be under evaluation for three years. No clear goals so far (S15).

The Ministry did not address any of the problems that occurred. The 4th grade is another experiment with similar problems (S14).

or in more graphic terms

the same misery will be repeated with Grade 4 teachers. The Ministry did not solve the problems still faced in the 6th grade (S7).

The only slightly optimistic responses were from three supervisors who felt

the only difference is that the textbooks are developed by international expert publishers. They may make the experiment more successful.(S9).

5.3 How future implementation planning of TEYL might be improved

Most supervisors seemed to be aware of important issues that required attention if implementation of TEYL in KSA was to eventually be.g.in to have positive effects. For example, several of those interviewed pointed out the need to create a curriculum (S4) which would be unified (S6) across the different school levels and which would have a coherent set of textbooks linked all the way through to high school (S5) . Others highlighted the need to deal with teacher shortages so that teachers are based in one school and can feel more stable in their schools and do better (S1). They acknowledged the importance of improving teacher training by ensuring that pre-service training universities provide training based on the new curriculum and textbooks (S3) and the need after initial training to provide continuing support for them (S11) They understood that it was important that school heads and the wider public understood the rationale for the introduction of English into primary schools, and so the particular need since the culture of the society is to reject anything new (S3) for the government to make a real effort to raise awareness across society as a whole that English teaching does not affect Arabic teaching ne.g.atively(S6) They suggested that the effects of such awareness raising might be reinforced if the the national leadership showed its commitment to the success of TEYL provision through , for example, ensuring that all schools had better , more attractive materials (S13) or by increasing the lessons to four per week (S5).

Individual supervisors seemed aware of several of the factors that the literature considers to be important influences on the success of educational change planning and implementation.

The need for communication between policy makers and supervisors was highlighted by one, referring to a pilot for the expansion to year 4.

The last three years they did a pilot in 10 schools in Jeddah and my colleague supervisor was working with them. We the other supervisors who are not involved knew nothing about this experiment. They did not tell us what the results of this pilot. (S16).

Another recognised the need for educational changes to be given time,

slow down implementation. If there is a five year gap between decision making and implementation, more successful preparation is likely (S3).

The idea that the implementation of any complex educational change is bound to be a process not an event (Fullan 2007:68), and will probably need constant adjustment in the light of experience was also mentioned

monitor what is happening during implementation, have monthly or quarterly meetings with all districts to take feedback from the field and then alter and change in response to problems quickly (S8).

Several supervisors pointed out the importance of involving as many as possible of those affected by a change in its implementation,

Implementation should allow the participation of all in society, parents, the school, teachers, administrators, even the finance supporters must participate (S13).

and particularly the important role played by school leaders,

we need the schools' principals to be involved and to take part in the change (S15).

Finally one pointed out that if national policy makers really wanted supervisors to become able to support TEYL implementation in primary classrooms

the way people think in the Ministry needs to change. It is not fair that Ministry leaders take decisions and we put out the fires that they create (S11).

6. Discussion

While some supervisors did report that they had felt able to help teachers cope with new textbooks or assessment methods, their reported experiences give little sense that the introduction of English at primary level was supported by focused and sustained effort by all parts of the education system and its partners.(Levin and Fullan, 2008). Although primary English provision had been discussed for many years, the Ministry does not seem to have used this time to prepare implementation plans. Instead the decision to proceed in 2004 seems to have been a matter of 'taking the plunge', against a political and social backdrop of continuing uncertainty about the desirability of the proposed changes, and an ongoing lack of clarity about what they were supposed to achieve. The lack of prior preparation for the 'change moment', resulted in initial implementation activities characterised by a series of hurried, and reactive responses to urgent 'needs' (in different 'parts' of the system- teacher recruitment and training, materials and assessment procedures) as they became obvious.

The initial national change planning strategies were thus neither particularly 'rational' (Hatch, 1997) nor 'evolutionary' (Levin, 2008). Even once the rush to enable initial implementation had subsided, the supervisors' reports suggest that national change leaders were slow to respond to the need to plan to make the parts of the TEYL subject system more consistent. Neither was there much development of systems to support the desired changes in teaching, administrative and social behaviours and/or attitudes among change partners such as teachers, heads and parents.

The large-scale educational change literature suggests that ‘hyper-rational’ pre-planning of a change process (Wise 1977), which assumes that implementation of desired change will proceed at the same speed and go through identical stages in every school is unhelpful; since it ignores the reality that implementation will always be mediated by local contexts. However, the reported experiences in this study suggest that too little planning can be as unhelpful as too much.

7. Conclusion

As the link between policy makers and schools/classrooms, supervisors will continue to play a central role in providing appropriate support to key change implementation partners (e.g.: teachers, heads, parents) across KSA throughout the expansion of national TEYL provision. On the basis of their reported experiences during the first phase of implementation many supervisors seem capable of making relevant contributions to inform future implementation planning. If their contributions are listened to, valued, and sometimes acted on, national planning for the second phase of TEYL implementation might over time become more coherent, thoughtful and supportive of teachers than it was during the first. We believe that continuing to restrict their role to ‘*putting out the fires that the Ministry creates*’ (S11), represents a missed opportunity to utilise an important change implementation planning resource.

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Appendix A. Interview questions

1. Why do you think the government decided to introduce English at Primary level? What did it hope to achieve?
 2. Do you agree with the decision? Do you think it makes sense in terms of what the learners will actually learn/ the knowledge and skills they will bring to intermediate classroom with them?
 3. What have the 6 years of TEYL achieved so far?
 4. What reasons can you identify for any lack of success?
 5. Do you believe that the YL curriculum/materials/assessment/teacher education provision:
 - a. Were consistent with each other when English was launched in grade 6 in 2004?
 - b. Are consistent with each other now that it has been launched in Grade 4 this year?
 6. Did the majority of YL teachers that you had contact with during 2005-2011:
 - a. Understand what the goals of teaching English at Primary School were?
 - b. Feel that the materials that were available helped them achieve these goals?
 - c. Understand the notion of continuous assessment, and feel able to carry it out as planned?
 - d. Understand the particular language learning needs of YLs?
 - e. Use some of the techniques commonly recommended for teaching English to YLs ?
 - f. Enjoy teaching at primary level?
 - g. Have any problems with needing to teach in more than one school?
- Would you change your answers for the teachers you know who are now teaching from Grade 4?
7. Why do you think there has been such public disagreement with the government TEYL policy?
 8. Was this disagreement a result of people's real feelings or has it been encouraged behind the scenes- for wider political purposes?
 9. Have attitudes to the teaching of English at PS changed since 2004 among:
 - a. School leaders/local educational administrators?
 - b. Supervisors?
 - c. Teachers?
 - d. Learners?
 - e. Parents?

If there have been changes, what has caused these?

10. Which aspects of the current Saudi TEYL situation do you think it would be most important to change, in order to better enable teachers and learners to achieve the goals of the YL English curriculum.? Why?