

## **Bridging the Gap Between School and Higher Education: Evaluating an Intensive English Programme for Women in Saudi Arabia**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to evaluate a project undertaken in Saudi Arabia to prepare its students for university study. It focuses on the Female Section of an Intensive English Programme (IEP) in the context of a Common First Year. It assesses the IEP's academic value and the extent to which cultural diversity affects its implementation. Findings show that the IEP gives students enhanced self-confidence and educational skills and provides a scenario within which positive relationships are established between students and international instructors, despite cultural differences between them. However, it uses textbooks that are not fully suited to the Saudi context and incompatible with IEP assessment approaches, tolerates dysfunctional behaviour such as plagiarism and poor attendance, and treats instructors in a manner that makes them feel over-controlled and unappreciated. Finally, the IEP fails to challenge students academically and leads them to overestimate their proficiency in English, risking disappointment for them within mainstream higher education. These problems need to be urgently addressed if the IEP is to be maintained in its present form.

### **Keywords**

Common First Year (CFY), English language, native English instructors, curriculum, Intensive English Programme (IEP), context

### **Introduction**

This article reports on a research project evaluating one example of an Intensive English Programme for women in the specific setting of Saudi Arabia, the location of the two most holy cities in the Islamic world: Mecca and Medina. The Islamic creed contributes to the values of society, particularly affecting the role of women. It was not until 2015 that women got the right to vote and stand in elections. Famously, the right to drive motor vehicles was denied to them, and they required male guardians' presence and/or consent wherever they went thereby vitiating attempts to achieve independence. However, things are

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changing under the reformist programme of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Women have been allowed driving beginning 26 September 2017, as an example of the reform initiatives undertaken by the Crown Prince.

Change is all the more necessary in light of the economic and social challenges. In Saudi Arabia, employment varies strongly by gender. According to the General Authority of Statistics (GAoS, 2019), the Saudi male job seekers' rate was 17.8 while for women it was 82.2%. The unemployment rate for males was 35.8% in 2016 which then increased to 39.9% in 2019, whereas female unemployment stood at 64.1% in 2016 and 60% in 2019. Females constitute the majority of Saudi graduates, yet about one-third of them remain unemployed.

According to the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency Annual Reports, education ranked at the top of the government's budgetary priorities in 2015; likewise in 2019, education was allocated 192.6 billion Saud Riyal or 17.4% of total budgetary expenditures. A state plan for the medium term entitled "Saudi Vision 2030" seeks to promote higher education to meet the requirements of the labour market; it aims to develop at least five Saudi universities to rank among the top 200 international institutions. Crucially, Vision 2030 has sought to bridge the gap between higher education output and labour market requirements through improving the output of the universities and better preparing students for a labour market where high English proficiency is required (Common First Year [CFY] Guide at KSU).

In primary and secondary school, the medium of instruction is Arabic, but at the tertiary level, the language of instruction changes from Arabic to English in certain disciplines. A propaedeutic CFY at the university level helps students manage the linguistic and cultural transition and prepare them for both university study and future employment. An Intensive English Programme (IEP) is the most important part of this Common First Year. The present study explicitly focuses on the Female Section of the IEP at King Saud University, which is the longest established university in the country, founded in 1957. The purpose is to explore the extent to which the IEP is effective in equipping female students to succeed in their university degrees.

### **The Common First Year in Saudi Arabian Higher Education**

King Saud University has 49,501 students, of which 37% are women (Ministry of Education). It introduced a compulsory CFY to male students in 2009/10 and female students in 2011/12. The Common First Year is a one-year programme that candidates must pass as a prerequisite for entry to the first year and consists of Mathematics Skills, Self-Development Skills, ICT Skills and the Intensive English Programme. The latter focuses on general English in the first semester and academic English in the second semester. IEP's explicit aims are as follows:

- 1) To equip the students with the necessary English-language skills they need to achieve success in their academic and practical careers.
- 2) To teach students lifelong knowledge and increase their self-esteem.
- 3) To train students to respect themselves, the environment and other principles.
- 4) To enable them to reach a proficiency level of 5 as a minimum score on the IELTS test (CFY Guide at KSU).

The IELTS 2015 statistical results show the mean band scores of seven native Arabic-speaking countries, and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates ranked the lowest at 5.0 and 4.9 respectively (IELTS). In 2018, IELTS reported that the overall academic score for Saudi Arabia was 5.33 and this justified the IEP to set a score of 5 as their benchmark in IELTS, and it was accepted as reasonable for Saudi students.

IEP instructors are mainly international staff consisting of native and non-native English-speaking teachers from a wide variety of backgrounds: the UK, the US, Canada, India, Pakistan, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan and Syria. All of them are officially required to have a Bachelor's degree, a TEFL/TESL or CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) of over 100 hours and a minimum of two years of ESL/EFL teaching experience. International IEP instructors must sign a cultural sensitivity form as soon as they are appointed and attend a cultural sensitivity workshop during the first week of the CFY. This is an orientation programme that helps the lecturers to adjust to Saudi Arabia and reduce any future potential cultural misunderstandings.

It is important to evaluate the IEP because this would contribute to the rather sparse literature available in the area of pre-university education in Saudi Arabia in general, and the Common First Year in King Saud University programme for female students, in particular. Besides, it may address issues brought up by local Saudi newspapers, social networks and university forums regarding student and teacher complaints against the effectiveness of IEP. Many students consider the CFY as a decisive year as it impacts their future academic plans and professional careers. This research focuses on the vital aspect of cross-cultural and multi-religious settings and how they are perceived in the CFY. This focus is not only valuable for this research but also for other cross-cultural educational situations, both domestically and globally.

### **The Context, Input, Process and Product (CIPP) Model and the Research Questions**

This section presents the theoretical model for the evaluation of the CFY and the research questions. The model chosen is CIPP proposed by Daniel Stufflebeam originally in the 1960s and updated recently in 2017 in a book entitled, *The CIPP Evaluation Model: How to Evaluate for Improvement and Accountability*. The model has

been thoroughly tested and proved to be exceptionally flexible and effective within educational contexts (Fitzpatrick et al. 47). It is both formative and summative and can provide a continuous evaluation process for stakeholders and decision-makers. CIPP relies on two assumptions: first, evaluation has a fundamental role in planning and developing and second, the evaluation process is an essential part of the programme. The model's four key parameters are related in an organised framework and can be described as follows:

**Context:** This parameter is used to assess the environment in which the programme is offered (Stufflebeam et al. 287). Stufflebeam and his co-authors emphasise the importance of values in the CIPP model because they provide the foundation for deriving and/or validating particular criteria (8-9). This emphasis on the sociocultural aspect of context is particularly important given the religious context of Saudi Arabia.

**Input:** This parameter examines and analyses resources deployed to attain programme goals. Examples of resources are textbooks, procedures, facilities, equipment, tools, staff, a budget and a timetable (Mertens and Wilson 97). This parameter answers questions such as: what strategies are currently being implemented to achieve the goals of the programme? (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield 46).

**Process:** Data are gathered on the operation of the programme. This component answers questions such as: To what extent is the quality of implementation adequate? Are facilities and materials being used rationally and appropriately? What are the obstacles that threaten the success of the programme? What changes does the programme require? (Stufflebeam 31).

**Product:** The product parameter is used to determine the extent to which a programme has achieved its purpose and objectives; it links this to context, input and process in the measurement and interpretation of the output. Product evaluation answers these questions: Have the goals of the programme been achieved? What results have been obtained? What is the relationship between the actual procedures of the programme and its output? To what extent is the programme able to meet the different needs of students? What are the long-term contributions of the programme?

The CIPP model will be used to evaluate the Intensive English Programme of the CFY at King Saud University. Table 1 presents the relationship between the research questions developed for the project and the CIPP model of project evaluation. Since Context constitutes necessary background but is not directly linked to the research questions, it is omitted from the table.

Table 1  
Research Questions matched against the CIPP Model

CIPP	No.	Research Question	Assessment Objective
Input	1	In what way does the IEP meet the learning outcomes required by the University?	Current curricula; goals and objectives; course materials; syllabus
	2	How do Saudi Arabian values affect the IEP?	Appropriateness of the course to Saudi culture; students' reactions to different cultures
Process	3	What is the effectiveness of IEP from female students' perspective?	Preparing students' transition, academically and personally; students' achievements from IEP, academically and personally
	4	What are the instructors' and administrators' perspectives of the IEP's contribution to supporting the students' transition to university?	Instructors' perspective of the students' academic and personal skills gained from the IEP
	5	How are common values practised in the CFY, and how are they perceived?	Students' perspective on the English language; students'/ teachers' perspective of English/Arabic native-speaking instructors; cultural awareness; perceptions of the CFY's regulations and policies
Product	6	Based on the data collected, what modifications could be encouraged and implemented in the IEP?	

## Methodology

Several authors such as Stake and Yin found case studies useful for programme evaluation and regard them as an empirical instrument that investigates “why” and “how” questions relating to the object of interest. Case studies are useful in

understanding how things in the social and naturalistic world are related to each other (Denscombe 122), and they are a good fit for educational studies framed by models of theories. A case study approach was therefore selected for the study featuring mixed methods research. Qualitative methods used to collect data were semi-structured interviews, lesson observation and document analysis.

Interviews and questionnaires involved staff and students at the IEP and university. In this way, it was possible to assess how students who had passed through the IEP rated their experience against the touchstone of reality: the “surrender value” of the IEP within their university experience itself. However, this was not a longitudinal study, given that the university students were different from those interviewed at the IEP. The cross-sectional design of the research was due to constraints on the timing, expense and duration of the research programme.

A document analysis helped to establish and deepen the understanding of the “Context” element of the CIPP model. Documents included mass media reports, blogs and letters published in newspapers, the CFY online forum and social networking sites such as Twitter. Documents were subjected to thematic analysis and content analysis, using NVIVO to reveal the frequency of topics and messages, giving the most important themes by percentage, and interpreting them within the CFY context. Other documents consulted were the textbooks used for the IEP, IEP Teaching Plan and the guidelines of the Professional Development Unit. To determine authenticity and accuracy, attention was paid to documents’ dates, origins, writers, intentions and publishers.

Having obtained ethical approval from Ulster University, the semi-structured interviews were piloted in Northern Ireland and Saudi Arabia. The actual interviews were then carried out with a total of 46 instructors, administrators and students. The instructors were chosen at random from the IEP and KSU; interviews lasted on average 90 minutes and the personnel included a blend of international (N=13) and local (N=6) staff who were selected from different colleges within Medicine, Humanities, Science and English. Most of the IEP students were aged 19 and the KSU students were 20. The average duration of their interviews was between 25 to 45 minutes. The purpose of the research was carefully explained to all participants, and informed consent was sought and all interviews were recorded. Interviews with Arab instructors and all students were in Arabic, whereas English was used with the international instructors. Recordings were transcribed, themes were identified using NVIVO and then categorised using the CIPP model to answer the research questions. Data for the non-participant observation was obtained via written notes, audio recorded lessons and completion of observational templates. Three observations were carried out each in the CFY and KSU.

## The Findings

### Context

Media data provided an overview of the IEP from the perspectives of parents, students and academics. Criticisms and disadvantages of the CFY were the largest category to emerge (42.5%). Negative comments related to the standard of teaching (one statement said that faculty members should be Saudi only), and the cost of the CFY which was judged to have added to the country's financial burden, requiring additional buildings, maintenance, labs and international staff recruitment. The second most prevalent category was the CFY's establishment, philosophy and goals (24.2%). Comments here included the desire to introduce students to a university atmosphere and to bridge the gap between school and higher education.

The advantages of the IEP constituted 21.2% of Context, the most frequent comment being that the CFY is a “transitional leap” contributing to the development of students' academic skills and self-confidence and career preparation. A further 12.1% of media content is related to recommendations for development of the CFY or similar property year programmes. Interestingly, the most frequent type of comment was the call to “conduct a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the Saudi CFY and to measure its achievements scientifically and impartially” and “evaluate the necessary future visions in respect of activating the CFY.”

Another type of “document” that constituted an important aspect of Context relates to the IEP's official textbooks. These are *New Headway Plus: Special Edition Pre-intermediate* (Soars and Soars) for the first semester and the *Headway Academic Skills 2* (Philpot and Soars) for the second semester. The “Course Objectives and Description” on the CFY website read as follows: “The New Headway Plus: Special Edition series... is designed specifically for the Common First Year at King Saud University and takes into consideration the aspects of civilisation and culture of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” (CFY Guide at KSU). The suitability of the *New Headway Plus* book to Saudi circumstances has been discussed by Ahmad and Shah who judge its approach “mono-cultural and Eurocentric” with “slight cosmetic changes to make it Saudised” (18). This issue will be the subject of further discussion later in the paper.

The IEP Teaching Plan was also analysed in relation to CIPP Context. It lays down strict regulations for the communicative language teaching approach, forbidding the use of Arabic in class under any circumstances. Instructors must cover all the goals stated in the textbooks, and additional teaching materials are banned unless they have prior approval from the Curriculum Development Department. A Professional Development Unit provides a detailed Teaching Guide and training and workshop courses. The unit also performs two kinds of evaluative peer observation for feedback: formal observation and buzz observation. The latter is an observation without prior notification and lasts for

about 10 minutes, whereas due notice is given of the formal observation which lasts for 50 minutes. Both are marked on a five-point scale with sanctions for inadequate performance on a scale of increasing severity that could culminate in dismissal.

### ***Input***

The purpose of the Input component is to consider the characteristics, obstacles and strategies employed to achieve the IEP's goals and meet the needs of KSU. It relates to the first and second research questions.

The first research question relates to the way the IEP meets the learning outcomes of the university. With regards to the environmental and educational aspects, the IEP and KSU classrooms provide a similar environment, but the class size in the IEP does not exceed 25 whereas that at KSU is between 60 and 120 depending on the department. The IEP instructors appreciate the smaller class size, which is conducive to student participation, but there are two downsides. First, the classes are of mixed proficiency levels which means teaching to a common denominator; and secondly, the intimate class atmosphere does not prepare the students for the less personal, more disparate, university environment. There is widespread dissatisfaction with IEP student attendance. One instructor (I/IEP10) commented: "The students are supposed to take 300 hours of English. However, the fact is that for a number of reasons they are only taking 150 hours of English. These include student absence and lateness or class cancellations, etc. So you can see why the students do not really come out of the programme with the level of English they should have."

IEP instructors must use communicative language teaching, which they find "forced." An international administrator stated: "All instructors... want to have the flexibility to use other methods in their teaching, but they can't" (I/IEP5).<sup>2</sup> The prohibition on the use of Arabic is controversial: native Arabs believe that using Arabic in the classroom is helpful for weaker students and good for explaining grammar. In terms of testing and assessment, we find three forms of evaluation within the IEP: the placement test, continuous assessment and the midterm/final standardised test. At the beginning of the academic year, students take a placement test to determine their English proficiency level. There are three levels of proficiency – advanced, intermediate and low – but students are taught in mixed ability groups in the IEP. The test is created by the CFY administrators and assesses receptive rather than productive language skills. Instructors were found to dislike the mixed proficiency classes and the fact that they have no control over grading. One of them (I/IEP3) stated: "It is not very effective because sometimes you see students with different levels of proficiency in the

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<sup>2</sup> The notation used in reporting the findings is as follows: I/ stands for "interview," IEP or KSU indicates the affiliation of a staff member, followed by an identification number; Std indicates a student interviewee, followed by her identification number.



same class. I don't know how the administration or the evaluators mark this test or what the criterion is for grading." Some students were reported to deliberately underperform to be placed in a lower category, thus making assessment easier and getting higher grades in their IEP course. The continuous assessment during the main IEP course is the only form of marked work that is administered and, as required by official IEP documents, the students are graded on their *completion* of the continuous assessment task and not on their mastery of English. One student (Std16) wrote: "The continuous assessment is very boring. I always ask myself why I should bother and prepare at home if I'm going to get the full mark anyway as long as I attend." The fact that it is very easy to obtain full marks can be frustrating not only for the students but also for the instructors.

The standardised test is computer-based and is applied as part of the midterm and the final tests. It too is designed by the CFY administrators and assesses English reading, vocabulary and grammar. The major problem here is that it is not related to the curriculum as taught. However, the students are "helped" by the provision of revision topics in advance so that they can prepare answers to the questions. This results in high-grade point averages (GPAs) that are used by applicants to achieve entry into their desired subject at KSU. Moreover, these GPAs are not just confined to the IEP; they will later be aggregated into KSU degree level results. One KSU student (Std10) said, "I am very grateful for the CFY because it raised my GPA and helped me to gain entrance to the degree course I wanted."

In one sense, these high marks help to achieve a major aim of the CFY: they give the students self-confidence. However, their confidence is not always justified, and it takes a battering when – as it often happens – the undergraduates find their GPA sinking at university. Participants reported feeling shocked, misled and demotivated. One instructor (I/KSU3) described a situation that some IEP female graduates faced at the university: "that they are good students and they deserve better scores than they receive; [this disappointment is] because of the false perspective they were given about their academic level at the IEP. Unfortunately, the IEP does not at all reflect the student's true academic level." Another KSU student (Std21) remarked: "I am not happy at all that my GPA decreased. I thought that it would not change or might possibly be slightly lower, but [I] did not expect it to fall to the point where it is now." At university, the students generally found the university tests (set by lecturers rather than administrators) difficult because they were different from those administered in the IEP. A science lecturer (I/KSU6) noted: "The IEP is a waste of time! For example, the IEP didn't even train the students in understanding questions that start with 'elaborate' or 'explain'"; a KSU student (Std20) complained, "We are not used to answering something by using our own words and sentences. In the writing test at the IEP, the instructors take our essay and correct it several times until we get a full grade." In sum, there is a serious disconnection between the

CFY and the university. Students' IEP work needs to be much better aligned with what will be required in the near future.

The second research question under the Input component of the CIPP programme evaluation model relates to how Saudi Arabian values affect the IEP. A very important aspect of the research is the cultural and social perspective. The IEP is taking place in a rather mixed cultural environment and it is entirely based on the English language which is considered a foreign language in Saudi Arabia.

As mentioned earlier, *Headway* textbooks were used in the IEP and were claimed by the CFY to be specially adapted to Saudi Arabia. However, further investigation revealed that this is not the case. The textbooks contain topics and concepts that are alien to Saudi culture, such as university exchange programmes, recycling, females travelling with friends and the stress of juggling paid work and study in student life. Despite females being depicted with their hair covered, some of the content contravenes laws and/or is contrary to what is considered to be culturally acceptable in Saudi Arabia. One Saudi instructor (I/IEP5) commented: "[T]hese textbooks are not supportive of the Saudi culture in some of the scenarios and situations that are mentioned." The books are also experienced as male-oriented based on topics such as racing car drivers and technical devices. As mentioned, bringing in new material is strictly forbidden and any departure from this would position the instructor in conflict with the CFY's policies, which could ultimately put her job in jeopardy. There are conflicting views of the English language. Many student participants stressed the importance of the English language in helping to spread the Islamic religion globally. One student (Std11) proudly stated that English helps to provide a good picture of Saudis to the Western countries. However, some fear that English might take precedence over Arabic subjects and give the impression that the mother tongue is unimportant. These fears co-exist with practical concerns such as the limited numbers of qualified Saudi EFL teachers and the high cost of native English speakers.

### ***Process***

Process focuses on the implementation of the programme and relates to research questions 3, 4 and 5. The third research question focuses on the effectiveness of the IEP from the students' perspective. Like the staff, the students had reservations about the IEP textbooks. The first theme that emerged was that they are "easy," with some students commenting that they are easier than the English textbooks in secondary school. Many wanted more subject specialised teaching, and this was especially true for medical students. One said: "... the [general English] books are useless because they have nothing to do with our future specialisation in the university" (Std19). However, the general English textbook was deemed more exciting than the academic English one, which they found unappealing. One IEP student (Std15) commented: "Current topics such as the Atlantic Ocean are very boring and there are also some other boring topics." It

was difficult for the female participants to engage with topics which seemed irrelevant to their culture and gender.

The majority of both the KSU and IEP students felt that their listening and speaking skills had improved and attributed this largely to their native English-speaking teachers. They liked working on presentations but wished they could do more, although such a performance was experienced as stressful; group work was more within their comfort zone. KSU students said that they used to memorise English texts for their tests and that they had copied articles for assignments when they were at school. However, at university, they had to write their own essays. An IEP student (Std16) confessed: “It is very difficult for me to compose sentences; even in Arabic, I don’t know how to write an essay. We are used to copying everything from the Internet at school and our teachers give us full marks, but here at the IEP, the international instructors know that we are copying it from the Internet.”

Most students said they had become more confident in themselves and their level of English skills at the IEP; they imputed this mainly to the native English teachers who demonstrated a teaching style that greatly differed from the non-native English teachers and encouraged the students to become more independent. During the observations, it appeared that students seemed more relaxed and confident in classes taught by native English teachers compared to those taught by non-native English teachers. This finding may stem from the better relationships students enjoyed with native English teachers than with non-native English teachers. Several students claimed to be “afraid” of freely stating their ideas and making mistakes in Saudi-taught lessons compared with those taught by native English teachers. One commented: “Some instructors understand us more than others” (STD14), specifically referring to the native English teachers.

Research question 4 probes the effectiveness of the IEP and its contribution to supporting the students’ transition to university, from the staff point of view. Similar to the students, the staff found the textbooks boring and conducive to a very slow teaching pace. They said the books were easy enough for the lowest grade level but lacked challenge for the more advanced students. A KSU instructor (I/KSU5) said, “I strongly believe that the curriculum at the CFY is much easier than what it is in here.” Some IEP instructors liked the academic English book because it provided a richer vocabulary for the students. However, they found the books male-oriented and felt frustrated that they had little flexibility in their teaching. The students only produced short paragraphs and were generously guided by “scaffolds” such as mind-mapping and outlining. On the positive side, they did come up with creative, authentic ideas and the instructors considered these would be very effective when put into intensive academic writing practice. Some of the instructors claimed that reading was not culturally widespread in the mother tongue, Arabic and that the students needed

to practise much more and make reading a habit for higher education. The staff detected an element of fear when students attempted to speak and complained that many read from their notes in their presentations.

The CFY pledges to instil confidence and discipline in the students. Most CFY instructors mentioned that students' confidence levels showed an improvement, and that the programme was geared towards the students succeeding. However, when it came to discipline, several of the staff complained that students were not punctual and often attended only the minimum number of hours stipulated. In their view, the IEP was too much like school and did not promote independence; a Saudi instructor (I/IEP1) commented: "there is no sense of responsibility; it is more like taking them by the hand, leading them everywhere and reminding them of when they have their tests. We have to tell them everything, like what they should and shouldn't know for their tests and where their classes are, etc. This is not really preparing them for the university."

Cheating was also a serious issue and the instructors felt unsupported by the administration in coping with it. They complained that at the IEP if a student cheats, nothing is done while at the university, attempts to cheat could lead to expulsion. That the IEP may choose to ignore students' cheating and upgrade their marks is not in keeping with the high ethical standards that the CFY seeks to inculcate in students. It should lead by example. The staff also stated that grade inflation took place, covering up poor English for some students entering university from the IEP. The Saudi instructors who were familiar with universities in their own country admitted that the IEP was not adequately preparing students for higher education, and mentioned that they were pressured to "accommodate students." One (I/IEP10) commented: "If you don't give a student high marks, then she will report you and you will get into trouble. This is very demotivating for the teacher because she can't fairly evaluate the students." The IEP wants to stand out as a successful educational organisation, and producing students with high grades is one way to demonstrate such an achievement, even when the students do not deserve it.

The final question under Process involved issues related to culture, working environment and motivation and how these common values are practised in the CFY. Tension existed between the native and non-native English teachers because of the former's attitude towards the Saudi culture. An Arabic-speaking teacher (I/IEP3) stated: "the native speakers are whining all the time; everything is different, so it is a shock to them.... I don't like their attitude. I find it very difficult to deal with them." Saudi teachers sometimes felt that the internationals did not know how to deal with the Saudi students. Moreover, they felt that CFY management and the students may favour the native English teachers on the assumption that they are better teachers and have higher qualifications. This can lead to feelings of envy and insecurity. The native English teachers for their part went through a stressful period of transition when moving from their home

countries to Saudi Arabia. They sometimes disapprove of the Saudi students' behaviour in class (e.g., talking and using their mobile phones). However, the students appeared to like the native English teachers' different cultures and enjoyed listening to them talking about the different lifestyles. They felt that these instructors were very "respectful" and "understanding" towards the Saudi culture. So clearly any negativity among the international staff is not felt by the students and this is a sign of professionalism among the instructors.

IEP teachers also complained about work pressure. Each week they must teach 28 hours, correct up to 60 papers, be available during office hours and cover the classes of absent instructors. They feel unappreciated. As one said, "I have to do three classes in a row (270 minutes) which is exhausting. The things that make us happy are basic things such as a bit of consideration – we are not machines!" (I/IEP6). Complaints were made about poor management in the IEP. For example, there was inefficiency in procurement (e.g., inability to obtain something as basic as a desk), inadequate IT services and lack of on-site support. Furthermore, there was no forum for the discussion of reports or the sharing of good practice. As a result, stakeholders were not fully engaged with the monitoring and reviewing of the programme.

Tension also exists between the instructors and CFY administration. When asked to describe their relationship with the administration, most of the instructors' comments were negative. The themes that emerged in this category were dissatisfaction with the Professional Development Unit: "no direct channel of communication" and "male dominance." The IEP instructors experienced a lack of authority and felt "controlled" and "powerless" in the classroom. One of the administrators stated: "Working here is very frustrating. There is a lot of bureaucracy and controlling behaviour and getting things done is very difficult" (I/IEP6). The instructors used some additional references to describe the Professional Development Unit, such as "bureaucracy" and "strictness." Some complained about the buzz observation which they described as "humiliating" and "uncomfortable." Others complained about the lengthy process for approving important requests, describing it as "frustrating." One of the international instructors (I/IEP11) commented: "We are constantly being told, 'If you don't do this, then we are going to mark you down on your performance approval,' and it feels like there is always some kind of threat. We are always expected to be here, on the campus, even if we don't have classes; however, I guess this is okay as I am getting paid." The prospects of a good salary and experience were major motivators for the international instructors. An administrator remarked: "The native English-speaking instructors at the CFY are not happy with all the restrictions and poor environment but the salary and the working benefits are very high so maybe this is their main motivator" (I/IEP5). It is, however, only fair to mention that some of the native English teachers

expressed their genuine interest in living in Saudi Arabia and were keen to develop their knowledge of the country.

Finally, under this section it should be mentioned that there is some tension along gender lines between the male and the female CFY teams. The men's campus is isolated from the female campus, resulting in limited communication between them. Regular meetings are held between the two sections, but only *one* woman representative from the Female Section is permitted to attend any meeting. This presents a problem and begs the question as to how the Chair, who is a male staff, could be fully aware of the day-to-day activities taking place on the female campus or of the problems that occur. The lack of proper communication channels between the male and female sections causes delays in resolving problems with the result that the female staff's requests are hardly ever heard by the relevant authority in the CFY.

### ***Product***

Product, the final component of the CIPP evaluation model, is extrapolated from the answers to the previous five RQs, and in effect constitutes the conclusion and recommendations. According to the developers of the CIPP model, Stufflebeam and Shinkfield, "product" is used to measure, interpret and judge the outcomes of a programme. It also assesses whether the goals of the programme are being met and whether the programme needs to be modified to achieve better outcomes.

We first address the staff and students involved in the study. The Female Section staff do not have the same rights as the Male Section staff, and they suffer from lack of esteem even within their own IEP unit. They feel patronised by the administration and valued lower than the students whom they teach. The situation is reversed at KSU. The male and female sections have parity of esteem and the same decision-making rights; they also have sustained, efficient contact at the organisational and administrative levels. The disjunction between the two is counter-productive for the Female Section. Another missing link is that between the education system in the IEP and KSU; this creates added, rather than reduced, pressure for the students in their transitional phase. Regular feedback and clear channels of communication are needed. The question could be asked whether the IEP, if retained, could or should be taught by KSU staff specially deployed for the purpose; or, indeed, whether its function could be assigned to upper secondary school. The fact that the IEP is currently mandatory for all students, irrespective of what they are intending to study, decreases students' desire to learn the English language because some perceive the IEP to be an obstacle in their studies rather than a supportive measure. Moreover, if the highest benchmark is a score of 5 on the IELTS, the students should take the test at the beginning of the year and if they already scored 5, they should be exempted

from the need to study at the IEP. This would ultimately reduce costs and save time.

Better orientation for native English teachers would undoubtedly help them settle more quickly and harmoniously in Saudi Arabia. The instructors appreciate the cultural sensitivity guidelines but would welcome more details, which would help them with academic acculturation. If reasons for the cultural guidelines were given, it would improve their understanding and assimilation within the Saudi context. Workshops could also be used to familiarise native English teachers with students' most common mistakes. Similarly, induction for the students themselves would be useful in acquainting them with western values and enabling them to better understand their native English teachers and the textbooks. More consultation with the IEP students would have a positive impact on academic and vocational development. The administration could dispense with the unpopular buzz observations which were found to be inadequate to determine the teaching quality and performance of instructors. Formal observations are well accepted and embedded within the system, whereas the "buzz" procedure increases the instructors' sense of insecurity and of being treated as irresponsible. It is incumbent upon the IEP administration to encourage instructors and demonstrate their appreciation of them, as suggested by AlNahdi and AlHamid et al.

We turn now to pedagogy, textbooks, curriculum and assessment. The doctrinaire attachment to the communicative language teaching approach could be liberalised to open up more creativity within the teaching situation. The students are only permitted to speak in English in the classroom, though this is something that Arabic-speaking instructors find extremely difficult to manage. The prohibition against the use of Arabic in the classroom is not always justified and can cause factional tensions among staff from different backgrounds. Research-based evidence (UrRahman and Alhaisoni) demonstrates that it is not damaging for students to have the first language used in the classroom, especially for teaching grammar and explaining subtle meanings: as such, the first language can become a serviceable tool for the non-native English teachers. It could also help to equalise the popularity of native and non-native English teachers, given that the native English teachers are closer to the students because of their friendliness, teaching style and English fluency. Students might feel closer to Saudi English teachers because they can switch to Arabic anytime.

There are problems concerning the IEP textbooks – they are too easy, boring and male-gendered. Sheldon confirmed that the wrong choice of EFL textbooks can negatively influence English teaching and learning. There is clear demand from the university instructors to make the IEP textbooks more relevant to the students' course of university study and their future careers. As Ahmad and Shah noted: "Although the educators in the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia, have tried to neutralise the cultural elements in the textbooks... many

students and parents have registered complaints about the inculcation of culturally inappropriate materials in the textbooks produced for the region” (14). Policymakers need to make the necessary changes to ensure that IEP textbooks reflect female interests, given that education in Saudi Arabia is segregated. Another important factor is not to alienate students from their own culture or identity or to steer them completely away from the target language’s culture (Al-Seghayer).

The testing and assessment regime needs scrutiny and revision. Standardised testing is understandable due to the large number of students in the CFY, but if the tests were designed for each level, the IEP’s monitoring of the students’ progress would be much more effective. The Professional Development Unit is supposed to ensure fairness in the assessment of all students, but it is hardly fair for students with different levels of proficiency to be evaluated based on the lowest common denominator that the IEP offers. The continuous assessment projects are helpful; however, they need to be done more frequently and continuously upgraded so that they match each textbook’s level of proficiency. Similarly, the IEP’s goals and objectives need to be harmonised with those set in the IEP textbooks as well as with the desired goals of the university.

This brings us to the IEP’s most serious problems: the fixed grading criterion which leads to grade inflation, tolerance for cheating and instructors having no influence on the marking system. Ali identified the top 10 unethical behaviours for teachers (96), three of which are currently and regularly being practised in the IEP context. These behaviours are “grade inflation,” “reducing the course content by removing the most difficult parts” (none of the materials that students study in the IEP is included in the test) and “spoon-feeding watered-down material to students.” These unethical behaviours are not occasional, nor are they the result of individual teachers failing to comply with best practice. Instead, they are systematic and a result of the IEP’s teaching plan that the instructors are obliged to deliver. In fact, the CFY does not focus on the quality of the outcomes but rather on the number of students finishing with high grades that would make it easy for them to gain acceptance into the university. Yet this compromises their academic progress in the long run. The IEP needs to demonstrate its commitment to the high-minded ethical core values that it pledges to develop in its students.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of the CIPP model has helped to diagnose the IEP’s problems and propose some improvements for the benefit of all interested parties. The model was comprehensive and robust; its four parameters encouraged looking at the holistic picture of its subject and provided a way of collecting evidence-based data. It enabled attention to values which were an important aspect of the research.



While this study has identified some areas of concern, it also highlighted positive elements such as the development of students' self-confidence and the mutual cultural acceptance between Saudi students and native English teachers. In particular, the willingness of both students and staff to participate in the research indicates their interest in the potential of the IEP to prepare female students for future study. The country is witnessing a move away from religious extremism and a remarkable transformation in the position of women in society. Women's education increases their qualifications and good qualifications maximise opportunities to participate in the labour market, which will help to change the Saudi government's perception of women's rights and enhance their contribution to society.

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