

Curriculum, Culture, and Change: Rethinking ELT Practices in the Gulf Region

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Abstract: This paper explores the changing landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) in the Gulf region, focusing on how social, cultural, and technological shifts are shaping new teaching practices. With English becoming the main medium of instruction in many Gulf universities, there is a growing need for modern and student-centered approaches. The paper also highlights the influence of diverse communities, national education reforms, and the increasing use of digital tools in classrooms. Comparing the ELT practices in the Gulf with those in India, the study emphasizes the importance of balancing global standards with local culture and identity to make English education more effective and inclusive.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Gulf region, student-centered learning, educational reform, cultural identity.

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Introduction

In higher education throughout the world, English as the medium of instruction has become increasingly common. In some countries in the Arab Gulf region, English is now the primary mode of instruction in tertiary education. Students from Gulf countries are actively practicing to learn English well. This shift can be seen rapidly, especially where advancements in technology and ELT methodologies have helped them improve. The Gulf states have a special cultural and language mix because of their traditions and many different communities. Arabic is the official language, but English is widely used, especially in business, education, and international communication. People from many countries live and work in the region, and this mix has changed the way English is spoken. Over time, a new form called "Gulf English" has developed. It includes local phrases and expressions, making it different from other types of English. There is a growing need to rethink English Language Teaching (ELT) practices to match the changing goals of society and education. As the world becomes more connected and technology plays a bigger role in learning, ELT methods must adapt to meet new student needs and future job demands.

English education in the Gulf began during the time of British influence in the region. Over the years, English became more important, especially with the growth of oil industries and international trade. Many Gulf countries started introducing English in schools and universities to prepare students for global communication and job markets. Today, English is often used as the main language in higher education and professional fields.

Arabic remains the official and native language of the Gulf states and plays a strong role in culture, religion, and daily life. However, English is widely used in education, business, and

international communication. In the Gulf, English is usually taught as a foreign language in schools, but in some cases, it functions more like a second language because of its frequent use in public life. This mix creates a unique language situation where both Arabic and English are important in different ways.

In the Gulf region, traditional English Language Teaching (ELT) methods were mostly textbook-centered or teacher-centered and grammar-focused. Teachers followed a set curriculum with heavy use of textbooks, and students spent a lot of time learning grammar rules and memorizing vocabulary. There was limited focus on speaking, listening, or real-life communication, which made it hard for students to use English confidently outside the classroom.

In recent years, many Gulf countries have introduced reforms to improve education, including the way English is taught. For example, national plans like UAE Vision 2031 and Saudi Vision 2030 aim to raise the quality of education and prepare students for future careers. These plans recognize the importance of English in the global world and focus on making learning more modern, flexible, and practical.

As part of these changes, new teaching trends are becoming more popular. Methods like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Learning (TBL), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) are now being used. These approaches help students use English in real-life situations by focusing on communication, problem-solving, and learning content through English. They encourage active learning and help students build confidence in using the language in everyday life.

In India, the traditional teacher-centered approach is still a major challenge. Teachers often have a dominant role in the classroom, where they mainly read from the textbook, and students remain passive listeners. However, there are some gradual improvements happening in India, with more focus now on student

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participation and interactive learning. In the UAE, different types of curricula are followed, such as the CBSE (Indian), UK, and American curricula. The UK curriculum in the UAE follows the British education system. It is divided into stages like Key Stage 1 to 5, with major exams such as GCSEs and A-levels. This system is more exam-focused and structured. The American curriculum, on the other hand, is divided into grades from Kindergarten to Grade 12. It focuses on continuous assessment through tests, projects, and Grade Point Averages (GPA). This curriculum is more flexible and encourages creativity, critical thinking, and student-centered learning.

In Dubai, English Language Teaching (ELT) is increasingly focused on student-centered learning. This approach encourages learners to take an active role in the classroom through group activities, project-based learning, and personalized tasks. Teachers act more as facilitators, guiding students to think critically, communicate effectively, and learn at their own pace. This method supports the diverse needs of students from different cultural and language backgrounds commonly found in Dubai.

The use of technology and digital platforms is transforming ELT in Dubai. Smartboards, language learning apps, and online resources help make lessons more interactive and accessible. To keep up with these changes, teacher training and ongoing professional development are essential. Many schools and institutions in Dubai offer workshops and courses to help teachers improve their digital skills and stay updated with modern teaching methods. This ensures high-quality English education aligned with global standards.

In the Gulf region, the way English is taught is changing and for good reason. As schools and universities update their goals, there's a clear move toward teaching English in ways that are more practical, engaging, and student-focused. But it's not just about

language skills. The curriculum also needs to reflect the culture, values, and identity of the people who live and learn here. When culture, curriculum, and change come together thoughtfully, ELT becomes more meaningful and effective for everyone involved.

In conclusion, English teaching in the Gulf should continue to grow in ways that fit the local context while preparing students for a global future. This means designing lessons that are not only modern and interactive but also respectful of tradition and community. By supporting teachers, involving local voices in decision-making, and using technology wisely, the region can build a strong and inclusive approach to English education one that helps learners connect with the world without losing touch with who they are.

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