

# Care-Based Pedagogy in the Saudi EFL Context: Possibilities and Challenges

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**Abstract**—The present study investigates the implementation of care-based pedagogy within the Saudi Arabian context of English as a second language of instruction. This study aims to examine the effects of cultivating caring connections, providing individualized support, and creating an inclusive learning environment on the language learning experience, in response to the increasing focus on student-centered approaches. By reviewing previous research on care-based pedagogy in EFL context, the findings of this study underscore the need to foster positive interpersonal connections, recognize and value cultural differences, and attend to the comprehensive growth of students. This study makes a valuable contribution to the current body of literature on pedagogical practices in Saudi Arabia. It offers valuable insights into the possible advantages and obstacles associated with the implementation of care-based approaches in English language instruction within the Saudi context. The purpose of these insights is to provide information to educators, policymakers, and curriculum creators who are interested in improving the quality of English language instruction and fostering a supportive learning environment in classrooms in Saudi Arabia.

**Index Terms**—educational practices, student engagement, pedagogical impact, curriculum development, supportive learning environment

## I. INTRODUCTION

Care-oriented pedagogy can be seen as a theoretical framework for teaching as well as in research. It places a strong emphasis on the significance of healthy connections between those who are being cared for and those who are providing care. This approach recognizes the importance of empathy, compassion, and mutual respect in the caregiving relationship. It is also considered the cornerstone of a connection that is defined by responsive attention between the person that is being cared for and also the carer, which certainly demonstrates the modeling, discourse, practice, and also confirmation.

The goal of a care-based pedagogy is to contribute to the awareness of the extent to which decisions are made that do not take gender into consideration. It also demonstrates how this understanding manifests itself in the decision-making processes of the students. Pedagogy of care acknowledges the influence that the educational setting can exert on the welfare of students. For instance, it delineates the manner in which students encounter heightened levels of discomfort and mental health issues that may be associated with or intensified by their academic obligations. Care-based pedagogies are therefore very important for making courses that aim to lower stress levels and create an environment of support and acceptance in the classroom.

It is also true that care-oriented pedagogy is a subject of care theory, and it centers on the responsibilities that simply come along with being an adult in society. This theory is of the opinion that education is a relationship and that the unique receptive activities that take place between the carer and the one receiving care are the basic basis of the theory of care.

According to feminist, psychologist, and ethicist Gilligan from the United States, “caring requires paying attention, seeing, listening, and responding with respect.” It follows a psychological and contextual logic. The relational ethic of care is based on the idea of interconnectedness. It isn’t, however, selfless. According to Robin Mays, care theory is a theoretical model that examines how relationships of care and connection make moral judgments and decisions difficult. Care theory’s central tenet is the examination of individual caring interactions, which helps us to understand how and why moral judgments are made, regardless of gender. Noddings (2002) advanced care theory, emphasizing the importance of connections above all else. She states that “education is relation” and that “all teachers are moral educators” with an obligation to create “better adults” (p. 102). Care theory is therefore based on the specific receptive behaviors that occur between the caregiver and the cared-for. The interaction characterized by receptive attention between the cared-for and caregiver forms the basis of the paradigm illustrated in Figure 1 of Mays’ study. Instead of “producing people,” the goal is to further our understanding of how moral judgments are produced (Noddings, 2016, p. 232).

By examining the application of care-based pedagogy in the Saudi EFL context, this study aims to identify the potential benefits and obstacles that may arise. Additionally, it seeks to explore how care theory can inform and enhance teaching practices in this specific educational setting. Gonzalez-Ramos and Sanchez-Nester contend that “the dismissal of (im)migrant educational performance is a result of the schools’ inability to understand the emotional

experience associated with (im)migration and to support (im)migrant students in navigating the terrain of a U.S.-based educational system.” “Schools were somehow contributing to the children’s learning problem if they didn’t address the emotional needs and traumas of immigrant children” (Ramos & Nester, 2001, p. 54). “Theories of care cannot be modeled on one social group and then applied to (or modified for) others” if they are not to be essentialist, according to Thompson (1998, p. 309).

## II. RELATED LITERATURE

Reflection on Loving Pedagogy and Students’ Engagement in EFL/ESL Classrooms, the article discusses the role of positive emotions in language education, with a focus on the concept of love. The authors argue that love is a basic human need that has been mostly neglected in EFL/ESL contexts due to irrational ethical and professional sensitivities. The article presents the theoretical underpinnings of love, its definitions, dimensions, and positive outcomes in language learning. Moreover, two trends of positive psychology and affective pedagogy are described. Finally, the study presents the possible implications of this line of research for different stakeholders in EFL/ESL domains along with a number of research gaps and future directions for avid scholars in this area.

Care Theory – Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research. The concept discusses care theory, which is a theoretical model for teaching and research. It explains the four key ideas of care theory, which are practice, discourse, modelling, and confirmation. These ideas improve one’s capacity to comprehend the moral decision-making process. Additionally, an overview of prior research utilizing care theory is given in the review. These researches may be divided into two categories: research attempting to use care theory in the classroom with an eye on quantifiable outcomes and research applying care theory to leadership practices in education more broadly.

Primary health care reform in Saudi Arabia: progress, challenges and prospects. The article discusses the progress made by Saudi Arabia in transforming its primary health care system to meet international standards. The reform process began in 2016 as part of the Saudi Vision 2030 initiative. The review has indicated that by mid-2019, the reform has contributed to an increase of 37.5% in the rate of PHC visits and 4.7% increase in patient satisfaction, enhanced coverage of rural communities (from 78% to 83%), and contributed to increasing the screening rate for prevalent chronic diseases. However, the country still faces gaps and challenges pertaining to human resources issues, cultural and lifestyle behaviour, geography, intersectoral collaboration and PHC infrastructure.

According to a number of studies conducted by Mutambik (2018), Alshehri et al. (2019), Oyaid and Alshaya (2019), and Al Shlowiy and Layali (2020), it has been observed that students in Saudi educational institutions hold favourable attitudes towards e-learning systems. These studies highlight the positive perceptions of students regarding the usability of the system’s features, the high quality of the learning materials, the interactive learning settings, and the user-friendly interface. Despite the fact that learning management systems (LMS) have been utilised in educational institutions for a considerable period of time, their overall adoption and utilisation remain relatively low and fall short of recommended levels (Bousbahi & Alrazgan, 2015).

According to Noddings (2002), the care theory encompasses four fundamental principles, namely modelling, discourse, practice, and confirmation. These notions are further reinforced by the underlying principle of receptive care. Collectively, these concepts enhance the capacity to comprehend the process of moral decision-making. Nevertheless, they can be individually employed to accomplish the same objective. Educators and individuals in positions of authority may already exhibit these practices.

The concept of modelling will result in the behaviour of taking opportunities to demonstrate the ability to care, but do not lose attention to the cared-for. By actively engaging in receptive care, educators and individuals in positions of authority can serve as role models for others to emulate. This approach not only showcases the importance of empathy and compassion but also emphasizes the significance of maintaining a genuine connection with those who are being cared for. Ultimately, by consistently demonstrating these behaviors, individuals can contribute to fostering a culture of moral decision-making within their respective communities.

The idea of dialogue will resemble that of open discussions in which both parties talk freely and listen intently, not knowing how the exchange will conclude. This promotes the investigation of novel concepts and solutions and enables a deeper comprehension of other viewpoints. People may foster inclusivity, establish trust, and foster an atmosphere where everyone feels heard and respected by having open conversations.

In order to develop the ability to care, the practice concept will promote the behavior of routinely participating in caregiving activities. Lastly, there is confirmation, which gives one’s actions the greatest possible reason; success hinges on the caregiver-career relationship. The other idea is confirmation, which gives one’s actions the best possible reason—success.

## III. CARE-BASED PEDAGOGY IN GENERAL CONTEXT

By bridging the gap between theory and practice, practitioners are able to create settings within schools that are of utmost significance to students who have recently arrived in the country. According to MacGillivray and Rueda, there are five ways that teachers can utilize to encourage learning and to further retain student engagement sensitivity to

other cultures in the creation of curricula. Their five suggestions are as follows: These tactics are based on an actual study that was conducted with teachers of learners who are not very good at a second language:

- Take responsibility for staying informed about the lives of your students;
- Have the highest expectations and stay away from deficit models.
- Acknowledging the importance of having knowledge of both the language and the culture;
- Watch out for the curriculum's content and organisation that are set by default;
- Make sure the lessons in the programme have some significance for the kids.

#### IV. CARE-BASED PEDAGOGY IN THE SAUDI EFL CONTEXT

The education system in Saudi Arabia has evolved over the years, and according to the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia (2010), the country has made significant progress in improving the quality of education. In the early years, education was a privilege and only the wealthy had access to it, but now it is a fundamental right for all children. Saudi Arabia has over 25000 schools, and more are constructed as time goes by. All social classes now have access to education, and the government pays for all of the students' tuition. The curricula are a mix of traditional Islamic religious education and lessons from other fields. The other fields are based on curricula from the United States of America or the United Kingdom.

In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Education plays a crucial role in providing special education services to students with disabilities. This is also based on care-based pedagogy. They develop curricula specifically designed for these students and offer training programs to teachers to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to support their needs. Additionally, the ministry also offers adult education literacy programs to empower individuals with disabilities to live independently and safely. Through establishing eligibility criteria and providing specialized services, the Ministry of Education strives to make a positive impact on the lives of students with disabilities in Saudi Arabia (Al-Mousa et al., 2006).

In the context of Saudi EFL, the concept of modelling can play a crucial role in empowering individuals with disabilities to live independently and safely. By showcasing and demonstrating the ability to care for themselves, individuals with disabilities can inspire others and break down societal barriers. However, it is important to remember that while focusing on self-care, one should not neglect the needs and well-being of those they are caring for. This balanced approach will ensure a positive impact on the lives of students with disabilities in Saudi Arabia. There are two primary categories of disabilities that have been extensively examined and discussed: mental disabilities and physical disabilities. Mental disabilities encompass a broad spectrum of mental health diseases or disorders that impact an individual's cognitive processes, emotional state, and behavioural patterns (Green et al., 2005). Mental disorders encompass a range of conditions, including but not limited to depression, mood disorders, personality disorders, psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, body dysmorphic disorder, borderline personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). In addition to the aforementioned cognitive disorders, there exist other conditions such as dementia, autism, and intellectual disability. Moreover, intellectual disability is a condition that manifests during the developmental phase of an individual's life, specifically before the age of 18 and is characterized by below-average intellectual performance. The delineation between a mental condition and a mental impairment is frequently challenging to establish with precision. In the context of Saudi EFL, it is important to consider that individuals with conditions such as dementia, autism, and intellectual disability may face specific challenges in language learning.

The concept of dialogue in Saudi Arabia's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context will be characterized by open conversations that encourage participants to speak and listen receptively. These dialogues will not have predetermined outcomes, allowing for an inclusive and empowering environment for students with disabilities. By incorporating this balanced approach, educators can inspire others and break down societal barriers, while also ensuring the well-being and needs of all individuals involved are met.

To promote receptive speaking and listening skills, Saudi EFL educators can create inclusive and empowering dialogues that do not have predetermined outcomes. This approach will help break down societal barriers and inspire others while meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Furthermore, encouraging regular engagement in care-giving activities will develop the ability to care effectively.

Alexander conducted a comprehensive analysis of dialogic discussion in his publications titled, "Culture and Pedagogy" (2001) and "Towards Dialogic Teaching" (2017). The primary aim of his research was to provide practitioners with a substantiated argument for the utilization of dialogic methodologies in classroom discourse and facilitated dialogue exchange. The author provides a definition of dialogic teaching as the deliberate utilization of oral communication to stimulate and enhance students' abilities and educational development. Verbal communication is widely recognized as a prominent and influential instrument in the process of human development and acquisition of knowledge. The educational process assumes a mediating function in facilitating the interaction between cognitive processes and cultural environments, thus equipping learners with the necessary skills to develop autonomy in critical thinking and active participation in society. Hence, it can be argued that dialogic teaching diverges from conventional forms of classroom discourse and casual interactions.

The instructional design is intentionally structured and strategically aligned with educational objectives to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills for individuals who are new to the subject matter. This portion of the literature study provides a detailed analysis of dialogic pedagogy, with a specific emphasis on the contributions of Alexander. Additionally, it explores the perspectives of other theorists who are tangentially related to the notion. According to Alexander (2008), it can be observed that entire class direct instruction is the prevailing mode of discourse. However, there are occasions where the teacher has challenges in facilitating a reciprocal exchange of discussion. Scaffolded discourse is utilized in these instances to facilitate the advancement of comprehensive comprehension by a systematic and organized approach to questioning, as outlined by scholars such as Bruner (1978), Wood et al. (1976), and Fisher (2011).

Incorporating the above instructions, Saudi EFL instructors can create inclusive and empowering dialogues that do not have predetermined outcomes. This approach will help break down societal barriers and inspire others while meeting the needs of students with disabilities in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, encouraging regular engagement in care-giving activities will develop the ability to care effectively among Saudi EFL learners. Another important concept in Saudi EFL is confirmation, as it assigns the best possible motive to one's actions. The success of caring relationships between the cared-for and the carer in Saudi Arabia depends on establishing a strong connection and understanding.

## V. TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CARE-BASED PEDAGOGY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Care-based pedagogy in teaching the English language, also known as compassionate or caring pedagogy, emphasizes creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment. This approach recognizes the importance of building meaningful relationships between teachers and students, fostering a sense of community, and addressing the holistic development of learners. From a teacher's perspective, implementing care-based pedagogy in English language teaching involves several key considerations:

### A. *Building Relationships*

Teachers focus on developing positive and respectful relationships with their students. This involves understanding each student's unique background, interests, and learning styles. Creating a classroom culture where students feel safe, valued, and supported is essential. Teachers strive to establish trust and open communication.

### B. *Individualized Support*

Recognizing the diverse needs of students, teachers tailor their approach to accommodate various learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds. Providing personalized feedback and assistance helps students feel acknowledged and encourages their individual growth.

### C. *Inclusive Practices*

Care-based pedagogy promotes inclusivity by acknowledging and celebrating diversity. Teachers incorporate diverse voices, perspectives, and cultural elements into the English language curriculum. Cultivating an inclusive classroom environment helps students feel a sense of belonging, fostering a positive attitude toward language learning.

### D. *Emotional Support*

Teachers are attuned to the emotional well-being of their students. They create a supportive space where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and discussing their thoughts and concerns. Recognizing the emotional aspects of language learning, teachers provide encouragement and empathy, helping students navigate challenges.

### E. *Holistic Development*

Care-based pedagogy goes beyond academic achievement to consider the holistic development of students. Teachers support the development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Integrating activities that promote critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration contributes to students' overall growth.

### F. *Responsive Teaching*

Teachers adapt their instructional strategies based on the needs of individual students and the dynamics of the class. Flexibility and responsiveness are key elements of care-based pedagogy. Ongoing reflection on teaching practices allows educators to make adjustments that enhance the learning experience for their students.

### G. *Encouraging Autonomy*

Care-based pedagogy encourages students to take ownership of their learning. Teachers provide opportunities for self-directed learning, fostering autonomy and a sense of responsibility among students.

### H. *Communication and Feedback*

Effective communication between teachers and students is crucial. Regular feedback, both positive and constructive, helps students understand their progress and areas for improvement. Transparent communication about expectations and goals contributes to a collaborative learning environment.

Care-based pedagogy in English language teaching centres around creating a supportive, inclusive, and emotionally intelligent learning environment. Teachers play a pivotal role in fostering positive relationships, tailoring instruction to individual needs, and promoting holistic student development.

## VI. POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES

The implementation of care-based pedagogy in the Saudi EFL context presents both possibilities and challenges. On the one hand, care-based pedagogy emphasizes the importance of establishing a positive relationship between teacher and students, promoting a safe and supportive learning environment. This approach values the emotional well-being of students, encouraging them to share their experiences and perspectives and fostering their sense of belongingness in the classroom. In a cultural context such as Saudi Arabia, which values personal relationships and community building, care-based pedagogy can be an effective way to engage students in the learning process and develop their social and emotional skills. A more action-oriented definition of care is provided, in which “caring is a concern for person and performance”. Ladson-Billings’ work with effective African-American teachers reveals that the teachers were concerned with both the academic improvement and the social and emotional development of their students (Billings, 1994). Jones, Siddle Walker, and Sowell found that children from underrepresented groups believe their teachers and the school environment are caring when those factors combine to make the school feel like a second home.

In Saudi EFL classrooms, teachers and students work together to create a safe and supportive learning environment. This approach focuses on the emotional well-being of students, allowing them to openly share their experiences and perspectives. By doing so, it fosters a sense of belongingness in the classroom. Considering the cultural context of Saudi Arabia, where personal relationships and community building are highly valued, care-based pedagogy becomes an effective method to engage students in their learning journey and enhance their social and emotional skills.

On the other hand, care-based pedagogy may face challenges in the Saudi EFL context. For instance, the emphasis on building relationships and promoting students’ emotional well-being may be perceived as overly informal or even inappropriate in a hierarchical and formal educational system. Moreover, the adoption of care-based pedagogy requires a significant shift in teachers’ instructional approaches and mindsets, which may require additional training or professional development opportunities. Moreover, cultural and religious practices may also impact the implementation of care-based pedagogy in the Saudi context. For instance, the separation of genders and the importance of maintaining modesty may require teachers to modify their instructional strategies to respect cultural norms.

In Saudi Arabia, the implementation of care-based pedagogy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms necessitates a substantial transformation in teachers’ instructional techniques and mindsets. This may entail additional training or opportunities for professional development to effectively incorporate care-based approaches into their teaching practices. It is crucial to consider the cultural and religious practices prevalent in Saudi society, as they can influence the implementation of care-based pedagogy. For example, the separation of genders and the emphasis on modesty might require teachers to adapt their instructional strategies to align with cultural norms, ensuring that students feel comfortable and respected in the learning environment.

Overall, care-based pedagogy has the potential to address some of the challenges present in the Saudi EFL context, such as student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. However, its successful implementation requires careful consideration of cultural and institutional factors, along with appropriate training and support for teachers. Future research can explore the possibilities and challenges of care-based pedagogy in the Saudi EFL context in more depth, investigating its impact on student learning outcomes and teachers’ instructional practices.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, care-based pedagogy shows great potential in improving student learning outcomes and promoting academic achievement in the Saudi EFL context. However, its successful implementation requires careful consideration of cultural and institutional factors, as well as providing appropriate training and support for teachers. Further research is needed to explore the possibilities and challenges of care-based pedagogy in more depth, including investigating its impact on student learning outcomes and teachers’ instructional practices. By understanding and addressing these factors, educators can create a more nurturing and supportive learning environment that enhances students’ educational experiences in Saudi Arabia.

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