

Investigation of Challenges Students Experience in English Language Learning: The case of Selected Secondary schools in Central Zone of Tigray, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This time around English Language is playing a paramount role worldwide as it is widely used as a language of science and technology. In the Ethiopian context, since the introduction of the New Education and Training Policy in 1994, English is taught as a subject as of grade 1 in all regions and is used as a medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary levels. Nevertheless, according to some scholars in the area, the English language learning ability of Ethiopian secondary school students has been worsening. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate the challenges students experience in English Language learning with particular reference to six selected secondary schools of the central Zone. In order to achieve the research objectives, a mixed approach methodology was used to obtain relevant and valid information. Coming to the subject of the study, students, English teachers, department heads, and directors were participants of the study. Then, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observations. Finally, the study showed that the students have poor background knowledge, a lack of motivation and participation, overuse of mother tongue by teachers and students, teachers use traditional lecture method, lack of co-curricular activities and language training centers. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are drawn based on the findings of the study.

Key Words: Challenges, Competence, Motivation, Mother Tongue

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1. INTRODUCTION

English is a language spoken and written by billions of people worldwide, and it has become everyone's second language (Crystal, 2004). Being skilled in the language is certainly significant, particularly in Ethiopia, where the language is considered a foreign language. This is mostly because English is rarely used in everyday life outside of the classroom, and students do not have the opportunity to learn the language informally. According to Mydans (2007), as the world becomes more interconnected, the expansion and relevance of English on every continent grows, owing to its status as the official or working language of the majority of international gatherings worldwide. Additionally, according to Crystal (2003) English is the language of globalization, worldwide communication, media, commerce, and trade. Crystal added that it is hard to deny its influence in any region of the world since language reflects the advancement of globalization, and its transmission includes not only the language but also the globalization that it represents. As a result, English is playing an increasingly important role around the world as a language of science and technology. In Ethiopia, since the implementation of the New Education and Training Policy in 1994, English has been taught as a subject beginning in grade 1 in all areas, and it is utilized as a medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary levels. As a result, the government has done its best in the last few years to raise the students' English learning ability and proficiency by designing different learning strategies like student-centered, cooperative and independent learning and training teachers to update their knowledge and skills of the English language teaching methodologies to help students develop their English Language learning. Regardless of the actions taken by the government, the English language proficiency of the students in most schools is not encouraging. Students who join universities and colleges are less likely to express themselves, communicate with each other in cooperative

group tasks and write short recall requiring texts in the English language. On such occasions, they are seen using their mother tongue instead of attempting their best in the English language. This may have different reasons, and it may be because students do not have much exposure to the language; they only confine themselves to the instruction delivered in the classroom, and they lack practice in using the English language outside the classroom. In addition, Heugh et al (2006) clearly expressed that students are not in a position to use English. Instead, they meet most of their primary needs by communicating in their mother tongue.

According to John & Ehow (2011), the problems of learning the English language are derived from many different factors in different environments, such as school resources, class size, quality of teachers, and the school attendance of learners and many students think English is only a school subject and they don't see its significance. For instance, Haregewoin (2008) mentions that there is a common belief among many college and university instructors that the language proficiency of many secondary school students who have recently joined colleges and universities in the country is found to be below the expectation levels. This clearly shows that most of the Ethiopian secondary school students lack proficiency and competency in their English language use. They joined higher learning institutions without a good English language background at secondary school. Besides, they score low marks in national examinations, and they become incompetent graduates because they lack the required skills which enable them to cope with the market demand (Mekasha, 2005). In this respect, the researcher does share the above complaints because previously, during his project work in the schools which are part of the study areas in this research, the researcher witnessed that students are less proficient in English. They have little ability to understand what they read, and cannot express their ideas in clear and simple English properly. As a result, the researcher's previous observation in some of the schools regarding the students' English Language Proficiency and their low performance in English language was the motive behind the researcher to conduct this research work in an effort to fill the gap. In general, to achieve the intended objectives of the study, the following research questions were proposed:

- What are the challenges the students experience in English Language learning?
- What are the sources of challenges students face in English Language learning?
- What are the possible strategies to alleviate the problems?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Status of English in Ethiopia

Historically, the expansion of the English language in Ethiopia is directly related to the introduction of modern education into the country in the early 20th century (Animaw, 2011), and English has played a significant role in the educational system of the country since then. According to Abiy (2006), the beginning of modern education in Ethiopia was typically characterized by the teaching of foreign languages. Then, after the end of the Second World War, schools and colleges were opened and English was used as the medium of instruction even in primary schools until it was replaced by Amharic in 1963/4. When the Amharic language is used as a medium of instruction in the primary cycle, English remains to serve as the medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels of education, including for most of the subjects taught in Grades 7 and 8. In addition, it continued to be taught as a subject at all levels beginning as early as grade 1 in some places and at grade 3 in others (Geremew, 1999; Abebe, 2012). In addition, Abebe (2012) states that English became dominant because both government and non-government schools played significant roles in the spread of English in Ethiopian education. Besides, most of the curriculum and teaching materials especially for high schools were imported from Britain. However, because of the contextualization problem of the curriculum and the students' textbooks, it could not be successful in using English as a medium of instruction. The main reason for students' failure in the secondary school is lack of proficiency to benefit from English as the medium of instruction, and because of problems with English (Abebe, 2012). In general, regardless of the problems English continued as a medium of instruction in secondary schools (Negash, 2011).

The Educational Roles of English in Ethiopia

In the Ethiopian context, the English Language has several roles, and among the roles, the educational role is the long-standing and dominant one. Likewise, trade and business communication, advertisement and entertainment, and communication are some of the other roles English is playing (Negash, 2011). In the

educational system of the country, English has been taught as a subject for students starting from grade one and is the language of instruction from grade nine through colleges and universities nationwide since 1994, when a new education policy was implemented (Bogale, 2009). Apart from these nationally consistent practices, different regions have adopted different regional policies and attitudes towards English in their education system; some of the regions have made English a medium of instruction from grade 7, some from grade 8 and some from grade 9 (Heugh et al, 2006). In addition, according to Negash (2011), English is the primary language of academia, as the majority of academic publications are written in English. In addition, the researcher feels that today English has become the language of research and publication, medicine, sport, business and international conferences. On the contrary, most graduates leave school and colleges with a very low level of English language proficiency in general, and they have been facing different challenges in their learning. Even though English has been used as a medium of instruction from grade 7 or 9 upwards for a long time, problems in learning and teaching English are worsening in Ethiopia.

Challenges of students' English Language learning

The issue of Motivation

Motivation is a psychological process which determines the intensity, direction and persistence of behaviors related to learning (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991). Gardener and Tremblay (1995) stated that students' progressive performance in school is determined by their motivation, among other factors. Highly motivated students will tend to outperform their fellow students and are more likely to engage in a subject if they see a good reason to do so. Besides, according to Gardener and Tremblay, the subject matter being taught by the teachers should appeal to the students' personal academic and professional goals. The more we can do to make the material as interesting as possible, the more motivated students will be to learn it and conceptualize it. Besides, Oxford (1990) indicated, factors affecting language learning are very complicated, including motivation, attitudes, language anxiety, self-confidence, and personality. In this vein, motivation is one of the most important factors which affect students' language learning process. In addition, Reece & Walker (1997) express that motivation is a key factor in the language learning process. They stress that less able students who are highly motivated can achieve greater success than the more intelligent students who are not well motivated. Shulman (1986) also explained that students' learning is facilitated most effectively when students are motivated, and that motivation can be enhanced through the creation of a positive affective climate. As to him, the importance of the teacher factor in having a high level of motivation in language learning and the choice of teaching strategy cannot be neglected.

Attitude of the students

Attitude and motivation towards language acquisition are interrelated and define the conditions under which the learning process occurs (Ellis 1997). Aiken (1996) defines attitude as an individual's taught disposition or predisposition to respond favorably or adversely. Furthermore, Gardner (1985) believes that both motivation and a positive attitude are required for an effective language learning experience. Krashen (1985) also suggests that attitudes can operate as barriers or bridges to learning a new language and that they are a key environmental component that plays an important role in language learning classrooms. He added that learning can only take place when specific affective conditions exist, such as good attitudes, self-confidence, and low fear, and input can pass through the affective filter and be employed by the learner. Furthermore, learners' views, experiences, and emotions may be related to language learning in ways that are directly or indirectly influenced by the classroom environment. Classroom learning activities, student-teacher relationships, teacher assistance, and class cooperation all contribute to the classroom's learning dimensions. Furthermore, Littlewood (1983) says that students will lose interest in studying because attitudes create a barrier in the learning process preventing them from acquiring new linguistic knowledge. Thus, it implies that attitude has a direct impact on students' language learning and performance, and that students with good attitudes are more successful than those with negative attitudes toward language learning. Nunan (2000) argues that students who have favorable attitudes toward learning today are more likely to pursue learning in the future.

The Role of English Language Teachers

Teachers in a foreign language environment are non-native English speakers who must be well-prepared to teach the communicative part of the language through on-the-job or off-the-job training. Furthermore, Littlewood (1981) defines the position of the language teacher broadly as a facilitator, with sub-roles such as "overseer" of students' learning, "classroom manager," and "consultant" or "adviser." Harmer (2001) expands on the term "facilitator" beyond Littlewood's definition, stating that the ultimate goal of all teaching positions is to aid students' advancement. He discusses utilizing "precise" phrases to describe the tasks that teachers play in the classroom: controller, organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, and observer. Tudor (1993) also examines the teacher's position in the context of the learner-centered classroom, a type of classroom in which the emphasis is on the learners' active participation in the educational process. Furthermore, Nunan (1996) views the teacher as not just the organizer and manager of all classroom activities, but also as an evaluator of the students' performance. However, traditionally, English teachers have held a very dominant position, maybe due to the belief that the teacher is the source of all information. The learner, on the other hand, has always been considered a vessel to hold the knowledge imparted by the teacher. In general, in any teaching-learning setting, the teacher's position in the classroom is critical since it determines how the classroom environment evolves. As a result, instructors must be explicit about their function in the classroom so that there is no disconnect between their perceptions of their duty and what they really do in the classroom, and they should take a student-centered approach rather than a traditional one. In contrast to the above review, most teachers are seen adopting the traditional teacher-centered style, with the teachers always in the spotlight. They give lengthy lectures on specific topics and the students expected to pay close attention. This has long been the strategy used to teach English in Ethiopia. Using this style, teachers have taught distinct elements of grammar or the communicative aspect in separate lessons, focusing primarily on the formal features of the language while encouraging students to utilize it.

Learning Environment

The school environment is of paramount importance to promote the learning process. This environment refers to the internal and external conditions. The external condition is the total of all social, emotional, mental and physical factors that make an overall contribution to the total teaching learning process within the classroom. The internal condition, which includes the classes and all other structures, should assist in creating a healthy teaching the learning process. This type of atmosphere prevailing in the school is a perpetual inspiration for the learners to learn more and more. The reason for this is that the academic environment instills an intellectual frame of mind in the students, which may be achieved by offering a dedicated study space. In this regard, Kristmanson (2000) suggests that a successful learning environment can be created by encouraging and supporting students at all times, but especially when they are struggling or lacking confidence in specific areas. During the process, it is stated that teachers should be energetic and excited about what they are teaching, and that on days when they lack energy, they should give activities that force the learners to put up effort. In general, in terms of the learning environment, Kristmanson stated that students should be given opportunities to talk about themselves, their interests and their culture as well as opportunities for interaction in the target language both inside and outside of the language learning environment via preplanned and spontaneous speaking activities.

3. Research Methodology

This part of the research paper presents the research design, participants of the study, sampling and sample size, methods of data collection and techniques of data analysis.

Research Design

A descriptive research design involving the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods (mixed approach) was employed at both the data collection and analysis levels. In connection with this, Mujis (2004) points out that combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods can often enrich our research. Therefore, a descriptive method involving a mixed approach was found to be the most appropriate to obtain relevant and valid information required to address the proposed objectives.

The study area, population and study subjects

The regional state of Tigray, Ethiopia, has seven Zones, and this study focuses on one of the largest zones, which is the Central zone. The zone has a diverse landscape that causes a varied microclimate in the region. The zone has a total of 38 secondary government schools (i.e. only grades 9 & 10) during the study, and the researcher has selected only six schools randomly, and those schools had a total population of 7,789. The subjects of this study were grade 9 and grade 10 students, teachers who teach English in these grade levels, and school directors of the respective schools.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size Determination

Since the total population in the central zone of Tigray is not manageable, the researcher decided to select six secondary schools randomly out of the existing 38 governmental schools in the zone, namely, Wukro Maray, Tadelech Hailu, Rama, Enticho, Werie and Maikinetel secondary schools. Therefore, out of 7,789 total populations (students) in the six selected secondary schools, a sample size of 390 students was randomly selected to fill the questionnaire, considering male-female distribution. Consequently, 65 students were randomly selected from each of the six schools under the study. As far as teacher participants are concerned, all English language teachers (35) who were teaching English in the sample secondary schools were included and completed the questionnaire. Regarding the students' focus group discussion (FGD), two groups (one group from grade nine and the other group from grade ten), each consisting of 5 students, were randomly selected from each school. In total, the number of FGD groups was 12. So, 60 students participated in FGD from all schools which are under the study. In the case of an interview, all school directors were interviewed to obtain valuable information about the issue under study. In connection with determining the sample size, it is very difficult to decide the sample size randomly because the researcher knows nothing about the background, motivation, attitude and interest of the population except predicting that there could be some challenges students face in English Language learning in the schools. Consequently, the researcher chose to determine the sample size using Yamane's (1967) formula, which is given as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} \quad \text{Where, } n = \text{number of samples (sample size)}$$

$$N = \text{total population and } e = \text{error tolerance/margin of error (5% or 0.05 for social sciences)}$$

So, the sample size is calculated using the above formula as:

$$n = \frac{7789}{1 + 7789 \times 0.05^2} = \frac{7789}{1 + 7789 \times 0.0025} = \frac{7789}{1 + 19.4725} = 400$$

===== 390 (sample size)

$$1 + 7789 \times 0.05^2 = 1 + 7789 \times 0.0025 = 1 + 19.4725 = 400$$

Data Collection Instruments

To gather reliable and valid data, four instruments were used in the process of collecting and analyzing the necessary data for the study. As a result, teachers' and students' questionnaires, school leaders' interviews, students' focus group discussions and observation were used as data gathering tools. For example, in the questionnaire, both students' and teachers' questionnaires were used to address different challenges students are experiencing in English Language learning. For example, students were asked about their opinion, attitude, motivation and background of English language learning in a five-point Likert-type form. Like the students' questionnaires, teachers' questionnaires, which were written in the five-point Likert-type scale and were designed to assess their perspective and opinion on the challenges students experience in English Language learning. To substantiate the information obtained through the questionnaire, English Language head departments and vice directors of the selected schools were interviewed using structured and semi-structured interviews, focusing mainly on what could be the major challenges the students are facing in English Language learning. With regards to focus group discussion, two FGD groups of students (one group from grade nine and the other group from grade ten, consisting of five members) were randomly selected and gathered to discuss issues concerning challenges students face in English language learning based on a list of key themes drawn by the researcher. Finally, in the classroom observation, participatory structured observations were used as one of

the data collection tools to get information about the issue at hand and an observation checklist that assesses the challenges students experience in English language learning in secondary schools was prepared and used. As a result, two (2) English Language teachers were observed three times with different lessons in each of the six schools under the study.

Techniques of Data Analysis

In the study, questionnaires, interviews, focused group discussions and observation were used to collect data from subjects of the study. Thus, the data obtained from quantitative instruments, like questionnaire items, were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics. Similarly, qualitative data gathered from the qualitative instruments like interviews, focused group discussions and classroom observation were analyzed qualitatively according to the themes that emerged in the study. Finally, the data secured through the four data gathering instruments were compared to arrive at a reasonable conclusion.

4. Results and Discussions

Students' General opinion about their English Language Learning

Table 1: Students opinion about English Language Learning

S. No	Items	Responses in %		Remark
		No	%	
1	Speaking in English gives me more confident in expressing myself.	126	33%	
2	I need to improve and use English in the future.	367	94%	
3	I do not pay much attention in the English classroom.	235	60%	
4	I have a strong desire to learn English.	353	90.5%	
5	I feel excited when I communicate in English with others.	198	50.7%	
6	I wish that I could speak fluent and accurate English.	387	99%	
7	I feel proud among my classmates when I speak English.	230	58.9%	
8	Studying English is important because it helps to get a good job.	372	95%	
9	It is a good thing to learn English and speak like native speakers.	361	92.5%	
10	I am relaxed whenever I have to speak in my English class.	112	28.7%	

As to the above Table 1, the students' opinions on English language learning reveal that the majority of respondents (99%) expressed a wish to speak fluent and accurate English. Besides, the majority of them believe that English is important for securing a good job (95%), and they also need to use it in the future (94%). Nonetheless, the data indicates a contrast between their aspirations and their current confidence because only 33% of them feel more confident when speaking English and followed by only 28.7% of the respondents feel relaxed when speaking in class. In addition, (60%) of the respondents admitted to not paying much attention to the English classroom. This shows there is a disconnection between their goals and their engagement in the learning process.

The Sources of the Challenges Students Experience in English Language Learning

Table 2: Students Related Challenges

S.N	Challenges	Respondents in %				Remark
		Teachers'		Students'		
1	Poor English Language background	31	88.5%	350	89.7%	
2	believing that English is difficult to learn	35	100%	375	96%	
3	Didn't attend pre-school (Kindergarten – KG)	32	91%	390	100%	
4	Low confidence in using the language	25	71%	273	70%	
5	Low motivation to use the language	28	80%	286	73%	
6	Predominant use of mother tongue (L1) in classes	33	94%	247	63%	
7	Poor participation of students in the classes	30	85.7%	315	80.7%	
8	Don't study English like other subjects	35	100%	369	94.6%	
9	Don't exposed to real life situational activities	23	65.7%	383	98%	
10	Limited use of English of in the classroom	34	97%	302	77%	

According to the table above, the responses of both teachers and students regarding the most common student-related challenges in English language learning are compared. Then the result shows that poor English Language background, believing that English is difficult to learn and not attending pre-school are the shared challenges by both groups that account (88% - 100%) of their responses without disparity. Looking at the highest responses from teachers, all of the teachers (100%) indicated that among students' related problems, believing English is difficult and not studying English are the most prominent ones. In contrast, the lowest score of the teachers, which accounts for 65.7% of them, replied that the students are not exposed to real-life situational activities in the class. Coming to the students, not attending pre-school and not being exposed to real-life situations which account for 100% and 98% of their responses respectively are the major challenges for them in English Language learning. Besides, the table shows that there is a disparity in perception between the teachers and students regarding the predominant use of the mother tongue by the students in class which accounts for 94% of teachers' responses compared to only 63% of students.

Table 3: Teachers Related Challenges

S.N	Challenges	Respondents in %				Remark
		Teachers'		Students'		
1	They are not equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills	15	42.8%	334	85.6%	
2	Look unhappy with their current professional activities	35	100%	320	82%	
3	Don't make necessary preparations before the classes	11	31%	353	90.5%	
4	Predominant use of the mother tongue in teaching English	25	71%	380	97%	
5	Don't have a good command of the English Language	30	85.7%	337	86%	
6	Focus mainly on Grammar and skip the other skills	33	94%	383	98%	
7	Low confidence in using the English language	9	25.7%	364	93%	
8	Seems less motivated to teach in the English Language	34	97%	378	96.9%	
9	Failure in using a variety of teaching methods	25	71%	381	97.7%	
10	Don't encourage students to use English	13	37%	376	96%	

Based on the above table, there is a significant perceptual gap between teachers and students regarding key challenges in English language teaching. For example, 90.5% of the students claim that the teachers don't make necessary preparation, and this view is shared by only 31% of the teacher respondents. Similarly, 93% of the students replied that the teachers have low confidence in using the English language, but the majority of the teachers fail to agree with this view. With regard to encouraging students to use English, the teachers' and students' responses do not correspond to each other. In contrast, both the teachers (100%) and the students (82%) confirmed that the teachers are not happy with their current professional activities, and they are less motivated to

teach in English which accounts for 97% and 96.9% of the respondents, respectively. In addition, 94% of the teachers and 98% of the respondents confirmed that the focus of classroom teaching is mainly grammar, skipping the other language skills.

Table 4: Schools Related Challenges

S.N	Challenges	Respondents in %			Remark
		Teachers'	Students'		
1	Inadequate provisions of resources	35	100%	390	100%
2	Lack of co-curricular activities in English	32	91%	375	96%
3	No English Language clubs in the schools	35	100%	390	100%
4	No language laboratories in the school	35	100%	390	100%
5	The target language is not used in the classroom	25	71%	356	91%
6	Free passing from grade to grade levels	33	94%	250	64%
7	Unconducive learning environment	35	100%	379	97%
8	Lack of support, follow-up and intervention	26	74%	285	73%
9	No qualified English Language teachers in the schools	5	14%	347	88.9%
10	The quality of education is not given due emphasis	31	88.5%	377	96.6%

The above table shows a comparison of teachers' and students' responses regarding the school-related challenges in connection to English language teaching and learning. Then the result shows that both groups have equally recognized inadequate provision of resources (100%), the absence of English language clubs (100%) and a lack of language laboratories (100%) as major obstructions. Besides, all teachers (100%) also reported that there is no conducive learning environment in the schools, and 97% of the students also confirmed that there is no supportive environment for learning. Conversely, there exists a disparity regarding the qualification of English teachers, and the majority of the students (88.9%) replied that there are no qualified English Language teachers in the schools. Whereas only a small number of teachers which accounts for 14% of them acknowledged that the lack of quality teachers is a challenge in English language teaching in the schools. This indicates there is a difference in perception on this specific issue between the teachers and students.

Major Findings of the Qualitative Data

The majority of the students are simply attending school for the sake of completing grade 12, and they don't pay attention to the English subject they are being taught. Hence, the students lack interest in education in general and English language learning in particular, and no motivation or participation in learning the English language. Besides, the students have poor background knowledge of learning English for communication purposes from the beginning. They also lack practice in communicating in English in the classroom and outside the classroom. In addition, the traditional lecture of teachers' fronted method of instruction is still dominant, and the students are not being taught in a way that develops their English Language skills. The English classes are dominated by a few students and their teachers. The other majority of students were passive listeners, and there is overuse of the mother tongue by both students and teachers in the classroom. Moreover, most teachers are grammarians because they like teaching grammar more than other English skills. Furthermore, some teachers don't have motivation for their profession and also lack on-job and off-job trainings that update the teachers' teaching profession. As to the informants, some teachers are inefficient in subject matter and pedagogical knowledge. The problem is worsened because most of the schools are not equipped with important resources such as reference books and authentic materials for teaching language skills. Schools also lack co-curricular activities and a language lab to support teachers and students in developing their English Language skills. More importantly, it is reflected that parents are simply sending their children to school, and they don't follow up on how well their children are doing in all subjects in general and the English language in particular. Finally, the participants indicated that the primary school curriculum is found to be doubtful because English language teaching and learning are not given due attention.

Suggested Strategies of Intervention

The teachers, students and the school administrators were asked to suggest possible intervention strategies so as to alleviate problems that are related to students' English Language learning processes. As a result, the following are among the common suggestions forwarded by those stakeholders in order to improve the student English Language learning.

Suggested strategies for Students	Suggested Strategies for Teachers	Suggested strategies for Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Helping them to be motivated and participate in class activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use a variety of teaching methodologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Setting up English language clubs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Boost their confidence and avoid shyness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Using student-centred methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Working on English language Awareness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Should be encouraged to take more time to practice in English	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Let students participate actively in class	<ul style="list-style-type: none">work on teachers' capacity building
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Studying English like other subjects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Model using the target language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Providing teaching resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Help them use English in classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Update their knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Creating a conducive environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Creating awareness about English	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Focus on all Language skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Making support and follow-ups
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ensure students' Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Respect their profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Working on the quality of education
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Expose them to real situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Make necessary preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ensure the use of target Language

Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that the students' current performance in English is not good. In connection to this, the teachers' quantitative and qualitative data show that the students' attitude towards learning in general and the English language in particular is not good, and the teachers explained that the students' background knowledge is poor, and most of the students are attending school simply to complete secondary school, and as to the teachers this is not healthy learning process. During the interview, the majority of them mentioned that the problem lies in the lower grades in relation to the curriculum because the students are not well cultivated and their background is not well empowered in all language skills. In addition, the results of the focused group discussion conducted with students imply that the students did not have a good background, which is the result of different problems. For example, they mention that they were not well taught in the primary schools, their parents did not make the necessary follow-up and support, and the students themselves are not ready to try to speak in English and did not pay attention to learn the English language. Moreover, the classroom observation conducted by the researcher shows that in many of the secondary schools, the classrooms are not attractive, and the seats in the classroom are fixed and not comfortable for organizing students in active learning methods. Besides, the teachers employ the traditional lecture method, and the students are not allowed to practice what they learned in the classroom. In other words, the English class time was dominated by the teacher-fronted mode of teaching. As a result, the majority of the students felt shy and did not want to make a mistake. They also had a language problem to discuss in class. They were using their mother tongue to explain things and ask questions. Finally, the major challenges that students experience in the English language are found mainly related to the students themselves, the teachers and the school and the potential strategies that could be taken as an intervention to alleviate the problem are also suggested by the participants.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Students should be engaged, interested and encouraged to develop confidence when speaking in English language classrooms.
- Students should be exposed to different situations within and outside the classroom to boost their communicative skills.
- English language teachers should teach all language skills, including grammar and vocabulary than simply focusing entirely on grammar.
- English language teachers should implement different methodologies to address the individual needs and learning styles of every learner.
- Since the English language is the medium of instruction in secondary schools and higher institutions, English language teachers must be well-trained and equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills of the English Language during their stay at Universities/colleges.
- The process of English language teaching should be supported by co-curricular activities.
- Workshops and other in-service trainings should be given to teachers to improve teachers' profession (both on subject matter and pedagogical knowledge).
- The schools should also fulfill the necessary preconditions to facilitate teaching and learning processes.
- Parents should try to encourage their children to be actively involved in learning the English language at home and school.
- Curriculum designers should consider language learners' gaps, needs, strategies and the English language learning context in every school level.

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