

Arab Learners' Problems in Learning English Language: A Teacher Perspective

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Abstract

Because of the social and cultural backgrounds of students, teachers, and specialists of English faces a lot of problems while teaching English to Arab students in general, and Iraqi students in particular. There are many reasons for this. The first and the most important reason is that the Arab students have no knowledge of even Basic English although they are taught English in schools. Perhaps the school teachers do not pay proper attention towards the role of English and its significance in the classroom. Whatever may be the reason for this but the teacher who teaches those students in higher classes suffers the most and faces a lot of problems while teaching them a prescribed book or course in higher classes. On the other hand students look towards their teacher with great hope. They consider the teacher the most competent and think that their teacher would make them learn English very soon Thus a teacher's responsibility towards his students is doubled. As a findings of earlier studies and many English teachers are fade up and disappointed and so leave the assignment in the middle of their contract. But if the teacher has a little patience and is competent and intelligent he would handle the situation easily and achieve his goal. The plans, strategies and methods of teaching English to these students have been discussed in details in the main research paper.

Keywords: Arab Learners, Problems, English Language Learning.

Introduction and Background of the Study

According to Zhang (2013, p.834), there are generally four basic skill involved in the language learning process. The processes of receiving are listening and reading. Furthermore, Harmer (2003, p.199) pointed out that receptive skills are the ways how people acquire the meaning from the discourse that they see or hear. In the same vein, Cooper (2015, p. 1) argues that the productive skills are those which enable language learners to communicate meaning effectively to others. The processes of production are speaking and writing.

Consistently, Rababa'h (2005) pointed out that there are many factors that cause difficulties in speaking English among EFL learners. Some of these factors are related to the learners themselves, the teaching strategies, the curriculum, and the environment. For example, many learners lack the necessary vocabulary to get their meaning across, and consequently, they cannot keep the interaction going. Inadequate strategic competence and communication competence can be another reason as well for not being able to keep the interaction going.

As well as, a study of Zhang (2009) who argued that speaking remains the most difficult skill to master for the majority of English learners, and they are still incompetent in communicating orally in English. Also, a study conducted by Hussein and Elttayef (2016) who concluded that discourse competence relates to collection, re-ordering, and arrangement of words, structures, sentences and utterances to achieve a cohesive, cohesion, and meaningful spoken or written text to avoid unnecessary repetition and to put each signals in its suitable position was improved with the help of instructional technologies as a mean of communication. The researchers used this tool because there was a big problem in the methods of teaching.

Therefore, this study revealed that the main speaking difficulties encountered by grade 5 students are linguistic difficulties, mother tongue use, and inhibition. Students are unable to speak in English because they lack the necessary vocabulary items and grammar structures. They also lack sentence formation skills, which result in using the mother tongue. Students also think of making mistakes in speaking in front of their classmates very embarrassing, which results in preferring not to speak to avoid such situations. There are five main factors that contribute to the existence of these speaking difficulties: teachers' perceptions and tacit beliefs of teaching speaking, teaching strategies, curriculum, extracurricular activities, and assessment regulations (Al Hosni, 2014:28).

Because speaking skill is the only skill that is not included in the exams, it is given less teaching emphasis. The focus is mainly on teaching reading and writing besides grammar and vocabulary. Although the teaching of speaking can be integrated into other skills like reading and writing, teachers think that time is insufficient to do that, and priority is given to other skills rather than speaking because they are included in the exam and speaking is not. Also, many classrooms should be equipped with computers because technology has become an integral part of the curricula such as video, tap-recorder etc. Students use them to work on online components of their courses and to write papers. Unfortunately, many students also use them for educational use in order to develop

their speaking, and listening skill. When instructors teach in their computer labs, they need to monitor their students to keep them on task.

Besides, it was found that grade 5 textbooks do not provide students with frequency of opportunities to use English communicatively, and they do not include sufficient tasks that are particularly designed for speaking. Moreover, the classroom is the only place where most students are exposed to English. Extracurricular activities that aim to improve students' speaking skill are very rare and limited to the English assembly, which is conducted once a week.

The general problem of the current study

The EFL teaching is always affected by sociocultural factors. Many Arab students, attending the EFL classes, come from the background where English is unknown. Of course they are taught English in their primary and secondary schools, but they are taught English only as a formality. Teachers as well as students take EFL lightly. They only need marks to pass the examination and they even pass the EFL examination by memorizing the answers without learning any English. Consequently they spend their valuable years in schools without learning anything of English language. But when they come to college or university or take admission professional courses like medical, nursing, computer science, engineering etc, they need English language even though in form of pictures because they have to study everything in English. At this stage English becomes a problems for them. At this problematic stage only an intelligent and competent teacher may come for their rescue. If, unfortunately, a student does not get a competent teacher, his interest in learning English will disappear forever. When we say language teaching or language learning, we are concerned with the four language skills (Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening).

Therefore, all these four skills are very important and so all of them should be taught with equal emphasis. All the four skills are related with one another. We cannot say that one particular skill is more important than others. In fact we cannot separate them from one another. Of course the method and the style of teaching of all the four skills are different. Additionally, after studying English for about 9 years, school leavers are, in most cases, incapable to speak or write a single flawless sentence in English. This increases many questions about the soundness of teachers and suitability of approaches engaged. Without a doubt there is a main problem confronting English education in Iraq.

Arab Learners' Problems in Communication

Our experience in teaching English as a foreign language in schools and other educational institutions in Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia has led me to believe that English language majors/graduates in Iraq have difficulties in using English for communication. When engaged in authentic communicative situations, they often lack the necessary vocabulary they need to get their meaning across. As a result, they cannot keep the interaction going for an extended period of time. They don't exposure to real life situation. There is absent of communication with native speaker. There is absent of use tap-recording in daily tasks. Therefor. There have been several complaints made about the weakness in English of school graduates who join the universities as English language majors or as English language learners. Because of the seriousness of the problem. Essentially, Arab learners face many problems in all language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The great number of erroneous utterances that Arab learners of English produce in oral performance and their recourse to communication strategies, as shown in Rababah's study (2001), is an indication of how serious the problem is. It is also an indication that the objectives of the English departments in the Arab world have not yet been achieved, and that this situation requires a solution. In the same way, the students in Jordan, for example, learn English in their native country, where the native language is Arabic. The only way to learn English in Jordan is through formal instruction, i.e. inside the classroom where the language teachers at school are native speakers of Arabic. There is little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction in the target language. This is only possible when students encounter native speakers of English who come to the country as tourists, and this rarely happens (Rabah, 2002).

Additionally, Suleiman (1983:129) argues that the most noticeable problems which impede the progress of Arab students at university level may be attributed to the "inadequate mastery of the four language skills; namely listening, speaking, reading and writing".

Problems Face Iraqi Learners

To teach EFL a teacher must have patience. In Iraq there is no environment of English language. Here English is not a serious subject. Students as well as Iraqi teachers take it lightly. Students are not taught English in a proper way in their schools for many reasons that is outside and inside of the school. After passing school when they come universities to study professional courses, all of they have to study everything in English and so suddenly English becomes very important for them. It is at this stage that students are frustrated. They want to learn English but they are helpless because they do not know how to read and write English properly. Consequently,

they lose interest in English language and consider it the most difficult subject. At this stage a teacher plays a vital role. If a teacher is dedicated, competent, intelligent and understands the psychology of students, he rescues his students from their frustration. Only a competent teacher can be helpful for these students. To teach grammar and composition to students having the knowledge of English language is very easy but to prepare students for English language is the most difficult task. The progress of these students in learning English language totally depends on the competent teachers and the curriculum they are taught. Besides that, there is also teachers complain about the lack of parental cooperation and guidance with them. A student can become successful only when parents support his teachers. But in fact, parents start attacking the teacher when they hear complain from their kid against teacher. Parents like to defend their child without knowing their child's behavior and problems. More importantly, in recent years Iraqi students face problems in their teaching especially the situations of war affections that occur in all of Iraq areas and lack of days and time. Actually, Iraqi students feel unfair, hopeless life, fear, and despair etc. There is nothing good in their daily life. Most of the students don't complete the material and don't take exactly time to finish the curriculum and finally they enter the examine class and the results that are a failure.

Problems Regarding Listening Skill

Listening materials are not used by the majority of schoolteachers, which is most probably because of the limited number of cassette recorders and the large number of teachers at the same school. Therefore, teachers try to read dialogues to their students, and this does not provide the learners with the necessary native speaker model (Rababah, 2002).

While learning listening it is necessary to listen carefully. So, make it habit of your students to listen everything carefully. You may do this by repeated practice. There are also a plenty of methods which can be used by a teacher in the class—room to improve listening power like dictation, aural comprehension, note—taking etc (Ansari, 2012).

Therefore, the most important element in learning to listen effectively in a second or foreign language is confidence, which comes from practice. The role of a teacher is to provide as much as positive practice as possible by speaking to learners in English, by exposing them to a range of listening materials in the class—room, and by encouraging them to use whatever resources are available in their institution or community. Consistently, the shift to the new millennium's styles of teaching and learning is one big challenge for the educators at present in classroom. Additionally, technology has become an essential part of education so classrooms today are equipped with computers. Computers are provided to students to get help and knowledge online and make assignments. Integration of technology does bring a lot of challenges to teachers. Teachers already feel naïve when it comes to technology and students in this age are digital natives. With the available technology students somehow finds their way out to misuse the technology which is one big concern of educators. The best way to overcome this problem is to monitor students strictly while working on e-devices, limiting screen time, using various Software that limits the usage to only academic purpose, get help from IT staff and learn to stay abreast with advancement in technology. From experience of teachers in 21st century, technology needs to come into the classroom to keep up with the learning demands of the 21st century. Schools that are already cash-strapped may find an unsurmountable challenge in coming up with the funding to bring computers and other forms of technology into their classes. Academic specialists offer some tips for school districts that want to fit the bill for technology, including everything from asking individuals in the district for “big gifts” to going to Uncle Sam for the funding. The website also suggests negotiating prices on technology when possible and allowing student to bring their own from home.

Problems Regarding Speaking Skill

In the process of teaching speaking skill, a teacher is very important because he is a model for his students. It is from him that students directly listen the spoken English. Many of the students do not find opportunity to hear English from the mouth of a native speaker (Ansari, 2012).

In addition, it is the teacher who directly speaks to his students in English. This is the first-hand experience of spoken English for students. So a teacher, automatically, becomes a model for his students. What and how he speaks becomes the final word for students. So, a teacher should really try to be a real model for students. For this a teacher has to do something to improve his ability as an English teacher so that he may become areally good model for his students. Thus, we see that a teacher has double duty. One is how to teach spoken English to his students and the other is how to improve his own speaking ability

Additionally, students with reading problems often have unsatisfactory relationships with adults in the schools. Studies show that poor achievers tend to be perceived negatively by teachers, paraprofessionals, and principles. Teachers often identify poor readers as aggressive, lacking self-discipline, and unmotivated. Low achievers receive less praise or acknowledgment from teachers, and they are more likely to be criticized.

Instruction that does not meet a student's needs can be an important factor in a reading problem. For

example, when immature children are given formal reading instruction before they can profit from it, they may become frustrated and develop reading problems. If children do not receive sufficient instruction in critical skills, they may fail in the initial stages of learning to read. For examples, research demonstrates that an important link exists between phonemic awareness by first grade, their reading in all of the following grades is affected. Finally, low-achieving students often do not read enough to become better readers (Blachman, Tangel, & Ball, 2004).

Problems related to teachers

They must be choosy in appointing a teacher because the learning of EFL totally depends efficiency and competency of the teacher. If a teacher is found incompetent he should immediately be replaced by a competent teacher. It does not mean that there should be any restriction on the teacher. In fact a teacher should be free in adopting a style of teaching in the class-room. Every teacher has a different style of teaching in the class-room. If a student fails in learning or improving his linguistic knowledge, it does not mean that his teacher is not good or incompetent. We can, utmost, blame his style of teaching, not the teacher himself. Essentially, for dealing with the most challenging of teachers can learn and apply strategies used in the field of counseling and psychotherapy, such as building empathy, admiring negative attitudes and behaviors, and leaving one's ego at the door. It seems particularly important to provide specific strategies for dealing with what can often be the problems that prevent us from persevering in the important work of helping students learn. In the area of classroom management, it is critical that teachers find ways of building relationships with all students, from the most motivated to the most difficult. To borrow the words and develop the learners' knowing.

Problems related to the curricula

In recent decades, however, a trend toward skill integration has ensued. Curriculum and course designers have taken a whole language approach whereby reading, for instance, is treated as one of two or more interrelated skills. The experts have realized that by emphasizing what learners can do with the language, rather than using the forms of language, EFL instructors can incorporate any or all of the language skills that are relevant into the classroom arena. According to Brown (2000: 218), the richness of integrated-skill courses give EFL students greater motivation that converts to better retention of principles of effective speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Besides that, the main problems that occur in Iraqi curriculum that is absent of basic components of communication such as pragmatic and culture competence. Also, lack of cartoon pictures and linked pictures which play the vital role in students' motivation. Then there is changeable curriculum within the short period that lead the Iraqi student to misunderstand the material in proper way. Additionally, Most of teacher don't know how teach the new curriculum such as the book (Iraq opportunity) then replaced to (English for Iraq). Therefore, we need to make workshop for teachers and enable them to teach the new material and proper the suitable environment for both teachers and students. And focuses on the role of both pedagogical interfere and groups-sitting in process of English Language teaching.

Problems related to students

While learning a second language, a student faces a many fold problems like socio-cultural problems, unfamiliarity with the subject, different style of writing from his mother tongue, pronunciation problem, problem in recognizing the alphabets etc. The socio-cultural background of a student plays a vital role in learning the second language. His culture is totally different from the culture of the language which he is learning. This unawareness of the culture confuses the student. At this crucial stage his teacher comes for his help. The teacher tells him something about the culture, the way of the living of the people, and the linguistic nature and style of the second language. He also makes his student familiar with the subject through the class-room practice. He teaches alphabets, words and finally gives short familiar topics to write on and to read the selected passages, in order to improve students' linguistic knowledge. Besides that, Learners can have numerous difficulties and problems in learning English. They can make different mistakes in English pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage. Additionally, there is a connection between the native language of a learner and the particular difficulties in learning and using English, and the kind of mistakes a learner typically makes in English pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary as there is native language interference in learning and using English. Consistently, An ESL/EFL learner can also look up unknown vocabulary in English dictionaries and use other English reference books when reading and writing a text in English, which is impossible when listening and speaking in English. Therefore, listening comprehension and speaking in English are more difficult than reading and writing. English vocabulary for daily living requires more time and is more difficult to master by foreign learners than English grammar. Additionally, All English learners would like to speak English well. They are excited at the idea of being able to communicate in English fluently. However, they usually don't care about the learning process itself. For most learners, learning English is a duty —something that they have to, but don't want to do. They don't see pleasure in learning English.

In addition, most learners would like to speak English well but don't like to be learning English. This is the first and biggest problem facing an English learner, because a person who doesn't like to learn English will not learn it well.

Diagram 1: The Circle of Learning

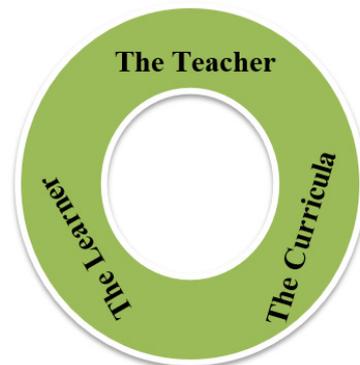
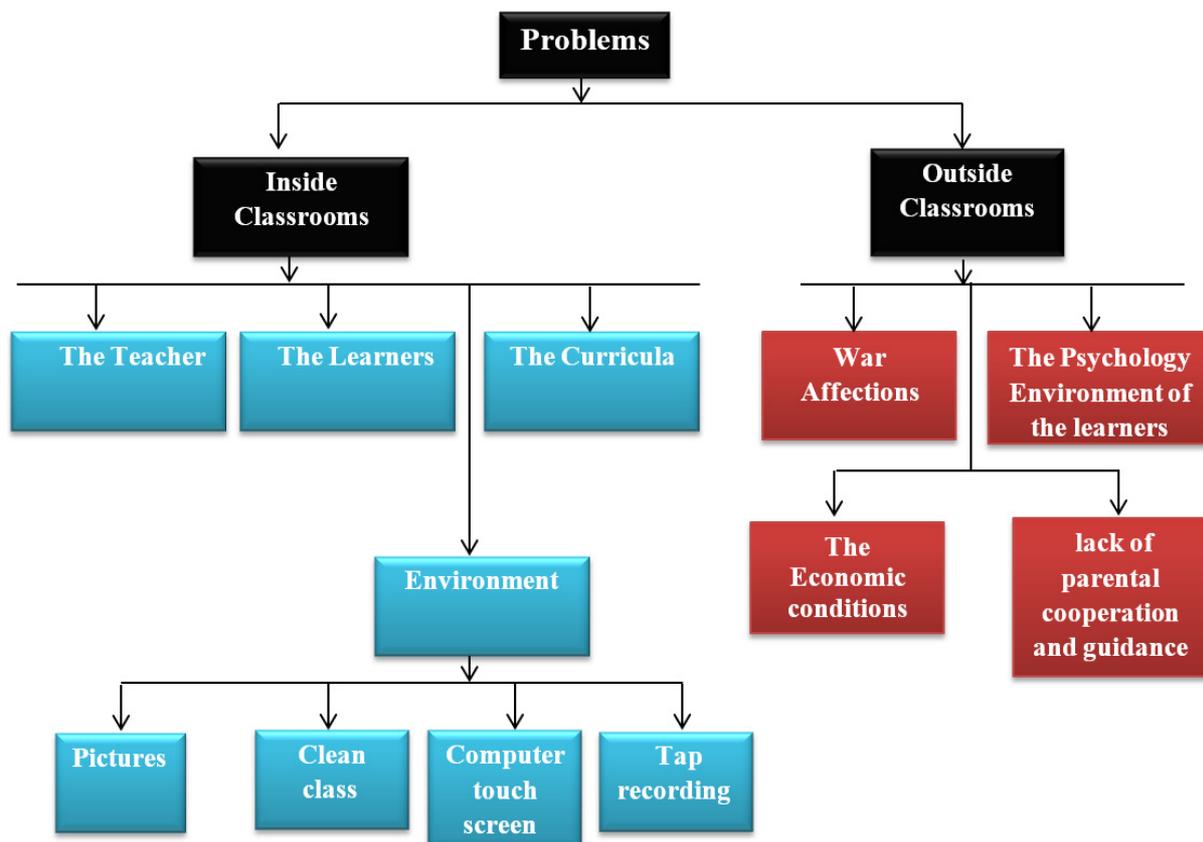


Diagram 2: Types and Classification of Problems



Conclusion of the Current Study

To conclude, Arab learners, Iraqi learners in particular face numerous difficulties in both communication and lack of all the language skills: such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Also, the great amount of erroneous utterances that Arab students of English produce in oral performance and their recourse to communication strategies, as shown in the author's study (Authors, 2017) is an indication of how serious the problem is. It is also an indication that the goals of the English departments in the Arab world, and more specifically in Iraq classroom, have not yet been attained, and that this circumstances requires a real solution. Essentially, the researchers tend to put remedies and resolve problems of communication in the 21th century schoolroom.

Constantly, the outcomes of the author's study (Authors, 2017) displayed that even weak learners were good at transmitting understandable and positive messages. This is probably a finding of the use of communication strategies. Additionally, Further education college learners and school learners should, therefore, be aware of these strategies and appreciate their value in act of communication. As well as, Weak learners will like the idea as it makes things easier for them and helps them to solve their communication problems.

Recommendations of the Researchers

The following recommendations might be adopted in the process of teaching English classroom, they also help teachers, educators, and specialists of curricula to develop both of their educational environments and communication skills. Therefore, According to the experiences of earlier studies, the researchers will be suggested a set of recommendations.

- A) Recommendations directed to the ministry of education
 1. The ministry of education is advised to use Internet technology, and rooms' technique (audio, video, instructional tool) in the curricula plans of the English language syllabus.
 2. The ministry of education should train teachers of English to deal with computer and Internet applications like chat rooms.
 3. The ministry of education should focus on Monthly workshop for new teachers, in order to know where weakness or strengths.
- B) Recommendation for the curriculum designers
Curriculum designers should take into their account the importance of technology use, and cartoon pictures and linked pictures which play the vital role in students' motivation. Also, involve in the EFL textbook topics which are related to the pragmatic and culture of language implicitly.
- C) Recommendations directed to FL teachers
 1. Attention should be paid to the integration of instructional technology into learning and teaching environments.
 2. Teachers should be aware that they teach the English language with imitation, motivation, encouragement of weak learners, and focus on the role of pedagogical interference and small groups.
 3. Teachers should improve their ability to tackle the pragmatic and culture aspects while teaching the English language.
 4. Teachers may conduct new procedures, bigger samples, different chat rooms, different techniques, and methods.

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