

الباحث

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العوائق امام التدريس الفعال للغة الانجليزية في المدارس الابتدائية الحكومية العراقية

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Obstacles to Effective English Instruction in Iraqi Primary Public Schools

عنوان البحث

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ملخص البحث

خلاصة
الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو استكشاف الصعوبات المختلفة التي يواجهها المعلّمون عند تدريس اللغة الانجليزية في المدارس العامة في العراق. تم اختيار عينة مكونة من ٦٠ معلّماً للدراسة، وطلب من المشاركين ملء استبيان ومقابلة. وكانت فئتاً المشاكل التي حددتها الباحثون تتعلقان باتجاهات المعلّمين وخبراتهم وبينة التعلم وتوافر الموارد. سيطر الوضع غير المستقر في العراق على العملية التعليمية بشكل عام. أشارت النتائج إلى أن تدريس اللغة الانجليزية في المدارس الحكومية الابتدائية في العراق يواجه العديد من المشاكل. يمكن استخدام فئتين لتجمّيع هذه المشاكل: أولاً، المشاكل المتعلقة بالمعلّمين شخصياً فيما يتعلق بالخلفيات والعقليات، مثل ضرورة وجود برامج تدريبية إضافية للمعلّمين واعتمادهم المفرط على اللغة العربية كلغة التدريس الأولى. وتشمل الفئة الثانية القضايا المتعلقة بالموارد وبينة التدريس والتعلم في المدارس العامة، مثل التهديد الذي تشكّله حالة الاضطرابات العامة في العراق وندرة المكتبات والموارد والوسائل التعليمية والمعدات السمعية والبصرية المجهزة بشكل جيد. وينبغي أن يكون نظام توظيف معلّمي المدارس الابتدائية على مستوى عالٍ، كما أشار المشاركون، الذين قدموا أيضًا أفكارًا أخرى لمعالجة هذه القضايا. دورات لمرسي اللغة الانجليزية قبل واثناء الخدمة. وقدمت الدراسة توصيات عديدة لمزيد من البحث، بما في ذلك إجراء دراسات مقارنة حول التحديات المرتبطة بتدريس اللغة الانجليزية في مدن عراقية مختلفة.

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The Title

Obstacles to Effective English Instruction in Iraqi Primary Public Schools

Abstract

This study aimed to examine the various difficulties faced by Iraqi public school teachers when teaching English.

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in an interview with a sample of sixty teachers. The researchers identified two categories of problems: the first category focuses on teachers' attitudes and experiences, as well as the availability of resources and the learning environment. Overall, the unstable situation in Iraq dominated the educational process. The results revealed several problems related to the teaching of English in Iraqi public primary schools. These problems can be classified into two groups: first, problems related to specific teachers. Second, concerns with issues related to backgrounds and attitudes, such as the need for more teacher training and their overreliance on Arabic as the primary language of instruction. The second category includes problems with the teaching and learning environment and resources in public schools, such as the lack of libraries, resources, teaching aids, and audio-visual equipment, as well as the threat posed by public unrest in Iraq. Participants, who also offered additional suggestions for addressing these issues, pointed to the need to adhere to high standards in the recruitment system for primary school teachers. The study included several recommendations for future research, such as conducting similar studies on the difficulties of teaching English in various Iraqi cities.

1. Introduction

In fact, English language teaching has now been incorporated into the school curricula of many countries due to its widespread acceptance as an international language. Because it paves the way for language acquisition and communication across borders, the popularity of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) has increased globally. Teachers face a variety of problems and obstacles that slow down and undermine the process. These problems place teachers in a difficult position as they face all the challenges of teaching. English is the most widely used language in primary schools, and Johnston (2009, p.33) described this widespread use of the language as "perhaps the greatest development in education policy in the world." Several factors contribute to this trend. First, according to Y. Hu (2007) and Nunan (2003), it is generally believed that acquiring a language at a young age is preferable. Second, because of economic globalization, English is now widely used, and many governments think that having an English-speaking workforce is necessary to remain competitive (Enever & Moon, 2009; Gimenez, 2009; Hu, Y., 2007).

Third, parents want their children to learn English to benefit from new global systems, so they pressure governments to teach it (Brock-Otne and Jimenez, Holmarsdóttir (2004), Enever and Moon (2009)). There are many problems that hinder English teachers from performing their jobs effectively in Arab countries, especially in Iraq. Some of the difficulties faced by Iraqi teachers are specific to a variety of factors, although they are shared with teachers in other Arab and foreign countries. English language teaching still faces significant challenges, especially in primary grades, despite it being made a compulsory subject in the Iraqi education system from grades one to twelve. The occupation and civil conflicts in Iraq have led to a series of educational challenges. Iraqi communities have suffered greatly from the conflict that has dominated the country for the past twenty years. Countless children and youth have lost formal education opportunities due to declining household income, displacement, and the deterioration of educational facilities. As a result, students' English proficiency has been affected by these challenges. This study aims to identify these problems and propose some corrective measures to address them.

1-2 Questions of the Study

This study posed the following questions:

.١ What are the most effective explanations for the weaknesses in English language teaching in Iraqi public schools at the primary level?

.٢ What are the proposed solutions to address these shortcomings in English language teaching from the perspective of English language teachers?

1-3 Values of the Study

1. It is anticipated that this study will be valuable for Iraqi teachers who use the Iraqi Opportunities Textbook because of its findings regarding the majority of issues that they might encounter and how to find potential solutions in light of the research's recommendations.
2. In addition, it will offer feedback regarding the new textbook.

1-4 Limits of the Study

The present study is limited to:

1. Iraq opportunities textbook that is used at Iraqi primary schools.
2. Investigation of the A Teacher B Syllabus C Lesson D – Pupil .
3. **Theoretical Background**

2-1 Essentials of Iraq Opportunities textbooks

2-1-1 General Teaching Approaches

Iraq Opportunities textbook uses a communicative approach to language learning. This method enables pupils to use English from the very first day.

Iraq Opportunities textbook also makes use of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method, it is based upon the theory that memory is enhanced through association with physical movements.

2-1-2. Communicative Approach to Language Learning

Since the 1990s, the communicative approach has gained widespread popularity because it establishes a set of very general principles, based on the idea that the goal of teaching

second and foreign languages is communicative competence, and that the communicative curriculum and methodology are the means to achieve this goal (Richard, 2006: 22 .(

According to Hancock (2012: 14), this method includes several learning stages and enables students to use English from day one. Typically, the first step is to elicit the language previously taught in class, building on students' existing knowledge.

2-2. Literature review

Teaching is defined by Brown (2014) To explain or help someone learn how to do something, to provide guidance in studying something, to impart knowledge, or to make someone aware or understand. There is a close connection between teaching and learning. Teaching is the process of directing and supporting learning as well as establishing the conditions required for learning. According to him, learning is defined as the process of learning a subject or a skill through study, instruction, or experience. Yule (1998) asserts that the majority of people learn a second language in a very different way than they do their first language; they learn their first language while still infants, when they are teenagers or older and are learning their second language. The first and second languages are learned in rather distinct environments; whereas, a baby picks up the first language from those in his immediate environment, such as parents and relatives, the second language is typically taught in schools. The teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) involves a number of components, including instructional strategies, resources, teaching aids, experiences of the teacher, teaching materials, and teaching methods.

2-2-1. Teaching materials

Toptaş, Çelik, and Karaca (2012) state that the purpose of educational materials is to support curriculum academic goals such as engrossing students, encouraging learning, fostering sense making, and deepening concepts. Textbooks, teacher guides, workbooks, maps, slides, images, C-Ds, and any other teaching aids are examples of teaching materials. By stimulating their curiosity, motivating them, and involving them in the teaching process, these resources aid students in learning more.

Learning aids are instructional materials and equipment used in educational settings for teaching and learning. Examples include real objects, audio-visual aids, visual aids, and many more. Using real objects as teaching aids has always been logical (Tobtasit et al., 2012). Both

teachers and students need a variety of resources, such as texts and equipment, according to Curtis and Gay (1974).

Teaching wouldn't be as effective and engaging without these materials, which are why they need to be prepared and customized in order to be used for any real teaching and learning objectives. Zhang (1997) investigated the challenges faced by English as foreign language (TEFL) teachers in secondary schools in China's Qinghai Province when implementing the communicative method to instruction.

The study identified several problems related to the implementation of the communicative approach, such as the pressures of external examinations on both teachers and students, the unified curriculum structure that focuses on the textbook, the low status and lack of motivation of teachers, their low competence, the inadequacy of facilities, and the location of training sessions far from the governorate. However, Abu Riash (2011) discovered that the expertise of the teachers, the classroom setting, and the usage of instructional aids all contributed to significant disparities.

According to Alkhuli (2010), there are varieties of teaching aids that can be of the most assistance to the instructor. To start, there are aids that are only visual, such as flash cards, charts, pictures, and the chalkboard. Second, there are aids like radios and tapes that are only audible. Thirdly, some teaching aids are both visual and auditory, such as television and movies. Other teaching aids include slides, filmstrips, opaque projectors, and overhead projectors. All of these tools are helpful. In order to make learning simple, pleasurable, and long-lasting, English teachers must either use teaching aids or improvise. For instance, there are perplexing word pairs in English used in daily speech. Gur-ze'ev, (2005) believes that the confusion can be resolved through the teacher's ingenuity of improvisation.

2-2-2. Teaching Methods

One of the earliest occupations in human history is teaching languages. Throughout this long history, new methods and approaches to teaching languages have been developed. The grammar-translation technique, direct method, audio-lingual method, and communicative teaching method are some of the methods that were used to teach foreign and second languages (Freeman & Anderson, 2014).

Teaching English in Arab societies does not go beyond the traditional use of certain methods without having a direct impact on the educational process, according to Hamadat (2009). It also lacks the organizational technology emphasized by the concept of modern teaching technology.

2-2-3 Teacher's Role in Teaching FL

In a classroom, the instructor has the greatest impact on pupils' learning (Edge, 1999). Teachers are essential to the language learning process. Establishing a classroom that is conducive to the development of students' language skills is the teacher's duty. Since the instructor evaluates students' work to determine their performance, they are also assessors. Additionally, the teacher is responsible for all activities that take place in and out of the classroom. For instance, he must be well organized when teaching foreign languages and should know exactly what constitutes a successful lesson in order to save time. He should refrain from giving the pupils confusing instructions or pointless material. Teachers also have a responsibility to act as prompters (Wang, 2010.).

Teachers need to inspire their students to overcome every obstacle they face while learning. Feedback is essential to evaluate students' progress because education is a two-way process. The instructor creates a friendly environment and supports the growth of the students' communication skills in order to help them become more effective learners (Kannan, 2009). Dweik (1986) found in his research that the lack of motivation among English language teachers presented many difficulties for students in Jordanian secondary schools.

2-2-4 Teaching-Learning Environment

An interactive setting where teachers and students are free to engage with one another is crucial to the learning process. To accomplish the desired outcomes, educational environments can improve and mold the teaching and learning process (Hussain & Safdar, 2008). Teachers' attempts to collaborate in teams and place students in the flexible and varied groupings that are required are hampered by the traditional classroom boxes with desks arranged in rows (Marks, 2001.).

An interactive learning environment is one in which students and teachers are willing to engage with one another. To accomplish the desired results, educational environments have

the power to improve and mold the teaching and learning process (Hussain & Safdar, 2008). Teachers find it difficult to collaborate with students in flexible and different groups and to work in teams in standard classroom boxes with rows of desks (Marks, 2001.).

Stevenson (2007), who hypothesizes, also supports an approach that exploratory centers and holistic learning labs may replace traditional academic classrooms, which may eventually disappear. Nneka (2010) proposed that the government should give principals more authority over educational accountability so they can manage their schools effectively and efficiently and achieve the goals.

2-3 Review of Empirical Studies

Numerous studies have been conducted on the challenges of teaching and learning a foreign language in both Arab and Western countries. A study by Dweik (1986) sought to identify the challenges of English language acquisition in Jordan. The researcher employed three tools to examine the administrators, teachers, and students in order to meet the study's goals. The researcher used the observation technique as the first tool, observing the teachers and methods. The researcher conducted interviews with Ministry of Education administrators as the second tool. The students' questionnaire, which had twelve questions, served as the third tool. The pupils were selected at random from three secondary schools located in two major West Bank cities. The findings implied that the lack of motivation among English language instructors in Jordanian secondary schools led to numerous issues for the students.

Abu-Aboud (1987) examined how an in-service teacher training program affected the communicative proficiency of English language learners in Amman schools. In order to carry out the study and accomplish its objectives, the researcher employed correlated T-test, which was based on tools and strategies teachers had to employ to promote Functional English and to meet the language's communicative goal. The course enhanced the students' communicative proficiency in the target language, according to the results. Furthermore, the results showed that the in-service teacher-training program provided by Jordanian universities and the Ministry of Education needs to be studied, and its direct connection to the English language curriculum should be investigated.

Al-Shirbinii (1988) sought to determine what communicative and interactive approaches English teachers needed. To achieve the study's objective, and through an experimental

approach, the researcher designed a methodological course to achieve the communicative goal of English language teacher preparation programs. The study's results reinforced the integration of language and methodology. The results also demonstrated a relationship between program methods and the level of improvement achieved. The accuracy of the theoretical foundations of the design was proven through application and experimentation. The researchers assert that this educational program helped students obtain advanced degrees.

Zhang (1997) investigated the challenges faced by English as foreign language (TEFL) teachers in China's Qinghai Province when implementing the communicative approach to instruction. Both teachers' and teacher trainers' perspectives were examined. After attending a workshop on the communicative approach, one trainer and five trainees participated in semi-structured interviews, and 19 respondents filled out a questionnaire. The study demonstrated that a number of issues were encountered when putting the communicative approach into practice, including the burden of external exams on both teachers and students, the uniform's textbook centered design.

Khankar (2001) conducted a study to identify the most significant problems facing the English language curriculum in Iraq for the first secondary grade. The researcher developed a questionnaire that focused on the most significant problems facing the curriculum components (educational objectives, content, teaching methods, assessment, school library, school activities, teacher's book, facilities, buildings, and equipment). The questionnaire was distributed to all English language teachers in Iraq, who represented the international sample used in the study, which consisted of 103 criteria. The study's findings revealed several problems with curriculum components, such as a lack of emphasis on cultural considerations, difficulty using English outside the classroom, a curriculum length that is disproportionate to the time allotted, a scarcity of engaging study materials, and content that discourages students from self-directed learning. The study also evaluated the English as a Second Language program at a technical college in the southeast and found a scarcity of modern teaching resources.

Kong and Zhou (2002) studied the use of ESL/EFL websites as a means of improving classroom instruction. In this study, 49 students in a beginner EFL class were shown five websites and asked to use them for self-study and homework. According to the study, students tended to have a positive evaluation of using the websites selected by their teachers

for learning English, despite some difficulties. The study also showed that students enjoyed learning English through the ESL/EFL websites, and that the teachers' methods were effective and necessary. A follow-up study was conducted one year after the original study, and the results confirmed the original study .

3 .Methodology

3-1. Study Design

Since the sample was chosen based on the current security conditions in Iraqi public schools rather than by random selection, this study used a quasi-experimental design.

3-2. Population of the Study

All 113 Iraqi English teachers working in 100 government primary schools comprised the population, along with English language supervisors affiliated with the Ministry of Education..

3-3. Sample of the Study

A convenience sample was selected due to the size of the community, time constraints, and accessibility. The final sample included three English language supervisors and sixty teachers, who were specially selected by the researchers.

3-4. Instruments of the Study

Two instruments were used for data collection: a questionnaire and open-ended interviews.

3-4-1. The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first collected background information such as educational qualifications, training, and teaching experience. The following three sections addressed:

1. Teachers' professional challenges (15 items.)

2. Teaching and learning environment.
3. Availability of resources and instructional aids.

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 6, Agree = 5, Undecided = 4, Disagree = 3, Strongly Disagree = 1.).

3-4-2. The Interviews

In addition to a questionnaire, open-ended interviews were employed to obtain a more thorough understanding. The following questions were posed to supervisors:

1. What are the biggest barriers to English instruction in Iraqi public primary schools?
2. How would you suggest overcoming these challenges?
3. How do you assess the outcomes of teaching English in elementary schools?

3-5. Reliability and Validity

With changes incorporated into the final version, content validity "was ensured through expert review." With a correlation coefficient of 0.80, test-retest reliability showed excellent consistency in a pilot group of five teachers who were not part of the main sample.

3-6 Findings

3-6-1 Teachers' Experience

According to the majority of teachers (88%) consistently create lesson plans, demonstrating a strong dedication to classroom management. But 80% said they needed more training. There was a noticeable traditional emphasis on grammar (70%) which might have limited communicative competence. There is a need for more learner-centered practices because only roughly half of the teachers took individual differences into account (53%) or integrated student feedback (52%).

3-6-2 Teaching-Learning Environment

Results show significant environmental barriers: 88% of educators voiced concerns about school safety, 80% mentioned noise pollution, and 74% reported overcrowded classrooms. The unstable sociopolitical environment of Iraq was reflected in other issues, such as frequent curfews (64%) and poor infrastructure 60%.

3-6-3. Resources and Teaching Aids

As demonstrated, the majority of educators complained about a lack of resources: 86% mentioned that libraries were not well-stocked, 74% said that there were no audiovisual facilities, and 76% mentioned that there were insufficient supplemental materials. Just textbooks were considered to be reasonably adequate (54%). Effective English language instruction is directly hampered by these restrictions.

3-6-4 Interview Insights

Interviews confirmed the questionnaire results. Supervisors emphasized three critical issues:

1. Weak foundational English skills among students entering intermediate schools.
2. Outdated teaching methods and lack of consistent instructional approaches.
3. Broader security and political instability affecting education.

Proposed solutions included:

- Assigning qualified teachers to primary schools.
- Standardizing teaching methods across grade levels.
- Providing pre-service and in-service teacher training.
- Incorporating audiovisual aids (e.g., flashcards, TV, slides, projectors).
- Administering pre-intermediate exams to assess readiness for higher levels.

Conclusion

According to the study, there are a number of obstacles that English language teaching in Iraqi primary schools must overcome. These include environmental issues such as overcrowded classrooms, loud noises, and unsafe school conditions, as well as teacher-related issues such as an overreliance on Arabic and an overemphasis on grammar at the expense of communication skills. In addition to poor prior preparation for students, which hinders their progress to higher levels, these problems are exacerbated by a lack of resources, as many schools lack libraries, teaching aids, and audio-visual materials. Teachers and supervisors have put forward several ideas for overcoming these obstacles, including changing hiring

practices to employ qualified primary English teachers, implementing interactive teaching strategies at all levels, increasing opportunities for professional development through pre- and in-service training, and allocating balanced teaching time to cover the four essential language skills, and introducing diagnostic pre-intermediate exams to better support learners' progression.

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