

Problems of Teaching English in the Omani Colleges: Problems and Solutions

Mohammad Ahmad Ibrahim Al-Shallakh

Instructor at the Department of English,

Sur University College, Sur, Oman .

Abstract: *The English language is an important subject to be taught in the Arab countries. Students in these countries suffer and face many problems in learning English as a second language in the colleges. The first problem related to the lack of interest and motivation for English learners. They are not motivated because they did not feel of the importance of learning the language in the school life. Another issue is the weak background for the language. Students did not learn English in a good way for many reasons. One of these reasons is related to the teachers in the schools who did not care about the students' way of learning and their outcomes in this part. This will be covered and solved in that period of learning by focusing on the teacher and choosing the suitable curricula. Finally, the language basics are very important in learning any language in the world. So, students should learn these basics and practice the language as much as they can. These issues have been discussed in details in the main research paper*

Keywords: Non-native, ESL, Parts of speech, Patterns, Curricula.

Introduction

The English Language is not the most spoken language in the world, but it is the language used in a big number of the countries. Around two billion and a half persons use the English language in their life as a communication language. It is the official language for communications. So, English was the language of Old England, but through the historical efforts of the British Empire, it became the primary or secondary language of many former British colonies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and India. This language entered the business world fields in a very strong way. Most workers use and depend mainly on the English language in their work fields to finish their business. All of them use the English language even if it is not their mother language. In addition, many groups of people who speak other languages prefer to use the English language in their communications as a formal language. This helps them finalizing their work clearly without struggles, problems or misunderstanding.

On the other hand, most of the websites on the internet are produced in English even if the site's owner is non-native. So if you know English, this will allow you access to an incredible amount of information which may not be otherwise available. Moreover, English is also important to the field of learning and education. In many countries, people encourage children to learn English as a second language. Most of the published books and research papers are written in English, so it became the dominant language in the sciences at the university level. Most academic institutions in the world teach their students all their subjects in English in order to make the material more accessible to international students.

This paper is an attempt to focus and to highlight the problems faced by Omani learners in the Colleges and to find suitable solutions to fill their gaps and solve this problem in learning English as a second language (ESL). It also highlights the difficulties that face the teachers who are dealing with those students in the first year of the college life which is done in the foundation department.

A- Problems of Teaching English as a Second Language

The students who finish the high school come to the college to start their first year in the foundation department to learn the English language. The students can pass this department of language if they get the pass mark on the TOEFL or the IELTS exams. Otherwise they have to study three levels in the foundation department (A, B & C). Here, the students face some difficulties and this causes some problems for them. These problems are:

1. The Lack of Interest and Motivation for Learning the English Language

Since learning English is obligatory for all the students in the Omani Colleges, they start feeling that they have to fight to learn the language and pass the expected levels. This causes the first issue in learning English as a second language. So, most students are not interested in learning any foreign language and just want to pass the language levels to start their study in the majors of the college. This decelerated the process of teaching-learning of the language because the students do not eager to practice and use English as a second language outside the classroom. Moreover, the teachers sometimes suffer from this problem because they have to push their students strongly to let them

answer their questions or practice using the English Language. Moreover, many students do not attend all intended classes because they do not like the English courses, so this produces many gaps between the student and the material.

2. The Background of the Language Learners

It has been noticed that the students come from the high school to the college with a very low background of the English Language. The students stated that they did not learn the language in a good way and the teachers did not help us to understand and practice the language as needed. This reflected on the outcomes from the school to the college. If the students learned the language in a good way in the school period, they would come to college with more English skills. Moreover, if the school teachers were professionals in this case, they would not leave this huge number of students to finish the high school with this low level.

3. The Difficulties of Basic Skills

Most of the students suffer from the weakness of the basic skills of the English language. One of these skills or basics is the **grammatical** one. Ahmad (2013) stated that grammar is the most important part of learning any language. Learners of other languages strive and they are often unable to get the exact meaning and exact type of grammar. Shaari (1987), in particular, found that the major difficulty faced by many of the students is learning the English grammar. Students do not know how to form sentences correctly. For example, they do not know the how to use the verbs in the correct tense or the correct order depending on the parts of speech rules. Moreover, they are confused on how to use the apostrophes by putting them in the wrong place. Many students use an apostrophe to form the plurals, particularly if the word in question ends in a vowel, which makes the word, might look unfamiliar with an (s) added to make it plural.

Another related issue to the skills is the correct pronunciation. Many students do not know the correct pronunciation of the alphabetical letters nor the vowels. Some of them mix between the /P/ sound and the /b/ sound. This might affect the meaning of the word from (Park to Bark). This also might affect their understanding of the language especially that the students used to hear the language from Arab teachers in the school and they have to deal now with English native speakers in the college.

Another problem which is also related closely to the pronunciation problem is the spelling difficulties. Many students miss spelling the written words as a result of the wrong way of pronouncing them. What increased this problem is the using of the English letters in the chatting applications to send and receive messages. Many students use the English letters in writing the Arabic word as a

homophone strategy. This destroyed the short background of the language they have. So, if he wants to write the word (cup), he writes it as /Kap/ or as Arabs say it /Koob/. This increased the ambiguity in the students' minds.

The vocabulary raises another problem in the language learning process. The students feel of shyness to use the language in front of the others because they do not have enough bank works in their minds. This point might give the students the motivation to read and learn new vocabularies or it might demoralize them and stop them of learning and enriching their minds with the new vocabularies. They also suffer from the derivation of the word and the different meaning of this part. For example, from the word House, which is basically a plain Germanic word, a number of word In English are built on this basic word such as:

HOUSE +ING= HOUSING

HOUSE+HOLD= HOUSEHOLD

HOUSE+WIFE= HOUSEWIFE

B- Suggested Solutions

Learning any language in the world is not easy and needs some efforts. Some solutions should be done to cover the mentioned problems. Many students face the mentioned difficulties through their learning English as a second language. The solutions will be by:

1. Encouraging the Students to Learn English

According to the first problem which is the lack of interest and motivation; it is very important to find a suitable solution for this important problem. If the students are interested in learning English as a second language, they will pass all difficulties and will create suitable solutions for all of the other difficulties. This task should be based on the teacher in the classroom.

- He should keep the lesson very rapid and let the students feel that they are moving ahead all the time.
- He also should give the students enough and reasonable time to answer any question. When the student is unable to answer, the teacher should support him by giving him some hints or ask another student to give a part of the answer.
- Another way might cover this gap which is the teacher should not correct every single mistake. He corrects only those errors which impede understanding. Those mistakes should be also covered later in another lesson.
- Moreover, the teacher should not strive for immediate mastery. He

should accept reasonable fluency and accuracy to help them covering and bridging this problem.

- Finally, the teacher should praise his students as much as he can and be flexible in his planning.

2. Enriching the Students' Background

The students come to colleges with very low background and knowledge about the English language. This happens due to the weakness in the curricula side and the school's teachers' side in learning the language.

- The Curricula Side: The used curricula are not enough to cover the language skills (Listening, Speaking, Writing and Reading Skills). Schools depend only on one book to cover these important skills through very small and short exercises. Moreover, the textbooks do not depend on well-formed levels to shift the students from one level to another level smoothly and correctly. So, a set of the textbooks should be selected depending on the needs and it should be according to the correct teaching levels.
- The School's Teachers' Side: Most of the teachers do not teach English as a second language professionally and they use the target language in their teaching to help the students' understanding the language in a good way. So, the teachers should teach using the first language which is the English language. This will help and force the students practicing the language in a good way.

3. Working More on the Skills

Many students suffer from the weak understanding and using of the grammatical parts of the language. They do not know how to use the parts of the speech clearly. Students should know the how to use and form the words in the sentences in a correct way. They also have to know all the basics of grammatical punctuation. According to the grammatical mistakes, Ansari (2012) suggested a good solution in his paper. He said that students should be given the structure of the sentences and asked to form sentences based on these structures. For Example:

Subject + Verb + Object

He plays tennis.

Subject + Verb + Adverb
He runs quickly.

Subject + Verb + Adjective + Noun
He is a handsome man.

Another issue, which is raised before, is the pronunciation problem. Students should study a course called "An Introduction to Pronunciation". This will help them pronounce words correctly and know how to produce all English Sounds correctly. This will increase their self-confidence in practicing the reading and speaking skills easily. Another remedial for this issue is that the students should listen to many audio tracks and read the scripts at the same time. This will help them pronouncing the sentences in the correct speed and the correct intonation. This will also help in covering the mistakes in the spelling because the students listen and read at the same time. This way will record the correct spelling in the students' minds. After that, the students should write an imitation to the dialogue they heard. This will help in minimizing the number of the spelling mistakes.

The last issue is related to the lack of vocabularies. This is an important part of the language because it is the basic of any language. Students should first learn the most common used words in their routine life. This will help them use these words every day in correct situations. After that, they have to learn the word's suffixes and prefixes which help them forming sentences easily and without mistakes.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, there are many different difficulties face the learners of English as a second language in the Omani Colleges. To cover these difficulties, the students should work hard and depend on the suggested solutions above. The students should learn the basics of grammar correctly, they should focus on the parts of speech, they should know and use the sentence patterns correctly, and finally they should practice the four language skills as much as they can. On the other hand, teachers of English should work with the students closely to cover the gaps they have in the language. They have to be ready in planning their lessons to match the students' needs.

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