



Challenges of Mastering English in Syria With Emphasis on Speaking: Suggested Remedies and Recommendations for Foreign Language Teaching

Farah Hijazi

JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Email: h.farah@jainuniversity.ac.in

Received: 04 December 2023, **Accepted:** 08 December 2023, **Published:** 09 December 2023

Abstrak

Pioneers of applied linguistics have spared no effort in theorizing and innovating fruitful techniques through which foreign languages should be both taught and mastered. In addition, a wave of research has been conducted to bring English language teaching inadequacy to light. It is because we are now on a threshold of a new age that mastering at least one foreign language, say English, has become an urgent need. But why English? English is the language of most manuals, the medium of instruction at many virtual or physical institutions throughout the world, of instructional programs, and of international conferences. News presentation or conference interpretation is mostly provided in English. Among other languages, English has long enjoyed an advantage. However, Arab learners of English, notably Syrians, show deficiency when communicating in English, which, in their setting, is merely a foreign language. This might be attributed to many factors related to teachers' teaching styles, governmental curricula or courses design, lessons allotment and exams question type. This article addresses the methods employed in language teaching, the challenges of mastering English in the Syrian setting with emphasis on speaking and why many languages program fail to operate as needed. Furthermore, it recommends specific policies towards better teaching and learning practices. These recommendations, therefore, once implemented, are capable of impacting both national and international security. They may include teachers' training program, new curricula design policies and lessons allotment where speaking is given more time for learners to practice the language. Additionally, programs for teachers should be developed to prepare them to use cutting-edge teaching strategies which take into account the different demands and styles of students. The training courses should also focus on enhancing instructors' abilities and expertise in the field of language instruction.

Keywords: Foreign Language, English Teaching, Learning, Curricula Design



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PENDAHULUAN

Mastering a minimum of one foreign language, including English, has proved necessary because English has spread throughout a variety of life aspects (Maricar, & Tawari, 2023; Pratami et al., 2023). It, therefore, influenced study, work, trade, industry and communication. Due to all these factors and more, English has enjoyed a privileged status among other languages. For instance, most manuals are provided with English descriptions, and in many countries, in the Arab world, street signs make use of both the local language and English, not to forget that it is the language of world summits and conferences. Further, teaching programs at many virtual or on-site universities around the globe are provided in English. Above all, it is the lingua franca, the language used for communication, between emigrants and others speaking different languages. This has added much to its prestige and reputation that many aspire to master it.

In countries where English is considered a foreign language, chances are few that learners might secure qualitative knowledge, especially when it comes to speaking and communicating using this language. In such countries, the language of instruction is more likely to be the national or standard national language, for example Arabic. This may minimize the amount of exposure needed for language proficiency because the major language the learners are exposed to is their mother tongue. In this case, many topics are discussed and dealt with using Arabic instead of the foreign language which is not used in everyday life except in the class of this language. Learners can only notice this gap when communicating in the foreign language, English, becomes an urgent need, and they do not seem to achieve the purpose needed properly.

Most teaching methods and styles employed while teaching English do not operate as expected in the sense that English is typically taught using conventional methods, which frequently ignore students' demands and learning preferences. Moreover, Language teachers and course designers may purposefully or accidentally overlook these criteria, which makes learning a foreign language, notably English, boring. For instance, immersion is rarely fully achieved since there are few opportunities for speaking, listening, group work or task-based activities.

Additionally, the design of governmental curricula makes it hard for instructors to deviate from the already established plan as they stick to what is prescribed. Parallel to this, communicative tasks and discussions are very few, reducing exposure in English language lessons. Furthermore, extracurricular activities are selected and decided on for the purpose of finishing the assigned modules and materials rather than building certain communicative skills needed for conversation or designing group work activities aligning with the course goals.

METHOD

Grammar and translation were the main areas of focus while teaching a second language, according to the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). It was hoped that students become fluent in reading and translating Latin or classical scripts. Later, as

Behavioural and Skinnerian techniques took hold, the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and the function of mimicry were given a significant weight, as Campbell & Rutherford (2000) argue. Although language mastery cannot simply be attained through translation, imitation, or repetition, these findings have constituted a stepping stone for teachers. When the Direct Method (DM) developed, it avoided taking into account abstract notions whose visual representations cannot be, attempting to draw analogies between verbal concepts and their visual meanings. It was until the emergence of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) that language teaching styles have shifted from focusing on memorising chunks to engaging in communication in the target language. (CLT) focuses, mainly, on changing the competence into performance which should be the main purpose of foreign or second language teaching and learning. In other words, learning a language should target its oral components.

Fareh (2010) points out the fact that several textbooks have been developed for the goal of teaching English as a foreign language in various countries across the world. Moreover, specialised institutions have devoted themselves to educating English language teachers by setting up pre-service and in-service training courses that may finally result in participants earning a teaching credential. Universities also provide degree programmes in TEFL. Even though there have been significant improvements enacted to the English teaching-learning process, EFL curricula still do not perform up to expectations. Furthermore, they do not focus on the basic purpose any language course should concentrate on.

When it comes to the Arab countries, namely Syria, conventional techniques are mostly employed while teaching English, and these techniques do not usually take learners' learning styles and needs into account. Such needs are intentionally or unintentionally ignored by language teachers or course designers, making language learning monotonous. For instance, speaking and listening chances are very few, so immersion does not entirely take place. These two skills are critical for building good knowledge of the foreign language, English. Aside from this, governmental curricula design makes it difficult for teachers to go beyond the previously set plan, for they stick to what is assigned. Similarly, English language lessons' allotment does not allow much class discussion or exposure. When extra school lessons are decided on, they are for the sake of completing the decided materials rather than bridging skills gaps. Exam questions' type, most importantly, do not address main skills; they are restricted to memorising words and applying grammar rules by doing gap-fill exercises and other task completion questions.

In doing so, learners are, mostly, trained to study in order to pass in the final exam, and they either tend to forget the same when they finish the exam or are not able to benefit from the information in real-life situations. The problem starts once students sense the necessity to use the foreign language, represented by English, in daily life, and they, suddenly, discover that what they learnt and focused on was a set of grammar rules and vocabulary which is difficult to retain when speaking. So, rather than taking advantage

of the (CLT) in teaching English, teachers are more likely to prefer the older methods as they allow them to present the required material in less time. Teachers are then bound to complete the planned curricula according to the course and lesson division and may not be able to foster other skills even if the course itself includes speaking and listening activities.

It is never a proof of language competence to be able to do grammatical exercises, recite grammar rules or perform other chants. Instead, the primary goal of language development is to be able to communicate clearly and comprehend the language of others. Grammar education is important, but how it is delivered to students might affect their ability to communicate. Not only passing final examinations should be the focus of instruction. This is because after tests are completed, it is more probable that students will forget what they learnt. Therefore, students should practise what they are studying more since doing so can increase their chances of learning something successfully. Additionally, it may make learning interesting, which will, once again, result in successful and high-quality input. When the same or comparable input is required, retrieval will be simpler due to this. So, it is not only the knowledge given that matters; rather, it is the technique employed while teaching this knowledge.

According to Mahmoud (2015), all individuals must learn English since it has replaced all other languages as the lingua franca and the common medium of communication. The globe has shrunk into a small town as a result of technological advancements, which have quickened the pace of life. So, not being able to speak English may deprive people of many advantages which include communication, openness, understanding others' cultures and responding to technological changes and globalisation. English now is widely spoken around the world by a large number of people. Moreover, those job seekers view the English language as their sole option for travelling the globe and participating in Western civilizations so they may lead better lives in the future. Some individuals require English for job concerns, whereas others need it for study purposes. Many universities and colleges require an English admission test or a certain score band in a proficiency test such as IELTS or TOEFL. Apart from these factors, understanding world news and politics may require higher English levels to be able to comprehend the clear and hidden messages. Likewise, dealing with social media may require a good level of English. Above all, part of reaching minds and controlling others is mastering their language and using it efficiently. This can play a significant role in building relationships and understanding others' mentalities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher makes recommendations for particular principles to promote improved methods of instruction and learning. Therefore, after being put into practice, these suggestions might have an influence on both domestic and international security. This is because the main purpose of language learning is to be able to benefit from it and communicate. Foreign language, notably English, should be taught and learnt the way

the mother tongue has been acquired. As a result, rather than teaching rules and abstract grammar, everyday language structure should be focused on. Moreover, the main aim for language teachers is to concentrate on listening and speaking skills as they are necessary for communication. While aspiring to build grammar and vocabulary, these aspects cannot be separately taught or learnt. Instead, these are taught and learnt well when they are structured in everyday example sentences. These will help promote the speaking skill and benefiting from grammar in real-life situations.

Instead, grammar and vocabulary can be best contextualised in task-based and learner-centred activities. As Blumberg (2012) argues, all of the positive aspects of teacher-centered approach are retained in learner-centred teaching, but they are used in ways that are more in line with how our brains actually learn. For instance, it acknowledges the teacher's expertise and the proper role of the lecture while simultaneously proposing fresh, efficient alternatives to outdated methods that do not maximise student learning.

Another recommendation might include increasing the amount of English instruction and assign conversation classes that follow the English course curriculum guidelines. For example, certain conversational features should be explored and practised in groups when teaching grammatical concepts, patterns or rules. This can help learners become fully immersed in the language and open the door to practice and speaking.

For Howard and Major (2004), English language teaching materials should be appealing from the standpoint of their "usability." Straightforward examples might include the following: Is there enough room for students to handwrite their answers if the task is a gap-fill exercise? Is there enough time for thought and reaction if an oral answer is required during a tape or video exercise?

In addition, part of understanding other cultures is comprehending the language of this culture, being able to use it precisely and considering the subtle nuances governing the culture of the mother tongue and that of the target language. Language can control minds, and it has the power of manipulating thought, and misunderstandings result from poor comprehension of the cultural aspects of language.

Teachers' training programmes need to be organised to train teachers to make use of modern teaching methods which address learners' needs, types and intelligences. Moreover, the training programmes might aim at expanding teachers' skills and knowledge in language teaching. Furthermore, they familiarise teachers with theoretical concepts of foreign language teaching and require them to design a teaching portfolio to be then presented and evaluated by both peers and inspectors. The teaching portfolio is no more than lesson plans on teaching reading, speaking, vocabulary or pronunciation supported aided by technology or other resources. In addition, this portfolio may encompass games and tasks design to be implemented while teaching a language aspect, say speaking for IELTS task 1. Besides, written assignments should be presented by teachers containing a week plan of a given course; the same should be evaluated and reviewed by both experts and peers. Other periodical meetings should

take place in order to train teachers how to cope up with teaching trends and deliver the material more effectively rather than focusing on grammar and teaching the same for the sake of passing written exams.

The study has examined the difficulties associated with acquiring fluency in the English language in Syria, particularly in terms of spoken communication. It proposes solutions and suggestions for enhancing the teaching and learning of foreign languages. This text highlights the significance of having a high level of proficiency in the English language, since it is widely used in various aspects of everyday life. Consequently, it had an impact on education, job opportunities, business, manufacturing, and communication. Likewise, English has had an advantageous position compared to other languages due to these characteristics and additional ones. English explanations are commonly found in most manuals, and in most Arab countries, street signs are bilingual, featuring both English and the local language. Additionally, English serves as the primary language for international summits and conferences. Furthermore, numerous physical or online educational institutions worldwide incorporate English instruction into their curricula. Primarily, it functions as a universal means of communication for immigrants and individuals who are proficient in several languages. Many aspire to attain mastery over it because to the substantial enhancement it brings to its renown and prestige.

Finally, to prepare instructors to use cutting-edge teaching strategies that take into account the different types and requirements of students, teacher training courses could be established. In addition, the training courses have to focus on enhancing instructors' abilities and expertise in language instruction. Moreover, they introduce instructors to the theoretical underpinnings of teaching foreign languages and demand, so they create a teaching portfolio which will be presented and assessed. Furthermore, lesson plans to teach reading, speaking, vocabulary, or pronunciation, supplemented by technology and other tools, make up the entirety of the teaching portfolio. Besides, this portfolio could include activities and games created and designed while teaching a language feature. Teachers should also hand in written assignments that include a course plan for peer and expert assessment and evaluation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study has discussed the challenges of mastering English in Syria with emphasis on speaking; it suggests remedies and recommendations for foreign language teaching and learning. It has summarized the importance of being fluent in English which has proven essential due to the language widespread use in daily life. As a result, it affected learning, employment, commerce, industry, and communication. Similarly, English has had a favorable position among other languages as a result of all these factors and more. For example, English explanations are included in the majority of manuals, and in many Arab nations, street signs are bilingual, using both English and the local language, not to mention that English is the language of international summits and conferences. Additionally, many physical or online colleges across the globe utilize English teaching in

the curricula. Above all else, it serves as a common language of communication for immigrants and those who speak other languages. Many want to master it because of the significant boost to its fame and status.

There are limited opportunities for learners in nations where English is regarded as a foreign language to acquire in-depth knowledge, particularly when it comes to speaking and writing it. In these nations, the native or standard language, like Arabic, is more likely to be used as the medium of instruction. Due to learners' primary exposure to their mother tongue, the amount of exposure necessary for English language competency is minimized. In this instance, Arabic is utilized to debate and handle a variety of issues rather than English which is only employed and revisited in its language classroom. Learners, however, only become aware of this gap when it is a demand to speak and communicate in English, and they do not appear to effectively accomplish the desired result.

The majority of English instruction in Arab nations, most notably Syria, implement conventional methods which frequently neglect students' demands and learning styles. Additionally, the design of government curricula challenges instructors to deviate from the already established plan since they stick to what is assigned. Generally, there is not much time for class debate or exposure in English language lessons.

The researcher then suggests recommendations for language teaching improvement which may enhance national and international security. These recommendations may have an impact on both internal and global security once they are implemented. Furthermore, they may encourage practitioners to take action towards better language practices. Foreign languages, especially English, should be taught and learned in the same manner as the mother tongue. Therefore, linguistic structure and grammar patterns utilized in daily speech should be emphasized rather than rules and abstract grammar. Additionally, as speaking and listening are essential for communication, language teachers should put much emphasis on these skills. In other words, when grammar aspects are presented in daily example phrases, these are effectively taught and learned to support the development of speaking abilities and the use of grammar in practical contexts.

Suggestions may extend to cover assigning discussion classes which adhere to the requirements of the English course curriculum and increase the quantity of English teaching. When teaching grammatical principles or rules, for instance, some conversational elements might be explored and performed in groups. This can assist students thoroughly immerse themselves in the language and make speaking and practice opportunities available.

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