



Benghazi University ... Faculty of Education



Journal of Faculty Education ... The Thirteen number august 2023



## Difficulties in Learning English Language at the Elementary level : (case study)

صعوبات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الابتدائية

أ. سهير فرج ميمون

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية - كلية اللغات - جامعة بنغازي

الايميل sohirarwaq@gmail.com

### Abstract in Arabic

الهدف من هذه الورقة هو دراسة مشاكل تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بين متعلمي المرحلة الابتدائية في بعض مدارس مدينه بنغازي. كما يهدف إلى النظر في تحفيز المتعلمين الصغار حتى يتمكنوا من تطوير المعرفة الأساسية لمهارات اللغة الإنجليزية؛ لهذا تم جمع البيانات من خلال استبانة من المتعلمين الذين عبّروا عن وجهات نظرهم المختلفة حول مشاكل تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لديهم، فقد تم تقديم 10 مجموعات من الأسئلة بين 50 طالباً لمعرفة أساسيات اللغة الإنجليزية، وبعد جمع البيانات وتحليلها اتضح أن معظم الطلاب لديهم مشاكل في قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية والمفردات ومهارات التحدث. وبناء على ذلك استخرج الباحث الاستنتاجات والتوصيات التي ترغب في إظهار بعد جديد لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لطلاب المرحلة الابتدائية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

, complexities of learning , elementary learners, acquiring languages school, **Abstract in English**

The aim of this paper is to examine the complexities of learning English Language among the elementary-level learners at Benghazi School. It also aims to look at difficulties among young learners at the basic knowledge of English language. For this reason, the data was collected through a questionnaire from students who expressed their different views on English language learning complexities. 10 sets of questions were provided among 50 students to find out their fundamental knowledge of the English language. It has been noticed that the majority of students were weak in English Grammar, Vocabulary, and Speaking Skills. After analyzing data that elaborates on students' English learning complexities, the researcher extracted conclusions and recommendations. Thus, this study would like to show a new dimension of English Language Learning for the elementary Level students.

### Statement of the problem

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1-Do students at the elementary level face difficulties in learning English language?
- 2-If they have difficulties, what are the areas of language that cause these difficulties?

### 1.Introduction

English becomes an international language. It is the most commonly spoken language in the world. One out of five people can speak or at least understand English. Therefore, the demand for English increases day by day. It becomes a language of life, policy, economy, and the main subject in the education system. More and more people are dedicating time to studying English as a second language. Many countries include English in their school. So syllabus design, lesson plan, examination system, and script evaluation should be prepared in such a way that the younger generation would benefit from English. If the ground starts at the elementary level, many young learners can be able to increase their knowledge of English language. As well as students and teachers will be able to get rid of English learning difficulties At the elementary level , When learners first acquire a new

foreign language, their reaction to the encounter is various 'because it is unlike their native language. In fact, foreign language has different structures, rules, system etc. Based on that some children learn language easily , some need time to develop their skills; and some struggle with it from the beginning.

As matter of fact, this study concentrates on significant difficulties that face the young learners at the elementary level learning English language. It is focused on the analysis these difficulties while learning Language in the classroom .

### **2. literature Review**

Due to the important role of English in business 'technology, science, education, and media, a number of countries in the world, including Libya 'makes efforts to build their learners' English proficiency .English is formally taught to students at all levels of education: at elementary schools 'secondary schools, and universities. Despite that, Libya is one of the countries that face problems in teaching English, it had passed many transitional phases causing impediments and difficulties for both students and teachers.

However, English becomes an obligated subject to be taught at all levels of education in the curriculum of schools. The question that all researchers and experts in the field of education try to answer is how children can learn a second language at early stages.

According to Krashen , (1981). The fact that young children learn their first language with such speed and competence must mean that if the process can be better understood it should be possible to design experiences through which children learn a second language in much the same way as they learn their first language.

The explanation can be seen in "the potential for social and cognitive development" during the early stage of life. Children's potentiality begins to broaden in interacting with others, mainly with parents, is intensive and children experience the language. This communication is based on children's non-verbal reactions (e.g. gestures, facial expressions, actions, and vocalizations) and later the first verbal responses are presented. The stage of verbal communication is preceded by a long process of gaining experiences for learning a second language.

Chomsky (1966) clarified that a child has a tabula rasa or an imaginary black box called Language Acquisition Device (LAD), at birth and only imitates what they hear until habits are formed. The innatists believe that a child is endowed with an innate system, which enables them to acquire the first language from a set of appropriate samples and in an appropriate supportive environment .The innatists' view of language acquisition assumes that second language acquisition (SLA) may also result from hypothesis formation similar to first language acquisition (FLA).

Therefore, There are at least three theories underlying the need of learning English at early ages: language acquisition device theory, critical period hypothesis theory , and affective theory . According to language acquisition device (LAD) theory, the LAD, naturally possessed by everyone since their birth, help them learn any language at any time without encountering difficulties. Therefore, learning English should not hinder elementary school students from learning other elementary subjects. According to the critical period hypothesis theory, children's brain plasticity is so biologically high that it is very easy for them to master any language exposed to them. According to affective theory, children have a good affective condition, so they will be less anxious, less nervous, and less stressful in learning a foreign language. The three theories mentioned above strengthen the necessity of learning English at the elementary school level.

Togh, (1984).

Brown (2007) "learning a second language is a long and complex undertaking" that includes different variables such as learner, learning atmosphere, learning materials, environmental factors, and teachers. In this acquisition process, teaching which is the process of "showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instructions, guiding in the study of something, providing with knowledge, causing to know or understand" (Brown, 2007) and teachers are two of the main characters. The successes of the teachers and the methods they use in the classroom have a significant effect on language learning process. Learner is another factor in language education as his/her character and individual ability are the definers of the success of the acquisition process. It is supported that starting language learning from an early period makes it easier to gather that language.

Although the majority of researchers in different fields insist on learning the second language in the early stages, there were a great number of problems facing learners at elementary levels. Both teachers and students have difficulties teaching English at elementary levels.

According to Brown, (2007) The major problems of teaching English at the elementary level are lack of teacher's training course, appropriate teaching materials, lack of efficient teachers, teachers' motivation, lack of proper experience of teaching, and lack of scientific teaching method .

Lack of teacher's training is regarded one of the major problems found to teach English in the elementary Level .There is a lack of training opportunities for teachers of this level; and most English teachers are nit trained.

However, they are not conversant with English. Consequently, most of the teachers are seen to be inattentive in their classroom. They teach the learners without any plan or target in mind. They do not have any knowledge of cognitive teaching methods and techniques. So, they never motivate the learners to practice four skills of English inside and outside the class. Due to a large number of learners in classroom, teachers do not involve the students in a variety of activities, such as group work, pair work ,role play, question-answer, discussion, debating, etc. Tough, (1984) Tasks should be interesting and relevant to the learners' life and environment. All four basic skills of English language would be practiced in the classrooms in an integrated manner. Grammar would be taught through the communicative approaches. Some language games, puzzles, and jokes may be used as exercises for developing students' language skills through fun and Journal of Education and Training entertainment. In every class, new vocabulary would be introduced.

Brown (1994) commented that communication is likely to occur in the classroom when: (1) a significant amount of pair work and group work is conducted; (2) authentic language input in real life context is provided; (3) students are encouraged to produce language for genuine ,meaningful communication; and (4) classroom tasks are conducted to prepare students for actual language use outside the classroom .

Teachers cannot afford to educate their children in the proper way. Students have to face difficulties in learning English language; they are deprived of expert English teachers; they have no proper basic knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and speaking skill .

For this purpose, the aim of this study aims to look at the difficulties of learning English language among the elementary Level Learners. So, the researcher has emphasized upon



some major complexities why the learners are deprived of knowledge of English language. Also some effective steps were investigated on how to solve English learning difficulties in order that the elementary level learners can be motivated to develop their knowledge of the English Language.

### Methodology & Data Collection

This study used a qualitative approach -that was chosen because this study aims to analyze the difficulties in learning the English language - including a questionnaire process, and interviews conducted in four local elementary schools. The data were collected from 50 students who did take an active part. 10 worksheets of multiple choices were provided to the hands of the participants. The participants were asked to answer the multiple-choice questions. These questions of both questionnaire and interview measure the students' level of understanding English grammatical knowledge, reading comprehension, composition, application ,paragraph, letter, story writing, and script evaluation.

### Data Analysis

Interview Schedule (for students): The interview schedule was prepared by the investigator in order to collect the information from the students regarding English language learning. The interview schedule was constructed for the sample of selected elementary students. The interview schedule included 10 open-ended questions. The sample of elementary students selected for the study was interviewed to know the problems faced by them in English Language Learning through interviews.

The content of the participant's responses was investigated. The researcher marked the answer in the form of yes, no, and none. This procedure enabled the researcher to gather new information into categories or central themes .Participants express their views about the causes of difficulties learning the English language. Responses from the participants were compiled and problems and reasons for learning the English language were from the data.

| Statement   | Yes | No | None |
|---|-----|----|------|
| 1. Do you like learning English?                    | 30  | 10 | 0    |
| 2.Do you start learning English early?              | 10  | 40 | 0    |
| 3-English is: A difficult language                  | 40  | 10 | 0    |
| 4. Do your English teacher use Arabic in the class? | 40  | 10 | 0    |
| 5. Do you think that you are good at English?       | 20  | 10 | 20   |
| 6. Are you interested in learning English?          | 30  | 10 | 10   |
| 7.Do you face difficulties in learning English?     | 40  | 10 | 0    |
| 8. Do you think a mother should learn English?      | 30  | 10 | 20   |
| 9. Do you think an English environment is a must?   | 20  | 10 | 30   |

|   |    |    |   |
|---|----|----|---|
| 10 .Do you think teachers are not alert in motivating students? | 20 | 30 | 0 |
|---|----|----|---|

It is seen that there were 50 participants in the test. A question set was provided to the students in the classroom activities .There were three options in each question pattern. It was found that most of the students gave the tick mark on 'yeas' option whose total summation was 280. Then they chose 'no' option which was 150, and 'none' was the third choice 80. The survey showed that 'yes' option was the highest choice of the students and 'none' option was their lowest choice.

It was obvious that most of the students were weak in English Grammar, Speaking, and vocabulary. They have failed to develop grammatical knowledge due to expert English teachers. While doing the test, it was found that some students did not understand the meaning of questions very clearly since the question set was in the English version. They expressed that they had vocabulary & grammatical problems in learning the English Language. The survey showed that teachers were not good at vocabulary & grammar as well. They practiced the traditional method.

It has been noticed during the interview that some teachers of English have no fluency in speaking skills. The teachers take classes, they use their mother language, Arabic. When they were questioned about the difficulties of learning the English language, they didn't understand properly about questionnaire pattern. From the students' point of view, it was found that teachers always use the Arabic language in the English classes

However, difficulties, like lack of trained English teachers, lack of English Language training courses, lack of teachers' knowledge of teaching procedures and new methods, and less motivation as well as the financial situation affect the teachers' spirit. All these problems create hindrances in the way of learning the English Language among both elementary learners and teachers. This was obvious though data were collected from learners and teachers.

### Conclusion

The aim of the paper is to find out weather the young learners have difficulties in learning English as a foreign language .Starting from the beginning, the foreign language learning process can be compared to the learning process of the first language. Children develop strategies (imitation, repetition 'formulaic speech, and incorporation) that help them acquire their mother tongue; young learners go through the same process while learning a foreign language. However neither children nor young learners can do this alone, their parents and teachers need to take part in this process. Besides strategies, there are other instruments that facilitate acquisition of a foreign language.

Arabic and English are different language systems and therefore, the problematic areas that cause the young learners of level most difficulties at the beginning of learning a foreign language are mainly grammar, speaking skill, and vocabulary, because whereas grammar is not practised properly at school and home, English is, on the other hand, not as transparent. Bearing this in mind the study provides a set of example activities that can be improved to facilitate the young learners' mastery of English with minimum difficulties.

### Recommendations

This study showed that both teachers and elementary students believe that the formal study of grammar is important to language learning. The respondents tend to believe that studying and practising grammar in the classroom help to improve students' communicative ability very quickly. The teachers thought that grammar learning is an important component to help their students achieve communicative competence. Clearly, their goal of helping their learners to attain a good ability, to communicate, or to involve in the formal study of grammar in the classroom. Thus, this study recommends the following advice:

1- Implement new teaching methods in the class. Most of the English teachers use the old method, they are not aware of the new method to teach students properly. They need to be well-trained. They need to gather knowledge on scientific & technological teaching methods in order that young learners can be able to improve their English. The environment in the classroom should be teacher-student oriented.

2- A suitable classroom environment is to be created .

3- Classes should be interesting so that the students can get motivated to learn English Grammar very easily .

4-Awareness should be raised in teaching and learning English Grammar with vocabulary and speaking .

5- Learners need more facilities to improve their basic knowledge of English. The teachers need proper time to get their students' knowledge implemented.

6- The learner needs more exercise books to practise daily

8- To make the teaching of English more effective syllabus and curriculum should be well-modified. Further, the recommendation is to add extra time for reading, writing, and speaking. In every week, a compulsory class is necessary on four skills. Schools should provide extra classes so that teachers can improve learners' basic knowledge of the English language. When the teacher reads something in the class, the teacher should motivate the students to read in the classroom. English teachers of each educational institution should take pragmatic measurements so that learners can be able to emphasize the English language.

### References

Allen, E., & Valette, R. (1997). Classroom Technique: Foreign Languages and English as a second Languages and English as a second Language. San Diego, Harecourt Brace Jovanovich.

Brown, H. D. (2000). Principle of Language Learning and teaching. New Jersey & NY : McGraw-Hill.

Chomsky, N. (1966) Verbal Behavior ( A discussion of B.F Skinner , 1966).

Clement, R. (1994).Motivation, self-confidence and group cohesion in the foreign language classroom. Language learning 44,417-448.

Ellis, R. (1997) Second language acquisition. New York: Oxford university press

Harmer, J. (2001). The Practice of English Language Teaching. Harlow: Longman.

Krashen, S. D. (1981). Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning. Pergamon Press Inc.

Tough, J. (1984). Young Children Learning Languages. In C. Brumfit, J. Moon, & R. Tongue

(Eds.), Teaching English to Children from Practice to Principle (pp. 213-227). London : Nelson.

Townend, J. (2006). Principles of Teaching – The DI Literacy Programme. The Dyslexia

Wadlington, E., Jacob, S., & Bailey, S. (1996). Teaching Students with Dyslexia in the Regular Classroom. Childhood Education.

Appendix one:

Interview Interviewer: What is your name?

Interviewee: My name is .....

Interviewer: What is your school's name?

Interviewee: The name of my school is .....

Interviewer: Are you interested to learn English?

Interviewee: I am interested to learn English

Interviewer: Do you know what the four skills of English are?

Interviewee: Yes. I know the four skills of the English Language.

Interviewer: What are they?

Interviewee: Reading, writing, speaking & listening

Interviewer: How did your teacher teach the English language?

Interviewee: My teacher taught us English through the whiteboard. He always uses his mother tongue.

Interviewer: Do you think English is essential for a job?

Interviewee: Yes. I think English is essential for a job.

Interviewer: what complexities do you suffer most?

Interviewee we suffer from pronunciation, speaking & writing problems.

Interviewer: What do you think about the English language?

Interviewee: I think English is an international language. English is used all over the world. Without English, we can't think of our existence. We need to develop our knowledge of English day by day.

Interviewer: What is your recommendation to overcome English learning complexities?

Interviewee: I recommend that we should practise English every day, especially grammar, vocabulary, writing, and speaking skills. We should bear in mind that practice makes a man perfect..