



Investigation of the Challenges Encountered by Iraqi Students in Learning English Language in International Schools in Turkey



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Abstract

This research paper examines the problems Iraqi students face in international schools in Turkey in speaking and learning the English Language. This paper examines the student's difficulties in different stages. Moreover, to know the actual problems by which the students cannot speak or learn the English language fluently. Learning English considers an essential aspect of any student's life; considering that English is an international language, it is a demand of today's world. It is known that more people have learned it as a second language than native speakers. It is estimated that there are over 2 billion speakers of English in the world. English might be a popular language, but this does not necessarily mean it is a simple language to master. There are many challenges people, especially students, face when learning English; if a teacher can define and simplify these challenges, it might be easier to overcome these challenges. Teachers, teaching methods, curriculums, and even teaching policies differ from one country to another. Schools in countries like Iraq face many challenges and difficulties in teaching English due to the curriculum that the Ministry of Education sets, and also the circumstances and the environment of the class; even the region can affect the teaching and learning methodology. Due to the war that took place in Iraq in 2003, many families were forced to immigrate.

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1 Introduction

Teaching a new language alone is a great challenge for teachers and students. The teacher introduces a new language, country, and culture. Language is somehow related to culture. Cultural learning helps understand the target language better and also helps to understand and respect the target cultural habits and the use of vocabulary and words. Learning a new language, such as English, for example, helps to explore different cultures even more than one culture due to the speakers of the English language around the world. English was first spoken in the middle ages of England, and afterward, it became a global lingua franca. Modern English has been spreading worldwide since the 17th century through the influence of the British Empire and the United States. It has such importunacy because it is the largest language by the number of speakers and the third most-spoken native language in the world. Therefore, language teaching has many challenges for teachers and students.

Objectives of the study

- This study aims to show the importance of the English language.
- The relationship between English language teaching and the region (the culture). Culture and language.
- The nature of English language teaching methodology in Iraqi educational policy.
- The challenges faced by students in learning the English language in general.
- The challenges faced by Iraqi students in Turkey in learning the English language.
- The role of teachers in ELT classes in defining the challenges that their students face.

The History and Varieties of the English Language

Every language has a history of developing and spreading, and the history of the English language began with the arrival of the three Germanic tribes in the 5th century who invaded Britain. Afterward, it crossed the north sea, what today is Denmark, and northern Germany. The inhabitants of Britain spoke a Celtic language. But most of those speakers were pushed west and north by the invaders - mainly into what is now Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. The two words "English" and "England" came from the language that was spoken by one of the three Germanic tribes; their language was called "Englisc," from which the two words are derived. The Germanic spoke similar languages, which in Britain developed into what is now called Old English. Old English isn't understood now with the English used today; even native speakers get some difficulties understanding old English; nevertheless, some words that are used today its roots back to old English, such words as water, strong, and be. Also, by reviewing literature written in the period that Old English was used, we can see the similarities: Eald - means old, and Brodor - means brother. This shift from old to modern English occurred in the 16th century when vowels were pronounced shorter and shorter. Thus to this shift, new words and phrases were added to the language. During this period, English was used in several countries, and there were many varieties according to the area and the civilization of the particulate country.

Varieties of English language

English is considered to be the most widely spoken language in the world. Due to the use of modern English in several different places and countries, the English language has been developed and has many varieties. It is also considered the official language of multiple countries. These varieties occur according to the environment, the country's culture, and the influence of other languages. We can identify the varieties by knowing and understanding the dialect or accent of the language, which is usually considered the factor that enables one to distinguish the various types of English out there.

- Dialect: a form of the language spoken in a particular part of the country or by a particular group. There are different dialects with different grammar and words in English. Most English learners learn these dialects or, in other words (standard English) [Ferguson & Gumperz \(1960\)](#). Examples of the different forms of standard English (dialect): are standard British English, standard American English, standard New Zealand English, and standard Indian English. Governments, schools, and international communication mostly use the standard dialects of the language.
- A dialect differs from an accent: An accent is how we pronounce words, and the dialect of a certain language can be spoken with different accents.

After explaining the dialect and the accents, we can now distinguish the varieties of the English language we have:

- a) Canadian English: The Canadian variety of English is used by more than 30 million Canadians throughout the country. Canadian English is most like American English. However, there are some key differences due to Canada's French influence.
- b) British English: is the English language if it is spoken and written in the United Kingdom or, more broadly, throughout the British Isles; British English was influenced by the Roman occupation.
- c) American English: English considers the most used and spoken language in the United States and is the common language used there.
- d) Australian English: It began to change from British English after the founding of the Colony of New South Wales in 1788, and it was recognized as different from British English by 1820.
- e) Indian English: English public instruction began in India in the 1830s during the rule of the East India Company.
- f) Philippine English is a variety of English similar to American English, native to the Philippines.
- g) Ugandan English, or English: is the dialect of English spoken in Uganda. As with any other dialect spoken in the English language, the speech patterns of the Ugandan languages strongly influence spoken English.

English probably is not the most spoken language in the world, but it is considered the official language of 53 countries and is spoken by around 400 million people across the globe. Being able to speak English is not just about communication and connection with other people but also about understanding a new culture, a new nation. Therefore, Understanding English language varieties help one understand and learn the language in a simplified and easy way. Both teachers and learners must review the English language history and varieties (Pica, 2000; Ahmad, 2012; Akbari et al., 2010; Aryani & Rahayuni, 2016).

The relationship between cultural teaching and English language teaching

Language is a part of culture, and culture is a part of the language; as mentioned earlier, the two are connected. If a teacher wants to teach a language, he/she must include cultural teaching to make the teaching process easier and more understandable for learners. Even if a teacher that teaches English, for example, gives less attention to cultural teaching, throughout language teaching, cultural teaching is unconsciously done through the process of learning about a specific society's behaviors, customs, and attitudes behavior because language teaching isn't just about teaching grammar, the arrangements of sentences (Elttayef & Hussein, 2017; Hossain, 2018; Erdem & Tutkun, 2016). Therefore, it is very important to refer to the culture that the language belongs to when we are learning or teaching a new language, such as English because language is very much related to culture. The two affect each other in many ways, and They influence each other, like how people think of the world, their ideas, their beliefs, and their faith are affected mainly by the language that the people used to use. Supporting this is the Anthropologist-linguist Edward Sapir of the United States. He said, "The language habits of specific groups of people built the real world." He added, "that no two languages are similar in such a way that they would represent one society. The world for each society is different ". This means I think that speaking a particular language is describing a particular culture, and knowing another culture is simply knowing another language based on this assumption of Edward Sapir. Therefore, one of the issues teachers face during the teaching process is their students' lack of cultural awareness about the target language, which also considers problematic for students to learn the target language, and it is considered one of the problems students face in learning a new language.

2 Materials and Methods

This part presents the practical side of the present study. A test has been designed to achieve the study's objectives and verify its hypotheses. The present part also aims to describe the whole aspects of the test, namely: the study's sample and the test objectives. Additionally, this part develops to analyze the test results to locate areas of difficulties Iraqi EFL learners face in learning English. This objective can be achieved by surveying the testers' performance on each question and implementing statistical procedures to ensure the scientific bases of these results.

Iraqi learners problems in learning English

English language teaching in schools and other educational institutions approved that the English language for graduates in Iraq has many difficulties in communication and using several vocabularies; therefore, sometimes they cannot keep the meaning correct nor keep communication with others. Therefore, many complaints have been made about the weaknesses in the English language of school graduates who join universities as English teachers. Iraqi students face many issues in learning the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The only way to learn English in Iraqi schools is by formal instructions inside the classroom for the teachers who are native speakers of Arabic and by the connection that students must make with the native speakers of English who come to the country as tourists, if possible as (Rabab'ah, 2005), suggested. In Iraq, there is no environment for the English language, which makes students, as well as teachers, take it lightly to learn the English language, which can't be taught or learned properly in Iraqi schools inside the classroom and outside of it for several reasons. Many students face problems after passing school and coming to universities to study professional courses, and suddenly all of the materials must be studied in English. At this stage, English becomes very important to learn yet frustrating, making them lose their interest in the English language and consider it a very difficult subject. In this stage, the teachers play an important role. If the teacher is dedicated, intelligent, and knows the student's psychology, he/she can rescue students from this frustration. Only a good teacher may be very helpful to his students at this level. Students already know English at this level; therefore, it will be easier to teach them grammar and composition. The student's development depends on the teachers and the curriculum they are taught. Lately, Iraqi students have faced problems due to the situations of war, which makes most of the students, especially immigrants outside of Iraq like Turkey, for instance, feel fear, unfair, and that they have hopeless life. Most of them don't complete their study and the materials and enter the exam class, resulting in failure (Kövecses, 2010; Akbari, 2015; Farrell, 2003; Crawford & Candlin, 2013).

Some difficulties faced by teachers in teaching the English language

Teaching English nowadays is a very important aspect of teaching a new language due to the importance and the use of the English language around the globe; as discussed earlier, 53 countries speak the English language as native and non-native speakers. Therefore, English has become a second language that must be taught. Teachers' role in learning a new language is very important, yet it contains a lot of difficulties. Some of the challenges that an English teacher may face in a class depend on their country, the environment, the curriculum, and the country's cultural aspects. Teaching the English language to non-English speakers is not an easy job for teachers for that reason, the role of a good teacher can affect the teaching process. The quality of a good teacher is to recognize the problems and facilitates the best environments for the students and encourages them to learn (Al Rifai, 2010; Noytim, 2010; Altae, 2020; Muhammed, 2014; Mukammal et al., 2018).

Some general difficulties faced by teachers in teaching the English language

The environment of the Class: The environment of the Class matters the most in teaching, especially in language teaching. In teaching the English language, the disturbing environment of the Class distracts the teacher and affects the teaching process. If there were any disturbing or uncomfortable environment, it would cause a lack of consideration from the teacher and less attention for his/ her students. A positive and comfortable environment lets the teachers consider teaching the language

- 1) Limited resources and abbreviated curriculum: Teaching mainly depends on resources, not only on teaching the English language. Most teachers face this problem when there's a lack of resources essential for the lessons. Some of these important resources in language teaching include digital devices like speakers, mikes, projectors, computer systems, and other digital devices. These resources provide a comfortable environment for teachers in the English language teaching.
- 2) The number of students in the class: A large number of students in the class causes disturbance and stress for the teachers because teaching a large number of students requires more effort and hardworking from the teacher. Also, it may be difficult for a teacher to control the class and provide enough student resources. Also, a teacher may not be able to engage all students in the learning process.

- 3) Limited time for the lecture: In learning the English language, time is very important for teachers; they need time to observe their students and teach them at their level.
- 4) Using other languages in the classroom: In learning a new language, it's very important not to use other languages or even the mother tongue in classes. For the students, it's very easy to speak in their native language or other languages, which they can speak easily instead of the use of the English language. Yet it will be hard for teachers to control their students to use the English language. This considers the most common and big problem faced by English teachers in teaching the English language to their students.
- 5) Difficulties in controlling the class and keeping the students motivated: In English language teaching classes, students from different backgrounds can be found, and most of them belong to places without room for learning the English language. Therefore, it's very difficult for them to learn the English language. Most of them cannot learn the language and can get bored easily. It is very hard for teachers to control and manage the class and keep everything in control, and also keep the students motivated and interested.

3 Findings of the Study

In the Iraqi educational policy, English language teaching has gained enough attention teaching according to the curriculum of schools associated with the Ministry of Education. Yet the limited curriculum and lesson plan that every teacher must follow narrowed many aspects of teaching a new language. Lately, teachers, especially in private international schools, are focusing on increasing learners' motivation, practicing the language, communicating with native speakers, and the cultural knowledge so that students can be able to compare different cultural aspects between learners' culture and the target language culture and to promote positive attitudes of tolerance, openness, and respect for the other cultures, people, and languages. Unfortunately, due to the lesson plan and curriculum, teachers are strict about following the lesson plan that the Ministry of Education has set. Limited time and a specific curriculum provide an uncomfortable environment for teachers to motivate the students and keep the teaching process in control. These difficulties can be even worse outside the country. Unlike a school in the country, Iraqi schools outside Iraq face so many challenges. For example, an Iraqi school in Turkey has several students from Iraq +who are required to follow the lesson plan and help the students practice the language. Teaching a language belonging to a specific culture in another culture to a non-native speaker from a different country who has different habits and a different culture can be very problematic for teachers and students as well. Supporting this idea, a study that I have made using my experience in teaching for two years in an Iraqi school in Turkey:

This study is collected from research with the help of three teachers in an Iraqi school in Turkey. The schools are located in Turkey (2023). The findings of the study regarding the challenges that these three teachers face in the teaching program in these schools:

- Limited time: Due to the assigned curriculum in each stage, whether primary or high school. Each year the English language book courses contain 8 units, and they must be taught within a time, every day for 40 minutes, and by two weeks, one unit must be given. This limited period narrows the teacher's strategies and forces them to focus more on giving the lesson assigned in the course.
- Written grammar rules: One of the major problems to explain for a student that teachers face is written grammar. The teacher is forced to write not only the sentences but the rules and steps for each tense and step that contains grammar structure, which is an issue for teachers cause not every rule is the same when it comes to English grammar structures. It may also confuse the students.
- Little cultural teaching: As we have shown earlier in this research in ELT classes, the role of culture is essential and important in language teaching. As (Kramsch, 1993), suggested, "culture is a body of factual knowledge about the target culture to be transmitted either from the teacher or the school textbook to the learners. " Cultural teaching is very important in English language teaching. Some teachers always face difficulties explaining other cultures to their students cause of the lack of time, materials such as digital objects, like videos, soundtracks, and computers, which are the important objects that are missing in such schools.
- The first teacher suggested that: "culture learning is necessary so ELT learners can use English fluently in context and conduct successful intercultural communication. Yet, the time set down in a lesson which is 45 minutes a day for five days, and the textbook, which consists of eight units, is not enough to include cultural

teaching, so we as teachers are forced to follow the textbooks and do the exams set by the ministry of education “.

- The second teacher suggested: “I believed that culture teaching is important so that learners can learn and understand the English language appropriately in its cultural context and in order to understand cultural differences and respect other habits and differences such as national days, national holidays and so on, that’s why cultural teaching must be included in the curriculum within English language teaching curriculum. “
- The third teacher also encouraged the incorporation of culture in the curriculum. “Most of my students refuse to use some words generally used in English but have another meaning in Arabic. That’s why they refuse to use it, thinking it may be wrong. Such words as “when “are originally English words used to ask about the time. In Iraq, they use it to ask about the place. If students are introduced to cultural differences, they may use the words in the correct way.

4 Results and Discussions

Teachers must understand that their role in class is essential in language teaching. A good teacher must define their weakness and difficulties in teaching the English language and find a way to overcome them. Teachers also must develop their methods, ideas, and knowledge as long as the English language is continually developing with time. Some of the effective methods that are used to overcome some of the difficulties that teachers face in ELT classes:

- 1) Arrange the rules in the classroom according to the timetable: Teachers can arrange the lesson program according to a specific timetable, and their rules and their students must follow; managing the class according to a specific rule is very important, especially in English language teaching, and that surely makes it easier for teachers to teach in a specific time.
- 2) Motivate the students: In every learning process, students need to be motivated to achieve their goals and move towards their success. The teacher's role is very important to keep the students motivated. They can keep their motivation through motivational speeches or other activities that can help them get back on track.
- 3) Using digital media in the classroom: Most English teachers tend to use old methods in teaching, which can cause a problem for students; using media and digital devices for educational purposes can be a better way for learning and teaching the English language. While using digital media such as listening learning which is considered very important if not available, a teacher may do it by repeated practice, and there are other materials that can be used in the classroom by a teacher to improve the listening skills like aural comprehension taking notes, and dictation for an example ([Ansari, 2012](#)).
- 4) Educational conversations in class: Conversations in class using the English language have a very important role in learning English. It makes the students forced to learn the English language and speak it

The challenges in learning English as a second language that the student's face are mentioned briefly in this paper:

- 1) Grammar mistakes: English Grammar is very complex and knotted, making it difficult to remember and understand. When learning English, using the correct grammar is tricky, especially when a person is conversing with someone who is speaking the language in an alarmingly fast way. Learning grammar is like learning how to drive; it is the way to get to a particular target by following the rules and regulations. Incorrect use of grammar can confuse the listener and sometimes lead to misunderstanding by changing the meaning of the main sentence. Therefore, learners need to understand the grammar of the English language. Most students face a problem learning a new rule if they compare it with their mother language. For instance, some Iraqi students learned a new rule for the past perfect continuance tense; the student immediately had a problem understanding the usage of this tense and started comparing it with the Arabic language and found no match for this tense; also compared it with the Turkish language and found no match as well. Here comes the teacher's rule to explain some complex grammatical structures in a simplified way.
- 2) Overuse of native language in the classroom: The purpose of learning any foreign/second language is to communicate with native speakers and understand their culture and nation. One of the challenges students face in learning English is using the native language in class to communicate and talk. Students find it easier to communicate in their mother language and make conversations. Most Iraqi students in Turkey tend to use Turkish or Arabic in English lessons because they get to use these two languages more in real life since they

live in a non-native English country, which is very problematic. Sometimes students even mix Turkish and English vocabulary; even while speaking, students tend unconsciously to use one Turkish word at least in every English sentence. The teacher's role is crucial to prevent students from using their native language in the classroom. It must encourage them to communicate in English and only in English, even if they have problems finding all the words and even if they are just talking to each other. This problem. Mainly comes from the cultural demands of the country that the students are in and the demands of their family.

- 3) Lack of self-esteem/shyness: Some students' shyness prevents them from learning and speaking the language. Shy students often fear making mistakes while speaking the language and giving their opinion. Not practicing any new language is an issue in learning it; teachers must push their shy students to participate in classroom activities, conversations, and games and teach them English language learning. It is also better to make mistakes in speaking rather than staying quiet.
- 4) Lack of vocabulary: When it comes to knowing verb variations and understanding which verb to use in which tense is often a challenge for students, considering English as one of the languages that has many variations students face many issues knowing most of them.

Suggestions to overcome the student's challenges in learning the English language

As we have seen in this research paper English language is very important to learn yet not easy, and we have seen the most important difficulties students face in learning English. Overcoming these issues is not an easy job. They need to be motivated to do it, and the teachers play an important role in helping the students to overcome the challenges. Correctly learning English makes the students avoid making grammatical mistakes while reading, writing, or conversing in English. Some of the methods that students may try with the help of their teacher to overcome the difficulties that have been discussed earlier in schools and especially Iraqi schools:

- Students can read articles on different topics: A teacher can choose topics that interest the students the most they can take home with them. Reading helps many students to improve their speaking skills and to learn several new vocabularies. First, a student will hesitate, get nervous to start reading and be afraid of making mistakes. The student never tried to read and had many problems recognizing the letters, and he was very shy and afraid; after the attempt to read many stories, the student became motivated to read more and participate in the class, and he started to understand the full sentence without necessarily knowing all the words. Therefore, reading helps students improve their English language and learn speaking, vocabulary, and pronunciation.
- Listen to English songs and watch movies: Listening to songs, English poems, and short stories can improve the students' both listening and reading skills, and also it can help improve their pronunciation. "listening is the basic skill in language learning, because without listening learners never learn to communicate effectively" Nunun (1998), argues.
- Working on their speaking skills: Students should work on their speaking skills and try to make conversations more to work on producing sounds and sentences correctly. Speaking means using the target language to communicate and deliver the target message (Şenel, 2006). The teacher's role is also very important to motivate their students to speak English, probably by asking their students to make presentations about specific subjects. students can make conversations with each other, which helps to make their speaking fluent, and they can help correct each other without feeling shy or embarrassed.

Practicing using the English language: Learning a new language needs practice to improve the learning process. Also, English students must practice using the language more to be fluent. Also, it makes the students know all the English language aspects. Students must learn that it is normal to make mistakes because, in English, even native speakers can make mistakes (Cain, 2011).

5 Conclusion

To conclude, the English language is as important as the native language of any student. The history of the English language started in the 5th century and developed with time till today and has spread to about 52 countries in the

world that speak English. This study examined the difficulties faced by Iraqi students in international schools in Turkey in learning English, and it has been shown that there are several difficulties regarding their lack of language use and cultural awareness. English language learning is not an easy job for non-native speakers. Learning a new language and even teaching a new language are related to the cultural aspects since culture and language come hand in hand. Learning the English language comes with many challenges for all students. After revealing the problems that Iraqi students face, there are Some methods that teachers and students can try to make the language teaching and learning process easier. Eventually, the researchers tend to make some rules and solve the challenges of learning English to improve communication in the 21st-century schoolroom.

Conflict of interest statement

The author declared that he has no competing interests.

Statement of authorship

The author has a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author has approved the final article.

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