

Study of the Learning Barriers Faced by Arab English Learners While Speaking in English Language

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Abstract

This research paper consists of the various problems faced by the Arabs all over the world while speaking in English language. The researcher has conducted a survey here and an interview to know and find out the common problems of the Arabs while speaking in English language. The researcher has been teaching English language to the Arabs in the middle-east and in India for over 8 years now and came across similar problems.

Keywords: English Speaking, Language, Learning Barriers, Arab English Learners, Methods of Teaching, Futility of Lecturing, Communication

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Introduction

In the communication process language has the most important role to play, it is true that a child can learn better in its mother tone because it is a natural process though learning English as a foreign language is an artificial and painful process, students have to learn it as we consider English as a global language.

As globalisation accelerates, there is a growing need for English language for communication across the Arab nations job market leaders are stressing English as a tool for gaining advantage in a world with competition. Arab government has introduced English teaching into their school as a medium of instruction in higher education. Yet research shows that Arab EFL learners lack proficiency and communicative ability in English. (Moody, 2009, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi; 2012)

Across the world it is widely acknowledged that English is the most widely spoken language or a designated 2nd language amongst the general population across, this stems from unlike other languages there being no dialects for a start and whilst spelling may be different the concept of International English remains the same both for punctuation and grammar.

The research found that Arab students are broadly found to struggle with reading and speaking. (Cobb and Horst; 2001; Shannon, 2003, Al-Mahrooqi and Asante, 2010). Poor language proficiency clearly obstructs reading comprehension, involvement and enjoyment. Thus, it is very important to find out the problems faced by the Arabic students in learning English.

In most of the Arabic countries including Yemen, Oman, Iraq etc. English is introduced after the 5th grade and it starts with only basic so their English language skills are not proficient until they reach college. The students there have all the other subject in Arabic language.

Most of the population does not speak English language fluently so the students do not get enough practice to improve their English.

I have been teaching English to the Arabic students for the last 7 years and have come across the problems faced by them whilst speaking in English language. It is a very challenging task for the teachers to teach English to the basic level students. However, the students also put in a lot of efforts to improve their English language skills and are very hard working.

Need of the study:

English language is considered as a global language for communication. In whichever field a person decides to study or work, English is mandatory. Similarly, in Arabic countries English is gaining importance. Arabic students are travelling to various countries to study English. According to the data analysis, the Arabic students are lacking behind in English vocabulary, grammar, accent and pronunciation.

Keeping all this in mind the researcher has made the English-Arabic handbook, which will help the Arabic students to improve their English level.

1. As their requirement of international job market is growing, also the need for English language proficiency is growing rapidly.
2. As the Globalization is accelerating, there is growing need for English as language of communication.
3. Developing English-speaking skill is needed for societal modernity and for the acquisition of advanced technology and high quality education.
4. To lucidly communicate and express their views and ideas to native English speakers.
5. To overcome cultural barriers and understand various cultures other than the Islamic culture.

Research Title:

“Study of the learning barriers faced by Arab English learners while speaking in English language.”

Assumptions:

1. Arabic students are familiar with basics of English language.
2. Arabic students have the language translator application in their mobiles and laptops.
3. Arabic students use English-Arabic language dictionary.

Objectives

1. To find out the problems of Arabic students while speaking in English language.
2. To suggest some easy tips to the Arabic students to overcome their English speaking problems.

Limitations:

1. This research was conducted only on Arabic students whose mother tongue is Arabic.
2. This research was conducted on Arabic students studying in “English language teaching institute of Symbiosis”.
3. This research only dealt with finding out the problems of English speaking skills of the Arabic students.

Delimitations:

1. This study will help the researcher to find out the problems faced by Arabs in learning English language and come up with a suitable solution for the same.
2. The suggestions given to the Arabic students are easy to follow and will help them improve their English language.
3. This research helped the researcher to find out the common problems faced by the Arabs in learning English language.

The major problems faced by the Arabic students are mentioned below in detail

1. Mother tongue influence and Pronunciation

Phonetic sounds in English language differs completely from that of Arabic. It is useful to distinguish between Arabic and English languages through contrastive analysis. Arabic is a part of Semitic languages, whereas English is an Indo-European language primarily originated from the Anglo Frisian dialects. As for the number of alphabets, Arabic has twenty-eight letters. In contrast, English has twenty-six letters. Orthographically, there is no distinction between upper letters and lower case letters in Arabic as it is always composed in a cursive form. According to English, the matter is different. In English, at that place is a clear distinction between upper case alphabetic characters and lower case alphabetic characters. English words can be written in both cursive and uncial. One of the most noticeable differences between the two speeches is that Arabic is written from right to left. English, on the other hand, is written from left to right. Most significantly, there are typical differences between Arabic and English in almost all syntactical, morphological, phonological, lexical, semantic, rhetorical and orthographical aspects. (Ali, 2007:3).

In all the above-mentioned differences between Arabic and English languages cause Arab learners unconsciously or involuntarily to make mistakes or even errors. It should be recalled here, it is beneficial to differentiate errors from mistakes. Ellis (1997) stated that errors reflect gaps in the learner’s knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct. Whereas, mistakes reflect occasional lapses in

performance; they occur because, in a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what he or she knows.

2. Cultural drawback

Arabic culture can be a great drawback for the Arab students to learn or communicate in English. These people are considered more religious as compared to other religions in the society. Their culture does not allow girls to get education parallel education as their boys. English language in the Arab school is introduced in secondary or sometimes higher secondary due to which they cannot complete the English language education till their college. The basic religious scripture i.e. the Holy Quran is also in the Urdu, which is why they emphasise on learning their national language to be kept as the priority. Since their first language is Arabic, therefore their cultural language is given more priority than any other language or English language to be more specific.

3. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the major issue faced by Arabic students. It is because of the vast words and alphabets available in English language. In English language one word has different meanings depending on the situation, whereas, in Arabic language one word has only one meaning. This causes confusion in the study of English language in the Arabic students. Hindi language is easy for them to study it is because of the similar words in both the languages. It is easy for Arabic students to learn Hindi as compared to English because all words and alphabets in this particular language is different and difficult for them to learn.

4. Grammar

Arabic grammar is more difficult and completely different as compared to English grammar. Helping verbs do not exist in Arabic language and so it is difficult for them to learn English grammar. Eg: In English, we say 'I am a boy.' Whereas in Arabic they say 'Ana Walad' which means 'I boy.' Figures of Speech is also a problem for them to understand and use. Idioms and phrases is the most difficult topic for them to understand, as it is completely different in Arabic language. Eg: 'Don't cry over spilt milk' the Arabic students take the actual meaning of this phrase and do not understand the English sarcasm unless someone explains it to them with examples. Singular and Plural is another difficult topic for them to Understand. Possessive Pronouns are new to them so they tend to get confused in using them. Most of the English grammar topics are new to them, hence it is difficult for them to understand it quickly.

These are the major problems faced by the Arabic students while learning English language. All the four skills listening, speaking, Reading and writing go hand in hand so while teaching English to the Arabs the teacher has to have a deep knowledge about the Arabic language as well to understand the similarities and differences and accordingly prepare a lesson plan to teach them with relevant and interesting activities and examples.

Method of research- Multi-method

1. Survey method.
2. Product method.

Survey method: The researcher made a questionnaire to interview the Arabic students. The questionnaire included general questions regarding the day- to- day life and the observations were recorded using a rating scale. The students were categorised according to the following rating scale based on their performance. (Below average, Average, Moderate, Good, and Very Good).

Questions included in the Questionnaire

1. Name of the student.
2. Country of origin.
3. What is the difference between the teaching methods in India and your country?
4. Describe your family.
5. When English language was first introduced to you?
6. What do you like about India?
7. What do you like to do in your free time?
8. Describe your best friend.
9. Describe wedding ceremony in your country.
10. Why do you want to learn to speak in English language?

Product method: After the oral interview with the Arabic students, the researcher tried to suggest some easy tips for the students to learn to speak in English.

Few suggestions are as follows:

1. To listen to anything like news, Songs, speeches, stories for at-least 30 minutes in a day.
2. To watch English movies with subtitles for a start.
3. Whilst you are in India or any English speaking country try to speak only in English with the people there.
4. To increase the vocabulary at-least 2 pages of reading is important and try to find out the meanings of new words and use it in your daily conversations.

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5. Look for private tuitions for Grammar or enrol yourselves for online courses.
6. Practice speaking in English with your fellow Arabs.
7. Do not hesitate in asking doubts to your mentors or teachers as it will correct your mistakes.
8. Do not be shy to speak in English in public, as it will only boost your self-confidence.

Sample:

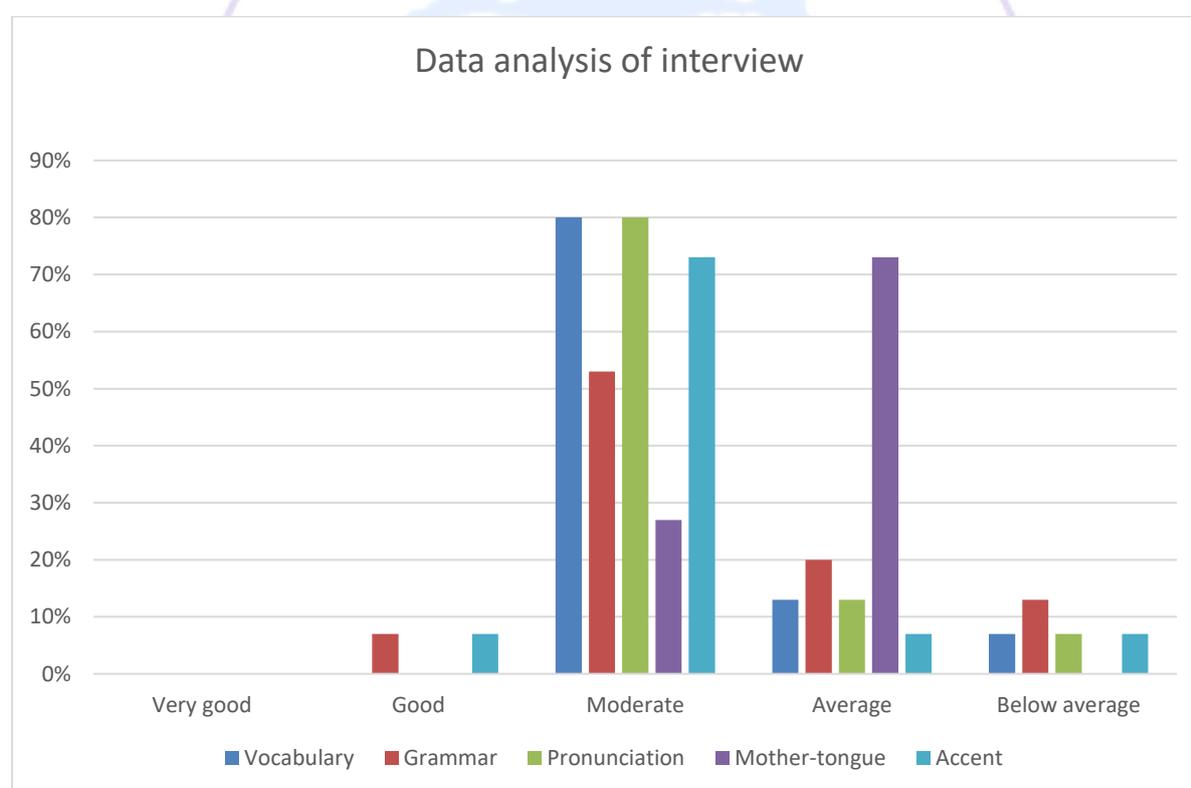
15 Arabic students whose mother tongue is Arabic and studying English language in “English language teaching institute of Symbiosis” in Pune city were selected as a sample for this study.

INTERVIEW CHECK LIST

Sr. No.	Name of student	Vocabulary	Grammar	Pronunciation	Mother tongue influence	Accent
1.	Ahmed. Hawach	Moderate	Below Average	Moderate	Average	Moderate
2.	Majed. Mohmood-al-sobaihi	Average	Moderate	Moderate	Average	Average
3.	Raeed.al-sobaihi	Moderate	Average	Moderate	Average	Moderate
4.	Kamal. Al-sobaihi	Below Average	Moderate	Moderate	Average	Moderate
5.	Mohammed. Al-sobaihi	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
6.	Mohammed. Mused	Moderate	Average	Average	Average	Good
7.	Hanni. M	Average	Below Average	Moderate	Average	Moderate
8.	Fahad. Redhwan	Moderate	Average	Average	Average	Moderate
9.	Omiama. Redhwan	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Average	Moderate
10.	Henna. Redhwan	Moderate	Average	Below Average	Average	Below Average
11.	Rahiba. Mohammed	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Average	Moderate
12.	Majed. Ali	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Average	Average
13.	Abdul. Al-sabaihi	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
14.	Amna. Al-sobaihi	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
15.	Khulud. Al-sobaihi	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

Percentage data analysis of the interview

Content	Very good	Good	Moderate	Average	Below average
Vocabulary	0%	0%	80%	13%	7%
Grammar	0%	7%	53%	20%	13%
Pronunciation	0%	0%	80%	13%	7%
Mother-tongue	0%	0%	27%	73%	0%
Accent	0%	7%	73%	7%	7%

Graphical representation of the data analysis**Results and Discussion**

According to the data collected and the researchers teaching experience we understand that the Arabs face problems due to their strong mother-tongue influence, Pronunciation, Accent, Grammar, Cultural background and all this is due to lack of practice, the teaching method followed in their countries, not enough exposure to English language. considering all these problems the researcher has decided to develop a program for the augmentation of the English language speaking skills of the Arabic students. It will also be very beneficial to find out the problems of Arabs while learning LSRW skills of English language along with Grammar. It will prove as an advantage to the Arabic students if we could take some effort to

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develop a wholesome English language program for them and this will also help them in pursuing their higher education from any part of the world and will boost their self-confidence.

Conclusion:

This research helped the researcher to find out the common problems of Arabic students while speaking in English language. The researcher also intends to develop a program for the development of English language speaking skills of the Arabic students. The researcher has given few tips to the Arabic students to develop their speaking skills.

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