

Learning Difficulties of the English Language in the Iraqi Villages and Countryside

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Abstract

This investigation focuses on the key roadblocks that hinder the students from acquiring the English language through the English language in the outlying rural areas of Iraq. For this purpose, 150 students were taken as the research sample from different primary and secondary schools located in the rural areas of Iraq. The students were selected to provide a representation of the intended demographic, i.e., they were a cross-section of rural learners. The students had to fill in a questionnaire developed for the purpose of the study that was structured so as to recognize and analyze the various linguistic, environmental, and instructional issues these students were facing. The findings disclose the specifics of the major obstacles to the acquisition of the English language in the countryside that revolve around but are not limited to the lack of qualified English teachers, which is a continuation of invalid exposure to English only in the school atmosphere, and the lack of learning materials like textbooks, audiovisual aids, and internet connectivity. The data demonstrate the difficulty of pronunciation for the pupils, the acquisition of vocabulary, and reading comprehension, mainly due to the limited exposure to the English language and the practice and the interaction that the students had. This conclusion is based on the students' responses to the questionnaire items.

Keywords: English language, learning difficulties, Iraqi villages, instructional barriers, socio-economic factors

صعوبات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في القرى والأرياف العراقية
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المستخلص

تركز هذه الدراسة على العوائق الرئيسية التي تعيق تعلم الطلاب للغة الإنجليزية من خلال اللغة الإنجليزية نفسها في المناطق الريفية النائية في العراق. ولتحقيق هذا الغرض، تم اختيار عينة بحثية مكونة من 150 طالباً من مختلف المدارس الابتدائية والثانوية الواقعة في المناطق الريفية من العراق. تم اختيار هؤلاء الطلاب ليمثلوا الفئة السكانية المستهدفة، أي أنهم كانوا يمثلون شريحة متنوعة من المتعلمين في المناطق الريفية. طلب من الطلاب تعبئة استبيان أعد خصيصاً لغرض هذه الدراسة، وصُمم بطريقة تمكن من التعرف على وتحليل القضايا اللغوية والبيئية والتعليمية التي يواجهها هؤلاء الطلاب. تضمن الاستبيان أسئلة مغلقة وكذلك أسئلة مفتوحة تهدف إلى جمع بيانات كمية ورؤى نوعية حول تجارب الطلاب وانطباعاتهم عن الموضوع. كشفت النتائج عن تفاصيل العقبات الكبرى التي تعيق اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية في الريف، والتي تتمحور – ولكن لا تقتصر – حول نقص المعلمين المؤهلين لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، وهو ما يسهم في حصر تعرض الطلاب للغة الإنجليزية في أجواء المدرسة فقط. كما تبيّن نقص المواد التعليمية مثل الكتب الدراسية، والوسائل السمعية والبصرية، والاتصال بالإنترنت. وتُعَدُّ الحالة الاقتصادية للأسرة، واضطرار بعض الأطفال للعمل لمساعدة ذويهم، وعدم توفر التكنولوجيا لديهم من الأسباب التي أدت إلى تغيب الطلاب عن المدارس وانخفاض مستوى تفاعلهم في أنشطة تعلم اللغة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أظهرت البيانات صعوبة نطق الكلمات لدى التلاميذ، وكذلك ضعفهم في اكتساب المفردات وفهم المقروء، ويُعزى ذلك بشكل رئيسي إلى محدودية تعرضهم للغة الإنجليزية، وقلة الممارسة، وانخفاض مستوى التفاعل. وقد استند في هذه الاستنتاجات إلى ردود الطلاب على فقرات الاستبيان.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية، صعوبات التعلم، القرى العراقية، الحواجز التعليمية، العوامل الاجتماعية والاقتصادية

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Introduction

There are many obstacles to overcome when learning English as a foreign language (EFL) around the world, but these obstacles are frequently more noticeable in rural and underdeveloped places. Iraqi learners, especially village and rural area learners, face a unique set of challenges that significantly impair their English acquisition. Infrastructure inequities, teacher skills, and resource inequities between rural and urban areas persist despite consecutive Iraqi education sector reforms (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024:7). These inequities are the single greatest cause of long-term learning issues for rural area learners.

According to one study, English acquisition can be influenced by numerous linguistic, social, cultural, and environmental factors in rural Iraq. It is hard for Kurdish students in the northern regions of Iraq to communicate using English, as discovered by (Ghafar and Amin, 2022:290).

Due to lacking confidence, lexical constraints, fear, and lack of sufficient practice opportunities. They may be representative of more universal challenges for learners from other Iraqi rural regions. Phonological issues, cultural issues, and limited exposure to genuine natural English language use then preclude Iraqi EFL learners from gaining oral fluency, as (Almadhady and Muhsen, 2024:15) have noted. The extremely large vocabulary and phonological contrast in English and Arabic also create such language barriers and mostly lead to errors and misunderstandings amongst the students (Mahdi, 2015:10; Fakhri, 2013:22).

In addition, instructional support and exposure between their mother language, Arabic, and English will lead to grammatical and vocabulary challenges among Iraqi learners (Fakhri, 2013:23). The use of English by students in a practical sense

is also restricted by traditional pedagogic practice hinging on memorization by heart and grammar translation at the expense of communicative competence (Younus, 2020:457). The lack of teaching material in English as well as qualified English teachers leads to its being exceptionally stringent at rural schools (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024:8). Inadequate provision of minimum learning facilities required for successful language instruction, like current textbooks, audiovisual equipment, and internet connections, is a common feature of rural schools. (Nada, 2023:21) learning. Socioeconomic status also greatly contributes to learning. Due to the economic constraints, household responsibilities, and sometimes insecure or inadequate conditions of study, there are widespread instances of missed school attendances among the majority of the rural students (Fortes et al., 2022:42). For instance, some governorates in Iraq have primary schools that are even devoid of the most elementary materials required to offer their water and sanitation, offering dirty study environments that discourage learners from reporting to school on a regular basis. Such socioeconomic hindrances constrain access to English outside the learning environment as well as limit the time and effort they have to invest in learning languages.

Cultural beliefs regarding language acquisition play a key role in shaping students' self-assurance and their desire to learn. The Iraqi society considers English primarily as a written language, which gives more importance to reading and writing compared to speaking and listening abilities (Almadhady & Muhsen, 2024: 13; Yeaqub, 2018:9). Young students face restrictions on their language practice because of cultural norms and societal standards, which discourage

them from using forceful speech. Language development and English immersion become limited when classrooms primarily use Arabic as the language of instruction and communication (Younus, 2020:460; Ghafar & Amin, 2022:290).

The psychological barriers of anxiousness, low confidence, and mistake avoidance prevent rural students from speaking English effectively (Ghafar & Amin, 2022:292). The learning environment becomes ineffective because students do not receive adequate motivation and support. English educators in rural regions sometimes struggle to provide their students with effective learning because they lack both enthusiasm and proper training (Nada, 2023:11; Carrete-Marín et al., 2024:9).

The literacy gap in Iraq becomes more pronounced because of the distinct educational challenges faced by city and rural students. According to (ReliefWeb's 2024) findings, women in rural areas suffer from high illiteracy rates compared to men. The essential reading and writing skills that students need to succeed in English learning are limited by this educational inequality gap.

A research project aims to identify distinctive educational barriers affecting English learning in Iraqi rural communities because of multiple intertwined challenges, which include language and teaching methods, economic factors, cultural elements, and mental wellness factors. A successful approach to enhancing English instruction in rural Iraq begins with understanding the key barriers, which enables schools to establish targeted teacher programs and resource distribution together with community language support. The resolution of these problems will enhance students' language abilities while

simultaneously expanding their educational and professional prospects in an increasingly interconnected society.

Items of Research

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Issues Faced by Iraqi Students in Acquiring English Language Skills

Students in Iraq who come from rural and underdeveloped areas face numerous barriers while learning English as a second language. The research conducted by (Ghafar and Amin, 2022:295) indicates that Kurdish EFL learners face significant difficulties in speaking English primarily because of their self-confidence issues alongside their limited vocabulary and fear of committing errors. Inadequate practice opportunities and a dearth of encouraging settings for speaking English exacerbate these psychological obstacles. According to (Abid, 2020), inadequate curricula and antiquated teaching techniques are primarily to blame for Iraqi sixth preparation students' low linguistic proficiency in all four language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. English acquisition is made more difficult by the involvement of Arabic as the mother tongue, which leads to additional lexical and grammatical problems (Fakhri, 2013:14).

These issues are made worse by socioeconomic considerations. Numerous students in rural areas experience erratic attendance brought on by family obligations, financial difficulties, and occasionally dangerous school conditions, all of which have a detrimental impact on regular learning (Fortes et al., 2022:45). (Rashid, 2016:20) underlined that in

many Iraqi schools, inadequate facilities and a dearth of instructional aids cause pupils to lose enthusiasm and impede efficient learning. Additionally, students' practical use of English, particularly their speaking and listening abilities, is limited by the conventional emphasis on rote memorization rather than communicative competency (Younus, 2020:460). Learners' capacity to internalize and practice the English language is further limited by their lack of exposure to real-world English language circumstances outside of the classroom (Almadhady & Muhsen, 2024:16).

2.2 Certain Challenges Encountered by Educators in Instructing the English Language

Effective English instruction is difficult for Iraqi teachers to provide. The efficiency of teaching is significantly hampered by the fact that many English-medium instruction (EMI) lecturers deal with students who don't speak English well, frequently at beginner or elementary levels, according to (Carrete-Marín et al. 2024:10). Kurdish EFL teachers face difficulties with pupils' poor motivation and reluctance to communicate, which are related to psychological and social aspects, according to (Ghafar and Amin, 2022:290).

Furthermore, a large number of teachers are under trained in contemporary communicative language teaching techniques, depending instead on conventional grammar-translation strategies that restrict student participation and real-world language use (Younus, 2020:461). According to (Al-Mousawi, 2023:8), the teaching process is further hampered by a lack of teacher passion and inadequate classroom supplies. Additionally, uneven government regulations and evaluation

procedures foster an atmosphere where educational innovation is restricted, and educators frequently experience a lack of support (Al-Khafaji, 2021:11). These difficulties are particularly noticeable in rural locations, where there are few opportunities for teachers to get professional development and few resources available (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024:18).

2.3 Certain Common Challenges Encountered by Educators in Instructing the English Language

Large class sizes, a dearth of audiovisual resources, and a lack of exposure to real-world English language situations are common problems that teachers encounter (Almadhady & Muhsen, 2024:10). Immersion and practice opportunities in English, which are essential for language learning, are diminished when the mother tongue (Kurdish or Arabic) is used in the classroom more often (Ghafar & Amin, 2022:292). Teachers in many rural schools have to deal with infrastructural deficiencies such as inadequate classroom facilities, poor sanitation, and no electricity, which have a detrimental impact on the learning environment and students' ability to concentrate (Rashid, 2016:19).

Moreover, the emphasis on speaking and listening in instruction is restricted by cultural views that value reading and writing more than oral abilities (Yeaqub, 2018:2). Despite some growth in reading and writing, this mismatch leads to low oral proficiency accomplishment among students. Students' willingness to practice speaking English orally is further hampered by the absence of a supportive classroom environment that promotes taking chances and correcting mistakes (Ghafar & Amin, 2022:293). As seen in numerous settings

throughout the nation, these difficulties taken together lead to Iraqi learners' poor oral competency and general low language accomplishment (Al-Khafaji, 2021:10; Fortes et al., 2022:49).

3. Description of the Problem

Iraq's English language learning environment, particularly in rural and impoverished areas, is beset by enduring and complex issues that make learning and teaching the language difficult. Iraqi students and teachers face many obstacles that impact language competency and academic results, even though English is a vital worldwide lingua franca and essential to scientific, technical, and academic progress. There have been multiple phases of curriculum development in the Iraqi educational system since 1921, but a lot of systemic problems still exist, especially in rural areas with limited infrastructure, resources, and skilled labor (Al-Mosawi, 2020:11; British Council, 2024:3).

The limited exposure to English outside of formal classroom settings that students in rural and village regions frequently experience limits their capacity to practice and assimilate the language. Consistent participation in language acquisition is further diminished by socioeconomic challenges, such as poverty, sporadic attendance at school, and family responsibilities (Fortes et al. 2022:50). Furthermore, a lot of schools lack contemporary technology, sufficient teaching resources, and comfortable learning spaces, all of which have a detrimental effect on student motivation and learning efficacy (Rashid, 2016:26).

Educators face multiple challenges because of overcrowded classrooms and limited educational

resources, together with inadequate training in teaching methods that promote student-centered communication (British Council, 2024). Student communicative skills and genuine language usage suffer because of two main factors, which are the traditional grammar-translation approach and excessive mother tongue instruction (Younus, 2020). Contemporary teaching standards face barriers because government educational policies together with assessment systems do not support educational innovation (Al-Khafaji, 2021:10).

The complex challenge in rural Iraq involves various elements of pedagogical theory, language teaching practice, educational infrastructure, economic conditions, and government policies, which collectively obstruct the learning process. A complete understanding of student and teacher obstacles is essential for developing effective educational solutions.

Materials and Methods

4. Research Design

Students in classrooms experience restricted linguistic development due to the application of grammar-translation methods alongside mother tongue use during instruction (Younus, 2020:461). Government educational systems fail to adapt to current instructional standards due to their inconsistent policy direction and evaluation mechanisms (Al-Khafaji, 2021:2).

The complexity of English language instruction problems in rural Iraqi areas stems from a combination of educational methods, language development strategies, infrastructure deficiencies, economic factors, and governmental regulations. Understanding the specific educational barriers

that instructors and their students face requires a complete comprehension of these issues.

This study combines quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to analyze the learning barriers confronting students in rural Iraqi settings and their English teaching staff. The research employs surveys together with interviews and classroom observations to obtain varied perspectives, which lead to result validation through triangulation methods.

Sample

The study involves 150 students from primary and secondary schools located in specific rural areas of Iraq. Thirty English teachers from these schools participate in the study to provide their viewpoints regarding teaching challenges. The research uses purposive sampling to ensure representation of various student age ranges and skill levels along with teacher instructional experience.

Tools for Gathering Data

- Questionnaire with Structure: given to pupils in order to pinpoint particular language barriers, educational settings, and socioeconomic Acquisition of the English Language and Its Influencing Factors
- Teacher Survey: Aimed to capture educators' insights regarding teaching woes, professional development, and resource sufficiency.
- Semi-Structured Interviews: Administered to selected teachers and students in order to gain rich qualitative data on psychological, cultural, and pedagogy-related constraints.
- Classroom Observations: Conducted to evaluate teaching and interaction patterns, use and dominance of mother tongue, and availability of instructional resources.

Data Evaluation

Descriptive and inferential analysis, including frequency distributions and correlation analysis, will be conducted using SPSS software on quantitative data obtained from questionnaires and surveys. Qualitative information gathered from interviews and observations will undergo thematic analysis to ascertain patterns and contextual elements related to the language learning-teaching processes.

Ethics

The study will seek ethical clearance from the appropriate education bodies. Participation is voluntary, and consent will be obtained from the participants or guardians. Confidentiality and anonymity of the data will be observed.

Rationale

This methodological triangulation broadens the understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding English learning in rural regions of Iraq. While considering the perspectives of both learners and educators bodies. Participation is voluntary, and consent will be obtained from the participants or guardians. Confidentiality and anonymity of the data will be observed.

5. Results

5.1 Results from the Questionnaire Analysis

As stated earlier, the aim of the questionnaire in this survey was to tackle the most celebrated problems Iraqi students encounter in the learning of English as one of their foreign languages. The students' perceived difficulties across various English language skills and how frequently these difficulties were reported, as shown in Table (1).

Table (1): State the Students' Perceived Difficulties in Learning English Language Skills and Their Frequency (N=150)

Language Skill	Percentage Reporting Difficulty (%)	Rank
Speaking	78%	1
Vocabulary	72%	2
Pronunciation	68%	3
Listening Comprehension	60%	4
Writing	55%	5
Reading	50%	6

Interpretation: The most difficult skill was found to be speaking, which was closely followed by vocabulary and pronunciation.

Interpretation: In terms of external factors,

highlights the major elements students believe influence their ability to acquire English effectively. Respondents were allowed to select more than one factor as shown in Table (2).

Table (2): State the Elements Influencing English Language Acquisition (Multiple Answers Permitted)

Factor	Percentage of Students Reporting (%)
Lack of Qualified Teachers	82%
Limited Exposure to English Outside Classroom	75%
Insufficient Learning Materials	70%
Socio-Economic Challenges	65%
Large Class Sizes	60%
Use of Mother Tongue in Classrooms	55%

Interpretation: There are little possibilities for pupils to utilize the language outside of the

classroom, as 70% of them practice it infrequently or never.as shown in Table (3).

Table (3): State that How Often Students Practice English Outside of the Classroom

Frequency Category	Percentage of Students (%)
Never	40%
Rarely (1-2 times/week)	30%
Sometimes (3-4 times/week)	20%
Often (5+ times/week)	10%

Interpretation: Although less than half of students find traditional grammar-translation approaches

useful, they continue to be the most common way, as shown in Table (4).

Table (4): State the How Students View Instructional Strategies

Teaching Method	Percentage of Students Finding it Effective (%)
Grammar-Translation	45%
Communicative Language Teaching	30%
Audio-Visual Aids	15%
Group Work/Interactive Methods	10%

These results highlight the need for better teaching methods and resource availability while painting a clear picture of the common difficulties Iraqi rural students face when learning English.

Conclusions

The research reveals the combination of learning challenges faced by both Iraqi teachers and their students when teaching and learning English within rural and underdeveloped areas. Students face their greatest difficulties in speaking English along with vocabulary learning and pronunciation because of socioeconomic limitations and insufficient practice and inadequate teaching

methods. The research discovered that educators face four major obstacles including teaching large classes without sufficient resources and teaching tools while using traditional grammar-translation methods without proper training. The problem becomes worse because of substandard facilities and traditional cultural beliefs which prioritize written communication over spoken interaction. These structural issues make it difficult for Iraq's well-designed English curriculum to be implemented effectively. Improving educational achievements and English language competency in Iraqi schools requires addressing these interrelated variables.

Recommendations

1. **Improve Teacher Training:** Fund extensive pre-service and in-service training courses emphasizing learner-centered approaches and communicative language teaching (CLT). This will give educators the tools they need to effectively engage pupils and enhance their oral ability.
2. **Enhance Educational Infrastructure and Resources:** Give schools, particularly those in remote regions, access to modern texts, dependable energy, and audiovisual aids. In situations when infrastructure is scarce, mobile teaching kits and solar-powered gadgets can serve as temporary fixes.
3. **Reduce Class Sizes:** To allow for more individualized education and improved classroom management, allocate funds to construct more classrooms and hire more certified instructors.
4. **Encourage English Exposure Outside of the Classroom:** Encourage family and community participation to establish English-rich environments by access to technology, media, and language clubs. Students' confidence and fluency will increase as a result of practicing English in real-world settings.
5. **Curriculum Adaptation:** To ensure congruence with students' needs and reality, modify the English curriculum to include culturally relevant content and low-resource teaching techniques that work in rural areas .

Suggestions

The evidence confirms prior studies which prove that students from Iraq face complicated learning challenges when studying English in low-income and rural educational environments. Students

identify English speaking as their main educational problem as stated by (Ghafar and Amin, 2022:288). A student's ability to speak English is commonly restricted by the combination of insufficient vocabulary knowledge and low confidence levels along with performance anxiety and the fear of errors. Both the limited chances for English practice in positive environments and the psychological obstacles create major limitations in students' ability to develop their language abilities. The practice of teaching English in teacher-dominated classes using minimal speaking opportunities and heavy mother tongue instruction according to the (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024:7) study results reduces student ability to communicate. The study demonstrates how both economic factors and infrastructure problems create obstacles for students to learn new languages. Rashid (2016:19) identified that many schools in Iraq's rural areas suffer from poor cleanliness and lack of educational resources as well as insufficient facilities. These problems negatively affect student presence and drive. The research by Fortes et al., (2022:42) demonstrates that students fail to attend regularly because they must fulfill family responsibilities while also dealing with financial constraints.

The difficulties noted in this study are similar to those documented in earlier studies from the viewpoint of the educators. According to the (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024:9), many English teachers in Iraq are undertrained in communicative and learner-centered teaching practices, and they frequently fall back on grammar-translation strategies that do not encourage students to use the language actively. This is in line with (Younus, 2020:460), who maintained that these approaches restrict students' ability to participate and use

language in real-world situations. The study also supports (Ghafar and Amin's, 2022:290) finding that resource availability and Effective teaching is further hindered by large class sizes, inadequate audio-visual aids, and infrastructure deficiencies (Almadhady and Muhsen, 2024:10; Rashid, 2016:20).

Language acquisition outcomes are significantly influenced by cultural attitudes as well. This study's finding that reading and writing are preferred above speaking and listening is in line with (Yeaqub's ,2018:9) observation that passive language skills are frequently given priority in Iraqi classrooms. Students in class demonstrate lower ability to learn English when they have restricted opportunities to use the language outside school according to the findings of (Almadhady and Muhsen, 2024:11).Cultural biases together with mother tongue usage in classrooms prevent students from achieving oral fluency while limiting their access to real-world English practice (Ghafar & Amin, 2022:292). Students face additional barriers to developing speaking skills because they experience psychological impacts in this environment such as reduced self-assurance and fear of errors.

This study concludes that extensive English revisions represent a vital requirement. The study demonstrates that rural regions in Iraq do not provide effective language instruction for their learners. The British Council (2024) recommends three main strategies to enhance educational outcomes: implementing communicative and learner-centered approaches, strengthening teacher training programs and using resources more wisely. The English language teaching frameworks can address psychological and emotional barriers experienced by students during conflict and

displacement through the inclusion of psycho-social support services.

The study results demonstrate the complex network of linguistic, educational, socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological components which act as obstacles for English learning in rural Iraq. An all-encompassing approach which combines curriculum modifications with teacher development and infrastructure funding and community support is essential to establish a supportive environment for students learning English.

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