



Issues and Challenges in Teaching English as a Third Language in Private Schools in Jordan

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Abstract

This study highlights issues and challenges in learning English as a third language in Jordan. The English language ranks first in the world in terms of studying it as a second foreign language. The official language of Jordan is Arabic; hence it becomes difficult for Jordanians to acquire English as a language for communication. The study is based on primary data by administering 400 questionnaires to 25 private schools in Amman, Jordan, out of which 200 questionnaires each were distributed to teachers and students of the schools under study. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and percentage were used to test the effect of teaching- learning English as a third language. One-Sample Test was used to test the hypothesis.

Keywords: English Language, Jordan, Third Language, Private Schools

Introduction

The English language ranks first in the world in terms of studying it as a second foreign language in most countries to expand the student's concepts or the teacher's understanding and awareness of the world around him. Each country has its method and educational system for teaching English but with the openness of the world and societal development.

There is competition among countries in terms of language. Some countries impose their language on developing and neighboring countries to become the country's second language or for people who want to

live in their country. Some countries have introduced new languages in developing countries to become the country's language after the mother tongue, like French and German. In other languages where multilingualism has become a norm globally for humans to communicate efficiently in a world with many migrant populations (Stein-Smith, 2016). This is basically due to the various factors that motivate people to learn a new language, such as securing a good job or learning more than two languages in school as per the education policies of the home country (Cabrelli and Wrembel, 2016). One of the reasons for the increase in communication is technology development (Leskovec, Kleinberg, and Faloutsos, 2007).

The linguistic backdrop is becoming more complex, leading to scientific research on language development in monolingual countries until a few decades ago and the influence of the cross-linguistic interactions in language development (Odlin, 1989). The importance is given to 'Trilingualism,' and the recent research studies focus on examining the process by which the third language acquisition takes place. They show that third language acquisition is different from first or second language acquisition (Cabrelli and Wrembel, 2016). Phonetics or phonology in third language acquisition has been the focus of some researchers (Hammarberg, 1997; Wrembel, 2015c). Earlier research studies focused on lexis and grammar in L2 acquisition, and as L3 is a new concept, there were not many studies until a few decades ago on the acquisition of L3. When the European Union was formed, the EU government proposed that the EU citizens be proficient in three European Languages. Later, it was made mandatory that one of the languages learned by the EU citizen must be an international language other than English. At the same time, another must be the neighboring country's language (cf. White Paper on Education and Training, 1995). Also, the world suffers from multiple problems in a language where there is a difficulty due to the spread of many languages. It is not easy to learn all languages, and the presence of language problems.

This study highlights issues and challenges in learning English as a third language in Jordan. The official language of Jordan is Arabic. Hence it becomes difficult for Jordanians to acquire English as a language for communication. For the study, both learning and teaching are considered as the researcher throws light on sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and educational aspects of third language acquisition. But due importance is given to the Jordanian educational aspects while acquiring English as a third language considering the demography of the learner. Hence, it is essential to assess issues and challenges in learning English as a third language in Jordan.

Review of Literature

Acquiring English as a third language

Research on trilingualism and multilingualism has seen significant growth in the last decade, reflecting awareness of the need to differentiate trilingualism from bilingualism conceptually. The acquisition of English as a third language shares many characteristics with English as L2, but it also presents differences. Third language acquisition of English is a more complex phenomenon than second language acquisition (SLA) because, apart from all the individual and social factors that affect the latter, the process, and product of acquiring a second language can themselves potentially influence the acquisition of a third.

The processes used in TLA may be very similar to those used by L2 learners, but, as Clyne(1997:113) points out, “the additional language complicates the operations of the processes.” Third language learners have more experience at their disposal than the second languages and have been found to present more strategies and a higher level of metalinguistic awareness (Jasone Cenoz and Ulrike Jessner, 2000). Third language learners have already acquired two other languages, either simultaneously or consecutively, as first or first and second languages. Therefore the knowledge of these two languages and the experience of the acquisition process of another language are likely to influence the acquisition of a third language (Jasone Cenoz and Charlotte Hoffmann, 2003).

The acquisition of English as a third language also raises issues such as the contextual and linguistic factors influencing multilingual and linguistic competence. The contextual factors refer to L1, L2, and L3 in both instructional and natural setting contexts or either a natural or formal educational context. According to Cenoz (2000), we need to consider the contextual setting where these languages are learned and used, the linguistic typology, and the socio-cultural status of the languages involved. It is believed that this aspect will influence the development of learners’ spoken and written communicative production as it is deeply dependent on the quality and quantity of the target language input.

Research on multilingualism acquisition has shown that the relationship between languages being learned as far as linguistic typology is concerned constitutes another factor affecting third language acquisition. Linguistic typology has proved to be influential in choosing the source languages. Speakers borrow more terms from the language that is typologically closer to the target language or the language that is perceived as typologically closer (Cenoz,2001).

Whereas according to Ringbom (1987), it has also been suggested that transfer is more likely from the first language than from later-learned languages, these effects seem to be less powerful than the typological similarity between the languages, as there is evidence for cross-linguistic transfer in multilingual acquisition when the languages involved are similar concerning phonetic structure, vocabulary and syntax (Mohle, 1989; Singleton, 1987, Cenoz, 1998).

Less frequently discussed in the literature are instances of transfer of meaning between non–native languages. According to Ringbom (1986), the transfer of meaning may be restricted to the native language. This influence requires “considerable fluency and automatization in the language transfer occurs.” He further observes that transfer of meaning could also occur from a second language, provided the learner’s proficiency level is sufficiently advanced. Between two typologically close languages, having the role of the interlanguage and target language, evidence of transfer of form is more likely than evidence of transfer of meaning

The educational aspects of the acquisition of English as a third language differ from those of English as a second language, too, and have more implications regarding the optimal age for the introduction of different languages and the desired level of proficiency in each. Also, according to Jasone Cenoz and Ulrike Jessner

(2000), another distinction between acquiring an L2 and L3 is related to terminology. In talking about L1 and L2, it is implicitly assumed that L1 is the dominant language and that the level of proficiency in L2 must necessarily be lower than in L1. When a third language is acquired, however, the chronological order in which the three languages have been learned does not necessarily correspond to the frequency of use or the level of competence of the trilingual speaker.

In most multicultural societies, languages have different statuses and roles and are used for various functional purposes. The socio-cultural context in which languages are learned affects acquiring a third language, as Safont (2005) reported. Nunan and Lam (1998) have proposed four educational programmes based on languages' cultural and educational position in society, promoting or not the multicultural acquisition and use.

Objectives of the Study

To identify the issues and challenges in teaching English as a third language in private schools in Jordan

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant influence of English as a third language in schools in Amman, Jordan.

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Research Methodology Data Collection

The study is based on primary data. Primary data was collected by administering 400 questionnaires to 25 private schools in Amman, Jordan out of which 200 questionnaires each were distributed to teachers and students of the schools under study. Data were subjected to inferential statistics to conclude the collected data by testing the hypotheses.

Area of Research

The scope of the study includes assessing learning and teaching English as a third language in private schools in Jordan.

Sampling Technique

In this study, the technique of Random Convenience Sampling was used.

Sample Size

The total number of respondents considered for the study was 400 to assess teaching- learning English as a third language in Jordan. The students selected for the study were from classes 7 to 10.

Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis is carried out using two ways: qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS. The qualitative analysis aimed at assessing teaching-learning English as a third language in Jordan. The quantitative analysis applies various statistical tools in finding out the study's outcome, i.e., Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and percentage were used to test the effect of teaching-learning English as a third language. One-Sample Test was used to test the hypothesis

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Issues and Challenges in learning English as a Third Language

Table 1: Issues and Challenges in learning English as a Third Language

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Society only supports learning of regional language	-	39 (13.4%)	71 (24.5%)	144 (49.7%)	36 (12.4%)
School language policy is not fully reinforced	3 (1.0%)	20 (6.9%)	62 (21.4%)	163 (56.2%)	42 (14.5%)
Most learners commonly use regional language in school, thus affecting the learning of English	-	29 (10.0%)	72 (24.8%)	129 (44.5%)	60 (20.7%)
Learning English is not given importance in Jordan	-	19 (6.6%)	87 (30.0%)	134 (46.2%)	50 (17.2%)
My family does not encourage learning English as a third language	-	31 (10.7%)	86 (29.7%)	105 (36.2%)	68 (23.4%)
Religious barriers do not allow me to learn English	-	3 (1.0%)	93 (32.1%)	143 (49.3%)	51 (17.6%)
The environment is the leading cause of the problems in learning English	-	20 (6.9%)	55 (19.0%)	134 (46.2%)	81 (27.9%)
The teachers are not competent enough to teach English	-	14 (4.8%)	86 (29.7%)	156 (53.8%)	34 (11.7%)
Pronunciation and speaking are the main complexities I face while learning English	-	15 (5.2%)	87 (30.0%)	153 (52.8%)	35 (12.1%)
The teachers are not alert in motivating students to learn English	-	24 (8.3%)	76 (26.2%)	126 (43.4%)	64 (22.1%)

English is not being equally imparted to girls because their families do not encourage learning of English	-	28 (9,7%)	58 (20.0%)	175 (60.3%)	29 (10.0%)
As a girl, I am encouraged to learn English from school in comparison to the boys	-	27 (9.3%)	103 (35.5%)	127 (43.8%)	33 (11.4%)
The schools located in rural areas do not have competent teachers to teach professional English	-	29 (10.0%)	76 (26.2%)	142 (49.0%)	43 (14.8%)
The schools located in urban areas have competent teachers to teach professional English	2 (0.7%)	19 (6.6%)	106 (36.6%)	133 (45.9%)	30 (10.3%)

Source: Primary Source, Compiled by the Researcher

The table shows respondents' opinions concerning issues and challenges in learning English as a third language. 144 respondents (49.7%) agreed with the statement that society only supports learning the regional language. One hundred sixty-three respondents (56.2%) stated that school language policy is not fully reinforced. 129 respondents (44.5%) agreed that most learners commonly use regional language in school, thus affecting their learning of English. 134 respondents (46.2%) agreed with the statement that learning English is not given importance in Jordan. 105 respondents (36.2%) agreed with the statement that their family does not encourage learning English as a third language. 143 respondents (49.3%) agreed with the statement that religious barriers do not allow me to learn English. 134 respondents (46.2%) with the statement that environment is the leading cause of learning English problems.

156 respondents (53.8%) agreed with the statement that teachers are not competent enough to teach English. 153 respondents (52.8%) agreed with the statement that pronunciation and speaking are the main complexities they face while learning English. 126 respondents (43.4%) agreed with the statement that teachers are not alert in motivating students to learn English. 175 respondents (60.3%) with the statement that English is not being equally imparted to girls because their families do not encourage the learning of English. 127 respondents (43.8%) agreed with the statement that as a girl, they were encouraged to learn English from school in comparison to the boys. 142 respondents (49%) agreed with the statement that schools located in rural areas do not have competent teachers to teach professional English. 133 respondents (45.9%) agreed with the statement that schools located in urban areas have competent teachers to teach professional English.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Statements	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Society only supports learning of regional language	290	3.61	.051	.870
School language policy is not fully reinforced	290	3.76	.048	.821

Most learners commonly use regional language in school, thus affecting the learning of English	290	3.76	.053	.894
Learning English is not given importance in Jordan	290	3.74	.048	.818
My family does not encourage learning English as a third language	290	3.72	.055	.941
Religious barriers do not allow me to learn English	290	3.83	.042	.716
The environment is the leading cause of the problems in learning English	290	3.95	.051	.863
The teachers are not competent enough to teach English	290	3.72	.043	.730
Pronunciation and speaking are the main complexities I face while learning English	290	3.72	.044	.741
The teachers are not alert in motivating students to learn English	290	3.79	.052	.880
English is not being equally imparted to girls because their families do not encourage learning of English	290	3.71	.046	.776
As a girl, I am encouraged to learn English from school in comparison to the boys	290	3.57	.048	.813
The schools located in rural areas do not have competent teachers to teach professional English	290	3.69	.050	.845
The schools located in urban areas have competent teachers to teach professional English	290	3.59	.046	.790

Source: Primary Source, Compiled by the Researcher

The table shows the descriptive statistics of the respondents' opinions concerning issues and challenges in learning English as a third language. The mean and standard deviation of the society only supports the learning of regional language were 3.61 and 0.870, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the school language policy was not fully reinforced was

3.76 and 0.821, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the most learners who commonly use regional language in school, thus affecting the learning of English, was 3.76 and 0.894, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the respondents who learned English is not important in Jordan were 3.74 and 0.818, respectively.

The mean and standard deviation of the respondents' family does not encourage learning English as a third language was 3.72 and 0.941, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the religious barriers that do not allow me to learn English were 3.83 and 0.716, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the Environment as the leading cause of the problems in learning English were 3.95 and 0.863, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the teachers who are not competent enough to teach English were 3.72 and 0.730, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the pronunciation and speaking are the main

complexities I faced while learning English were 3.72 and 0.741, respectively.

The mean and standard deviation of the teachers who are not alert in motivating students to learn English was 3.79 and 0.880, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the English is not being equally imparted to girls because their families do not encourage learning of English was 3.71 and 0.776, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of a girl encouraged to learn English from school compared to the boys was 3.57 and 0.813, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the schools in rural areas that do not have competent teachers to teach professional English was 3.69 and 0.845, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the urban schools with competent teachers to teach professional English were 3.59 and 0.790, respectively.

Testing of Hypothesis:

H₀₁: There is no significant influence of English as a third language in schools in Amman, Jordan.

H₁: There is a significant influence of English as a third language in schools in Amman, Jordan.

Table 3: One-Sample Test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
English Language	290	3.8197	.42717	.02508

	Test Value = 3.4					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
English Language	16.734	289	.000	.41975	.3704	.4691

When a one-sample t-test was performed to determine the significant influence of the English language as a third language in schools in Amman, Jordan, taking 3.4 as standard, it was found that the observed mean 3.8197. 't' value of 16.734 was found to be significant with a p-value of **.000 level**. In other words, **there is a significant influence of the English language as a third language in schools in Amman, Jordan. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.**

Conclusion

In Jordan, the English learning process is considered a crucial challenge. Although Jordanian students are taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at both the school level and higher education institutions, they still find it challenging to master. Learning a foreign language is often a difficult process, as it takes a long period to acquire a language besides one's mother tongue. The study aims to explore teaching and learning English as a third language in Amman City, Jordan. It was found that there is a significant influence of the English language as a third language in schools in Amman, Jordan, and challenges in teaching-learning of

English as a third language in schools of Jordan. English is the leading foreign language enjoying a prestigious position in many countries, and English is widely taught as a foreign language in the country. Despite being exposed to English instruction for a long time at different levels, the reasons for the poor performance have long been a matter of discussion in education. Jordan should hence create a relevant, manageable, and recognized certification system for language competence, which would recognize the importance of multilingualism and the difficulties displaced people face in providing verifiable evidence of their linguistic competence.

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