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Difficulties Faced by EFL Students in Learning and Teaching English as Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the difficulties encountered the EFL Learners in learning and teaching English language. It tried to find solutions to these problems by developing new techniques and effective teaching methods that enhance learning and teaching process in English. The study made it necessary to combine the descriptive method, conducted in designing, testing and discussing the instruments used in the present study. The researcher used questionnaires for EFL Teachers as the main instrument in this study. The sample investigated in this study composed of thirty EFL Teachers who work at Zawia University, Faculties of Education. Department of English. The data obtained from the EFL teachers' questionnaires have been analyzed and discussed. The findings revealed that EFL students faced difficulties in learning and teaching English.

The main reasons behind these obstacles are due to the lack of students' language skills and language competence.

It also found that the ineffective teachers' method and the resources used by EFL teachers with no interest, could hinder the students from learning English language appropriately.

Finally, a sets of recommendations have been suggested for further studies.

الصعوبات التي تواجه طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية في تعليم وتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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المخلص:

تناولت هذه الدراسة الصعوبات التي تواجه الطلاب في تعليم وتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وحاولت إيجاد حلول لهذه المشكلات من خلال تطوير تقنيات جديدة وطرق تدريس فعالة تعزز عملية التعليم والتعلم باللغة الإنجليزية. وقد استخدمت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، حيث تم تصميم واختبار ومناقشة الأدوات المستخدمة في الدراسة الحالية. استخدم الباحث استبيانات لي معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كأداة رئيسية في هذه الدراسة. تكونت العينة في هذه الدراسة من ثلاثين معلماً للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، يعملون في كليات التربية. قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة الزاوية. لقد تم تحليل ومناقشة البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها من استبيانات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية والدراسات المتعلقة بهذه الدراسة من مختلف المصادر والمراجع.

وجاءت نتائج الدراسة على النحو التالي:

واجه طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية صعوبات في تعلم وتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية.

وتعود الأسباب الرئيسية وراء هذه العقبات إلى نقص المهارات اللغوية لدى الطلاب والكفاءة اللغوية. كما وجدت أن أسلوب المعلمين وطرق التدريس غير الفعال والموارد المستخدمة من قبل معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية دون أي اهتمام، ادي الي هذه الصعوبات في تعليم وتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بطريقة فعالة. ومن ثم تم اقتراح مجموعة من التوصيات لمزيد من الدراسات المستقبلية. وأوصى الباحث بضرورة أن يكون معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية مؤهلين تأهيلاً عالياً ومدرّبين تدريباً جيداً في تدريس وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. تصميم

واستخدام منهج جيد يلعب دورًا حيويًا في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. استخدام أساليب التدريس الفعالة والتقنيات الجديدة في تعلم وتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية من قبل معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. يجب على معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية استخدام استراتيجيات تعليمية تناسب الطرق التي يتعلم بها الطلاب بشكل أكثر فعالية.

1. Introduction

English has become most widely spread as a language of international communication. That means we no longer speak only of the nature of the language, but of its function as well. People also learn English to have good contact with modern sciences and technology, learning English help learners to have a closer look at the native speaker's culture and penetrate rich areas and experience lying beyond his/her mother tongue communication (Murcid, 1987).

The one point on which academic agreement can be said to exist is that the vast bulk of the problems associated with student learning can be directly related back to the nature of the curriculum or method of teaching and are not due to any lack of requisite intelligence or innate ability on the part of our students but often overlooked fact that many problems in learning are not due to intrinsic causes such as lack of cognitive ability, perceptual impairment, learning disability, deficiencies in memory and attention or poor motivation, instead, difficulties are caused by ineffective or insufficient teaching, or by curriculum content that is some way inappropriate (Wood, 2006).

The researcher investigates these problems and tries to find solutions to the main obstacles that stand behind learning and teaching English language.

1.1 Statement of the problems

It is observed that most of the students encountered a lot of problems in learning and teaching English as a foreign language. These difficulties concern with, the students 'lack of linguistic abilities, language skills and competence, and teachers' methods and curriculum.

1.2 Objectives

This research paper aims at:

1. investigating the difficulties that the students face in learning and teaching process in English language.
2. exploring new techniques that the teachers can use in order to meet the needs of the students in learning and teaching process.
3. finding out solutions that help the students in learning English.
4. implementing effective teaching methods and learning styles for both teachers and students.

1.3 Questions of the study

This study tries to find answers to the following questions:

- 1- Does the teacher know enough of the language to use the method?
- 2- Has the teacher the necessary teaching skills to use the method? Is he clear on language-teaching principles and procedures?
- 3- Is he able to make the necessary adaptation of the texts? Does he know how to prepare drills and assignments?
- 4- Does the method rely on heavily ostensive procedure? Is the teacher skilled in using these?
- 5- Is he willing to use them, or are they under his dignity? Is the teacher's professional training oriented towards a different level from the one at which he is teaching?
- 6- Is the curriculum itself can contribute to difficulties in learning and teaching?
- 7- Is the curriculum presenting concepts that are pitched too far ahead of the cognitive level of students?
- 8- Is the curriculum using topics and materials that are of no interest or relevance to students of that age?

1.4 Significance of the study

This study is more important for students and teachers, educators and curriculum designers. It is also an attempt to discuss and present the educational issues that deal with difficulties in learning and teaching of English as a foreign language. It also an attempt to find solutions to these problems which concern learning and teaching difficulties in English language.

1.5 Limitation of the study

This study is limited to investigate the difficulties encountered by students in learning and teaching English as a foreign language.

The study is conducted at Faculty of Education, Nasir, Department of English, Zawia University, the place where the researcher works at.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Difficulties in teaching and learning English

There are many complex factors, physical, psychological, economic and sociological which account for each child's school performance, the basic cause of failures is the schooling process itself. Student don't inter school as failures. When students 'fail', it is the practice which teachers and administrators individually and collectively employ that they are fault. This is not to suggest that certain characteristics of student don't predispose them to encounter difficulties in learning. Features such as sensory impairment, low intelligence development delay, lack of support from home, frequent absence and so forth, can naturally cause difficulties.

It can be said that although learner's characteristics account for some 50 percent of the variance in school achievement, another 30 percent is accounted for the quality of the teaching they receive, very little can be done to modify most characteristics of learners (such as home background, poverty, health disability, intelligence), but in contrast, quality of teaching can be improved with obvious benefits for all students (Wood, 2006).

2.1.1 Curriculum as a source of difficulties

The curriculum itself can contribute to difficulties in learning by :

- a. Presenting concepts that are pitched too far ahead of the cognitive level of students.
- b. Moving forward too quickly compared to student's rate of learning.
- c. Using topics and materials that are of no interest or relevance to students of that age.
- d. Overloading the program with too much content studies are made to problems. (Wood, 2006).

2.1.2 Teaching methods as a source of difficulties

Perhaps even more than curriculum content, the teaching methods and resources used by teachers can contribute significantly to learning problems. For examples, a teacher may:

- Use instructional strategies that are not suited to the ways in which students learn most effectively.
- Adopt an approach that is too unstructured and informal for some students,
- or unsuitable for achieving certain learning objectives.
- Provide too few practical activities to engage and hold student's attention.
- Create insufficient opportunities for students to acquire knowledge and skills to mastery level before moving onto new topics.
- Review and revise previously taught material, and information and communication technology.
- Manage time inefficiently, often leaving tasks unfinished.
- Fail to accommodate educationally relevant differences among learners.
- Communicate poorly with the students when instructing or when asking or answering questions.
- Talk too much.
- Listen to students too little.

All the factors above may cause or exacerbate learning difficulties. Students who begin to have difficulties soon lose confidence and may give up any attempt to improve. Teachers may regard them as 'problem learner and lower their expectation regarding the student's potential. If the above points identify poor teaching leading to learning difficulties, what is good teaching? And how does good teaching minimize learning problems? Two sources of information are available to help answering these questions; student's perceptions of teachers and classroom research. (Wood, 2006).

2.2 Learning styles in English

The ways in which an individual characteristically acquires, retains and retrieves information are collectively termed the individual's learning style (Murrel, 2000).

Mismatches often occur between the learning styles of students in a language class and the teaching style of the instructor with

unfortunate effects on the quality of the students' learning and on their attitudes towards the class and the subject (Murrel, 2000).

Studies show that matching teaching style to learning styles can significantly enhance academic achievement, student attitude and behavior at primary and secondary school level and especially in foreign language instruction. This is not to say that the best thing one can do for one's student is to use their preferred modes of instruction exclusively. Students will inevitably be called up on to deal with problems and challenges that require the use of their less preferred modes and so should regularly be given practice in the use of those modes (Lessard, 1997).

2.15 Teaching style in English

Teaching styles are made up of the methods and approaches with which teachers feel most comfortable; if they tried to change to completely different approaches they would be forced to work entirely with unfamiliar awkward and uncomfortable methods, probably with disastrous results a wide variety of learning styles need not make drastic changes in their instructional approach. (Oxford, 1993).

2.15.1 Teacher and Methods of teaching English

A good teacher can be ineffectual with poor method. The suitability of a language teacher to the method is a matter of his:

1) Language Skills:

Does the teacher know enough of the language to use the method? If the method teaches the spoken language and does not include recording, is the teacher's pronunciation alone is good enough to serve as a model? If it is not, is the phonetics part of a course and the availability of recordings may take precedence over the features of the method? Of course, we should expect the teacher to know he is teaching. But this is not always the case and it is not a simple either/or question. It is not sufficient that he should know the language well in order to teach it. If it is, the best language teacher would be native speakers with high degrees in their own language and its literature. Such persons have sometimes turned out to be not the best teachers of their mother tongue as a foreign language. What is important is a mastery of the language to the level at which it is being taught. Some outstanding elementary language teachers can never compete with a native speaker in range of vocabulary, but they may have no need to

do so. They may have a good pronunciation, a mastery of structure, speak it, fluency and on top of this be able to out-teach some of the best native speakers (Hargreave, 1950).

2) Professional Skills:

Has the teacher the necessary teaching skills to use the method? Is he clear on language-teaching principles and procedures? Is he able to make the necessary adaptation of the texts? Does he know how to prepare drills and assignments? Is the method relying on heavily ostensive procedure? Is the teacher skilled in using these? Is he willing to use them, or are they under his dignity? Is the teacher's professional training oriented towards a different level from the one at which he is teaching? If he has few qualifications, this does not mean that he should be teaching at an elementary level. It has even been suggested that the contrary is the case that none but the most experienced and most skilled teachers of beginners should know phonetics, have a keen ear, good pronunciation, and intimate acquaintance with the foreign country and its people and be able to teach what they know efficiently and with enthusiasm. Only mature and experienced teachers can do this. Elementary language teaching, however, has often been considered as a period "penal servitude" to be endured until the teacher has acquired sufficient seniority and reputation to be allowed to teach what he really wants – literature grammar; textual criticism and the like.

3) Teaching load: Has the teacher the time to use the method? Some methods require more preparations than others. The less preparation done by the method, the more will have to be done by the teacher and the more time will he need to devote to the preparation of his lessons. But teachers with six or more hours a day of elementary language teaching may not have sufficient time to prepare each lesson.

The method may be an excellent and the teachers employing it are highly skilled in teaching and using of the language; yet, there may not be enough time to undertake the amount of lesson preparation which the method requires of the teacher. In such situations, a less perfect method which does more teaching may be what is needed. (Dunkel, 1978).

2.18 Student's views of good teaching

- Students tend to describe a good teacher as one who:
- helps you with your work.

- takes time to explain things.
- explains clearly so you can understand.
- knows what he or she is talking about.
- likes teaching his or her subject.
- tell you how you are doing.
- makes lesson enjoyable.
- is friendly and easy to get along with.
- is fair and straight forward.
- cares about you, understand you and encourage you.
- makes you feel clever.
- is always ready to listen; allows you to have your say.
- has a sense of humor?
- controls the class well.
- is forgiving.

It is interesting to note that student's perceptions of good teaching and a good teacher include both an instructional skills dimension and a humanistic, emphatic and caring dimension; students perceive both to be important in helping them learn. (Wood, 2006).

3.Methodology

This paper used descriptive method to investigate and handle these difficulties that encountered by the students in learning and teaching English as a foreign language. A descriptive study is systematic, fixed, format and structured. (Kothari,2004).

The researcher chooses the questionnaire which is considered to be a reliable and valid way of collecting data.

3.1 Sample of the study

The participants of this study are EFL Teachers at University of Zawia, Faculties of Education, English Department.

The sample investigated in this study is composed of 30 teachers of English. The respondents were asked and informed to participate in this study. The aims of the study were clearly shown.

3.2 Instruments

Questionnaires for teachers of English has been used as a main instrument to collect the data, in which this study was based on. The questionnaires contained ten items which focused on the study objectives that concerned the problems faced students in learning and teaching English. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to the

teachers of English to complete them by selecting appropriate response category which considered appropriate, regarding obstacles in learning and teaching English language.

4. Results

The researcher presents and overviews analysis of data collection which have been gathered, and the results obtained from the teachers' questionnaires.

4.1 EFL Teachers 'questionnaires results

1.EFL students face difficulties in learning English due to the lack of language skills and linguistic competence.

Table (4.1) (Results of item1).

Option	Percent	Frequency
Neither	10 %	3
Strongly disagree	6 %	2
Disagree	13%	4
Agree	23 %	7
Strongly agree	46%	14
Total	100.0	30

This table shows the EFL teachers' results, that 46% and 23% have chosen (strongly agree and agree option), whereas the others selected (strongly disagree, neither, disagree) that is (6%, 13%, 10%).

This result emphasized that the students surely met with learning difficulties.

2.Teaching English language skills (listening, speaking, writing and reading) will be effective with the use of effective methods.

Table (4.2) (Results of item 2):

Option	Percent	Frequency
Neither	-	-
Strongly disagree	-	-
Disagree	-	-
Agree	33 %	10
Strongly agree	67%	20
Total	100.0	30

As we can see from the table above, that 20 teachers obtained (67%), and 10 teachers got (33%). The others options were left empty.

As the result of this item, it can be said that the mastering of language skills could be effective if followed by effective teaching methods.

3. A good teacher can be ineffectual with poor method.

Table (4.3) (Results of item 3).

Option	Percent	Frequency
Neither	-	-
Strongly disagree	16%	5
Disagree	10.5%	3
Agree	33.5 %	10
Strongly agree	40%	12
Total	100.0	30

In this result, it can be noticed that twelve and ten teachers have selected the options (strongly agree, agree). (40 %,33.5 %).

This item assured that the outstanding teacher can deal with poor method and consolidate teaching process effectively even if with poor method.

Whereas the lowest rates of degree of percentage (16% and 10.5%) confirmed that a teacher should be highly qualified and well-trained to use the method.

4. The teaching methods and resources used by EFL teachers can contribute significantly to learning problems.

Table (4.4) (Results of item 4).

Option	Percent	Frequency
Neither	6.5%	2
Strongly disagree	10%	3
Disagree	20.5%	6
Agree	26.5 %	8
Strongly agree	36.5%	11
Total	100.0	30

Based on the result of this item, eight and eleven participants got the highest percentage (36.5% & 26.5%). This means that sometimes teaching methods and syllabus are to some extent can lead to learning difficulties.

The others participants obtained the lowest percentage (20.5%,10%,6.5%) which stated that they are not aware of teaching methods enough in their learning and teaching process.

5. Students prefer teachers who use simple and effective lessons in the classroom.

Table (4.5) (Results of item 5).

Option	Percent	Frequency
Neither	6.5%	2
Strongly disagree	16.5%	5
Disagree	13.5%	4
Agree	23.%	7
Strongly agree	40.5%	12
Total	100.0	30

As the results of the above table, the majority of the participants have gained (40%&23%) percentage, whereas the others respondents got the low degree of percentage. This proves that simple teaching with simple lessons can facilitate learning effectively. The lowest degrees of percentage (6.5% -16.5%-13.5%) come on the contrary which is completely different.

6. The curriculum itself can contribute to difficulties in learning and teaching English.

Table (4.6) (Results of item 6).

Option	Percent	Frequency
Neither	-	-
Strongly disagree	20.5%	6
Disagree	10 %	3
Agree	26.%	8
Strongly agree	43.5%	13
Total	100.0	30

This item, indicates that the majority of the respondents have obtained the highest degree of percentage (43.5%&26.%).This shows that the curriculum sometimes leads to learning difficulties. Besides the lowest degrees of percentage (20.5% and 10%) which indicate the opposite views of the others participants.

7. Poor teaching leads to learning problems.

Table (4.7) (Results of item 7).

Option	Percent	Frequency
Neither	-	-
Strongly disagree	-	-
Disagree	-	-
Agree	40.0%	12
Strongly agree	60%	18
Total	100.0	30

In this result, it is clear that all the participants have selected the positive options. (60% & 40%) Which come in favor of the study main objective that poor teaching can leads to learning problems.

8. In my view, making a good design of the syllabus plays a very important role in learning English language.

Table (4.8) (Results of item 8).

Option	Percent	Frequency
Neither	3%	1
Strongly disagree	10%	3
Disagree	3%	1
Agree	40%	12
Strongly agree	43.5%	13
Total	100.0	30

This item shows the responses of the EFL teachers in choosing the positive options (40%&43%), whereas the rest of the participants achieved the negative options (3%,10%,3%).

9. Teachers who teach wrong syllabus will make a negative impression on students.

Table (4.9) (Results of item 9).

Option	Percent	Frequency
Neither	-	-
Strongly disagree	6.5%	2
Disagree	3%	1
Agree	33.5%	10
Strongly agree	56.5%	17
Total	100.0	30

The results of this item emphasizes that the majority of the participants have reached the positive options (56.5% &33.5), whereas the others got the negative options (6.5% % and 3%).

10. Using topics and materials that are of no interest or relevance to students' age or level can cause learning difficulties.

Table (4.10) (Results of item 10).

Option	Percent	Frequency
Neither	6.5%	2
Strongly disagree	16.5%	5
Disagree	13.5%	4
Agree	26.5%	8
Strongly agree	36.5%	11
Total	100.0	30

This result as shown in the table, concludes that most of the participants have chosen the options (strongly agree & agree) (36.5% & 26.5). On the contrary the other respondents selected the options that involve the lowest rate of the percentage. (6.5%, 16%, 13.5).

4.2 Results and Discussion

This section is devoted to the analysis, presentation, and interpretation of the data collected via EFL teachers' questionnaire and the related review of literature.

Based on the findings of the study teacher's questionnaires and related studies all the results came in favor of the study objectives and questions which mentioned before. The results showed that the learners of English encountered difficulties in learning and teaching English in many factors.

One important factor, that the majority of the students face problems that concerning teacher's methods and the resources used by the teachers that involved in the syllabus, which caused big obstacles in learning and teaching English. Another issues related to the students 'lack of the language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. As a result of poor teaching and using syllabus with no interest which is far pitched up on the students 'cognitive ability.

All the factors above may cause or exacerbate learning difficulties. Students who begin to have difficulties soon lose confidence and may give up any attempt to improve. Teachers may regard them as 'problem learner and lower their expectation regarding the student's potential. It is interesting to note that student's perceptions of good teaching and a good teacher include both an

instructional skills dimension and a humanistic, emphatic and caring dimension; students perceive both to be important in helping them learn.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary

This paper investigated the difficulties encountered by the students in learning and teaching English.

The study used the descriptive method that is conducted in designing, testing and discussing the instruments used in the present study.

The researcher adopted a questionnaire for EFL teachers as the main instrument in obtaining the results.

The findings of the study are as follows:

EFL students faced difficulties in learning and teaching English.

The main reasons behind these obstacles are due to the lack of students' language skills and language competence.

It also found that the ineffective teachers' method and the resources used by EFL teachers with no interest, could hinder the students from learning English language appropriately.

5.2 Recommendations

The researcher recommends that:

1-EFL teachers must be highly qualified and well-trained in teaching and learning English language.

2-Making a good design of the syllabus that play a vital role in learning English.

3-Using effective teaching methods and new techniques in learning and teaching English by EFL Teachers.

4. EFL Teachers should use instructional strategies that are suited to the ways in which students learn most effectively.

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