

*Full Length Research paper*

# Learning difficulties in English: Diagnosis and pedagogy in Saudi Arabia

Intakhab Alam Khan

King AbdulAziz University Community College, Jeddah-Saudi Arabia  
E-mail: [dr.intakhab@yahoo.com](mailto:dr.intakhab@yahoo.com)

Accepted 01 July, 2011

Teaching of English as a Foreign Language is always a challenging task. English in Saudi Arabia serves a very limited purpose. Yet, it is very important for social as well as technological development. Therefore, English language teaching in this country in particular catches attention of many researchers. Teaching of English in Saudi starts at the school level. Despite good overall planning, purposive curriculum, integrated textbooks, qualified teachers, achievement is below the expectations. Therefore, diagnostic studies should better be undertaken in different language areas and skills so that the teacher may know the types of the problems and the corresponding factors. Such attempts are expected to be helpful in possible evolution of some fruitful and compatible strategies in order to yield the maximum academic output. Pedagogues have different views regarding English Language Teaching which may occasionally involve translation from First language to the target language and vice versa. On the other hand, the idea of Communicative approach to Language Teaching (CALT) is also significant in order to focus the skills. However, Bilingual approach can also be used as an alternative strategy.

**Keywords:** EFL (English as a foreign language), ELT (English Language Teaching), diagnostic studies, Pedagogues, CALT (Communicative Approach to Language Teaching), strategies.

## INTRODUCTION

English is the '*Lingua Franca*' of the world. With the technological revolution and e-learning system English Language has emerged as one of the world's most important tools of formal communication in the present cyber and digital age. A very important reason for considering English as a global language is that the world's knowledge is usually preserved in English. It is a modern and fashionable language so most people use it. Thus, English is the most preferred language even in the regions where the local language is supposed to be as important as the culture. But, when it comes to the link language issue, it is English that deals with the issues of cross cultural communication.

Teaching of English as a foreign language is always difficult. When it comes to the places where English serves a very limited purpose, it becomes more crucial and painstaking to teach and learn. Teaching of English language in the Gulf region in general and Saudi Arabia in particular catches attention of many researchers and scholars especially when the issue is particularly related to the classroom situations.

Teaching of English at most technical colleges of Saudi Arabia serves two purposes: first, it strengthens the foundation of English and later lays the basis for Specific English which will be used in the years of the students' specialties such as business, health, computers etc. English teaching is taught even at the school levels, but it does not enjoy as much important part in the curriculum as in many other developing countries.

Despite a sound planning, purposive curriculum, suitable textbooks, qualified teachers and effective administration, the teaching-learning process sometimes seems to be ineffective especially the case of skill development is not found as satisfactory as it should be. In this connection, an investigation may be proved to be quite helpful towards finding out the actual causes, and evolution of some fruitful and compatible strategies of teaching English as a foreign language. It is usually believed that the poor result in English is mainly due to the traditional approach to teaching of English right from the school level. In this situation, the concept of Hybrid teaching can be proved to be at least of some help

especially when all the attempts to improve the situation of English turn futile or ineffective.

As mentioned above, English has been embraced by almost all nationalities and it is not limited any more to the nations like the UK and the USA because the number of the people who use English as a means of communication exceeds much more than the number of the people who speak it as their mother tongue. The case of India is the right example. There are many other nations in which English is going to play immensely important role in the overall development of the country. Saudi Arabia is one of them.

Pedagogues and language masters have different views regarding the teaching/learning of English. Some of them are of the opinion that teaching of English can be done only if we translate the target language into the mother-tongue, while the other group states that the teaching should be done the way first language is taught so that the skills may be focused. Some teachers say that the teaching of the aspects like words, meaning, structure, grammar etc. are more important than the skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. However, outcome based education should always be in focus.

Language teachers being the followers of different learning theories of psychology, have chosen few objectives, and suggested various approaches/methods/strategies such as oral approach, situational teaching, audio-lingual method, communicative approach, bilingual approach, the Neutral approach etc. for the achievement of language objectives. Most modern teachers support the idea of situational approach while there are still a few who teach following grammar-translation method.

## English Language Teaching Methods

There are many teaching methods which are used by a language teacher within the class in order to achieve the learning objectives that are the most important aspect of a unit lesson plan. The relevance of grammar-translation/direct method/audio-lingual approach/bilingual approach/communicative approach to language teaching or computer assisted English teaching depends on the objectives and the situation. Sometimes one method/approach can yield result, but in a different situation, it may completely fail. Therefore, it is sole responsibility of the English language teacher to opt for the most appropriate one, and if needed evolve a compatible strategy to teach effectively.

## The Research Context

Literature pertaining to English language teaching in general is available in bulk, but studies on the present research are quite rare. However, studies that are directly

or indirectly related to the proposed project have been reviewed in order to arrive at a place to conceive research hypotheses and design of the studies. The present review is a summary of some of the studies that frame the basis for the research and its various aspects:

Arab learners of English encounter problems in both speaking and writing. This fact has been clearly stated by many researchers, e.g. Abdul Haq (1982) and Harrison et al (1975). The students in Jordan, for example, learn English in their native country, where the native language is Arabic. Foreign language teachers have long been perplexed by a continuum of abundant psycho-linguistic theories. One approach is the traditional method to Second /foreign language teaching and learning. This embodied the grammar translation method which developed at the end of the eighteenth century in Germany, but later used in the rest of the bilingual world. The Second approach is the direct method that developed in the late nineteenth century as an alternative methodology when the grammar-translation method received a lot of criticism.

While reviewing the related studies/literature, it has been noticed that some work, mostly dissertation, have dealt with the Saudi acquisition of specific linguistic features of L2, such as Morpheme acquisition Order (Al-Afaleg, 1991), Temporal Conjunctions (Noor, 1993), English Derivational Morphology (Al-Qadi, 1992), Tense and Aspect (Farraj, 1995) and Second language Relative Clauses (Maghrabi, 1997), and Studies on the psycho-linguistic theories of language acquisition, specifically in relation to the Saudi learner of English do not seem to exist.

There are a lot of problems that confront Arab students in their course of studying the English language. In Saudi Arabia, since Saudis speak their native language at home and during their interaction with their friends, peers, and classmates, there is a bleak chance to learn English through day-to-day interaction. In one study conducted by Abdul Haq (1982), it was concluded that most Arab students usually fumble in their writing skills.

In his study, Abdul Haq (1982) also revealed that most English instructors and University officials complained about the continuous deterioration of the mastery in the English language among the students. Another study conducted by Zughoul (1984) confirmed the findings of Abdul Haq, and revealed that most Jordanian students enrolled in EFL classes have poor oral communication skills, as they usually commit gross lexical errors.

Similar problems were also reported in Sudan, as most students enrolled in English classes usually commit serious syntactic errors in the composition of English passages. Kambal (1980) noted that most students were weak in the following areas: tenses, verb structure, and subject-verb agreement. Several problems were also observed in the students' use of tenses, like tense substitution, tense sequence, tense marker, and uncertainty of perfect tenses (Kambal, 1980).

In an wide-scale study about the problems being faced by Arab students, Mukattash (1983) observed that these problems are categorized into two: First, most errors committed concerned with the gracious pronunciation, morphology, knowledge of the use of syntax, and spelling; Second, most Arab students have difficulty expressing themselves contentedly and competently either when faced with scholarly subjects or usual everyday issues.

Most studies conducted by Mukattash (1983), Suleiman (1983), Zughoul (1983,1984, 1987), and Ibrahim (1983) noted that Arab students' problems in learning English usually spring from the following reasons: a) school graduates have lack of information regarding the university or college they enrolled in; b) there is deficiency in the English language curricula offered by some schools and universities; c) dreadful teaching methodology; d) problems with proper language environments; and e) lack of personal impetus on the part of the students.

Because of the general problems encountered mostly by Arab students in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, among others, Suleiman (1983) contended that the pervading displeasure with the overall output of Arab learners in English subjects was to due poor essential principles in curriculum conception and design, insufficient in-classroom approaches, slow development in the students' communication skills, among many others.

One crucial reason why Arab students have difficulty learning the English language is the fact that English subjects are only studied in school, and that too in a very unprofessional manner as perceived by most educationalists. The focus on English is put when some sharp students get enrolled in the colleges and universities.

In Saudi Arabia, English teachers (at school levels) are usually Arabs, perhaps this is an advantage since they may be able to convey better their techniques in teaching since they can communicate with their students in their native Arabic language. The teacher usually gives instructions in written make instead of directly conveying them to their students (Al-Hazmi and Scholfield 2007). In assigning topics to students, the teacher demands that they be completed either inside their classroom or at home. As part of the teaching method in most Arab schools, teachers do not really necessitate their students to revise or modify their works.

The students are usually left alone in revising or making drafts of their own works without any guidelines (Al-Hazmi and Scholfield, 2007). This confirms most observations of researchers that teachers usually count on the personal interests of their students to learn. In some cases this practice might work as this could inculcate in the minds of the students the value of independence or self-reliance, but in most cases it would hamper the academic development of the students.

One of the observations is that teachers do not usually

follow up the works of their students, to check whether they have improved or not. There is also a common understanding or practice that giving remarks or comments on students' works is best reserved for pupils in lower ESL levels but not to those in higher levels (Asiri,1996). Such remarks are mostly limited to mechanics, grammar, and vocabulary.

As worthy as possible, teachers who may be invited to teach in Saudi Arabia should be native English speakers or L1. But being a native English speaker is not always a guarantee that one is qualified to teach in the oil-rich kingdom. Most academicians voiced out their worries regarding the unsystematic techniques being applied by most schools and universities in looking at the qualifications of applicants (Alosaimi, 2007). They warned that there are teachers who may be fluent in English but they lack the qualifications to teach ESL students.

Language teaching practice often assumes that most of the difficulties that learners face in the study of English are a consequence of the degree to which their native language differs from English (a contrastive analysis approach). It has been noticed that most English Language learners often commit linguistic mistakes of syntax and pronunciation as an effect of the interference of their L1. This is popularly known as L1 transfer or 'inter lingual error' (Dulay et al, 1982). In this connection, Lado (1957) observed, "...those elements that are similar to his native language will be simpler for him and those elements that are different will be difficult." Weinreich (1953) after an extensive study concluded about the mechanism of bilingual interference, "... are those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language."

Bista (2010) carried a survey and quoted, 'The fact that every one of the students from a variety of different countries spoke with accents created a degree of non intelligibility and made them laugh at one another. One student said, "I speak English but my Korean friend does not understand me because of my accent. I also do not understand Chinese spoken with an accent. I ask my Saudi friend before I reply to my professor. If we talk in Arabic first, and answer my professor, he says, 'very good,'

The following studies support the idea of mother-tongue interferences in different language aspects and skills: Ali (1969), Nair (1966), Singh and Srivastava (1986), Alam (1983), Chanchi (1972), Dulay et al (1982), Lee (1981), Wilkins (1972), Mark (1970), Kachru (1980), Bernstein (1974), Gardener (1960), Golding (1965) Khan (1995a, 1995b, 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2005a, 2005b, 2009,2011).

To throw light on the problems of Arab learners of English, the following are examples taken from different countries. In Jordan, for example, many studies have been conducted to investigate lexical, syntactical and phonological errors committed by Jordanian school

learners of English (Abdul Haq, 1982; Zughouli and Taminian, 1984). Abdul Haq (1982) states that "One of the linguistic areas in which students in the secondary cycle commit errors is the writing skill". He adds "There are general outcries about the continuous deterioration of the standards of English proficiency of students among school teachers, university instructors and all who are concerned with English language teaching". In support of A. Haq's view, Zughouli and Taminian (1984) found that "Jordanian EFL students commit serious lexical errors while communicating in English".

Kambal (1980) reported on three main types of error in the verb phrase: verb formation, tense, and subject-verb agreement. He discussed errors in tense under five categories: tense sequence, tense substitution, tense marker, deletion, and confusion of perfect tenses. With regard to subject-verb agreement, three types of error were identified. These involved the third-person singular marker used redundantly, and the incorrect form of the verb to be.

Like other Arabs, Egyptian learners of English also face problems. Some of these problems are summarised by Wahba (1998). Egyptian students face certain problems related to pronunciation. Some of these problems are related to stress, others are related to intonation. However, most of these problems can be attributed to the differences in pronunciation between English and Arabic.

In Yemen and Saudi Arabia, the situation is even worse because children start learning English in grade 7 (first preparatory class). Abbad (1988) admits the weakness of Yemen Arab learners of English: "in spite of the low proficiency level in English of most applicants, they are accepted into the department". This is what happens in most of the universities in Arab world countries. English language departments accept high school graduates without taking into consideration their proficiency level and whether or not they will be able to manage.

The weakness of English language learners in general has been attributed to various factors: lack of knowledge on the part of school graduates when they join the university, school and English language department curricula, teaching methodology, lack of the target language environment and the learners' motivation (Suleiman, 1983; Mukattash, 1983; Zughouli, 1983, 1984, 1987; Ibrahim, 1983).

Motivation also plays an important part in improving and developing the learners' communicative ability. Attitudinal studies conducted on Arab students, such as those of Zughouli and Taminian (1984), Salih (1980) and Harrison et al (1975) have consistently shown that Arab students are instrumentally motivated to learn English and that they are well aware of the utility of knowing English (Zughouli, 1987). This means that the main stimulus for learning English is instrumental, i.e. to achieve a goal, e.g. a career. It is true that some learners are interactively motivated, but they are in a minority. The proposed research is also going to attempt to study the

challenges due to many factors, and a possible solution for the effective teaching/learning at JCC in particular.

### **Factors Affecting the Teaching of English**

There are so many factors that affect the teaching-learning process in KSA. The students face problems in learning due to the reason that they don't study English in early stages and don't use English as medium of instruction except in certain higher education courses. Further, environment and family background play vital role in success of learning process. For example, countries like Saudi, where majority of the people are not well educated, have humble background in education. Moreover, the income of majority of the families may not be adequate. Hence, the parents are not interested in giving good education background or educational promotion to their children. In some cases, they are willing to engage the children in some jobs in order to earn money. This is the very basic reason and the affecting factor in teaching. Secondly, the infrastructure, viz. school buildings – class rooms, labs, etc. may not be quite adequate.

There can be many other socio-linguistic or pedagogic issues that can be found related to the teaching/learning of English in Saudi in general.

### **Remedial measures**

Having seen some of the very important factors and issues that can be found directly or indirectly related to the teaching/learning of English, the teacher can do something needful in order to cope with the issues:

### **Diagnostic analysis**

Diagnosis is not only important in medical profession. It is equally important in teaching field as well especially when the target group is not at home in the field of study.

### **Relevance of diagnosis of language problems**

Obviously, every caring teacher wants to do a good job for his or her students, which is why we talk about the target learner groups.

A proper diagnosis is important in medical field. It is done just to make an analogy, as a doctor will not prescribe any medicine for a patient suffering from a particular disease unless he makes proper diagnosis. Thus, an effective treatment always needs diagnosis, and trial and error may not be the right way. The next step that a n equipped teacher is supposed to take is: the evolution of certain strategies on the basis of the

diagnosis. It will ensure the effectiveness of the treatment that the teacher will provide as a remedy of the learning difficulties.

### **Innovative Strategies**

In the context of modern teaching, strategies based on novel and sophisticated software or conceptual strategies are always needed to deal with the day to day teaching/learning situations in which the learners face difficulties, and without some strategies they perhaps can't achieve the target.

### **Other Helpful Measures**

There can be plenty other measures to face the problems of EFL in Saudi Arabia. The following are a few of them:

#### **Early start**

It has been felt that the teaching of English language should be started prior to the stage of teaching English in Saudi Arabia.

#### **Use of technology**

It is my firm belief now that the language laboratory (suitably equipped with computer assisted language learning) must be looked upon only as an aid to the mastery of certain specific language skills. This can motivate the learners as they may enjoy the activity. This can be added advantage if the teaching is improvised by sophisticated tool and technology and proper implementation of such principles.

#### **Intensive Summer Courses**

The students who are in need of remedial measures may attend summer courses with in kingdom or even outside especially the places like the UK where there are many institutes and centres are holding such short term courses during the summer vacation. Apart from some of the above measures, the other factor that seems to be highly crucial in the process of teaching/learning is the teacher factor. The teachers are expected to be update, equipped and ready for some challenges while teaching.

#### **Training and professional development**

Teacher factor is the most important of all in the educational setting. It is the teacher's responsibility to

afresh his knowledge update his potential and equip himself with the advancement of the society and use of technology in general and educational environment in particular. (Khan, 2005)

In order to justify the job of a teacher, he has to attend trainings which are considered quite essential in this fast changing society. Thus, in order to be update, modern and sophisticated, one should attend in-service training or professional development programs. It is always appreciated if the teachers of English are research oriented, but ironically speaking, most teachers in India and Saudi are disinterested in any such program. They think that this is an academic embarrassment to take part in any training program. They innocently forget that every teacher is not a born teacher. Instead some are made good teachers. Professional development is always needed for every teacher even if he is highly knowledgeable, experienced and trained.

### **Problems of ESL Students: An Analysis**

Problems confronting Arab students during the course of learning English language exist in a large number. First of all, Saudi students are not exposed to listening / speaking activities in their daily life interaction not at home, nor at school / college / university, nor in market or public places. Such conditions dampen the spirit and stunt the growth of the pupils. By virtue of their personal efforts some students achieve a considerably good level of fluency in spoken English. But they miserably lag behind in other active skill that is writing. The study conducted by Abdul Haq (1982) concludes that most Arab students usually fumble in their writing skill. One may also quote another study conducted by Zughoul and Taminian (1984) to corroborate the findings of Haq. This study reveals that most Jordanian students enrolled in EFL classes have poor oral communication skill, as they usually commit gross lexical errors. In his study, Abdul Haq (1982) further reveals that most English instructors and University officials complain about the continuous deterioration of the mastery in English language among the students.

Besides oral-aural problems they also face problems because of the act of comparing and contrasting the foreign language items with those of their mother-tongue. As no two languages have one to one correspondence it leads to commission of errors. The pattern of an Arabic sentence widely differs from that of English. For example, in most cases Arabic language does not take is, am and are forms of verb "Be". So when a student translates *ana waladun*, he lapses into direct translation that reads "I boy". No doubt, translation may serve the purpose of learning a second/foreign language but requires a lot of time and long sustained practice. Moreover, every phrase of the mother tongue can't be translated. Noticeably, sometimes translation sounds incongruous. The

**Table 1.** Showing the learning difficulties on account of apparently looking similar words

Target words	Written words	Notes
Park	Bark	/p/ sound missing in Arabic
Van	Fan	Confusion between /f/ and /v/ sound
Better	Peter	They write what they pronounce
Sheep	Cheap	/ch/ sound missing in Arabic

expression 'Traffic jam' was once translated as 'murabbah al-maroor' or muroor al-murabbah. The translator took "jam" as "sweet soft food" rather than "many people or vehicle". By doing so, 'Meanings' may be conveyed, but the chances of distortion or incongruity are quite bright. Moreover interpreting and learning of lexical items with the help mother-tongue leads to collocationally wrong use of words in the target language. For example, one may use 'son and "boy interchangeably because in the mother-tongue there is one lexical item to represent both the words. Thus, the word *walad* in Arabic may be translated as both son and boy.

### Areas of Difficulties

Based on my long experience as an English teacher in Saudi Arabia, and various tests (placement test, diagnostic test, achievement test etc), there are many language areas/aspects and skills in which the target language learner face difficulties. The following are some of them:

#### Pronunciation

Pronunciation or sound system is the first and the foremost aspect of the target language in which the learners face difficulties. The following are those specific aspects in which Saudi learners face specific difficulties in the process of learning.

It is important to remember that learning a second language involves much more than learning the words and the sounds of a language. Communication breakdowns occur not only due to the more commonly understood syntax and pronunciation difficulties but because when we learn a language we also learn a culture.

English does not have more individual consonant sounds than most languages. However, the interdental, /θ/ and /ð/ (the sounds written with *th*), which are common in English (*thin, thing*, etc.; and *the, this, that*, etc.) are relatively rare in other languages (e.g., English *thousand* = German *tausend*), and these sounds are missing even in some English

dialects. Some learners substitute a [t] or [d] sound, while others shift to [s] or [z], [f] or [v] and even [ts] or [dz]).

The distinction between [f] and [v] can cause difficulty for native speakers of Spanish, Japanese, Saudis and Koreans. Saudis in particular are not able to differentiate between /sh/ and /ch/ as sheep and cheap respectively. They are also sometimes confused in the uses of /s/ and /c/.

#### Some examples

There are many other examples of difficulties in discriminating the sounds of English words: possessions - position, talk-take, take- tick, pool-pull, push-bush, my-me, e-eye, fool-full etc.

#### Clusters of phonemes

Such features of English create problems for Saudi learners as are not available in the Arabic language. On the other hand, doubling of sound doesn't exist in English, but it is quite a prominent feature in Arabic. For example, the most common name in Arabic is Mohammed. The doubling of sound /m/ is very important in Arabic, but it is not used in English at all.

#### Transliteration of English words into Arabic

Some Saudi learners of English occasionally transliterate an English word into Arabic, but they do not do so often. And, they should not do so as the English alphabet is easier than Arabic provided they learn to a considerable extent. However, there are many phonemic features that are specifically related to English, and can't be applied to any other languages for many reasons.

#### Grammar

Grammar of a second/foreign language is more important than any other language aspect. In some countries, it is believed, however wrongly, if you learn grammar you learn a language. The importance of functional grammar

**Table 2.** Showing the learning difficulties in structure of English

Responses	Types of difficulties	Expected Causes
two	short (true answer, but incomplete)	lack of confidence/fear of error
I am two.	Grammatical structure	Intra lingual (L1 interference)
Me two	Grammar error	interlingual errors
I two	No verb	lack of knowledge
I have brother two.	grammar	L1 interference
I have brothers.	Grammar	Brothers(understood as two)
I have two brothers.	Right answer(but rare)	

can never be minimized.

### Structure

The following is an example of the usual mistakes committed by Saudi learners. If a teacher asks a question such as 'how many brothers do you have? The following responses may come:

### Doubling of subjects

The following example will explain the case:

1- My brother he is a bank manage.

2- My brother he is 30 years old.

Yet another interesting feature is usually found in regular classroom situation. A student writes 'he is name' instead of 'his name'.

### Tense

English has a relatively large number of tenses with some quite subtle differences, such as the difference between the simple past 'I ate' and the present perfect 'I have eaten.' Other examples have been mentioned at other places in the paper.

### Articles

English has an appreciable number of articles, including the definite article *the* and the indefinite articles *a*, *an*. At times, English nouns are used without an article; this is called the zero articles. Some of the differences between definite, indefinite and zero article are very easy to learn, but others are not, particularly since a learner's native language may lack articles or use them in different ways than English does.

### Capitalization and punctuation

Most students don't care about even names. Even if the letter is in the beginning of a sentence they don't care. Some students try to write sometimes, yet the size is too small to discriminate between the small and the capital letter.

It is found that the students make excess use of 'and', and ignore using full stops and commas.

In a piece of simple composition such as a paragraph on a family, the students most often don't use full stops and commas until they come to an end.

### Double prepositions

The following example is an indicative of the use of two prepositions, however, this tendency is not found in even Arabic.

1- I am from in Jeddah,

2- I watch TV from at 8 O'clock.

### Confusion in number identification

The actual reason due to which Arab learners' face this type of problem is the difference in the pattern: in Arabic, we start counting from the right while in English, as usual reading or counting starts from the left. The "teens" and "tens" of English tend to get reversed in their usages by Arabic native speakers. To indicate why this happens, we need only to look at the Arabic word for "thirteen", which is *talatasher*, meaning "3 and 10", and then at the word for "thirty", which is *talateen*, showing the masculine plural object/possessive *een* ending for "3 tens".

### Problems in the Learning of Vocabulary/Meaning

The following are the observation based on the author's teaching experience at Community college, Jeddah.

Theoretically, Lexicon and Semantics are two separate parts of applied linguistics, however interrelated and dependant on each other. Most of the time, while teaching new words, an instructor initially teaches meaning. And, in order to realize the goal he uses the following as aids to the teaching of a word:

### Synonyms

If two or more than two words communicate nearly similar meanings, they may not be the exact synonyms, however considered by many.

### Uses of Synonyms

The second/foreign language learners face problems while discriminating the synonyms, however, there are same features available in the learner's mother-tongue: Arabic.

### For example

Handsome: John is a handsome man. ('handsome' is used for the charm and external quality),

Beautiful: Maria is quite beautiful. ('beautiful' is feminine in nature)

Pretty: Barbie is my pretty doll.

The following are the some aspects in which Saudi students also face problems due to many reasons:

### One word different uses

- The doctor asked me to apply the ointment twice daily. (as an infinitive),
- I applied for a job in a company two weeks ago. (simple past),
- I have already applied for the same job. (past participle),
- I studied mathematics and applied physics in the university. (adjective)

### Prefixes

-inefficient, immoral, illegal, irregular, Disregard, -non-Arab, -misconduct etc.

In Arabic, there are two patterns of making opposites:

There is another opposite word with a new root, (*taweel* - *qaseer*)

The feature is available in English also. (Example: good-bad, tall-short),

2- Prefix *ghair* (that means non or not) is used in Arabic as mother-tongue.

### Suffixes (Some Examples in English)

-able	Honorable
-age	package
-al	vocal
-ality	punctuality
-atory	laboratory
-ery	machinery
-ful	powerful

### Spelling (English is quite un-phonetic)

The spelling system of English is quite un phonetic. It is not like Hind, Urdu or Arabic. Hindi is hundred percent phonetic. There is no case of silent letters. While in Urdu and Arabic, there is a case of silent letter in *Harroof shamsi* like *As Shams*.

In the learning of spelling system in English, the following three characteristics pose greater difficulties in the process:

### Silent letters (Examples of Silent letters)

- Edge, Half, Though, Know etc.

### One letter different sounds (Examples)

/a/ in  
Apple, Bat, Bathe, Talk etc.

### Different letters-one sound

The following groups produce the same sound: /ce/ in ocean, /sh/ in fashion, /ti/ in patient, /ss/ in Russia, and /s/ Sugar.

### One group different sounds

Rough ( gh = /f/) and Though ( /gh/ is silent)

### Writing guides speaking

Sometimes, spelling guides writing and speaking, but in some cases, speaking guides writing as well:

### Other Factors

There are many other factors affecting learning, but can't be described and explained due to the want of space, however, a brief mention is needed: life style, discipline,



**Table 3.** Showing the difficulties in writing/speaking the target words

Target words	Spoken/written
<i>First</i>	<i>Frest</i>
<i>Turn</i>	<i>Tern</i>
Biscuit	<i>Bscout</i>
<i>Football</i>	<i>Futboll</i>

punctuality, motivation, future aim, family pressure, social status, lack of guidance, excessive freedom etc. The tendency of self study is completely missing among the students.

## CONCLUSION

Teaching of English is as crucial in Saudia as the entire system of higher education. Being the medium of instruction, and an important tool of communication, English seems to be very important in a developing country like Saudi Arabia.

There are varieties of factors that affect the learning of English. The issues which are directly related to pedagogy are of more importance than any other factors. Among others, teacher factor is always considered as very important as he is the one who is considered as the instrument of change.

In order to face with the pedagogic issues, the teacher has to be well equipped, and make diagnostic study in order to analyse linguistically the nature and type of difficulties that the Saudi learners face during the course of study. By doing so, it is expected that the teachers may be able to evolve some fruitful strategies for the teaching of English that will be able to minimize the difficulty level and yield better and maximum results.

## REFERENCES

- Abbad Aziza (1988). An Analysis of Communicative Competence Features in English Language Texts in Yemen Arab Republic. Ph.D Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign.
- Alam QZ (1983). Issues: Linguistic and Pedagogic. New Delhi, Sterling (pp.36-46)
- AbdulHaq F (1982). An Analysis of Syntactic Errors in the Composition of Jordanian Secondary Students, Unpublished MA Thesis, Jordan, Yarmouk University.
- Al-Afaleg O (1991). A Comparison of Morpheme Acquisition Order in learners of English as a Foreign language versus English as a Second language: The Case of Adult learners in Saudia. Diss. Indiana University, Bloomington.
- Al-Hazmi SH, Scholfield P (2007). 'Enforced Revision with Checklist and Gaze Feedback in EFL Writing: The Example of Saudi University Students', SJKFU 8(2) pp. 237-258.
- Alosaimi N (2007). English Teachers Not Always Qualified, *Arab News*, 30 November. Retrieved July 3, 2008, from <http://www.arabnews.com/2007>
- Ali (1987), in S.R. Ganguly. *English as a second language: A Select and Annotated bibliography*. Haryana: IDS, 1987,p.33
- Al-Qadi NS (1992). "Acquisition of English Derivational Morphology by Arab Speakers", Diss. University of Georgia, Athens.
- Asiri I (1996). *University EFL Teachers' Written Feedback on Compositions and Students' Reactions*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Essex University, UK.
- Bista K (2010). Factors of Code Switching among Bilingual English Students in the University Classroom: A Survey *English for Specific Purposes World*, Issue 29 Volume 9, 2010 (Retrieved from [http://www.esp-world.info/Articles\\_29/Factors.pdf](http://www.esp-world.info/Articles_29/Factors.pdf) )
- Bernstein B (1974). *Class, Code and Control*, Vol.3, London:RKP.
- Chanchi (1972). in M B Buch. *A Survey of Research in Education*. CASE, Baroda, India, 1974.PP.286-87
- Dulay H, Burt M, Krashen S (1982). *Language Two*. New York, OUP, P.5
- Farraj AM (1995). "Acquisition of Tense and Aspect in the English Based Inter- language of Non-native Speakers", Michigan State University, East Lansing.
- Gardener RC (1960). *Motivational Variables in Second Language Acquisition*, dissertation, Mc Hill University.
- Golding SR (1965). *Common Errors in English Language*, London: Mc Millan.
- HarrisonW, Prator C and Tucker G (1975). English Language Policy Survey of Jordan. Arlington, Va: Center for Applied Linguistics
- Ibrahim M (1983). *The Role of English Departments in Arab Universities*, In Dihayat and Ibrahim (eds.), Papers from the First Conference on the Problems of Teaching English Language and Literature at Arab Universities, University of Jordan, Amman-Jordan.
- Kachru (1980). Transfer in Overgeneralization: Contrastive Linguistics Revisited. *TESL Studies*,. Pp 233
- Kambal M (1980). *An Analysis of KhartoumUniversity Students' Composition Errors with Implications for Remedial English in the Context of Arabization*, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.
- Khan IA (1995). Difficulties faced by Urdu/Hindi Speaking Students in the Learning of English, *Educational Review*, Madras, India, CI (10).
- Khan IA (1995). Factors Affecting the Learning of English as Second Language, *Progress of Education*, Pune, India. LXX (7)
- Khan IA (1997). Strategies for the teaching of English as a Second Language, *Educational Review*, Madras, India, Vol. CIII (10).
- Khan IA (1997). Strategies for the Teaching English Pronunciation, *Progress of Education*, LXX (6) Pune, India.
- Khan IA (2000). Difficulties in the learning of English Vocabulary, *Edu. Review*, 45 (5) Madras, India.
- Khan IA (2002). Importance of Dictation, *Edu. Review*, 45 (5), Madras, India.
- Khan IA (1999). Bilingual Competence, *Progress of Education*, Pune, LXX11 (12).
- Khan IA (2003). Importance of Meaning, *Edu. Review*, 46(7) Madras, India
- Khan IA (2003). *Difficulty in English: Contrastive Approach*, Delhi. Rajat Publication.
- Khan IA (2005a). *Teaching of English: The Bilingual Context*, Delhi: Academic Excellence. pp.35
- Khan IA (2005b). *Teaching of English as a Second Language*. Delhi: Vitsa international pub. , pp.19
- Khan IA (2009). Teaching of Writing and Grammar, *GESD*, Delhi, India. 1 (3): 25
- Khan IA (2011). Role of Applied Linguistics in the teaching of English in Saudi Arabia International Journal of English Linguistics. 1 (1): 105-114
- Lado R (1957). *Linguistics across Culture*. Ann Arbor, Univ. of Michigan

- press, pp. 5
- Lee WR (1968). in J. Fisiak. *Contrastive Linguistic and the Language Teacher*. Oxford, Pergamon, 1981 pp. 218
- Maghrabi A (1997). "The Roles of Psycholinguistic Constraints and Typological Influence in the Acquisition of Pronominal Copies in Relativization by Arabic and English Learners", Thesis, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.
- Mukattash L (1983), '*The Problem of difficulty in foreign language learning*', Diss. In E. Dahiyat, and M. Ibrahim (eds.), Papers from the First Conference on the Problems of Teaching English Language and Literature at Arab Universities, University of Jordan, Amman- Jordan.
- Nair N S (1966). A Study of the common Language Difficulties (English) of Secondary School pupils in Kerala. Govt. Training College, Trivendram in M.B. Buch (ed). *A study of Research in Education*. CABB, MSU of Baroda, 1974. pp288-289
- Mark N (1970). in Fisiak. *Contrastive Linguistic and the Language Teacher*. Oxford, Pergamon, 1981. pp.157
- Noor Hashim (1993). "The Acquisition of temporal Conjunctions by Saudi Arabian learners of English", *Int. J. Appl. Linguistics*, 3(1): 101-2A.
- Salih M (1980). The relationship Between the Attitude and Proficiency in EFL of Public School Students in Amman. M.A. thesis, American University of Beirut.
- Singh Srivastava (1960). in M. B. Buch. (Ed) *Second Survey of Research in Education*, SEBD, Baroda, India, 1980. pp.308-309
- Suleiman S (1983). *Teaching English to Arab students at the university level, diss.*, In Dihayat and Ibrahim (eds.), Papers from the First Conference on the Problems of Teaching English Language and Literature at Arab Universities, University of Jordan, Amman- Jordan.
- Wahba E (1998). Teaching Pronunciation-Why? *Language Teaching Forum*. 36(3): 32.
- Weinreich (1953). *Language in contact: Findings and Problems*. New York: Linguistic Circle of New York. pp.1
- Wilkins DA (1972). *Linguistics in Language Teaching*. London, ELBS, pp.201-202
- Zughoul M (1983). The unbalanced program of the English department in the Arab world, Diss. In Dihayat and Ibrahim (eds.), Papers from the First Conference on the Problems of Teaching English Language and Literature at Arab Universities, University of Jordan, Amman- Jordan.
- Zughoul MR, Taminian L (1984). The Linguistic Attitudes of Arab University Students: Factorial Structure and Intervening Variables, (In Arabic), *J. the Jordanian Academy of Arabic*, 25-26 (1984): 148-200.
- Zughoul M (1987). *Restructuring the English department in the Third World universities*: Alternative approach for the teaching of English literature. *IRAL*.XXV(3): 221 – 236.