

## Original Paper

# University Jordanian Learners of English: Difficulties and Solutions

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### **Abstract**

*Referencing related literature and drawing upon our experience, observation and talks with specialists, we have realized that the problem of difficulty encountered by Arab learners of English in general and by Jordanian university English students in particular is sporadically addressed by researchers. They mention it along with their focus on errors committed by those EFL learners. At the university, English majors study English language, linguistics, and literature courses over a period of four years. While enrolling in the English program, they encounter difficulties or problems like teaching methods, cultural and language problems and teaching settings which negatively affect their language proficiency and, thus, graduate committing gross errors in various language skills, pointing to their weakness, low proficiency and unsatisfactory achievement which do not meet teachers' and society's expectations. The present paper is meant to diagnose the problems that confront university Jordanian English majors and to propose some solutions including strict requirements on transfer students, a TOEFL score of 500, and a small class size intended to play a role in reforming the present status quo of English departments, thus upgrading their outputs, and helping students improve their level linguistically and extra linguistically.*

### **Keywords**

*English, learning, difficulties, solutions*

## طلبة اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات الأردنية: صعوبات و حلول

سجاوردات و محمود وردات

### ملخص

استنادا الى الأدبيات السابقة و على خبراتنا و ملاحظاتنا و حديثنا مع متخصصي اللغة الانجليزية, تبين للباحثان أن الصعوبات التي يعاني منها طلبة اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات العربية بشكل عام و في الجامعات الأردنية بشكل خاص لم تحظى بكثير من الأهتمام من قبل الباحثين الذين تطرقوا في ابحاثهم للأخطاء التي يرتكبها طلبة اللغة الانجليزية بدلا من الصعوبات. يدرس هؤلاء الطلبة مساقات في اللغة و اللغويات و الأدب خلال أربع سنوات. خلال دراستهم يواجهون صعوبات مثل طرائق التدريس و مشاكل لغوية و ثقافية التي تؤثر سلبا على مستواهم اللغوي, لذلك يتخرجون و لا يزالون يرتكبون أخطاء في مختلف المهارات اللغوية الأساسية التي تدل على ضعفهم و تدني مستواهم الذي لا يليق طموحات مجتمعهم و مدرسهم. لذلك يهدف هذا البحث الى تشخيص هذه الصعوبات التي تواجه طلبة أقسام اللغة الانجليزية و الى تقديم حلول لها مثل اجراءات قاسية في تحويل الطلبة الى قسم اللغة الانجليزية من أقسام اخرى, و الحصول على علامة 500 على الأقل في امتحان التوفل أو ما يعادله, و خفض عدد الطلبة في المساقات. مثل هذه الحلول تلعب دورا رئيس في اصلاح الوضع الحالي لأقسام اللغة الانجليزية و تعمل على تحسين مخرجات التعليم و تساعد الطلبة على تطوير و تحسين مستواهم اللغوي و الثقافي.

### 1. Introduction

English is the language of the colonizer imposed on several countries including the Arab World. In this World, English is taught and learnt as a foreign language (EFL) since Arabic is the mother, official tongue of Arabs. Because of the significant role played by English throughout the world including Arab states, English has become a lingua franca. It has eventually become a global language not only because it is the colonizer's language but also because it is the language of modern science and technology used to disseminate the various types of knowledge. It is the language of business, diplomacy, and most widely used medium of communication between speakers of different languages. Further, it is the language through which most of well-known, well-reputable, world journals and periodicals publish their material. Consequently, it is taught and learnt worldwide.

In Jordan, English is taught and learnt as a foreign language in all schools, private and public, and in higher educational institutions. Jordanian students learning English come from different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. They come from all social classes no matter what their cultural and economic status is. This is the case since primary schooling is compulsory and almost free without fees and tuitions. Further, the majority of students come from areas or families where English is not even known.

Nevertheless, Jordanian students are taught English in primary and secondary schools. They start learning English in the first grade till the twelfth grade when they leave high school. They are given an average of six classes of English per week. When they leave school, most of them go into a university where English, depending on their major, is the means of instruction. For example, in natural science classes, medicine, engineering, administration and economics classes, translation, information technology, English department, etc., almost all courses are taught in English no matter what the

background and level of the students are. Here in university education, English becomes a more serious problem than before for them mainly because they have not mastered the English language in schools. This situation points to the fact that Jordanian school graduates suffer from several problems in their attempt to learn EFL. To put it differently, they encounter difficulties in learning EFL.

The ultimate goal of this paper is, therefore, to investigate the problems or difficulties that those learners face and to identify the reasons lying behind them. To put it differently, the paper addresses the following two questions:

- 1) What difficulties do Jordanian university students face in their attempt to learn English?
- 2) Why do those students encounter those problems?

Prior to embarking upon the questions of the study, let us first try to review relevant issues and some related works done in the Arab World.

## **2. The Concept of Difficulty**

The concept of difficulty expresses different meanings to different people. For instance, for curriculum designers it means grading the teaching material from easy to difficult subject matter. For instructors, it means difficulties or problems foreign language learners face when they attempt to learn a language.

For some linguists, difficulty means error production. In this regard, see Wilkins (1972: 149—quoted in Mukattash, 1983). Yet for others, difficulty means error production and avoidance (see Schacter, 1974; Kleinmann, 1977; Mukattash, 1978, among others).

Sources of difficulty in Foreign Language (FL) learning are abundant to the extent that FL practitioners and linguists do not all have one agreement regarding them. For example, Lado (1957) and Shachter (1974) ascribe difficulty to differences between the Target Language (TL) and the First Language (L1). Richards (1971) ascribes it to interlingual and intralingual interference. Yet, other linguists ascribe it to language universals and markedness (Gass, 1979; Eckman, 1977).

Because of this obvious controversy or lack of agreement on what difficulty is, we would venture the view that difficulty is a mirror or reflection of FL students' errors, lack of comprehension of instructional material ascribed to both linguistic and cultural factors or causes, inadequate linguistic and communicative competence, and any other problems associated with educational background, socio-economic status, inadequate language preparation in schools, personality, age, religion, motivation and attitudes which would constitute a blockage or an obstacle that impedes success, good performance and achievement and proper mastery of the FL. Further, difficulty would be accounted for by means of interlingual, intralingual and universal principles.

## **3. The Theoretical Framework**

Research on the linguistics of bilingualism has mainly dealt with Second Language (L2) acquisition, among other areas. It is based on three major notions: Linguistic Analysis (LA), Contrastive Analysis

(CA), and Error Analysis (EA). Carried out and investigated by linguists, LA aims at describing language, particularly L2. Therefore, it is mainly concerned with native speakers' competence in their language, a competence different from that of a second language learner. Consequently, it seems that researchers are not sure of how valuable LA to L2 learning and teaching.

Contrastive Analysis is, however, pedagogical. For further details, see Fries (1945), Lado (1957), Stockwell and Brown (1965), and Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), to mention only few specialists. The CA approach has two forms: strong and weak. The former can best be described by Lado's (1957) and Fries's (1945) words. Lado says "the plan of the book, *linguistics across Culture*, rests on the assumption that we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student (p. VIII)".

Fries also states the most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner.

All such quotes obviously represent the jest of the strong version. That is, a CA of the mother or first and target languages can predict the difficulties L2 learners will encounter in learning or acquiring the TL. Thus, it is very helpful in designing bilingual educational programs and materials to help them learn the TL.

The CA strong version requires that there be a linguistic theory which can adequately describe the systems of the two languages in order to provide FL teachers, curriculum and teaching material designers, and examiners with contrasts to base their work on. This description is not based on the actual performance or the actual linguistic behavior of the speakers of both languages under contrast. It solely depends upon the reference grammars of the two languages written by grammarians. Thus, "the strong version doubtless sounds quite unrealistic" (Wardhaugh, 1970—cited in Robinett & Schachter, 1983, p. 8).

By the same token, Richards (1971—cited in Richards, 1974, pp. 172-188) claims that CA is not without problems. He states that interference from L1 is a source of difficulty in L2 learning and acquisition, but errors committed by learners cannot be accounted for on the basis of contrasts given by CA advocates. Those errors result from strategies used by L2 learners to learn the TL. These include overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and faulty comprehension of distinctions in the TL. Such strategies result in intralingual and developmental, but not interlingual, errors that cannot be explained by contrastive analysis.

Moreover, Salih (1988, pp. 25-51) finds out that while 29.2% of the Arab university learners' relativization errors reflect their use of their mother tongue system, i.e., L1 interference, 70.8% of their errors in relativization are intralingual and developmental. These cannot be ascribed to syntactic differences between L1 and L2; rather they can only be explained in terms of their inadequate,

incomplete knowledge of the TL itself.

However, the weak version entails studying actual errors made by learners and using linguists' knowledge of the differences between L1 and TL/L2 linguistic systems to account for difficulties or errors in L2 learning and acquisition.

As a matter of fact, although CA provides contrasts which linguists can refer to in their attempt to explain the linguistic behavior of L2/TL learners, not all errors or difficulties can be attributed to differences between L1 and L2. Many errors, as we have already pointed out, have their sources in the TL itself rather than in L1. The failure of CA has resulted in the framework named Error Analysis.

Error Analysis (EA), unlike CA, has started from the analysis of the TL itself, or from a learner's actual linguistic performance and behavior in the language he is studying or learning. This approach looks upon the TL/L2 as the learner speaks or uses it. Thus, the L2 learner has become the focus under this framework because he is formulating the TL system. He is trying to devise or come up with rules, hypotheses or strategies which would help him achieve at least a native-like competence. By time, by means of teaching and learning, and by listening to adults and native speakers, he can verify his hypotheses and modify his rules to achieve his goal of learning the TL/L2.

The task of the error analysis is, on the basis of observable linguistic data, to explain why certain aspects of the TL/L2 have been acquired easily while others have not been adequately learned. This approach attempts to identify and account for the causes or sources of L2 learners' errors or difficulties. Accordingly, researchers have suggested a variety of sources like interference, transfer of training, overgeneralization, teaching material, inappropriate techniques and teaching methods, and induced and performance errors.

In this regard, defining "Interlanguage (IL)" as a hypothesized linguistic system on the basis of linguistic observable output which is a consequence of the L2 learner's production of the TL, Selinker (1972—cited in Richards, 1974, pp. 31-54) suggests five central processes to L2 learning or acquisition: "First, language transfer; second, transfer of learning; third, strategies of second language learning; fourth, strategies of second language communication; and Fifth, overgeneralization of TL linguistic material" (p. 35).

Having presented a brief overview of two frameworks, CA and EA, which aim at accounting for L2 learners' difficulties, problems, or errors, let us address the difficulties which Jordanian university students majoring in English encounter, first, and then discuss the reasons lying behind them. The difficulties are all arrived at referencing what is proposed within EA in particular.

#### **4. Jordanian EFL Students' Difficulties**

The problem of difficulty encountered by Arab learners of English in general and by Jordanian university English students in particular is sporadically discussed by some researchers. They mention it along with their focus on errors committed by those EFL learners. In what follows we take up some of

those studies, trying to shed light on the difficulties which Jordanian English majors face referencing the findings of those studies and drawing upon our experience as a student and instructor at two English departments in Jordan.

Abdul Haq (1982) investigates the syntactic errors in writing committed by secondary students in Jordan. He finds that Jordanian students make various types of syntactic errors in writing English as a foreign language. He concludes that most English teachers and university instructors complain about the English low level of students. Examples on errors include wrong use of tense, verb forms, agreement, and faulty structures. Abdul Haq concludes that most Arab EFL learners are weak in writing.

Mukattash (1983) states that the difficulties encountering Arab university English students stem from the complaints of teachers. Students make basic errors in morphology, spelling, syntactic structures and pronunciation. These errors are evidenced in students' productive skills, speaking and writing. Further, students cannot express themselves correctly and properly in language classes and in situations where they should use English. In brief, students suffer from a deficiency in communication and linguistic competence. According to Mukattash, these problems constitute "the grounds for this mutual teacher-student complaint" (p. 170). Students' complaint results from their unfulfilled expectations because teachers are not "doing a good job" during the four-year course in teaching and learning English at the University.

Most participants in the conference on the problems and difficulties of teaching and learning of English language and literature held at the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan, in 1983, voice the same problems, displeasure and dissatisfaction with the low level and weak competence, linguistic and communicative, of the English departments graduates of Arab universities.

For example, looking upon the role of English departments in the Arab World, Ibrahim (1983, pp. 19-43) states that the departments have failed to graduate competent English specialists. Thus, these departments do not satisfy the needs of students and the society which badly needs this language for purposes of technology, business, international relations, communication and science.

Marken (1983, p. 97) states that one difficulty facing Arab students in English departments comes from what the professor wants to teach. That is, professors teach a culture which is alien to Arabs who, for religious, moral, etc., reasons, find it difficult to understand and appreciate western, cultural images depicted in English literary texts. The reason behind this problem is that university students might not have been taught some literary pieces in school introducing them to this western alien culture.

A related reason for this difficulty is that school students coming from different regions may not all have access to books or material on English literature. Some students from the city may have this facility mainly because the city is expected to have bookshops and libraries from which those city dwellers can get literary texts familiarizing them with the western culture and, thus, become equipped with an idea about the west and their culture. This facility is not available in the countryside, thus

making village or small town dwellers lack and deprived of this privilege.

Another source of difficulty is the instructor's techniques. He may speak very quickly and may use unfamiliar, probably, slang or archaic, words that hinder students' comprehension of what is being taught. The student would start thinking of the meaning of those words and, consequently, would lose track of other ideas.

In this regard, Marken (1983, p. 98) contends that when instructors use unfamiliar words or speak very fast, learners concentrate on those words, thus failing to follow up and understand what they are saying. Thus, instructors must periodically make sure that they are being comprehended.

Another source of difficulty is the length of assignments. It is obvious that students are weak at the language; lengthy assignments would make them lose interest not only in the subject matter but also in the language itself. Moreover, because of their weakness, this type of assignments would make them give up learning and further developing their linguistic competence. The way out of this highly undesired practice is to give learners short ones which would hopefully motivate them to work hard and improve their linguistic proficiency.

Anani (1983) investigates the kind of language used by Jordanian students attempting to learn the English language at the University of the Jordan in Amman. The researcher showed his subjects a film and asked them to record on tape an oral description of what they had seen. Then he analyzed those recordings representing or showing Jordanian university students' spoken language. Data analysis points out that students committed a variety of errors in the structure of noun phrases (e.g., *\*Virgin Mary and the Jesus* **instead of** *Virgin Mary and Jesus*), incorrect selection of lexical items (e.g., *\*a fishman* **instead of** *a fisherman*), errors in derivational suffixes (e.g., *\*childness* **for** *childhood*), errors in the verb phrase (e.g., *\*He want to get up early* **instead of** *He wants...*), incorrect past tense of verbs (e.g., *\*sleped* **for** *slept*) in addition to errors in the production of speech sounds, vowels and consonants alike.

A similar example comes from a graduate Yarmouk University student who, while defending her MA thesis in December 2019, used the incorrect plural form *childs* **instead of** *children*, among so many other gross errors in English.

Suleiman (1983) looks upon problems relevant to the teaching of English to university Arab students. He states that Arab students encounter problems attributed to their inadequate mastery of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Those skills are lacking and poorly developed; they are, therefore, unable to communicate in English. Arab learners also suffer from the low level of vocabulary building. As long as their vocabulary is limited, they find it difficult to improve and further develop their language skills.

Abuhamdia (1983) studies the usefulness of the preparation of the English majors to the requirements of the job market and how the English department teaching material would be adapted to meet the needs of the job market. He maintains that English departments suffer from weaknesses like English

students' inability to learn the job duties from a job description, and to understand and interpret manuals, to write short reports for a local English newspaper, to handle their English personal mail, and to fill out an application form without assistance. These problems or weaknesses are, according to him, "the indicator that the English department is graduating the insufficiently trained students" (p. 178). That is, English departments' graduates' performance is inadequate and far from expectations and desires on the job.

Salih (1989) investigates Yarmouk University students studying English as a major, aiming at further exploring the view that generalization in English as a second language (ESL) takes place from more marked to less marked constructions. The subjects were sixty Arab junior students who were given both a pre-test and post-test measuring their knowledge of English relative clauses and their ability to make up sentences with relative clauses. Following the experiment, the researcher concludes that Jordanian English university students committed a variety of errors in relativization in English. Errors include repetition of the relativized noun phrase, agreement in relative clauses, and choice of a relative pronoun. The researcher further concludes that the teaching-learning process will be more fruitful if it presents the TL aspects whose structure is similar to each other and those aspects whose structure differs separately. Finally, the data analysis reveals that the hypothesis that instructional generalization proceeds from more marked to less marked structures cannot be valid.

Wahba (1998, p. 36) finds that Egyptian EFL learners face various problems in general, but most of their errors are phonetic problems related to stress assignment and intonation. She attributes these to interference: differences in pronunciation between Arabic and English.

Rabab'ah (2003) maintains that much research has been carried out on problems facing EFL Arab learners, but very few studies have dealt with presenting ways of solving these problems in general and students' communicative problems in particular. Thus, the researcher focuses on communication problems that Arab learners encounter in their attempt to learn EFL. He also investigates English graduates' or majors' problems at Arab world English departments. He believes that Jordanian English language majors or graduates have serious problems using English for communicative purposes because they lack enough vocabulary to help them carry on communicating successfully.

He concludes that EFL Arab learners suffer from weaknesses in listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Also, the objectives of university English departments in the Arab World have not been achieved. This situation needs remedy.

Khan (2011) investigates the teaching and learning of EFL in Saudi Arabia. He finds that students' achievement in EFL is below the expectations though there are good planning, purposive curriculum, well-qualified instructors, and integrated textbooks. Students speak their mother tongue at home, with friends and classmates. He finds out that Arab learners of English encounter several language difficulties including pronunciation, transliteration of English words into Arabic, grammar, syntax, punctuation, prepositions, vocabulary-meaning, synonyms, antonyms, word forms, spelling, agreement,



and tense. There are also sociolinguistic factors affecting EFL learning. These include life style, motivation, excessive freedom, self-study, future outlook or goal, socioeconomic status, lack of guidance and counseling, discipline and family pressure. Thus, all factors should be diagnosed and seriously considered if an EFL program is to effectively achieve its objectives.

Ansari (2012) looks upon the problems facing teachers while teaching English to Saudi students in Saudi Arabia. He maintains that students encounter sociocultural problems, unfamiliarity with the subject, phonetic problems, morphological, grammatical, and semantic problems and writing problems. Thus, a competent, efficient and knowledgeable teacher is needed to work very seriously and willingly to help his students overcome such problems in order to improve their English proficiency. This is necessary so that students would not lose interest in the language. Further, the teacher should vary his classroom activities and approaches to help students develop their language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing in addition to teaching them vocabulary items to use in learning those skills and in discussing topics about the English culture.

Al-Qadi (2017) aims at identifying and categorizing EFL Saudi problems in using the English article system. His sample was 50 Saudi male EFL learners who took the Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ), and five EFL teachers were interviewed. The findings show that those Saudis committed errors in omission, addition, and substitution. Errors are mostly attributed to L1 interference, and in some cases to the ignorance or incomplete application of English rules.

Baharum, Salleh and Noor (2017) study the problems or errors committed by Malaysian students from the faculty of major languages studies in their attempt to translate English collocations into Arabic. Data analysis manifests that those students faced grammatical, lexical and cultural problems. These errors are ascribed to interference of the mother tongue, Arabic, lack of vocabulary, difficulty in understanding words, frequency of language practice, and literal translation.

Hussein and Elttayef (2017) state that Arab learners, specialists, and teachers face problems while teaching EFL due to their social and cultural backgrounds, Reasons include:

- 1) Arab learners of EFL have no knowledge of basic English;
- 2) EFL teachers do not pay attention to students' lack of knowledge although students consider teachers as their model for teaching and learning English;
- 3) Teachers may not be competent enough in English and use inappropriate teaching styles and methods;
- 4) Most teachers do not know how to teach changeable curriculum; thus, workshops are needed to fulfil this objective;
- 5) Students suffer from phonetic problems, social- cultural problems, lack of alphabet recognition, different culture, and no awareness of culture. Therefore, English objectives have not been achieved.

To summarize, the previous presentation demonstrates difficulties that Jordanian Arab learners of EFL in the departments of English in Jordan have encountered during more than three decades. Difficulties

are linguistic and socio-psychological, and cultural. Owing to various sources which we will present in the following section, students commit a variety of errors. They are syntactic, phonetic, morphological, and semantic. Besides, other problems are there with spelling and selection of proper lexical items, and the limited number of vocabulary.

Other difficulties are associated with the components of the learning teaching settings. Teachers do not always do a good fruitful job; they do not very often take care of students' problems. They assign teaching material and texts that are in conflict with students' beliefs, outlook and culture. Techniques or methods of teaching material are not normally productive. Instructors sometimes speak very fast, use difficult words, and assign difficult assignments. All such approaches may result in socio-psychological problems like loss of interest, anxiety, fear, unfavorable attitudes toward both the language and its speakers' culture, and lack of motivation. Besides, the needs and interests of learners would not be fulfilled. This devastating or discouraging outcome would negatively reflect upon the society at large. The community and the job market would not get their need of well-qualified English graduates necessary for job market, business, and international relations.

In brief, due to this deplorable, undesirable state of our English departments, we strongly insist that outstanding, powerful, knowledgeable figures from the government, decision makers, private sector, and linguists form a committee and address themselves to this present situation so that English departments can graduate competent graduates playing a positive long standing role in the development of the country and region at large.

### **5. Sources of Students' Difficulties**

The reasons or sources behind Jordanian university English students' difficulties in learning EFL are abundant.

First, students' English proficiency is low at the time they get enrolled in the English department. Those are school graduates whose level is not satisfactory in English. They leave school without much information about the English language helping them to use the language efficiently, properly and effectively for communication purposes.

Second, English departments do not have clear-cut objectives against which English graduates' level would be measured. Nowadays, officials or higher authorities in universities talk about quality assurance without paying attention to how the unsatisfactory status quo of the departments could be eradicated and replaced by a better one. In this regard, Williams (1975, p. 550—cited in Abuhamdia, 1983, p. 178) maintains that English department' weaknesses could be attributed to the failure of the policy of the institution to state the goals of the department in clear terms and operationalized measures.

Third, admission into English Department (ED's) constitutes an extremely serious problem. In the Jordanian setting, students' average in the general secondary certificate examination is the only crucial

requirement no matter what their individual score is on the English subject. This policy results in a large number of admitted students whose English level is not satisfactory.

The way out of this problem is a TOEFL score of 500 or its equivalent on any other standardized test required from students who want to enroll in English departments.

Fourth, transfer students to English departments are another factor. Students admitted to other majors can transfer to English departments if they meet certain requirements; mainly they are required to take around 30-credit-hour courses with a rating of “very good”. Of these at least two English courses are to be taken. Other content courses are all taught in Arabic which does not add up anything to the English level of students. In this regard, Abuhamdia (1983) believes that “this kind of sporadic skill-training does not in many cases result in overcoming the major difficulties, let alone bring the students up to the level whereby they can function well in literature courses” (p. 179).

Fifth, English departments do not assess their role and goals, if any. This assessment is crucial for upgrading their effectiveness and function. To carry out this periodical assessment, Onushkin (1971—quoted in Abuhamdia, 1983, p. 180) states English departments should seriously give due account to the following questions: What is the English departments’ goal? Who are their students? Why do students choose English departments? What are the economic and social needs of the country which affect the need for English graduates? This sort of assessment should be part and parcel of the policy of English departments if they have the true ambition and aspiration of graduating competent English degree holders.

Similarly, Khan (2011, p. 3451) stresses the significance of diagnosing language difficulties. Diagnosis should be periodically done by language teachers, administrators, and policy makers so that they can devise relevant strategies to eradicate problems, help learners overcome their difficulties and modify teaching methods to ensure the effectiveness of EFL teaching and learning.

Sixth, the large number of students in English classes is frustrating. In so many classes even in language skills classes like writing, reading, and pronunciation, more than sixty students are registered. We wonder how the instructor can work trying to achieve his ultimate goal of getting very good writers, readers, listeners and speakers. Students are not given enough time to practice this foreign language. Unless university decision makers address themselves to this problem of large size classes, students’ benefits of teaching and learning English would be extremely minimized, but, unfortunately, strongly maximizing losses and costs.

Seventh, the English culture depicted in literature constitutes a problem for students’ communication and linguistic competence. Students would not understand what the instructor is talking about. This is perceived as a tremendous, “unbridgeable cultural gap” which seems to yawn between the text under consideration and students. (Munro, 1983, p. 54). To make literary texts enjoyable, the instructor should select texts relevant to students’ needs, world and experience.

A related issue here is the mode of teaching. Literature teachers almost always concentrate on content; that is, they focus upon and stress topics depicted in texts like religion, freedom, characterization, feminism, and politics. In so doing they forget about form, i.e., language. Given the fact that Arab university English majors are primarily weak in English, literature teachers do not help students gain any benefits, neither content nor language. To make literature comprehensible, interesting and useful, teachers, realizing students' language weaknesses or problems, should initially emphasize language and gradually proceed to content. Thus, form should be given priority over subject matter.

Eighth, students do not practice the language neither in class nor outside of it. The rarity of this significant means of learning or enhancing students' level has a negative effect. Sometimes students can watch TV shows and films, but this act is not always fruitful because they watch and focus upon the translation of those shows. Shows are normally bilingual not monolingual. That is, they are presented in two languages: Arabic, the students' mother tongue, and English. Such a means does not help them improve their skills and overcome some difficulties.

Ninth, students get teaching material and texts, most of which are translated into Arabic. That is, they do not usually go through the original texts written in English. This mode of handling the texts is detrimental in the sense that it does not add to their knowledge of the language. Further, Dahiyat (1983, p. 71) maintains that most students do not read the primary texts. They rely on what others say or think of texts by teachers, researchers, and critics; "nothing can make up for the personal and immediate contact between the reader and the texts" (p. 71).

Tenth, students are not always motivated to learning English. In some cases, some students major in English mainly because of the desire of their parents. They study English simply because their parents want them to do so. They think learning English or getting a degree in English is instrumental. Utilitarian goals like getting a well-paid job motivate parents to have their children study English. In this regard, the findings of the study carried out by Dahiyat (1983, p. 65) revealed that the first reason given by a sample of 51 English students is that English majors "get better jobs than graduates of other departments in the faculty of arts". Thus, EFL students are instrumentally motivated to learn English (Salih, 1980).

Eleventh, writing is problematic. When students write an essay or paragraph, teachers do not usually follow up student writing. It is true that teachers check or read those writings and make comments on them, but they think that it is the task of the students to reconsider and correct what they have written. As a matter of fact, teachers should go through the errors with students to help them know their problems and correct them.

Twelfth, most of the difficulties facing EFL students are attributed to the first language interference. Differences between students' mother tongue and the target language result in difficulties. This is actually the jest of the Contrastive Analysis framework advocated by Lado (1957) and his followers. Lado states that differences between the two languages create difficulties which impede good

achievement or performance, but similarities facilitate learning TL features. Problems ascribed to mother tongue interference are known as L1 transfer or interlingual errors.

Thirteenth, the economic status of families is another factor affecting students' learning. Poor families in particular do not always invest in education. They are not well educated and their income is not adequate. Consequently, this low economic status may not create interest in their children to learn not only English but also any other type of education or knowledge. In such a situation parents would rather have their offspring get a job to earn money.

Fourteenth, EFL learners have no exposure to English, be it listening or speaking encounters, in their daily life. They are not exposed to listening and speaking interactions at homes, nor in streets nor in educational institutions, and nor in other contexts. Such factors hinder the progress of the language learners and enhance their problems. This does not imply that all students suffer this difficulty. A few students, however, work very hard individually on their own improving their productive skills.

Fifteenth, instructional material and curriculum designers have never considered students' needs and future goals. This cause would result in students' loss of interest and motivation to learn. If an EFL program is to serve the community with both its private and public sectors, those needs and the ones of the community should constitute the grounds upon which teaching material is to be based. We still remember that undergraduate and graduate students alike have never been approached by university authorities regarding this factor.

Finally, fossilization constitutes another cause for Arab Jordanian learner' difficulty in EFL. Fossilization, as defined by Selinker (1972—cited in Richards, 1974, p. 49), is a mechanism which “underlies surface linguistic material which speakers will tend to keep in their Interlanguage (IL) productive performance, no matter what the age of the learner or the amount of instruction he receives in the target language”. A very remarkable error on fossilized structures is the third person singular simple present tense morpheme *-s/-es*. It is very frequently the case that university English Arab learners tend to produce structures like “\***The boy go to school**” rather than “**The boy goes to school**”. Those students are taught this rule among others for a very long period of time; they know it by heart; but when it comes to produce sentences the verbs of which require this morpheme, they do not produce it. This difficulty would be related to their psychology. It is possible that when they are in a state of fatigue, anxiety, fear, happiness, or relaxation, fossilized structures or items tend to appear or even to re-emerge.

Selinker (1972—cited in Richards, 1974) provides several processes to account for this phenomenon of fossilized items, rules, structures, or hypotheses, revealing the learners' interlanguage grammar or system.

- 1) Overgeneralization: It is the process whereby a syntactic rule or structure is extended to a linguistic environment in which, according to the learner, it could logically and properly apply, but it does not. **That** is a complementizer or conjunction illustrated in

sentences like:

**a- That your answer is right is convincing.**

**b-They think that your answer is right.**

Here **that-** clauses consist of **that** followed by a subject and verb phrase. Jordanian English majors tend to overgeneralize the structure of **that-** clauses to other structures in which it does not apply, resulting in ungrammatical sentences like (c) below:

**c-\*There are students all different countries that they come to study engineering in Jordan.**

Ungrammatical cases like (c) clearly indicate that Arab English learners most probably take the relative pronoun **that** for the conjunction or linking word **that**, thus producing ungrammatical sentences.

2) Language transfer:

Language transfer difficulties are errors caused by the interference of Arabic, the mother tongue of Arab English learners. This negative transfer is exemplified in (D):

**d-\*The man bought farm.**

Here the indefinite article **a** is not used with the singular count noun **farm** mainly because Arabic does not have an indefinite article. This is the source of such a deviant structure like (D).

3) Rule conditions:

This source refers to structures where Arab students fail to observe restrictions or conditions on some rules. For example, those students are taught that object pronouns like **him, me, whom, them**, and the like should follow prepositions. Yet this condition is violated getting wrong structures like (e):

**e-\*The teacher to who I talked is French.**

In such cases the preposition should be left at the end of the relative clause (...**who I talked to...**) or **whom** must replace **who** (...**to whom I talked...**). By the way a difficulty or problem like this one cannot be explained in terms of L1 interference because Arabic does not allow the use of preposition before a relative pronoun.

To recapitulate, causes for Jordanian university EFL learners' difficulties should be given due account to by English specialists, practitioners, policy makers, and administrators. All of them should sit together and deeply contemplate them and come up with practical and feasible proposals to help EFL learners and their departments achieve their main goal which is graduating competent, efficient graduates equipped with all necessities for the long standing desire of changing and reforming the present state of English departments in Jordan.

## 6. Conclusion

The aforementioned discussion has demonstrated that university Arab EFL learners suffer from a variety of problems. These problems are indicative of the present status quo of English departments not only in Jordan but also in other Arab countries as well. As is arrived at by other researchers and based on our experience, Jordanian university English majors graduate from departments of English language and literature without being able to interact with specialists and English natives fluently and intelligibly. This means that they have not benefited that much from the four-year-program of learning various language, linguistics, and literature courses. They are incompetent linguistically and communicatively. There are several measures or recommendations, we can propose, to overcome this type of unsatisfactory EFL output, or at best to help English departments and decision makers to graduate competent specialists.

First, there must be a standardized English entrance exam. All students wishing to major in English must sit this exam. If they get, let's say, a score of no less than 80 out of one hundred, they can start their English program.

Students who score less than 80% and wish to study English should enroll in an intensive English program for one semester. Here they should extensively be taught the four language skills and vocabulary building. At the end of the semester, they have to retake the entrance exam. If they get the score required for majoring in English, they can be admitted to the English department. If not, they have to take the intensive program again till they get the scored needed. Prospective English majors can stay up to four semesters. If they cannot pass the exam, then they should look for another major.

Second, English departments should have clear-cut, measurable objectives. They should be known to both students and higher authorities or administration. At the end of every academic year, the objectives should be evaluated against the quality of the English graduates that year. If objectives are achieved, English department professors conclude that they have been able to meet the expectations of students.

Third, teaching material or curricula should be designed or based upon the needs and interests of both students and Jordanian society. This proposal entails that a survey should be carried out to identify those needs and interests. What is the advantage of teaching an EFL program that does not serve the needs and goals of the students, society, and job market? Further, curricula ought to be very frequently looked upon and evaluated so that departments can continue fulfilling their objectives.

Fourth, since learning a language is also cultural, students should be exposed or given courses concentrating on various aspects of the culture of English speaking countries. Present literature courses deal with issues like democracy, freedom, feminism, and international conflicts. Such issues are interesting and essential since literature, as we all know, reflects the circumstances, values, beliefs, conditions, and crises of the society. Yet we want our students to learn socio-pragmatic or cultural acts, i.e., pragmatic acts, like inviting, welcoming, and apologizing. This subject matter is highly necessary for developing students' communicative competence.

Fifth, students' motivation and attitudes should also be investigated and seriously considered. Favorable attitudes and integrative motivation in particular play a strongly positive role in graduating English competent graduates. Research on this area has shown a positive correlation between such attitudes and motivation and success in EFL programs. In this respect, see Salih (1980) and the references cited therein.

Finally, class size is crucial. We do not expect that a class of seventy or more students can achieve its objectives. What we are suggesting is the following. In language skills classes like listening, writing and vocabulary development, no more than twenty students should make up the class. In other, mainly theoretical, courses, a class of forty students, we feel, can achieve its objectives.

In conclusion, we are pretty sure that solutions like the ones suggested here are not primarily feasible because of funding and of necessarily changing the policy and admission requirements. Nonetheless, a step towards reforming the current situation should be taken if and only if we want our English departments to graduate skillful, competent graduates whose needs are met and who can fulfill the needs of the job market and region.

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