

The Iraqi's Foreign Language Acquisition and Arabic as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Although decades have passed on language teaching techniques, foreign language teaching is still a subject that does not fall off the agenda and does not lose its originality. It is a fact that there are prejudices against foreign language learning among nation-state citizens or that they have no interest in learning a foreign language. The Iraqi state is in geography where dozens of nations live, and different languages are spoken, and although it is a nation-state, it does not have a mass of people who are closed to foreign language learning like the people of America, England or Turkey. Along with this fact, it is also true that there is a minimal audience that looks at foreign language learning with cultural prejudice. This article focuses on foreign language acquisition in Iraq, language acquisition of children and adults, and the position of Arabic as a foreign language.

Keywords: Foreign Language Acquisition; Arabic as a Foreign Language; Language Curriculum

Introduction

In today's world, where it is important to know a foreign language, foreign language teaching methods have also diversified. However, foreign language education has become a sector, and serious investments have been made. In addition, the rapidly developing technology in our age has allowed people to establish close relations at the individual and social level, so the need for foreign language learning has increased much more than the usual standards compared to the past (Gazieva, 2020; Yildiz, 2021; Usmonov, 2022).

In Iraq, there is great interest in learning a second language, especially among adults. In each city, it is possible to see language schools and special course centres. In general, it has been seen that the mass over the age of forty knows a foreign language at a basic level. That being the case, nation-states feel that although there is largely no attempt to learn languages in their citizens in general, those who attempt to do so are soon disappointed and eventually lose their innate ability to acquire language (Milton & Meara, 1998). One of the common beliefs among methodologists of foreign language teachers is that the ability to acquire a general language after adolescence is lost, and those general learning mechanisms can only learn a new language after this period (Ortega,



2014). In other words, consciously examining grammar topics as if learning mathematical formulas and placing them in the subconscious by doing plenty of exercises is shown as the only way adults can follow.

In Iraq, which has been opening up to the outside world recently, foreign language (English, Turkish, German, French, Arabic, etc.) education is carried out effectively (Amin, 2017). It is noticeable that in school curricula, a large proportion of English education is provided from primary education to university (Mohammed-Marzouk, 2012). Since bilingualism is largely dominant in families in society, English as a foreign language is easily learned. Along with this fact, it is clear that as a society, there is a mass of people who cannot learn a second or third language (Ahmed, 2021). It has been seen that the main source of the problem is the mistakes in the foreign language teaching method practices in public schools (Jukil & Beckett, 2016).

Foreign Language Acquisition in Iraq

Today, in many European countries, films are broadcast on television in their original form and subtitles are given in their language. That is why the peoples of most European countries know at least two languages at an advanced level. Despite this, on Iraqi television, films are watched as dubbed films, originals or in the mother tongue (Al-Deen, 2005). People can listen to movies (usually in English) with their original sound while following them with Arabic subtitles. In Iraq, it is possible to find people who can speak something in English in the regions where Arabs live. It is even more important for children to watch the film in the original language because certain patterns used in daily life become a habit in the individual (Nor & Ab Rashid, 2018).

People of Iraq, like most Middle Eastern countries, are a society that spends a long time in front of the television. Male adults are mostly interested in sports and news programs, while women have been observed to follow music and dramas. Preschool and school-age children followed games, animation, sports and dramas (Sheyholislami, 2010). Although there is always a mass of people who see this event as a time-killing or a pause in the brain, it is an acceptable and healthy situation for children and school-age students because there will be no loss of energy and money spent on dubbing, and the opportunities offered by technology, which is often complained about due to its harms, will be positively utilized. When this becomes an obligation or a policy, society will necessarily learn some of the original English words and sentences on television. When one has the opportunity to use the simple sentences he learnt once or twice, it may increase the learner's courage, so he may be motivated and convince himself that he can learn a foreign language.

Children's Inability to Learn a Foreign Language

In Iraq, children need to acquire a new language with the support of subtitles in the original language of television broadcasts because children acquire their mother tongue by imitating the sounds they hear from their surroundings (Cook, 2010). As a society that watches television for a long time, the foreign words and sentences that children hear on television will become a habit over time, and great progress will be made in learning a second or third language. The main thing in language learning is the individual's familiarity with the language.

The most important reason why students in school cannot acquire a new language is low motivation. Since it is difficult to motivate the students of today's technology generation during the lesson, teachers need to use new techniques (Tosun & Yildiz, 2015a). Behind the lack of motivation lies the wrong methods applied in language teaching (Hsieh, 2008). Unfortunately, in some places, foreign languages are still taught based on grammar subjects. No matter which



society one goes to, people do not even like the grammar of their mother tongue and therefore cannot learn it. In Iraq, generations who have been traditionally learning English for years have come to hate English. The time and material losses societies lose in this regard are a separate subject of discussion. Therefore, teachers should use authentic materials in teaching a foreign language to introduce learners to new situations and to complete real-life tasks (Al-Akraa, 2013; Daskan & Yildiz, 2020b; Ulker & Yildiz, 2021).

Teachers are the students' managers in classes and the main source of ethical behaviour due to their prominent and crucial position. They are the role models for their students, and if they behave ethically, they will inspire their learners (Ali et al., 2020). The number of students who cannot learn a foreign language or whose learning is delayed due to the quality of the teachers teaching the language, the approach to the student, and the way they give the lesson is too high to be called small (Han, 2005). It is a fact that the teacher who teaches the lesson can sometimes be out of the branch and does not follow any other way than to explain grammar topics. Therefore, he tries to explain the lesson in his native language, which are serious reasons that delay or prevent the student from learning a foreign language (Voicu, 2012).

Childhood is the most special and sensitive period in which the foundations of a person's future life are laid. Teachers' communicative interaction with learners motivates them to be accurate in language (Daskan & Yildiz, 2020a). During this period, children's developmental, cognitive and behavioural changes occur rapidly (Celik et al., 2022). Better language acquisition should be started at a young age. The age of learning English in Iraqi public schools starts in the first grade as 5 hours a week and lasts till the twelfth grade. Apart from English, students take German or French language courses and even Kurdish language courses in some schools. However, since approaches that will attract children's attention as a teaching method have not been put forward, children say goodbye to foreign languages they can learn at an early age, even if they start language acquisition at an early age (Amin, 2017).

In addition, educators, who have the most important mission in shaping the characters of the learners, do not practice the language they teach in and out of class and do not treat students equally (Tosun & Yildiz, 2015b). Therefore, it causes a loss of motivation among students. Because it is noteworthy that students take every opportunity to communicate in English. It is an important determination that they communicate with English teachers in English during recess breaks. Unfortunately, educators who teach foreign languages in Iraq cannot speak the language they teach in practice as much as they have mastered grammar issues (Celik, 2021).

A child can learn many languages simultaneously, provided with the appropriate environment (Verhagen et al., 2017). An example of this issue is the children of my colleague-who teaches in a private institution in Iraq-know three languages at the native language level. As soon as my colleague, whom I work as a lecturer at the same institution, completed his education in England, he married an Iraqi lady, and then after living in England with his family and two children for another five years, they returned to Erbil. The children speak Kurdish at home, Arabic in the street, and English at school because they study at the International School. It is possible to come across many families like this in Iraq (Issa & Jamil, 2010).

Language Acquisition of Adults

Private universities are effective in forming a new educational culture (Khan & Yildiz, 2020). These universities or institutions have solved the problem of foreign language education to a certain extent. In this global age, businesses in the education field of private universities are getting more important than ever, with their great impact on the economic development of the country (Yildiz & Amin, 2020). These institutions, which have economic opportunities, carry out



foreign language education by hiring teachers from abroad (native English speakers). Communicating with a stranger is also something that students enjoy. Even when students communicate with a native English speaker and speak a few sentences with him, it positively motivates them. In addition, private institutions organize practical trips to their students in the country of the language they learn during the summer holiday, which is an important approach in terms of language acquisition for adults (Day, 1987).

Today, one of the most common methods of foreign language acquisition is to live in the country of the acquired language because the language acquired in the real environment is permanent. The targeted language is acquired on the street, in the market, in public transport, and the natural environment. Along with the language, learners face the opportunity to examine the culture of that society (Celik & Yildiz, 2019). Such foreign language learning activities can be carried out by staying with a predetermined family or exchanging students between schools (Son & Morrison, 2010). In addition, academicians who have master's and doctorate degrees abroad can acquire an academic foreign language in a natural environment.

Learning a new language for adults stems from a need. Today, everyone who sees language learning as a necessity spends money to learn but going to the best language school in the world, even taking lessons from very talented private teachers, may not be enough. If the individual does not have the patience, determination, and effort required to learn, it is difficult to acquire a foreign language (Ganschow & Sparks, 1996).

Finally, feeling compelled can also be mentioned. One of the conditions for getting somewhere and being effective is to know a good foreign language. In our age, politicians, bureaucrats, scientists, intellectual circles, economists, academicians, doctors, lawyers, a large segment of the media, corporate operators, marketers, etc. are the indispensable political, cultural and economic power holders of every country's society, at least to follow the scientific, technological and cultural developments related to their fields, to notice the developments in the world in a global sense promptly and to ensure their dignity by doing what is necessary for the conditions (Long, 2005).

The Political Aspect of Language Teaching

Today, especially in colonial countries, the indigenous people use the language of the colonial state rather than their language (Guilherme, 2002). Colonialist countries have both materially and culturally dominated third-world states. Regarding our subject, the colonial states have also changed the languages of the geographies they have taken under their control. This change has been made in a very conscious and systematic way. The occupying countries have managed to change the mother tongue, which is one of the most important factors of culture, even under pressure to move it to the second place. Today, it is observed that the people of the colonized countries speak the language of the occupying states naturally without coercion. There is such a delicate and strong relationship between language, thought, culture and civilization that to master the language people use is to master their thoughts. Those who have taken over a nation's language have also shaped that nation's future (Sharp, 2002).

The cornerstone of the cultures that make up the leaven of societies is the mother tongue and must be preserved. Foreign language education should not be put in the background by bringing foreign language education to the forefront. That is why nothing is as important as a mother tongue (Kecskes & Papp, 2000). This point of view is correct. However, with the concern that our mother tongue will disappear, some marginalized groups make foreign language education material and create psychological pressure on learning foreign languages in society (Alazrak, 2021).



Language education has also been affected by this change in our changing world with technology. People want to learn a foreign language without going to school or a course. Foreign language teaching programs prepared over the computer do not escape the attention of young people close to technology. Hearing-comprehension, speaking, reading and writing activities, which are the pillars of language in the virtual environment, are programmed (Evans, 2009). All but speech (hearing-comprehension, reading, writing) partially achieve their purpose. Although the program in the virtual environment offers a good speaking opportunity, it will not be able to provide the benefit of the natural speaking environment. Language is like a living being (Ahmed, 2018). It is acquired in natural environments. Technological tools alone cannot be enough to learn a foreign language, but they can help

Arabic as a Foreign Language

In learning a foreign language, the fact that different societies are learning common languages such as English, French and Russian quickly can hurt those who do not have language ability or have difficulty learning. Languages are widely spoken on Earth, such as English, French, German, and Russian are common members of the Indo-European language family. In kinship and structure, these languages are close to each other. Therefore, it is easy for societies whose mother tongue is one of these languages to learn another language from the Indo-European (Ramat & Ramat, 2015). Although Arabic is in the Semitic language group, the Arab community is also more advantageous when learning this type of foreign language since it is partially similar in structure to the languages of the Indo-European language family. Prejudices against foreign language learning have been partially isolated as citizens in Iraq who have to go abroad for different reasons to learn different foreign languages (Lies, 2004). However, considering the foreign language education curriculum followed in the Iraqi education system, the methods used by foreign language teachers, the books and tools used and the economic dimensions, the success in foreign language education is not to the desired extent (Aljorani, 2019).

An interest in foreign languages is also very important in understanding the importance of the mother tongue. Goethe said, "He who does not know a foreign language cannot know his language exactly" (Latifjon o'g'li, 2022). Educators who teach Arabic to foreigners abroad have been able to compare Arabic with other languages as foreign language education. As a result of this comparison, it was understood that Arabic is not easy to learn as a foreign language (Al-Busaidi, 2015). Research by linguists shows that this assumption is correct. The first reason is that there are many rules in Arabic and grammar that are not like other languages. Despite this, the number of individuals trying to learn Arabic is not small at all. Spoken in 60 countries today, Arabic is the fifth most widely spoken language in the world and one of the six official languages recognized by the United Nations (Abu-Absi, 2016). Arabic, a member of the Semitic family of languages, is a much more spoken language than previously thought. It is one of the oldest languages spoken on Earth. As of 2022, 480 million people speak Arabic. The most Arabic-speaking country is Egypt. It is followed by countries such as Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, Syria, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Yemen (Khaldarbekovna & Abduqaxarovna, 2021)

The Privileges of Arabic as A Foreign Language Education

The interest in learning Arabic is not as much as in European languages. As with any foreign language, we learn, and learning Arabic helps us stand out in what we do. Speaking Arabic as a second foreign language or as a mother tongue is a privilege to understand what is happening in the Arab world. Most people want to learn Arabic to read the Holy Qur'an and understand religious literature without others needing interpretation. The fact that people who want to study theology learn Arabic allows them to have the opportunity to study in Arab countries. Learning a



language is understanding different cultures. Most of the civilizations originated in the Middle East, in geography where many nations lived together and used the same language rules, and finally, in the Arab world, it is a wealth to know Arabic to do business (Jusoh & Abdullah, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although there are practical solutions for acquiring a new language, individuals come to the learning environment with differences in knowledge and experience and perceive and learn within the framework of their capacities. For this reason, the idea of a single method, a single understanding and a single activity in acquiring language processes is never appropriate (Sanders, 2013; Yildiz, 2015; Sanjani, 2020). One of the most serious problems experienced when acquiring a foreign language is the worry that 'I will do wrong'. The person who makes a mistake in the language learned several times has declared himself defeated in this regard as motivation. However, all truths and beauties can be reached by making mistakes (Naser Oteir & Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). In this respect, individuals who adopt a second language should address the issue without fear, hesitation, breaking, spilling or even losing their enthusiasm, even if they are ridiculed. The individual who addresses his mistakes will soon enjoy this effort as he begins to speak the language being studied.

Since the people living in the Middle East geography generally belong to the same culture, tradition and religion, they are shocked by the cultural shock when they encounter western culture and have difficulty communicating with western society (Irwin, 2020). One of the main reasons for this is that they prefer to learn the local language, not integrate into social life, and stay in their shell. Although efforts are made to attend language courses several times to eliminate this situation, the continuation and efforts in this regard are short-lived. Overcome this problem by showing the will to speak the local language, both in oneself and the community in which one lives.

The most important condition for a language to become a world language is its deeprooted and strong literature. From this point of view, Arabic is the heir of solid literature whose foundation goes back a long time (Al-Issa, 2020). Those who know the subtleties of their natural language well can learn a foreign language at a good level. Therefore, before foreign language education in Iraq for adults, the richness of the Arabic language, the origin of which is very old, should be understood by individuals. Especially in the Kurdistan region, the individual who is aware that Arabic is a language that can be learned as a foreign language education will be positively motivated while learning another second foreign language.

In recent years, Iraqi society's courage to learn foreign languages has increased. New and result-oriented programs put forward in this regard have started to be implemented. The belief of individuals who learn foreign languages in Iraq that Arabic is a strong and rich language has also changed positively (Zakraoui et al., 2020, April)..

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