

Language Skills and their Relationship to Learning Difficulties in English Language from the Students' Point of View

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the relationship between learning language skills and learning difficulties in the English language among students in the elementary stage in Irbid Governorate from the students' point of view. The study used the descriptive-analytic approach. The sample of the study consisted of (300) male and female students, who teach the fourth and fifth grades, distributed as follows: (150) males and (150) females. To achieve the objectives of the study, a questionnaire was designed to identify the relationship between learning language skills and learning difficulties among students in the English language. The questionnaire included the following dimensions, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The study results revealed that the overall degree for the relationship between learning language skills to students' learning difficulties in the English language at the primary stage from the teachers' point of view was high in all dimensions of study. The study concluded that it is important to identify the importance of learning language skills for students with LDs and teachers should be aware of these skills and their role.

Keywords: English language, Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing, Learning disabilities

Introduction

In recent years, the English language has facilitated the widespread of the electronic networks in the field of public communication. This spread, in turn has contributed to improving the use of English as an international language (Almousah, 2020). In addition, Al-Arifi (2020) emphasised that English is the language of communication and understanding between many countries of the world, as it is the language of political and scientific conferences and forums, and the language of publishing and scientific research in many fields, especially technical and medical ones. Therefore, the Jordanian Ministry of Education has continuously developed English language teaching, as English is the second official language in Jordan.

There are clear indications of students' weakness in the English language, as students are unable to speak English, and their ability to comprehend and understand written texts is also weak (Minshar, 2020). In addition, students are weak in understanding conversations they listen to in English and are weak in written expression. This led to the increase in learning disabilities in the English language among students and its great impact on the future of children, their social and professional lives, and their psychological stability. Such a phenomenon requires a comprehensive, careful, and insightful view of the familial, social, and economic factors interacting with the preparations, tendencies, and psychological trends of each student separately. It is also important to avoid random judgments and intolerant trends such as the misconception of some teachers and parents that learning disabilities are linked

to misunderstanding and mental retardation (Musaed, 2018). Therefore, this problem triggered the researcher to investigate and identify the most important reasons behind the students' learning difficulties in the English, including those related to learning language skills.

Problem Statement

The level of students in the elementary stage in the English does not meet the expected learning outcomes in various language skills (Al-Zoubi, 2013). Therefore, it has become necessary to identify the causes of students' learning disabilities in the English language from its various aspects. The rationale behind this reason is that the English language is very important in achieving the objectives of the educational system and the progress of individuals scientifically and practically. The idea of this study was to identify the relationship between learning language skills to the learning disabilities of students in the English language and methods of treating them. Therefore, it was necessary to take the opinions of students to face these difficulties, as taking their opinions will lead to a deeper understanding of the language, In addition to achieving better performance on the part of both the teacher and the learner alike.

Research Objectives

This study aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- Identifying the causes of learning disabilities among students in the English language at the elementary stage in Irbid Governorate from the students' point of view.
- We are identifying the relationship between learning language skills and learning difficulties in the English language.

Research Questions

The present study seeks to give answers to the following research question:

- What is the relationship of language skills with the learning disabilities of students in the English language in Irbid from the students' point of view?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the current study stems from the importance of the English language as the first global language that contributes to the progress of individuals scientifically and practically, so everyone needs to learn it. Therefore, research on the relationship of language skills to students' learning difficulties in the English may contribute to finding solutions for these reasons. This will help reduce the number of students with learning difficulties in the English language in the future. The current study also derives its significance from the importance of the elementary stage, which represents the first pillar of the next educational stage in the educational system, which depends on the quality and development of students' academic performance (Saadeh and Dhmour, 2017).

Delimitations of the Study

The results of this study are limited to human limitations, as it was applied to the fourth and fifth primary students. The study tools were applied in public primary schools in the Second Directorate of Education in Irbid Governorate during the second semester of 2020/2021. The results of the study also are limited to the validity and reliability of the study instrument.

Definition of Operational Terms

The primary stage: is defined as the stage at the beginning of the educational ladder, where students undertake their spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, and social care in a manner consistent with the nature of each student and according to the goals of the society in which they live (Al-Mutairi, 2009). The researcher defines it procedurally as the stage that includes students from the fourth grade to the sixth grade in public schools in the Second Education Directorate in Irbid Governorate.

Reasons: They are defined as the factors behind a particular problem or work to make something happen (Olimat et al., 2013).

Students with Learning Disabilities: those who have disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes, which include understanding of written or spoken language and their use (khasawneh, 2019).

Literature Review

Students face difficulties learning English as a second language, which is a multifaceted problem that requires organised and multidimensional solutions. They also face other challenges related to mastering the skills necessary for reading comprehensions, such as rapid recognition of words and an abundance of linguistic vocabulary. They need a kind of education that directly solves their deficits and promote their language level (Nuruzzaman, Islam & Shuchi, 2018).

The problem of students' weakness in the English language is one of the challenges facing researchers in teaching and learning English in general. The improvement of students' achievement in the English language confirms the good progress of the education process in the right direction. In addition, the teacher grows a positive motivation towards the teaching profession and helping students achieve better. On the other hand, we will find that the achievement of many students in the English language is a complex problem, as they feel that it is an unsuitable subject for them and that whatever they do they will not be good at. Therefore, we must look into the reasons behind the formation of negative trends towards the acquisition of English language subjects, the most important of which is the low achievement rate (Turki, 2019).

The general atmosphere prevailing in elementary schools neither helps nor encourages learning the English language. The student speaks Arabic with the school administration and teachers and learns the Arabic language in all subjects. The remaining time to learn English is limited to a class of forty-five minutes, most of which is covered with Arabic. The time specified to learning the English language is very limited compared to other study subjects, which is of course not enough for students to practice and acquire the language. Therefore, it is necessary to take advantage of all the opportunities available to the student in learning the language. As for teaching methods, we find that they do not achieve their goal for several reasons, including that teachers do not speak English in their performance and focus on giving information and teaching it as a subject only, regardless of teaching English. In addition, teachers focus on the written contents of the curriculum and neglect the verbal side of the language.

Previous Studies

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the reasons behind learning disabilities in the English language and these studies have come up with different results.

Al-Mawajdeh (2020) identified the reading difficulties facing the 9th-grade students in the English language and how to deal with these difficulties from the teacher's point of view in Jordan. The sample of this study consisted of 100 teachers (40 males and 60 females) from the Almazar Directorate of Education in Jordan. The author used the analytic descriptive method and developed a questionnaire where its validity and reliability were verified. This study showed statistically significant differences in the teacher's perceptions and these differences are attributed to the variable of years of experience.

Abdel Moneim (2019) investigated the effectiveness of a training program based on strategies of attention and working memory to improve reading skills among students of the third primary with learning disabilities in English at Kafer El Bateek Al assay School Kafer El Bateek Idara. The sample of this study consisted of 30 students. The study followed the quasi-experimental where the students were randomly divided into 2 groups, a control group of 15 students and an experimental group of 15 students. A pre-test was applied to both groups and then only the experimental group took the training program, which consisted of 24 sessions and after that, a post-test has been applied to both groups. A reading and writing scale and IQ test of Ahmad Zaky Saleh were used alongside the training program. The results of the study revealed that there are significant differences in student's performance on post-test in the experimental group that proves the training program is effective.

Williams (2020) examined the effects of an intensive reading intervention RIA (Reading Intervention for Adolescents) on reading outcomes (word reading, vocabulary, and comprehension) for ninth-grade English language learners with learning disabilities (LD). The sample of this study were students from 3 different large high schools in an urban, diverse southwestern U.S. school district where all students were English Learners by the time of this study or during the past 5 years; this study

analysed the treatment effects only for the English Learners with learning disabilities from the full sample in the study of the (Reading Intervention for Adolescents (RIA) for English Learners (Vaughn et al., 2018). And to analyse the treatment effects, 2 groups (treatment and comparison) were created from the four originally randomised groups of 10 to 15 students. The study results exposed the challenges of improving reading outcomes for English learners with learning disabilities in high school.

Swanson (2020) examined the prevalence of latent classes at risk for reading or math disabilities for elementary school children whose mother tongue was Spanish. The sample of this study consisted of 394 students (155 first grade, 129-second grade, and 110 from the third grade) were selected from 30 classrooms from urban schools with a high poverty representation from two large school districts in southwestern United States, 192 boys, and 202 girls. The findings of this study supported the idea that children at risk for certain LDs reflect a latent class group that can be separated from a heterogeneous sample of children who differ in reading, L1, and L2 measures of vocabulary, math, fluid intelligence, and attention.

Research Methodology

This section provides information on the methodology of the present study, which includes population and sample, research instrument, and validity and reliability of the instrument.

Population and Sample

The study sample consisted of (300) male and female students, who were chosen from the teachers who teach the fourth and fifth primary grades. 10 schools of males and females were chosen by the stratified random method to consist of (5 schools for females) and (5 schools for males). The study was conducted on a sample of 300 students as shown in Table (1).

Table 1: Distribution of the Study Sample According to Independent Variables

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	150	50%
	Female	150	50%

School grade	Fourth	100	33.33%
	Fifth	100	33.33%
	Sixth	100	33.33%
	Total	300	100.0

Research Instrument

The instrument of the study consisted of a measure of the relationship of language skills to students’ learning difficulties in English at the primary stage from the students’ point of view. The study instrument consisted of two parts. Part one included general information about the study sample (students). The second part included the statements of the questionnaire addressed to teachers, which were divided into the following topics (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The response was graded on each statement according to a triple scale and was determined at three levels: high (3 degrees), medium (2 degrees), and low (1 degree).

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the correlation coefficient was calculated. The correlation coefficients are shown in Table (2) below.

Table 2: Cronbach’s Alpha Internal Consistency Coefficient and Repetition Stability of the Instrument

Field	Test Re-test	Internal Consistency
Listening	0.91	0.85
Speaking	0.87	0.86
Reading	0.88	0.85
Writing	0.90	0.87
Total	0.89	0.86

Table (2) shows that the value of the total reliability coefficient of the study instrument was (0.89), where the listening field obtained the highest stability factor (0.91), and the lowest stability factor was (0.87) for the speaking field.

Findings

This section provides the findings obtained from the present study. These findings are presented based on the research questions that guide the present research.

Results of the research question of the study.

To answer this question, the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills to students' learning difficulties in English were extracted as follows.

The first field: language skills

Table (3) shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties among English language students and the overall degree of for the language skills fields.

Table 3: The Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Statements of the Language Skills Fields Arranged in Descending Order According to the Mean Scores

Language skills	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Rank
Listening	2.17	.567	Medium

Table 4: The Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Listening Field Arranged in Descending Order According to the Mean Scores

Rank	Statement	Mean score	Standard deviation	Level
1	Weakness of students in following the instructions of the course in English language by listening	2.19	.688	Medium
2	Not linking the listening material to real-life situations	2.17	.757	Medium
3	Poor ability of students to connect sentences by listening	2.13	.761	Medium
4	Difficulty distinguishing students by hearing similar words	2.08	.735	Medium
5	Lack of sufficient audio materials to get students used to listening	2.08	.752	Medium
6	Poor comprehension of the listening material	2.08	.777	Medium
	Total listening field	2.12	.493	Medium

The results in Table (4) show that the overall degree of assessment of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties in listening was medium. The highest statement was "students' weakness in following the instructions of the course in English by listening". In contrast, the statement "Poor comprehension of the listening material" came in the last rank.

Speaking	2.12	.518	Medium
Reading	2.12	.493	Medium
Writing	2.09	.516	Medium
Total	2.12	.421	Medium

It is evident from Table (3) that the overall degree of assessment of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties among English language students was generally high. All of the statements of the questionnaire were also high, as the "speaking" field came in the first place, while the "writing field" came in the last place.

The Listening Field

Table (4) shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties among English language students and the total degree of assessment of the listening field and its statements.

The Speaking Field

Table (5) shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills to learning difficulties among English language students and the overall assessment degree for the speaking field and its statements.

Table 5: The Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Statements of the Speaking Fields Arranged in Descending Order According to the Mean Scores

Rank	Statement	Mean score	Standard deviation	Level
1	Not focusing on speaking experiences during the lessons.	2.20	.757	Medium
2	Poor ability of students to express their thoughts orally	2.19	.718	Medium
3	Poor ability of students to form correct sentences	2.17	.753	Medium
4	Poor ability of students to synthesize language terms	2.11	.738	Medium
	Total speaking field	2.17	.567	Medium

The results in Table (5) show that the overall degree of assessment of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties in speaking was medium. All of its statements were also high, as the statement, “Not focusing on speaking experiences during the lessons” came in the first rank. The statement, “ Poor ability of students to synthesise language terms” ranked last.

The Reading Field

Table (6) shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties among English language students and the overall degree of assessment of the reading field and its statements.

Table 6: The Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Statements of the Reading Fields Arranged in Descending Order According to the Mean Scores

Rank	Statement	Mean score	Standard deviation	Level
1	Difficulty reading and summarizing English texts by the teacher	2.20	.762	Medium
2	Difficulty pronouncing vowels in English	2.16	.727	Medium
3	Difficulty understanding the meanings of the reading material	2.13	.718	Medium
4	Difficulty deriving word roots	2.05	.780	Medium
5	Difficulty reading English sentences	2.05	.757	Medium
6	Difficulty distinguishing silent letters	1.95	.808	Medium
	Total reading field	2.09	.516	Medium

It is evident from Table (6) that the overall degree of assessment of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties in the field of reading was medium. All its statements were also high, as the statement, “Difficulty reading and summarising English texts by the teacher” came first. The statement, “Difficulty distinguishing silent letters” ranked last.

The Writing Field

Table (7) shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills to students’ learning difficulties in the English language and the overall degree of assessment for writing and its statements.

Table 7: The Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Statements of the Writing Fields Arranged in Descending Order According to the Mean Scores

Rank	Statement	Mean score	Standard deviation	Level
1	Lack of marks (grades) for written assignments	2.21	.737	High
2	Difficulty distinguishing letters and syllables	2.13	.740	High
3	Lack of marks (grades) for written assignments	2.12	.771	High
4	Difficulty expressing in writing life situations.	2.07	.751	High
5	Lack of written assignments assigned to students	2.06	.778	High
	Total writing field	2.12	.518	High

The results in Table (7) show that the overall degree of assessment of the relationship of language skills to students' learning difficulties in writing was medium. All of its statements were also high, as the statement, "Lack of marks (grades) for written assignments" ranked first, while the statement, "the lack of written tasks assigned to students" came last.

Discussion

The results in Table (3) showed that all language skills statements received high grades by teachers. The fields of the questionnaire came in the following order, speaking, writing, listening, and reading.

In the field of listening, the results showed that the students face a real weakness in listening, especially the linking of sentences while listening. The researcher attributes this to the teachers' lack of focus in their teaching on this particular skill and their focus on other skills, in addition to the lack of a curriculum in which the teacher uses to teach that skill. Listening skill largely depends on the teacher, who in turn can be asked to possess this skill.

As for the field of speaking, the results showed that all the averages of this field came at a high level. The researcher attributes the reason for this because students face a real weakness in conversation skills because of their teachers not focusing on conducting conversations in English in the classroom. In addition, students' fear of making mistakes or feeling shy while they speak in front of their colleagues is also another reason. This indicates that the students' speaking skills are still affected by many problems. Students face great difficulty in speaking the English language due to not being exposed to sufficient experience to develop this skill.

In reading, the results showed that all the averages in this field came at a high level. This is a clear indication that teachers see that students face weakness in terms of reading skills. It is also an indication of the weak foundation of students concerning reading, especially letter training. Students find it very difficult to distinguish letters, especially those written and not pronounced, as the student is not exposed to many exercises and activities that enable him to distinguish between them.

As for the writing field, the results showed that

all the averages in this field came high. This is a clear indication that students face real weaknesses in the field of writing. The researcher attributes this to the teachers' lack of focus in their teaching on this skill and their focus on other skills. In addition, there are weak appropriate opportunities for the student to show his skill in writing and expressing himself.

Recommendation

One of the most prominent recommendations of this study is to focus on the need to diversify teaching methods, reduce the teaching burden for teachers from lessons, and open channels of communication between family and school to follow up on students' affairs. It is recommended to identify problems in the process of learning English and increasing the awareness of students and their families about the importance of learning English. In addition, they are encouraging schools to establish a unique English language laboratory equipped with the latest equipment to enable students to listen to the language better and with sound pronunciation and encourage teachers to develop remedial plans to improve the achievement level of students.

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