

Reasons For The Low Student Attainment In English Language Subject Among Secondary School Students (Secondary Schools In Al-Qalaa Municipality As A Case Study)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the main reasons for the low student attainment in English language subject among Secondary School students, using Secondary schools in Al-Qalaa Municipality as a case study. The researcher employed a descriptive approach using a comprehensive social survey, deemed the most suitable method for the nature of the study and its objectives. The study relied on a questionnaire consisting of 21 items to collect data. The study sample comprised all 19 English language teachers in Secondary School in Al-Qalaa Municipality. Frequencies and percentages were used to statistically analyze the data. After conducting the study and analyzing the data, the researcher arrived at several conclusions, most notably: teachers' weakness in using curriculum teaching strategies, reliance on Arabic in teaching English language, and weak skills in utilizing information and communication technology. The results also revealed an inadequacy of the time allocated to teaching the subject compared to the density of the curriculum, overcrowded classrooms exceeding capacity, weak student foundation, limited vocabulary, and

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a lack of motivation to learn. In addition to the schools' lack of modern educational resources and language labs.

Keywords: Student attainment, Secondary School, English language subject language subject, Al-Qalaa Municipality.

INTRODUCTION

The decline in student attainment is defined as a state of delay or deficiency in attainment due to reasons that may be mental, physical, social, or emotional, such that the achievement rate falls below the normal and average level compared to peers of the same age (Al-Hattab, 2018). It has been shown that this weakness is cumulative, as students move from one grade to the next while suffering from weaknesses in reading and writing. This makes it difficult to address in advanced stages using traditional methods; consequently, students transition to the secondary and High school stages, which represent a significant leap in terms of the volume and quality of prescribed books and materials.

The reasons for the decline in students' achievement levels are attributed to many factors related to the student, the teacher, the curriculum, educational aids, or others. Studying the decline in students' achievement levels in the English language subject has become matters of great importance that cannot be overlooked, given the resulting difficulties students face

after graduating from high school and moving into university studies or entering practical life (Al-Maamari, 2013).

Language is a tool for thinking, expression, and communication, and the teaching and mastery of English language is considered one of the basic educational goals in our schools. Despite all this interest, the phenomenon of low student attainment among some basic education students has emerged, alongside their inability to read and write. This problem has occupied all educational, family, and local community circles, and questions have increased about who is responsible for this decline: Is it the school, the home, the curriculum, or the teacher? (Madanat, 2001).

As the researcher noticed through her experience in teaching English language, most students at the university level exhibit low proficiency in English language. This may be due to a weak foundation in English language in previous educational stages for most students, despite the development of the curriculum for all basic stages.

Research Problem

The researcher has observed, through her work in education, a continuous decline in English language proficiency among basic education pupils in the Al-Qalaa municipality in general, which negatively reflects on higher educational stages. Therefore, the researcher decided to investigate this problem, identify its causes, and propose solutions and suggestions to help resolve it.

Study Objectives

The study aims to identify the reasons for low student attainment in English language subject for basic education students, including:

1. Identifying the extent of the teacher's ability to use modern teaching methods to convey information to pupils.
2. The suitability of the curriculum to the pupils' age and cultural levels.
3. The availability and diversity of educational aids in teaching English language.

Research Methodology

Research Methodology Guided by the study's objectives, questions, and hypotheses, the descriptive approach was followed using a comprehensive social survey, as it is the most suitable for the purposes of this study.

Previous Studies

Previous studies are a fundamental pillar in scientific research for the purpose of accurately defining the study problem and its objectives. They represent the efforts of previous researchers, guide toward strengths and weaknesses, and help in developing a sound plan and methodology. Some relevant previous studies include:

1- Shahwani (2021): This study aimed to identify the reasons for low added value in student attainment in the English language subject as measured by educational supervisors in basic education schools in the central sector of the Al-Baha region, Saudi Arabia. The sample consisted of 16 English language teachers and 88 students. The researcher used a questionnaire consisting of 12 questions. Among the most important results of this study: The study concluded that the low added value in student attainment in the English language subject is mainly due to a set of common factors between teachers and students, most notably: frequent absences of teachers and students, poor quality of supervisory visits, excessive use of Arabic during teaching, and failure to adhere to the standards for preparing and implementing diagnostic tests according to learning outcome indicators. The results also showed, from the teachers' perspective, that relying on summaries and notes instead of the curriculum, and weak motivation from supervisors, are factors that negatively affect student attainment.

2- Utomo, Kusakabe, Sultana, and Setyowati (2020): This study addressed the challenges faced by English language teachers in teaching: a case study of a High school in the Banjar Negara region (Indonesia). It is located in a mountainous area where most people prefer to speak their mother tongue in their daily lives. The study sample included 125 English language teachers in public schools. This study used a qualitative approach involving

questionnaires and personal interviews. The results showed that the challenges facing English language teaching are divided into four parts. The first challenges were from teachers: these include curriculum teaching strategies, learning strategies, classroom management, and teachers' skills in using Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The second was from students: lack of vocabulary, loss of motivation, and weak student foundation. The third was from schools: schools have limited facilities used by teachers and students in educational activities, such as dictionaries, projectors, and limited language laboratories. The fourth was from parents: many parents in the village have low education and a limited future vision, which affected their children's education.

3- Awad and Sultan (2019): This study aimed to identify the causes of low student attainment among basic education pupils in learning the English language from the perspective of English language teachers in Aden Governorate, and to determine the effect of gender, scientific qualification, and years of experience on their viewpoints. To achieve the objectives of the study, the researchers designed a closed questionnaire consisting of 60 items distributed over six fields. The study sample consisted of 91 teachers, including 41 males and 50 females. The results of the study concluded that all fields received a general average of (3.79 out of 5), indicating a high degree of causal strength. At the field level, "Curriculum Content" ranked first with an average of (4.12), "Educational Goals" ranked second with an average of (4.04), and "Evaluation Methods" came third with an average of (3.93). "Teaching Methods" ranked fourth with an average of (3.63), followed by the "Teacher" field with an average of (3.51) in fifth place, and finally the "Student" field in sixth place with an average of (3.48). There were no statistically significant differences between the averages of the teachers' opinions toward the reasons for students learning the English language subject based on gender, scientific qualifications, or years of experience.

4- Katy Allen (2008): In her study titled "Primary School Teachers and the Problems They Face in Teaching the English Language," the study aimed to identify the obstacles facing English language education in primary schools in Tanzania. The researcher used a

descriptive-analytical approach, and the tool was observation. The researcher conducted a workshop for both teachers and students and observed their performance to identify the causes of weakness in English language education and related problems. The study sample consisted of 10 teachers and 14 pupils. Among the results reached by the study were the poor academic and professional levels of teachers, in addition to the fact that the English language taught by the teachers is not their native language. There was a lack of motivation to learn the English language among both the student and the teacher, a lack of student discipline, and weak curricula that were unsuitable and did not meet student needs. There were also problems related to sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary among the students.

Commentary on Previous Studies

After reviewing the similarities and differences, the researcher benefited from these studies in defining the problem, importance, and tools, as well as statistical methods and sample selection.

The results of previous studies indicated that schools have limited facilities (dictionaries, projectors, labs), weaknesses in curriculum strategies, classroom management, and teacher ICT skills, as well as students' weak foundations, lack of vocabulary, and loss of motivation. This current study is distinguished by being more comprehensive than most previous studies, with a sample size of 125 teachers, similar to the study by Utomo et al. (2020).

Studies like Allen (2008) and Shahwani (2021) indicated that low achievement is due to factors related to the teacher, student, and supervision, such as frequent absences and excessive use of Arabic. Meanwhile, Awad and Sultan (2019) found that curriculum content was the primary factor, followed by educational goals and evaluation methods.

Analysis of these studies shows a broad agreement on the central role of the teacher, the curriculum, the school environment, and teaching and evaluation methods in shaping achievement levels. They reveal an urgent need to develop teacher preparation programs, improve supervision quality, and update curricula to suit learner needs.

Study Questions

1. Is teacher incompetence a cause of low student attainment in English language?
2. Is the unsuitability of the curriculum to the pupils' age and cultural level a cause of low student attainment?
3. Is the lack of educational aids a cause of low student attainment in English language?

Importance of the Study

1. The pupil is the main pillar of the educational process and preparing them helps the society progress.
2. This study may help teachers improve their performance and avoid reasons leading to low student achievement in English language.

Scope of the Study

- Spatial Scope: All secondary education schools in Al-Qalaa Municipality.
- Temporal Scope: The first semester of the academic year 2024–2025.

Study Terminology

- Student attainment: The scientific level reached by the pupil in a subject, determined by grades obtained in school exams (Al-Hajri, 2024).
- Secondary Stage: A three-year stage between primary and High school education in the Libyan system, ending with the Secondary Certificate (Shawqi, 2023).
- Low Achievement: A decrease in the pupil's level in one or more subjects, making it difficult to follow the curriculum, or a deficiency in achievement growth due to mental, social, or emotional factors (Nafez & Ali, 2014).
- English language: One of the compulsory subjects and the second foreign language prescribed by the Ministry of Education for basic education students in Libya (Al-Akar, 2010).

- Al-Qalaa Municipality: A city in the Infusen\ Nefusa Mountain region, 5 km east of Yefren Municipality and 120 km southwest of Tripoli. Known for its history (Qalaa' means fortress), trade, tourism, and agriculture (Al-Abbadi, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Student attainment

Student attainment is one of the most important basics of educational systems, used by teachers to estimate the extent to which educational goals are achieved. It is linked to a person's mental ability and their capacity to complete work through sensory and mental actions (Al-Kubaisi & Al-Dahiri, 2000).

Low Student attainment

This is a sensitive topic related to the future of the youth and their professional lives. It is viewed by some as the decline of a student's performance in one or more subjects compared to their peers' average, while others see it as achievement falling below a specific grade (Jabr, Ahmed, 2018).

Causes of Low Achievement

1. Academic and professional weakness of some teachers.
2. Lack of interest in training new and veteran teachers.
3. Lack of interest in school activities.
4. Lack of laboratories and libraries in some schools.
5. Family neglect regarding the pupil's lessons and encouragement (Fahmy & Moussa, 1999).

English language

English language is of paramount importance for any researcher wishing to keep pace with the modern world as the primary global language for technology, scientific research, tourism, and economy (Al-Turki, 2019).

Goals of English language Teaching:

- Equipping pupils with basic language skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking).
- Providing vocabulary and word-building skills.
- Introducing models of human knowledge (poetry, stories, etc.).

- Training students to apply what they learned in expression and writing.
- Providing high values and introducing the use of dictionaries (Sinnada, 2006).

History of English language Teaching in Libya

The instruction of the English language in Libya dates back to the 1940s following the end of World War II, under British administration in the northern part of Libya. On February 19, 1968, the Minister of Education issued a decree to form a committee to review the Libyan educational system. The decision aimed to establish the English language as the medium of instruction for scientific courses in High schools and universities. The first English language series used in Libya was "Basic Way to English," prepared by K.C. Ogden. In the 1960s, there was a need for a new English language program and textbooks to transform and improve the entire process of teaching this foreign language in Libya. Mustafa Gusbi authored the series titled "English for Libya". For the High school stage, Gusbi, in collaboration with Roland John, produced another series titled "Further English for Libya," which relied on English culture as a medium for teaching the English language.

Following the 1986 air raid on the previous regime, the Minister of Education issued Decree No. 195/1986, which halted the teaching of foreign languages in Libya. This decision negatively impacted the future of education and student attainment. The teaching of the English language subject resumed in the Libyan educational system during the 1993/1994 academic year. In the 1998/1999 academic year, a new "English for Libya" series, published by the British firm Garnet Education, was introduced for the secondary and High school stages. In 2005/2006, a new English language textbook was introduced for the third year of primary school. It was taught for only one year before being discontinued, then reintroduced for the fifth and sixth primary grades (or basic education) in 2006/2007.

Historically, there was university-led training in cooperation with UNESCO, and teachers were regularly sent abroad for professional development. Since the 1986 hiatus, the

educational process has faced numerous challenges: a shortage of qualified teachers, a lack of English language instructional aids, an absence of language laboratories in schools, a lack of programmed linguistic training for teachers, and a deficit in computer training that would enable teachers to utilize technology and the internet within language labs (Muhaisen, 2021).

Methodology

The study followed the descriptive methodology using a comprehensive social survey.

Study Sample

The sample consists of all 19 English language teachers in the Al-Qalaa municipality for the 2024/2025 semester.

Study Tool and Measurement

A questionnaire was designed consisting of 16 items. The measurement passed through several stages, including reviewing educational sources and presenting the initial 20-item version to a panel of 3 expert arbitrators. Based on their feedback, items were modified and reduced to the final 16 items to ensure the tool measures what it was intended for.

Statistical Methods

The researcher utilized percentages as the primary statistical method, as it is one of the most common approaches for data analysis.

Analysis of Basic Demographic Data

Table (1): Frequency Distribution of the Study Sample by Gender

Item	Female	Male	Total
Frequency	19	0	19
Percentage	100%	0%	100%

The table indicates that all English language teachers in the study are female. This may be attributed to the fact that female graduates from colleges of education in the Infusen\Nefusa Mountain region account for 75-80% of the total graduates.

Table (2): Frequency Distribution by Educational Level

Item	Bachelor's (License)	High Diploma	Intermediate Diploma	Total
Frequency	10	8	1	19
Percentage	53%	42%	5%	100%

Bachelor's degree holders constitute the majority at 53%, followed by Higher Diploma holders at 42%. This distribution might reflect a lack of clear educational policy regarding staff distribution across various educational institutions.

Table (3): Frequency Distribution by Experience

Item	Less than 5 Years	More than 5 Years	Total
Frequency	1	18	19
Percentage	5%	95%	100%

A vast majority (95%) of the teachers have more than five years of experience. This is likely due to a lack of new appointments for teachers in this subject.

Analysis of Data Related to the Study Subject

Table (4): Insufficiency of Time Allocation for Teaching English language

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	19	0	19
Percentage	100%	0%	100%

All participants (100%) agreed that the allocated time is insufficient. Inadequate time allocation represents a real challenge, negatively impacting the effective use of class time and the achievement of educational goals.

Table (5): Large Class Sizes and Achievement Levels

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	16	3	19
Percentage	84%	16%	100%

Large class sizes (84%) hinder the teacher's ability to provide adequate attention to all students, particularly low-achieving students who require more intensive support.

Table (6): Lack of Professional Training Courses

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	18	1	19
Percentage	95%	5%	100%

Most teachers (95%) have not received capacity-building or curriculum analysis training courses.

Table (7): Use of Arabic Translation vs. English language Understanding

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	17	2	19
Percentage	89%	11%	100%

The majority of teachers (89%) translate English language words and texts into Arabic language. This is often due to the lack of educational aids that would facilitate comprehension without resorting to the mother tongue.

Table (8): Lack of Modern Educational Aids and Technology

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	18	1	19
Percentage	95%	5%	100%

Teaching remains largely traditional (95%) due to the unavailability of supporting tools such as pictures, posters, computers, projectors, and phonetics labs.

Table (9): General Weakness in Using Technology

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	14	5	19
Percentage	74%	26%	100%

A significant percentage of teachers (74%) face difficulties in using technological tools.

Table (10): Curriculum Integration and Cohesion

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	16	3	19
Percentage	84%	16%	100%

The English language curriculum is perceived as interconnected and integrated by 84% of respondents.

Table (11): Linguistic Topics and Cultural Differences

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	1	18	19
Percentage	5%	95%	100%

Most teachers (95%) believe linguistic topics are not selected in a way that avoids cultural differences between the mother tongue and English language; rather, many topics mirror the native culture.

Table (12): Need for Modern Teaching Methods

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	19	0	19
Percentage	100%	0%	100%

There is a 100% consensus that the English language curriculum requires the implementation of modern teaching methods.

Table (13): Suitability of Curriculum for Student Age

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	11	8	19
Percentage	58%	42%	100%

While 58% believe the curriculum fits the age level, teachers noted this is only true if students have a solid foundation from previous years. Currently, weak foundations cause students to struggle with many topics.

Table (14): Density of the Curriculum Content

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	18	1	19
Percentage	95%	5%	100%

Curriculum content is considered dense by 95% of teachers, which is a negative indicator given the limited number of weekly classes.

Table (15): Weakness in Basic Principles and Skills

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	17	2	19
Percentage	89%	11%	100%

The majority (89%) observed weak basic skills among students, likely stemming from poor foundations in earlier educational stages.

Table (16): Neglect of Homework

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	13	6	19
Percentage	68%	32%	100%

Most students (68%) neglect their homework, possibly because they find the assignments too difficult to solve.

Table (17): Weak Motivation to Study English language

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	10	9	19
Percentage	53%	47%	100%

Low motivation (53%) is linked to students not perceiving the importance of the English language in their daily lives.

Table (18): Focus on Achievement Results vs. Linguistic Ability

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	17	2	19
Percentage	89%	11%	100%

A high percentage (89%) of students focus on their final grades rather than on developing actual linguistic proficiency.

Table (19): Weak Ability to Use Vocabulary in Sentences

Item	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	17	2	19
Percentage	89%	11%	100%

Students' low proficiency levels prevent 89% of them from effectively using vocabulary in meaningful sentences.

Conclusion

Based on the results obtained in this study, it is clear that the low student attainment in the English language subject among secondary school students in Al-Qalaa Municipality is a multi-dimensional educational problem. It results from the interplay of temporal, educational, instructional, and psychological factors. Through the study of this subject, the following findings were reached:

1. The time allocation is insufficient for teaching the English language subject compared to the density of the curriculum. The equivalent of two and a half hours per week is inadequate for learning the English language, especially with the large number of students in the classroom. This leads to a weakness in the teacher's ability to convey information and a lack of attention to all students within the classroom.

2. Most teachers have not received professional development courses or curriculum analysis training, which causes an inability for many teachers to teach the English language subject effectively.
3. Schools are not equipped with language laboratories that assist in teaching the English language subject.
4. Modern teaching aids are not used in explanations due to their unavailability in schools and their high cost for both students and teachers. This negatively affects students' understanding and comprehension of the English language subject.
5. Most teachers follow traditional methods in explaining the English language subject, as well as using the Arabic language to translate terms and texts. This limits the students' ability to converse and speak in the English language inside and outside the classroom.
6. Students are unable to use English language terms and employ them in meaningful sentences. This may be due to a weak foundation from previous stages and students' focus on attainment results (grades) instead of focusing on developing linguistic proficiency. This is also evident through the neglect of homework, in addition to their weak motivation to study the English language due to a perceived lack of importance in their daily lives.

Recommendations

1. There is an urgent need for training courses for English language teachers to familiarize them with the latest developments in using modern teaching strategies and active learning methods.
2. Provide language laboratories that allow students the opportunity for practical application of the English language, as it is a language of communication.
3. Encourage students to use the English language as a means of communication with one another and with their teachers, rather than excessively relying on the Arabic language.

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