

The Status and the Future of the English Language in Jordan

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Abstract—This paper explores the English language status in Jordan in the past, present, and future. The predictions for the future depend on the historical performance of both Jordanian learners of English and developments in Jordanian institutions providing English teaching as a foreign language for the previous century. The study discusses the policies which may improve English education at public and private schools and universities. Besides, the research is going to try to provide sophisticated anticipation for the status of the English language in Jordan for the next 30 years or more. The primary finding is that the growth of Departments of English and the number of university students using English for their majors are following the Fibonacci Sequence. The study may benefit teachers, students, researchers, linguists, language planners, and policymakers. The findings are also discussed within Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1980, 2001; Giles & Johnson, 1987; Giles & Harwood, 1997) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner & Reynolds 2001).

Index Terms—English, Jordan, learning, language planning, and policy

I. INTRODUCTION

Expecting the status of the English language in the future is an established activity from de Saëncourt (1928) until Kortmann (2001) and Jansen (2017) albeit it is risky. The current paper is going to reflect on multiple issues linked to the status of English in Jordan such as expected learning impediments, overt and covert teaching problems, and the prospective situation of English in Jordan. The study will also deal with the sociolinguistic dimension of the English language by relying on the context in which it is used. The model used here is Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1980, 2001; Giles & Johnson, 1987; Giles & Harwood, 1997). CAT is furthermore related to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner & Reynolds, 2001) where speakers reveal associations about the linguistic codes they use.

Jordan was under Ottoman rule between the 16th century and the First World War. After the British invasion, Jordan had become the Emirate of Transjordan. In 1946, the independent Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan was founded and admitted to the United Nations and the Arab League. English thus was taught in all Jordanian schools for several decades at the age of ten. Since the 1990s, English has been taught in conjunction with Arabic in all Jordanian schools starting at the age of six. Accordingly, the growth of English in secondary schools led to an even greater spread at universities. Jordan had only one English department in the 1960s (at the University of Jordan). Jordan had three English departments between 1976 and 1985. Then, from 1986 to 2021, there are almost 32 English departments teaching English at university levels. Between 1962 and 2021, the number of English teachers expanded considerably. To put it another way, tens of thousands of English teachers are currently employed in Jordanian classrooms. English is beginning to compete with Arabic in many areas inside Jordan including trade, tourism, international affairs, higher education, and business. This has given the English language a unique status in Jordan.

The objectives of the study are first to examine expected learning and teaching impediments, and then to rethink the appropriate methods needed to reform the teaching of the English language in Jordan. A better understanding of the whole picture of teaching and learning English in Jordan is expected to help to develop future policies and implementation plans on a national scale.

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The current study hypothesizes that the English language is more likely to change in the coming years because of the better accessibility to students and teachers which enhanced better learning and teaching approaches.

English is an international language spoken across the globe as a first/second language and as a foreign language as well for decades, especially after the advent of broad communication facilitated by enormous advancements in recent technologies. This also applies to Jordan since English is considered the second language for education by interviewed students and instructors. English is required for global communication, good schooling, and industry. Besides, the English language is a key language in several countries as the language of diplomacy around the globe. It is the main language used by financial funds and exchanges. Over half of magazines in the world are written in a variety of English, and English is the language of medicine, space technology, and the high-tech industry. Furthermore, industries like Philips for instance offer English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses to their employees in the workplace. ESP classes are being imposed on employees in the oil industry to advance their English language. The picture is almost alike in Jordan. The English language is going to be the most widely used in business. As a result, knowledge of foreign languages, particularly English, is a vital component of success in practically any field of endeavor in modern times, as it is used by the majority of people from different nations to communicate. In a globalized economy, the ability to communicate in English is a must. Knowledge of English will be an unquestionable advantage in the workplace and will provide excellent opportunities for individual and national progress. Such needs triggered different attitudes toward the English language in Jordan. Some attitudes are positive and other thoughts are negative.

Communication in English requires that we start planning for teaching ESP; including aviation English in the airline industry, hospitality English in the hotel and restaurant industry, medical English in the drug industry and healthcare industry, and English for business. Maouche (2021) suggested that ESP is even inadequate in Algeria where now they should move to teach globalized communication where nations are required to work collectively to enhance business and collaboration overseas. Various studies have been conducted on diverse institutions in the Arab world to evaluate learners' attitudes toward foreign languages and the culture of native speakers of these languages; for example, Malallah (2010) evaluated students' attitudes toward the English language in three colleges in Kuwait University, namely the College of Science, College of Arts, and College of humanities. Malallah found that students in the College of Science showed the most positive attitudes regarding English and its native speakers. And students in the College of Arts had some positive and some negative attitudes. However, students at the College of humanities exhibited negative attitudes for the most part toward English. Ranjha et al. (2021) investigated students' attitudes toward English. Participants showed that some factors may demotivate their language learning attitudes. Al-Khasawneh et al. (2015) also investigated the level of motivation of gifted students at Jordanian schools towards learning English. They found out that gifted students are instrumentally motivated towards learning English. Al-Saidat (2009) also examined the attitudes and prestige of using English in Jordan. Respondents have chosen the English language as a tool for achieving success in the future over all other languages. Students consider it to be more impressive, developed, and technical than other languages. Abu-Melhim (2009) conducted a study in Jordan on 45 female college students to determine the good and negative views Jordanian college students may have about studying English as a foreign language and how these attitudes may affect the learning process outcomes. The study revealed that half of the students have negative attitudes toward studying English and becoming a teacher, while the other half have more favorable attitudes. Even though the vast majority of individuals, 87 percent, believe that English has a colonial meaning for them, they nevertheless prefer it. 81 percent of the same participants claim that English is a highly beneficial language for Jordanians. In reality, English is seen favorably by both people and decision-makers. All of this is positive in the sense that achievement has always met or exceeded expectations. For some years, this trend has been on the rise. In a study, Alkhatib (2008) identified weak national education policies, limited financial resources, and challenges attracting and retaining competent teachers as some of the issues that foreign and L2 students experience in the MENA region.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. *Research Design*

Since the study focuses on multiple dimensions such as learning impediments, teaching problems, the prospective situation of English in Jordan, and language bias and attitude, a qualitative approach was applied (Salkind, 2006).

(a). *Sampling Method*

The study deals with students and professors who would present detailed information about the learning process. The interview questions aimed at eliciting a detailed evaluation of the teaching process at different levels. Stratified sampling was chosen.

(b). *Research Instrument*

Researchers addressed a set of basic questions before introducing central questions. Interviews lasted for approximately 40 minutes. Researchers documented immediate comments and observations throughout and after every meeting. The questions were mainly tackling the learning problems that students faced in the past and the suggestions they have for future learning settings. The professors were asked questions about the teaching problems and their future

expectations about the status of English in the future and questions about the policies that should be adopted in the future to guarantee better English to be taught at Jordanian schools and universities.

The questions were:

For students:

- A. Why do you think you have to learn English in Jordan?
- B. What are the challenges (or difficulties) you have faced during the process of learning English?
- C. When do you think you will be able to master the English Language fluently and accurately?
- D. Where do you use English other than in the classroom?
- E. What is the impact of non-native instructors on your English?
- F. What do you suggest that schools or universities do to improve English teaching?

For Teachers and Professors

- A. What are the problems that are considered barriers to teaching English in Jordan?
- B. How do you see the future of English in Jordan for the next 30 years?
- C. What policies should be implemented to guarantee a betterment in teaching the English Language in Jordan for future students?
- D. What are the domains where students will need English the most in the future; inside or outside Jordan?

(c). *Subjects*

The subjects in this study were 80 students from different levels from different public and private universities in Jordan and 20 instructors and professors who are also from different public and private universities in Jordan. All these participants were interviewed by the researcher.

B. *Data*

(a). *Data collection Technique*

The leading technique was collecting data via interviewing the focus groups. Semi-structured interviews were used since they are flexible in generating detailed answers. First, participants were encouraged to contribute to the study willingly. Then participants were informed about the task (purpose, timing, and risks). All participants were guaranteed privacy of their answers to construct confidence in the interviewer.

(b). *Data Analysis*

By analyzing data; all the facts, hypotheses, and notions were also documented.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most of the interviewed students were introduced to English by the age of six years in the first grade. They studied it for 12 years at schools. After that, most of them chose to study at a university where they are taught using English in almost all majors (medical majors, engineering majors, natural sciences majors, and economics majors). The rationale behind using English, as instructors from different schools stated, is to enable students to read excellent textbooks and references relevant to their majors and to enable students to use the English language when they pursue their postgraduate studies, to conduct good research based on recent international references which are usually published in English, and when they choose to work abroad in different countries and international organizations inside and outside Arabian territories. There has been an escalating awareness, as instructors confirmed, in learning English during the last several decades. And there is a need to understand the progression of English language teaching/learning in Jordan, which is dependent on several aspects in the next 30 years. The value of being fluent in the English language is required for success in Jordan, principally in both business and intellectual venues. English is widely used in a variety of fields, including economics, tourism, arts, sciences, media, and politics. Figures 1 and 2 show an increase in the number of universities and teachers of English in Jordan from 1920 until 2020 according to statistics published on the websites of universities; the anticipated escalation until 2050 is also included:

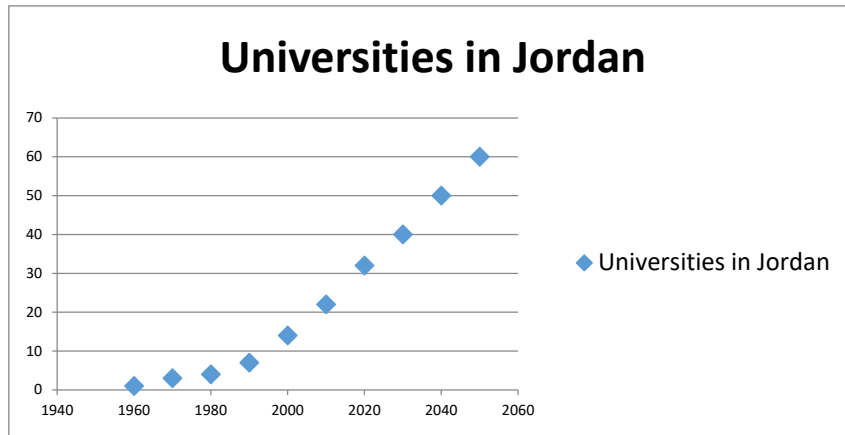


Figure 1: Increase in Number of Universities According to Founding Years in Jordan and Anticipation of Future Increase

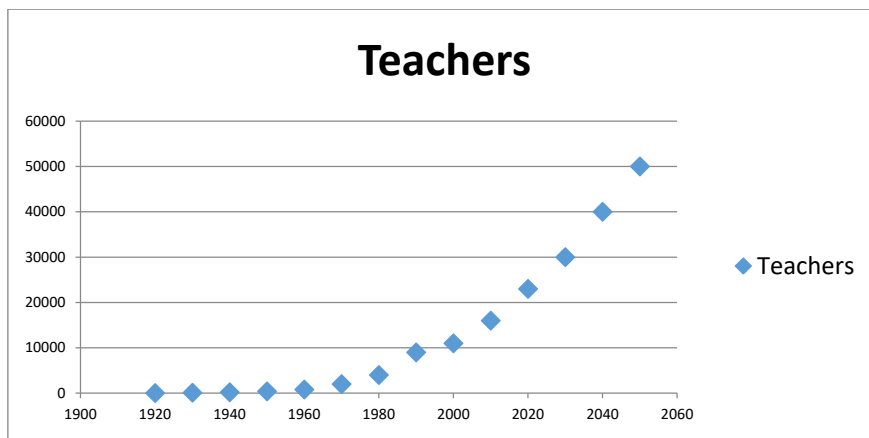


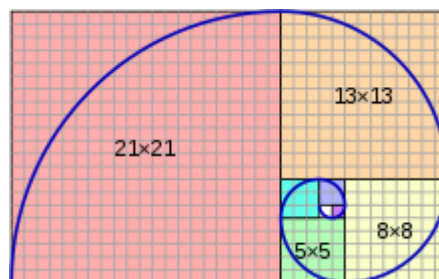
Figure 2: Increase in Numbers of Teachers According to Ministry of Education and Predicted Increase in Future

Both the rise in the past and the predictions for the future seem to approximate the Fibonacci Sequence. The equation for the Fibonacci Sequence is

$$F_n = F_{n-1} + F_{n-2}$$

for $n > 1$

Fibonacci numbers are also strongly related to the golden ratio.



For more explanation of both Fibonacci numbers and the golden ratio see the following link (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fibonacci_number) and Encyclopedia of Mathematics, EMS Press, 2001 [1994].

Even though there is an obvious and natural increase in the numbers of universities and teachers of English for the last 50 years as indicated by Figures 1 and 2 above, a central issue confronting English education in Jordan is that students encounter several challenges; the first basic issue which students argued about was the fact that learning English in Jordan has been focusing on grammar-based approaches for the most time. The communicative approach was introduced only 20 years ago and both students and teachers stated that they were not comfortable with such a method of teaching and resisted it most of the time because it was new and time-consuming in classes with a large number of students. Thus, Arab learners of English encountered several problems in speaking and writing. This fact has been clearly stated by many researchers (Harrison et al., 1975; Assasfeh et al., 2011; Assasfeh, 2015). Noticeable weaknesses of English language learners are explained by several factors: curricula, teaching methodology, lack of natural input and motivation, and humble incentives.

The substantial issue, then, is not about the number of Departments of English or the number of teachers who graduate every year and join the board of teaching team, but it is about how to consider the quality of teaching the

English language as a foreign language with a focus on language skills parallel to native output. At present, we do not teach the English language by using precise rubrics for each skill needed by a certain audience. Teaching English in Jordan is still a broad practice that is teacher-dependent. There is no nationwide assessment of English language teaching/learning achievement. There are no substantial incentives that may enhance the process of learning English productively. Moreover, the students' motivations to master the English language are oriented to focus only on obtaining some jobs such as teaching, translation, and internal tourism. Most Jordanian students reported that they were and are taught by non-native English teachers who themselves exhibit several problems in mastering the English language. In the past, the only way to learn English was through formal instruction at governmental schools and universities, i.e., in a classroom where the language teachers are native Arabic speakers. In the last 20 years, however, there have been few opportunities to learn and use English through natural interaction with people who can speak the English language fluently either at private schools recruiting native speakers of English or with the help of the abundance of online material and online communication with native speakers of English. To cope with these needs, Jordanian educational authorities must modify classical methods of teaching English and quickly adjust the curricula in response to the needs of learners and society. Moreover, more trained English language teachers especially in modest public and private schools outside Amman are urgently needed to fill the gap in such schools which are usually provided with less competent English teachers. If Jordan scholars, schools, and universities attempt to resolve such educational concerns and work towards improving the methodological and curricular barriers, the future of the English language in Jordan may look very promising. Now the English Language has evolved into the language of international business and trade even between nations that do not speak English as a first or even a second Language.

Another barrier was that many students reported that they were taught by translating words. Teachers also reported that they asked to put more emphasis on grammar as guided by teachers' books and supervisors, and they disregarded other skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, the value of Arabic is intact and the incentive for learning English appears to be instrumental rather than integrative. Students and instructors stated that English will not affect the Arabic language or the Islamic faith in Jordan. Furthermore, studying English will have no negative impact on people's culture because they will not develop negative behaviors. English, on the other hand, holds high esteem and is regarded as the language of science and technology. Both instructors and teachers argued that speaking English demonstrates that the speaker is better educated and superior to others who do not. It expands their horizons and provides them with the opportunity to obtain a respectable job. Jordanians' attitude toward the English language is very important because it reflects the Jordanian's viewpoint of the language. We can see that Jordanian people have a good attitude toward the English language, which will aid the spread of the English language in Jordan in the future especially since the role of mass media is exceptionally intervening in the favor of the English language.

Mass media is another arena where English is rapidly developing in Jordan today since there is a new trend in education around the globe to use media education. English, like any other language, has several features, including grammar, vocabulary, and so on. Listening, on the other hand, is one of the hardest skills to master. As a result, students and instructors confirmed that they can overcome this impediment with the help of some additional resources. The case for media education is based on the student's personal experiences. Students can learn about the English language as well as the cultures of English-speaking nations via various mass media. It also fosters critical thinking in students, encouraging them to become active observers and listeners, and hence producers of their messages. Learners at different levels indicated that watching movies is the most interesting way to learn. The internet is in the second position, while songs are in third place. Everyone enjoys going to the movies. Everyone enjoys it regardless of where they are: at home or at the movies with friends. Foreign language films are the finest way to improve your vocabulary, enhance indirect grammar learning, and smooth the capacity for successful communication. Furthermore, films assist them in comprehending a large number of unfamiliar phrases simply by displaying the representation on the screen. Students realized that watching movies without subtitles and then going over them with the translation help them comprehend difficult terms. Learning English through films is input-based learning. Students begin by memorizing a large number of correct English sentences. Then they try to mimic them and construct new words. Movies also allow students to learn new vocabulary that isn't yet in dictionaries since these words are part of certain dialects of particular regions like informal English. Students also learn how native speakers pronounce words with correct lexical stress, with the proper social tone, and with accurate intonation. Furthermore, students can choose to learn to speak English like Americans or British if they are interested in a certain accent or dialect.

Students and instructors reported that language material related to English language learning on social media enables current students to compare and classify material according to their needs, and it helps learners to work in study groups, among many other rewarding things since the material is enormous and renewable. The dynamicity and free accessibility nature of English language material on the Internet provides learners with unlimited options concerning diverse vocabulary drills, grammar awareness, and miscellaneous communication opportunities from different countries speaking the English language. Students as learners of the English language benefit from material on the Internet to focus on these educationally expanding sources. The Internet is making education today more accessible to a huge number of learners around the globe. It also has the potential to advance new types of successful prompt learning. Learners of the English language at a higher level (postgraduate degrees) can also benefit from professional education through scholarly articles offered via open access journals, and international conferences accessible to a large audience

using different smart applications for live and face-to-face contact. The internet can be used for a variety of objectives and in a variety of methods in language school. The more students use it, the more sophisticated their learning abilities become. The majority of internet websites are current and give useful linguistic information. They may provide a wide range of authentic materials that are critical to the student's advancement. As a result, they can be used as supplemental online educational courses that allow students to work and interact with native speakers and experienced tutors.

Moreover, the language used in video and online computer games may have a significant impact on players' language ability, and so the act of playing video and online computer games could be considered a learning circumstance. Because English is a lingua franca among gamers, it may be useful to consider video and online computer games as a source for English language acquisition. As a result, while interacting with other non-native speakers, the players may be able to expand their English vocabulary. As previously stated, games contain a variety of vocabulary, which the players may not have been exposed to in school. Playing video games can be viewed as a learning setting in which players can improve their literacy skills.

IV. CONCLUSION

The majority of Jordanian students are willing to learn and master the English language to succeed in studying their majors either in Jordan or abroad especially for their postgraduate studies, and this is not possible without mastering verbal English with a certain level of adequacy. Other students plan to work and live by securing a sound career to gain either in Jordan or outside Jordan. Jordanians also would love to widen a healthier perception of the values and traditions of other people from various parts of the world.

There are some procedures that the Ministry of Education, school principals, and English language supervisors must follow. The Ministry of Education should pay teachers a fair wage based on their years of experience, specializations, and the age of the students they teach, provide schools with appropriate facilities and aids for teaching English, and conduct ongoing surveys to stay informed about teachers' problems and make it clear that the English language is an important part of the curriculum.

This study was a thoughtful endeavor to conclude what the future of the English language in Jordan will be based on a variety of features. The study predicts an escalation in the number of English teachers and learners, and it predicts advancement in the quality of the teaching/learning process. Such escalation and advancement are not only governed by public teaching. Different factors can help in enhancing the teaching and learning of English such as new technologies provided by mass media communication and by private schools and universities recruiting more native and native-like speakers as English teachers even if this strategy will add more expenses to the learners and teaching institutions with modest budgets. The issue of funding teaching good English in Jordan is a very challenging factor that may hinder some of the processes of successful learning.

Another challenging issue in the future is to convince professors teaching English majors at the university level to shrink the load of teaching courses of Linguistics Theory and Literature courses with the current weight, which is about 70% of courses; and this hinders the possibility of adding more courses focusing on both language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and English for Specific Purposes. What learners need is to practice more language skills and to focus on curricula that are specific such as curricula related to Business and Commercial English, Legal English, Journalistic English, English for Tourism, and other English programs focusing on specific purposes for diverse audiences of students who plan to succeed in future careers that do not require a solid theoretical background in linguistic philosophical theories or even acquaintance with current literary theories and ancient literary works such as plays, poetry, and novels extending to medieval ages. Students need not learn Old and Middle English since they are after learning Modern English with its contemporary vocabulary, grammar, and usage. Moreover, a future rethinking of the function of the English language in Jordan should focus on teaching globalized communication to strengthen the alliance between international powers' indefinite cultural perspectives.

Communication Accommodation Theory suggests that there are some behavioral changes that Jordanian speakers of good English would make to obtain approval from other efficient and native speakers of English, and this maximizes the effectiveness of communication with a constructive shared identity even if interlocutors belong to different inherited identities. Jordanians speaking good English feel more powerful in contexts requiring efficient English either for carrying or traveling abroad. And according to Social Identity Theory, Jordanians with adequate English would not feel an inferior status when they move from one group to another all over the world. The possession of good English is believed to minimize social status differences and to maintain the stability of such status by exhibiting positive self-categorization.

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