



## Effective Ways to Teach English Language Skills at the Secondary School Level in Libya

الطرق الفعالة لتدريس مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية على مستوى المدارس في ليبيا

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### ملخص

يعد تدريس مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية للطلاب في المراحل الدراسية الأولى كمادة في مناهجهم الدراسية في المدارس أحد مجالات الإهتمام المهمة في ليبيا. والهدف الرئيسي من هذه الورقة هو دراسة الممارسات الحالية في نقل المهارات المتكاملة للغة الإنجليزية للطلاب على مستوى المدرسة واقتراح بعض التدابير الناجحة في اكتساب هذه المهارات بطريقة سهلة وفعّالة. أجريت هذه الدراسة في المدرسة الثانوية الواقعة في بلدية براك بمنطقة وادي الشاطئ ليبيا. تم إعطاء الطلاب استبياناً لتعليقاتهم فيما يتعلق بالطريقة التي يتم بها تعليمهم مجالات مختلفة من اللغة الإنجليزية مثل المفردات، والقواعد، والاستماع، والتحدث من قبل معلمهم، كما تم طرح بعض الأسئلة الشفوية لتخمين مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية للطلاب فقط. أخيراً، ختمت هذه الورقة بجملة من النتائج والتوصيات وهي نقص المفردات والمعرفة النحوية الكافية على أنها من العوامل الرئيسية التي تعيق مهارات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بين المتعلمين.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المفردات، القواعد، الاستماع، التحدث، القراءة والكتابة

### Abstract

Teaching English language skills to the students since the time they are introduced to study English as a subject in their curriculum at schools is an important area of concern in Libya. The main objective of this paper is to suggest the effective ways to teach English language skills at the secondary school level in Libya. This study is conducted at the secondary school located in Brack town in Wadi Alshatti region in Libya. The students are given a questionnaire for their feedback





regarding the way they are taught different areas of English language like vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking by their teachers and a few oral questions are also asked to just guess the English language skills of the students. Finally, the paper presents the findings and recommendations. Lack of enough vocabulary and knowledge of grammar are seen as the main factors crippling the English language learning skills among the learners.

**Key words:** Vocabulary, Grammar, Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

### **Introduction**

English, being an international language or which is called in other words the ‘lingua franca’, serves as a link language in the globalized world. It is the language of the majority of the people in the world to communicate with one another. Most of the world’s literature pertaining to different areas of knowledge is published in English. It is not only used in the academia but also the one employed in international relations, tourism, trade and commerce. Hence, it became the requirement of the nations to prosper themselves in all the fields. English has ‘travelled’ to many parts of the world and has been used to serve various purposes (Sharifian, 2009)

One can acquire the skills of any language in an efficient way only when it is taught or learnt in a proper way. Acquiring skills of English language skills also is not an exception from this rule. To some extent, it can be learnt in the same way as one learns his or her mother tongue. It is known to all that we acquire spoken skills of our mother tongue in a natural way since birth thorough observation, listening and practice. The acquisition of English language skills also occurs in the same way even with the adult learners when they are exposed to English speaking environment.

In a country like Libya where there is less exposure in general or no exposure at all in particular to practice English language outside the classroom, it has become the dire responsibility of the educational institutions to impart the English language skills to the students since their joining the schools. To be successful in this task of teaching English language skills to the students at schools, the English teachers must work on innovative ways of teaching the language skills by motivating and encouraging the students in the right direction.





### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to have an insight into the ways which are in practice in teaching English language skills at schools and thereby suggest some effective measures to be considered in English language teaching by the teachers at schools to obtain the task in an interesting and easiest way.

The secondary objective is to measure the level of the students in various aspects related to English language and suggest some important steps to improve their level in a remarkable way.

### **Significance of the study**

Libya needs a strong foundation in imparting English language skills to the students from the school level.

This study is significant because Libyans are enthusiastic that their children should communicate well in English and this study, through its recommendations, paves the way to turn their hope true.

This study is considered significant also because possession of English language skills in Libya is a dire need of the individuals who want to travel for different purposes to countries where the language of communication is not Arabic. When they are taught English language skills since their school days, they can communicate with the rest of the world comfortably.

### **Literature review**

#### **Vocabulary**

Many researchers and academics agree that vocabulary is the main component for effective communication in the language of interaction. Croll (1971), states that a full vocabulary is essential to adequate self expression. Furthermore, Jarvis and Stephens (1994) maintain “one of the most obvious linguistic factors affecting communicative effectiveness is vocabulary” (p.2). Moreover, Ediger (1999) argues that conversations carried on with other persons require a rich vocabulary.

Carl (2003a) states Research indicates that in order for the students to perform well inspeaking,





reading, and writing they need to possess a rich vocabulary (p. 3).

Despite the many arguments raised against its use, Nation argues “learning of vocabulary is faster for many learners if the meaning of the word is given through an L1translation first (cited Folse 2004, p. 66)

Carl (2003b) says regarding the role of context in learning a new word:

We can learn much about a word’s meaning through different contexts in which it is used. And the more different contexts we encounter with that word, the more flexible we become with that word and its meaning and the more likely it is that we will remember it (p.2).

### **Grammar**

Swan (2005) points out that most dictionaries often present the definition of grammar as the rules for combining words into sentences (p.60). The distinction of explicit and implicit instruction to grammar teaching can be identified. It claims that language learners will be exposed to the implicit instruction in which learners are provided with the chances to induce the language forms from the certain example in the context (Ellis, 1994). In addition to the explicit instruction, learners will be provided with specific grammatical rules and then practice how to use it in some way (ibid). Similarly, the issues about whether grammar should be taught inductively and deductively are also related to Ellis’s focus (Roberts, 1998).

### **Listening**

Hamouda (2013) defined listening comprehension as an interactive process in which listeners are involved in constructing meaning. Listeners comprehend the oral input through sound discrimination, previous knowledge, grammatical structures, stress and intonation, and the other linguistic or non-linguistic clues.

Goh (2000) said that it is very important to teach listening strategies to students and before doing this, teachers should increase learners’ knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and phonology.

### **Speaking**





Speaking skill is the ability people used to communicate with each other through a verbal use of language (Al-Tamimi, 2014)

Brown (2007) suggested that fluency, accuracy and pronunciation are the three main components of speaking skill. However, in the research of Hadijah (2014), speaking skill components are further divided into vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension besides the three components mentioned earlier.

### Reading

Phonological awareness is a “strong and significant predictor of word reading skills in elementary children” (Park & Lombardino, 2013, p. 83)

“When students are provided frequent opportunities to orally read text, they make significant gains in fluency” (Alber-Morgan, 2006, p. 273).

Martin (2011), a classroom teacher, observed that families of her students wanted to help their children academically at home, but were often frustrated due to lack of skills and understanding how to help.

### Writing

(Gautam, 2019) states, "writing skill assumes the highest order on a scale of hierarchy and develops only after the former three have been learned or acquired."

Research findings indicate handwriting instruction is a daily practice for only approximately 35% of teachers, and spelling instruction is a daily practice for approximately 50% of teachers (Cutler and Graham 2008), despite research showing that handwriting and spelling in the primary years contributes to improved writing (Graham et al. 1997). Sentence-level instruction, particularly sentence combining, is effective and recommended not only in the primary years, but also in the secondary years (Graham and Perin 2007a)





## **Methodology**

The researcher used a quantitative research in this study. The reason for choosing this method is to understand the quantity of the students who are under similar situations and need improvement in language learning process. In order to understand the ways being followed by the teachers in teaching English language skills to the students and to understand the level of the students in their language skills, a simple questionnaire of 10 questions is given to the students at the Secondary school located in Brack town in WadiAlshatti region in Libya. All the ten questions are open-ended questions with Arabic translation to facilitate the respondents to understand the questions well and respond with their valuable inputs in details and the questions are focused on assessing the level of the respondents. The questionnaires are floated to 20 students with the due permission of the Head master and the assistance of the English teachers at the school. The students gave their responses to all the questions the same day when they were given the questionnaire. The questions are aimed at understanding how the important components of English language like vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading and writing are taught and at the same time to assess the level of the students in these skills. Some oral questions also are asked to understand their difficulties in the learning process of these necessary skills of English language

Giving English synonyms while teaching a lesson, asking the students to bring a new word a day to the class to improve vocabulary skills, teaching grammar in easy and interesting steps, creating awareness of phonology to improve pronunciation skills, listening to news and taking down note of the news items to improve listening skills, model reading by teachers to improve reading skills and drilling over spellings and repeated instruction by the teacher regarding the correct usage of punctuation marks are some of the effective ways to practice and achieve perfection in language skills.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the common factors that cripple the learning process of English language among the secondary school students





2. What are the effective ways to teach English language skills at the secondary school level?

In order to understand the factors and to suggest effective ways, a quantitative research method has been observed. A questionnaire with 10 questions was given to the respondents. The text of the questionnaire is shown in the appendices

### **Place of research**

This study was conducted at 'Dat Alntakeen Secondary School' located in Brack town in Libya. The students attend school from different villages and towns around and these students study English as a subject in their curriculum. Every day they study English. The school starts at around 8 am and works until 1 pm

### **Data Analysis**

There were 20 students participated in this study. The students were given a questionnaire.

When the students were asked about the frequency of English classes, all of them replied that they have an English class on regular basis. All most all the students responded that they learn vocabulary by knowing the meanings of the new words which were written on the board by their teacher while introducing a new lesson. Most of the students responded that grammar questions were directly answered by the teachers without more explanation of the rules. Majority of the students are not aware of the usage of different sentence structures and the correct usage of punctuation marks. Both in speaking and reading most of the students have faced difficulty in the pronunciation of multisyllabic words. The recommendations section suggested solutions to overcome all these problems faced by the students and learn the language skills with ease. It is a quantitative research and the responses of the respondents are calculated using the frequency table

### **Results and Findings**

#### **Frequency of English classes**





The respondents responded that they are having an English class every day of the week. This is a positive sign that makes the students more exposed to the English language environment.

### **Vocabulary**

The first and foremost need of an individual who wants to communicate with others in any language is the vocabulary. One of the most obvious linguistic factors affecting communicative effectiveness is vocabulary (Jarvis & Stephens, 1994). If the people know the vocabulary of a language other than their mother tongue that is used in daily life, they can convey their message to others very easily in that language though they are not very sure of other components like grammar and pronunciation of the words they use sentences. Research indicates that in order for the students to perform well in speaking, reading and writing and they need to possess a rich vocabulary (Carl, 2003)

It is found through the respondents' responses that the teachers follow a specific method in introducing new words in the beginning of the lesson. This is essential. To a question on how the vocabulary taught by the teachers, the respondents replied that they teacher writes the new English word in English on the board and gives the Arabic meaning of the word. When students are examined to know their level in synonyms, antonyms of the words, they are found weak in it.

### **Grammar**

Grammar speaks about the rules of a language. It is found that students are taught grammar points in a direct way. The students are given direct answers for the grammar questions in the exercises. The students are used to memorize answers and they are not used to apply the rules that can be followed in order to solve a given question in grammar. The students are less aware of how the answer is made. Students often do mistakes in answering the questions with a little change in the questions.

### **Listening**

Listening is the foot step in the learning process of any new language. Providing the students with the text of what they are listening to with some spaces in it can enhance their reading and writing







skills too. The first skill that received by a person is listening skill (Orilina&Suryani, 2017). The respondents replied that they are more used to listen to their teacher only while the teacher teaches the language. The students found it difficult to identify the word when they were given the audio output of simple words spoken by the native speakers.

### **Speaking**

Speaking is the fastest means of communication in any language. If one wants to excel in oral communication, skills are needed in this certain area. It is replied by the respondents that they practice speaking only by reading the text of the lessons and they feel it difficult to pronounce the multisyllabic words properly.

### **Reading**

Reading is a receptive skill one needs to improve in order to comprehend the message written. Reading comprehension is the product of word decoding and linguistic comprehension (Gough & Turner, 1986). It is a two folded skill. Though the main goal of reading exercises is to understand the meaning of the given text, it also helps the students to improve their pronunciation skills of English language when they read it out in the presence of the teacher. Vocabulary is a robust predictor of reading comprehension across development. Children acquire vocabulary at a remarkable rate, on average 2 to 8 root words per day (Biemiller & Slonim, 2001). Most words are learned implicitly through repeated exposures in multiple contexts over time (Landauer & Dumais, 1997). Besides facing difficulty in the pronunciation of the multisyllabic words as mentioned above, when asked the students to read a simple text from their course books, it is also found that the pace and tone of the students while reading the given text does not suit the message to be conveyed. They fail to maintain a semi pause for a comma, the rising intonation for questions and a full pause for a full stop while uttering the text.

### **Writing**

The last productive language skill is writing. In language acquisition, this particular area needs more practice than the other language skills mentioned above. Writing is the most complex





human activity (Jozsef, 2001). It is found that the students have a very little scope to practice this skill. They just answer the questions in their course books and work books. Beyond this, they are not doing anything. Frequent errors are found in legibility, means clear and understandable hand writing, spelling and punctuation. Writing plays district roles: It is a skill that draws on sub skills and processes such as hand writing and spelling; a rich knowledge of vocabulary, mastery of the conventions of punctuation, capitalization, word usage, and grammar (Graham and Berin, 2007)

## **Discussion**

### **Frequency of English classes**

Attending English classes on regular basis enhances the chances of improving the English language skills among the students as they get a chance to get involved in working with the language tasks given by the teachers in class.

### **Vocabulary**

Here, the researcher wants to recommend that it is important to give the synonym (the word which similar in meaning) of the actual English word followed by its Arabic meaning. By doing this, the students get a chance to learn more new words in their English classes every day. The other techniques like asking the students to come to the class with a new word a day and sharing it with the class with its meaning and usage in a sentence enhances the vocabulary skills of all the students in an excellent way. Students at this stage are more enthusiastic. So, teachers can suggest them reading some interesting literature like short stories and guess the meanings of the new words based on the situation in the story.

While teaching the skill to the young learners, the teachers can consider other interesting ways as young learners are enthusiastic to learn things in play way methods. The teachers can give them cross word puzzles where the students are divided into pairs and they are given a sheet with empty spaces to write words. The first student writes a letter and passes it to his or her partner. Then the second student will take the chance and writes another letter next to the first





letter written by the first student and the turns go like this until they make a meaningful word. It is very interesting and entertaining for young learners.

## **Grammar**

It is recommended that easy steps to be taught to the students to solve any question related to that grammar topic in the easiest way. Grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it meta-linguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it (Ellis, 2006). For example, the researcher wants to suggest the following easy steps to the teachers while they teach a topic like 'forming question tags'. Teach the students as follows:

1. Write the auxiliary verb
2. Delete/insert negative word 'not' (if it exists in the given sentence, delete it. If it doesn't exist in the given sentence, insert it)
3. Write the pronoun of the subject
4. Write a question mark (?)

E.g. She is singing a song

Isn't she?

If the students are taught this topic in this way, they will be able to answer the question tags for any given sentence with ease and they will be interested to answer more questions. Teachers can plan their own way of teaching each English grammar topic by using such easy ways. Grammar teaching involves rule explanation (Doughty, 2003)

The very important thing to make sure that the students understood the topic well is to give them as many unseen examples as possible to give them as homework or revision task in the class.

## **Listening**

The best way to improve their listening is to make them aware of the standard pronunciation of English sounds. It helps the learners to be accurate when they speak English through listening





itself improves listening. As long as they do not know the mechanism how mouth organs function while producing a sound in English, they can't grasp the word. For this, the teachers must make the students listen to standard pronunciation of English sounds teaching the students initially about phonemes and phonology of English language. Teachers can choose the topics that attract students' attention in this task.

Language learning mostly happens by imitation. It may not be possible to acquire the English language without listening as it provides second language learners with language input, which in turn plays a crucial role in language development (Darti&Asmawati, 2017; Gilakjani& Ahmadi, 2011). Another important feature of English language is the same alphabet is pronounced in a different sound based on the neighboring alphabet. This should be taken care of by the teachers. English pronunciation is not consistent (Abdalhamid, 2012)

Modern technology has its place in imparting the listening and speaking skills to the students. As the present generation students are techno friendly, it is suggested to use the multimedia tools in teaching listening and speaking skills to them. A language laboratory is recommended at schools with all the necessary equipment and infrastructure.

Students can be given tasks like listening to English news on television for a specific time everyday and grasp the words they listen and the teacher can ask the students to present the vocabulary they learnt while watching TV. This task can be done in two ways by the students. One is by listening to the news and the other way is by reading the news that scrolls at the bottom of the screen. This type of activity improves the speaking skill of the students as well as they present the words to class by speaking them out.

### **Speaking**

To overcome this particular problem, teachers can divide the multisyllabic words into chunks of individual syllables, practice each syllable one by one in the first stage, pronounce the first two syllabic together and then the first three and then the first four etc. and finally pronounce all the syllables together. This is the best way to make it easy for the students to pronounce the multisyllabic words with ease. Imitation of native speaker's pronunciation also helps the students





to improve their skills. The imitation technique consists, as its name mentions, in the imitation of the pronunciation of sounds and intonation, the students can pay close attention to the difficult codes regarding the English pronunciation and try to utter them correctly (Derekhshan, Khalili&Beheshti, 2016)

Another recommendation here is to make the students able to communicate in English. For this, teachers can suggest role plays for the students with a short dialogue on a topic which they use to talk in their daily lives. Teachers in lower level classrooms utilized some ‘free techniques’ (such as drama and game) (Yunus, Salehi, and Aminie, 2016). Gradually, teachers can ask the students to speak a few words on a given topic individually. This is the best way among many other ways to improve the English speaking skills among the students

### **Reading**

To avoid this difficulty among the students, teachers can read the text for the students first with a perfect model reading. It can be done twice. It should be done slowly the first time focusing and repeating the multisyllabic words and asking the students to repeat with you and the second time the teacher can read it with normal pace. Then, the teacher should ask the students at random to read the same text and correct the students where necessary.

Reading comprehension exercises are the best sources to improve the other basic skills of language. Reading texts also provide an opportunity to study language: vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and the way they construct the sentences, paragraphs and texts (Harmer, 1998)

It is also found that the students answer the questions in reading comprehension exercises by simply memorizing the order of the answers the teacher give them. To avoid this tendency among the students, the teacher should change the question order so that the students will try to read and understand the message conveyed in the text and finally they can answer any question related to the given text successfully.

### **Writing**





The last productive language skill is writing. In language acquisition, this particular area needs more practice than the other language skills mentioned above. Writing is the most complex human activity (Jozsef, 2001). It is found that the students have a very little scope to practice this skill. They just answer the questions in their course books and work books. Beyond this, they are not doing anything. Frequent errors are found in legibility, means clear and understandable hand writing, spelling and punctuation. Writing plays distinct roles: It is a skill that draws on sub skills and processes such as hand writing and spelling; a rich knowledge of vocabulary, mastery of the conventions of punctuation, capitalization, word usage, and grammar (Graham and Berin, 2007)

First of all, to improve their hand writing, calligraphy note books must be employed in schools since the time students are introduced English as a subject in their curriculum. In order to come over the mistakes related to spellings, each student must be given enough drilling like writing the word ten or fifteen times with reciting the spelling of the word. It results in an excellent way to improve their spelling skills. Regarding punctuation problems, the teachers should repeatedly inform the students how to start the sentence with a capital letter, how to maintain the other punctuation marks with reference to assertive and interrogative sentences mainly. Proper punctuation is both the sign and the cause of clear thinking (Truss, 2003). Care must be taken in teaching them how to use comma, semi colon, apostrophe etc.

In the opinion of the researcher, the examination system also cripples the English writing skills of the students at schools. The final examinations are of multiple choice questions where the students just choose one of the four options given as answers and this makes them not exposed to writing practice during the school year. If there are some questions that need answers which are descriptive in nature, students get a chance to practice and improve their writing skills while preparing for their examinations.

The basic needs the students need to start writing are vocabulary and knowledge about different kinds of sentence structures. The teachers can suggest students the familiar topics for writing practice. When the teacher suggests a topic to the students, s/he must give them some vocabulary





related to the topic and then s/he can give them the sentence patterns that the students can use while doing the writing task.

In the first phase the teacher can give them the structures of positive and negative statements and questions (Assertive and Interrogative sentence). Then, the students must be taught the important sentence structures with few examples that are used in simple sentences with a structure Subject+Verb+Obj. Later, the students can be taught about different sentence types occur with voice, speech, degree and clause structure etc.

Once after the students are able to write simple sentences without errors, they should be encouraged to write simple paragraphs and essays too. All these steps meant for improving their writing skills must be planned well in the curriculum from the beginning to the tertiary level. The very important step is to check the compositions of the students and give them the feedback in an encouraging way while correcting their mistakes if any.

## **Conclusion**

Improving English language skills is not a difficult task when they are taught since the school level considering the easy and effective ways as mentioned above. All these easy and effective steps can be shared among the teachers by organizing seminars and workshops for the English teachers at one of the schools in the region. The researcher believes that the recommendations suggested above may reap excellent results when they are practiced at schools on a regular basis and students may be able to master all the basic skills of English language with ease. The researcher also believes that these suggestions can be considered as a basis for further research in the area to find out or suggest more effective steps in achieving the task of English teaching skills to the students at the school level in Libya.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Dear Respondents,

The researcher needs your valuable responses to the following questions. This questionnaire is designed to know how English language skills are taught at your school and thereby suggest some effective ways that improve the skills with ease. Your genuine answers serve the cause of this research in a remarkable way.

Thanks for your participation..

1. How often do you have an English class?

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2. How is Listening skill taught to you?

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3. How many news English words do you learn a day?

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4. How is Speaking skill taught to you?

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5. How often do you listen to English news on TV ?

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6. How is Reading skill taught to you?

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7. What sort of English books other than your class books do you read?

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8. How is Writing skill taught to you?

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9. How often do you speak English inside/outside the classroom?

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10. List out your suggestions further if any that help you learn English  
language skills

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