

# Policy and the Acquisition of the Second Language in Arabic-Speakers Countries; Iraq And Saudi Arabia as Examples<sup>1</sup>

Suad Qahtan Hussien

MA in English literature, The Open Educational College, Baghdad, Iraq

DOI:10.37648/ijrssh.v13i03.013

Received: 30 April 2023; Accepted: 25 June 2023; Published: 07 July 2023

---

## ABSTRACT

Acquiring English as a second language becomes essential for many reasons. Basically, because English is a universal language, moreover, the universe witnesses globalization which turns the whole universe into a small village because of the internet and the rapid expansion of technology, economics, tourism, and the like. However, the mother tongue, to a certain extent, refrains from the process of acquiring a foreign or second language because of several problems. One of these problems that play the controlling role is the policy since it determines and leads the citizens in any given society. In this paper, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, as two Gulf Arab States, have been examined as examples to show how policy plays the dominant role in enhancing the English language in their countries.

**Keywords:** *mother tongue; second language; policy; tourism.*

## INTRODUCTION

Acquiring English as a second language becomes essential for many reasons. Typically, because English is a universal language, moreover, the internet and the rapid expansion of technology turn the universe to be a small village. However, the mother tongue, to a certain extent, refrains from the process of acquiring a foreign or second language because of several problems. One of these problems that play the controlling role is the policy since it determines and leads the citizens in any given society. The policy in Iraq plays a fundamental role in the way through which it would scale up or undermine the ability of learners to acquire a second language. The specific part of any policy that influences the interaction and exchanging knowledge, culture, and language between nations is tourism. It is the political system that participates as a vivid approach to interconnecting with various nationalities. However, in Iraq, the tourism authority, for example, has suffered from neglect and marginalization for decades. This matter has turned Iraqi society to be closed. The result is a dominating mother tongue without the courage to obtain any other language because there is no actual use of it in everyday activities. In contrast with other countries in which tourism gets paramount importance, learners are aware of the significance of acquiring more than one language.

## THE MOTHER LANGUAGE VS. THE SECOND LANGUAGE

It is worth mentioning that language is the most dominant tool through which people can exchange knowledge, beliefs, opinions, wishes, threats, commands, thanks, promises, declarations, and feelings. However, body language can be used to express people's states. Human beings apparently can laugh to express their amusement, happiness, or disrespect. They also can smile to express amusement, pleasure, approval, or bitter feeling. At the same time, they can express their anger, excitement, or fear by using shrieks. They can clench their fists to express determination, anger, or even threat. When they use their eyebrows, they may want to express surprise or disapproval, and so on. Nevertheless, communication before anything else is the language system. With the existence of the mother tongue

---

<sup>1</sup> *How to cite the article:* Hussien S.Q. (July, 2023); Policy and the Acquisition of the Second Language in Arabic-Speakers Countries; Iraq And Saudi Arabia as Examples, *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, Jul-Sep 2023, Vol 13, Issue 3, 114-118, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v13i03.013>

language, second language acquisition has become a necessity. In their book, *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, Ralph Fasold and Jeff Connor-Linton theorize that:

Over thousands of years of evolution, the human species developed a vocal tract flexible enough to make a wide range of distinguishable sounds and the ability to perceive differences among those sounds. But most important, the human species developed the ability to use these sounds in systems which could communicate meaning. No one knows just how this happened.... Or perhaps once they reached a certain level of neurological and cognitive complexity, the synapses of the brain “reorganized” themselves, making the development of language possible. In any case, language is a distinctive attribute of the human species. Although languages differ in many ways, they are all made possible by the same genetic information, they are all processed by the brain in basically the same ways, and, not surprisingly, they all share certain fundamental “design features” and structural characteristics that enable them to work the way they do (2).

They also state that although dissimilar languages use diverse sets of sounds, their sounds are systematized and combined according to just a few principles. If there were no shared, universal features of language, one would expect the sounds of languages and their combinations to vary randomly. Instead, “the sounds of languages and their combinations are limited and systematic. Likewise, all languages follow similar constraints on how they can combine words into phrases and sentences” (2-3).

Language as a system of communication has occupied the concern of scholars and philosophers for centuries. Aristotle has defined language as “a speech sound produced by human beings to express their ideas, emotions, thoughts, desires, and feelings.” While Saussure believes that “Language is an arbitrary system of signs constituted of the signifier and signified.” It is a system based on no logic or reason; it is the system that covers both objects and expressions used for objects. Furthermore, objects and expressions are arbitrarily linked. Finally, expressions include sounds and graphemes used by humans for generating speech and writing, respectively, for communication. For Sapir, “language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires through a system of voluntarily produced sounds.” Noam Chomsky says that “language is the inherent capability of native speakers to understand and form grammatical sentences. A language is a set of (finite or infinite) sentences, each finite length constructed out of a limited set of elements (Hakim).

Language, however, is a phenomenon that raises questions that cannot be given a single satisfying definition. Nevertheless, scholars, authors, and linguistics all agree that it is a complex human phenomenon used in actual social situations (Hakim). It also can be defined as the language that a person speaks best, and so is often the basis for socio-linguistic identity. It is the language that every baby acquires from his first environment, and he can understand it remarkably. It is the language that a group of people considers inhabiting and which eventually becomes their natural instrument of thought and communication (Oyewole). On the other side, a second language can be defined as any other language learned or acquired once the mother tongue or first language acquisition is already established; this means that second language acquisition is the process of learning other languages in addition to the native language. Consequently, the difference between the mother tongue and the second language lies in the process itself. In other words, “language learning refers to the formal learning of a language in the classroom. On the other hand, language acquisition means acquiring the language with little or no formal training or learning” (Hoque 1).

There is a study entitled “Some Language Acquisition Principles and Their Implications for Second Language Teaching.” by Elaine K. Horwitz; in it, the writer claims that there are many principles to acquire a foreign language. One of them is “You learn to talk by talking,” saying that to develop true speaking fluency, a learner “must have experience with the pressures and feedback of natural conversational interactions” (687). He also states that students who spend an hour a week in roleplay and simulation activities achieve higher levels of communicative competence than students who spend the same amount of time in the language laboratory or cultural activities. In a vertical structure, the language learner continues to figure out an utterance through conversational turns. Previous parts of an utterance and the response of a conversational partner are used to build a longer utterance. In other words, one learns how to interact verbally, and out of this interaction, syntactic structures are developed; thus, according to this perspective, language learners use conversational interactions to increase their ability to communicate (687).

## **POLICY AND THE ACQUISITION OF A SECOND LANGUAGE**

Policy means “a set of ideas or a plan of what to do in particular situations that has been agreed to officially by a group of people, a business organization, a government, or a political party” (Cambridge Dictionary). This means

that policy plays the dominant role in determining a given country's direction. When the political system becomes against the country's global expansion, the result would be disappointing. The disastrous consequences would appear on the whole fields in that country, even on the educational structure. One of the prominent factors that enrich the acquisition of a second language is tourism. It opens up the prospect of the labour market, trade and financial services, educational system, and other different axes. This means that it is the resource that provides an excessive opportunity for people to obtain other languages through which countries exchange cultures, traditions, customs, and languages.

There are two controlling obstacles that participate in minimizing the acquisition of a second language in a given society—the two-dimensional problem, which is the social-personal issue, and the political issue. The personal social problem means that a person who lives in a society that completely depends on the mother tongue finds difficulties and obstacles to using any other language to communicate with others. Consequently, the speaker, whether he is a student or even a teacher, cannot interconnect with other languages confidently; he might feel shy, hesitant, and uncomfortable. That is the first pole of the problem, and the second one is the policy which is more extended and complicated since it is related to the political system, which means that this issue is out of our control.

As it is familiar that Iraq is a Middle Eastern county that has been exposed to many political, commercial, and military ambitions, and Iraqi society has become a victim of various political dilemmas. Tourism, for instance, plays a significant role in communication with various nationalities. Iraq is a country that is characterized by diversity in tourist attractions from the north to the south, charming nature in the north, religious places, historical landmarks, marshes in the south, and many other appealing places to be discovered. This diversity in the Iraqi environment confidently enhances and encourages people around the whole world to visit it and discover innovative places. In this way, people would speak more than one language because of tourism. As Iraq has suffered from lots of political problems and critical periods since the nineties of the last century and recently the American occupation of Iraq, violence, destruction, and desolation tourism has been very idle, and the result is a closed society. In other words, there is no actual interaction with people from other nations. Students then have no real chance to practice any foreign language just in their classrooms. The result is a shy generation that may have no confidence in using English fluently.

In contrast with most of the Arab Gulf countries, in such peaceful and advanced countries, people there get advantages from massive environmental advancements. The rapid expansion of trade, tourism, architecture, industry, employment, and economy play a directing role in polarizing people around the whole world and from various nationalities for different purposes. All these factors have led to a rapprochement between several nationalities, and the benefit is a newly open society gets development to use English as a second language fluently. To sum up, a closed society without actual and vivid use of English as a second language, especially with native speakers, would lose an excessive opportunity to master English, and even if there is progress but it would still be in its first steps. In a study entitled "Principles of instructed language learning," Rod Ellis states that "Language learning, whether it occurs in a naturalistic or an instructed context, is a slow and laborious process. Children acquiring their L1 take between two and five years to achieve full grammatical competence, during which time they are exposed to massive amounts of input"(217). In L2 acquisition, theorists believe that "if learners do not receive exposure to the target language they cannot acquire it. In general, the more exposure they receive, the more and the faster they will learn"(217). In the same article, Ellis mentions that theorists have adopted a very strong position on the importance of input. They point to studies that have shown that length of residence in the country where the language is spoken is related to language proficiency and other studies that have found positive correlations between the amount of reading reported and proficiency/literacy. However, the input must be made "comprehensible, either by modifying it or using contextual props. Yet, other researchers may disagree with this claim that comprehensible input (together with motivation) is all that is required for successful acquisition, arguing that learner output is also important, but they agree about the importance of input for developing the highly connected implicit knowledge that is needed to become an effective communicator in the L2 ( 217).

In Iraq, teachers almost always find various difficulties in teaching English to their students as a foreign language. The core problem is that there is no actual use of the English language in their everyday life activities, and they depend only on their mother tongue language. There are many reasons behind that, and policy for sure has played the supervisory role in refraining from the acquisition and use of the English language. In studying the acquisition of English as a foreign language in Arabic-speakers countries, a study entitled "A Brief Historical Perspective of English in Saudi Arabia," the writer states that though the society in UKA has been characterized to be conservative, and there was fear that the dominance of English would affect the Arabic mother language of Saudis. However, these obstacles have noticeably declined. The most important reason for this distinguished change in the status of English in KSA

can be attributed to the substantial desire of both the Saudi government and Saudi nationals to continue up-to-date with the needs and advances of the rest of the world. The government, particularly, makes vast efforts to improve English education in the country. In 1973, the Ministry of Education designed and instituted a special program to train English language teachers, both nationally and internationally. Today, Saudis' recognition of the English language extends far beyond the country's borders. To enhance English language acquisition, the Saudi government has sent hundreds of thousands of scholarship students to English-speaking countries, such as the USA, UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and so on, to study different disciplines in which the medium of instruction is English. In exchange, these students are expected to contribute powerfully to the expansion of EFL teaching and learning in the country upon their return. In addition to sending large numbers of Saudi students abroad to acquire a Western education, the government has recruited qualified teachers from around the globe to teach English in Saudi academic institutions. Since its introduction to the Saudi educational system, English has played an important role in the lives of Saudis and society generally (45-46).

Another reason for acquiring English professionally in the Saudi educational system is the economic values since the language is linked inextricably with the discourse of petroleum. As a result, English is taught as a core subject in public and private schools and is used as the medium of training in major organizations and companies across the country, such as Saudi Airlines, Saudi Aramco, the Saudi Telecommunication Company, etc. Learning English gives the opportunities to Saudis to benefit from its use as the medium of international communication, and to contribute thereby to the expanding economy and business environment of KSA. According to them, "English has enabled Saudis to communicate with approximately 9.5 million foreign expatriates who work in Saudi Arabia, which is necessary to acquire the competence they need to be qualified and ready to replace foreign expatriates in the labor market" (46). Additionally, English plays a key role in the development of foreign investments in Saudi Arabia. Politically, learning English has empowered KSA to interconnect with the world and to become a key player in the foreign policy domain, both regionally and globally. Moreover, English is associated closely with the growth of KSA's military power, as American military advisors, trainers, and technicians work in the Kingdom. The country still buys a large amount of American military equipment regularly, and thus the imperative remains for English to be taught to KSA military as well as civilian personnel. Socially, using English in KSA also allowed the fast spread of technology and an increasingly globalized society. Further, gaining access to such technology makes it possible for Saudis to communicate across geographical borders through social network media (46).

## CONCLUSION

Acquisition of English as a foreign language in Arabic speakers countries finds some obstacles to maintaining the use of the English language in everyday transactions. However, policy and political governments have great responsibilities to exploit their basic sources like geographical location, economic activities, tourism sector, and cultural exchanges to increase the ability of people to use the English language. In Iraq and Saudi Arabia, the differences lay in their serious dealing with the English language as a universal language. The Saudi government has made massive efforts to promote English, which has resulted in tremendous development in the way in which English is taught and its influence in the country. This development has contributed significantly to the enhanced status of English, as well as the appearance of new trends and insights in EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. In contrast with the state in Iraq, the government somehow does not give the matter serious applications. There is no actual use of the basic materials that, in one way or another, give the people a chance to be in close transactions with native speakers or people who speak English as a second language. In addition to that, the military stability in a given society substantially participates in global openness. Iraq, as it is undoubtedly acknowledged, has suffered for decades from military instability that prohibit expansion, development, globalization, and cultural exchanges.

## WORKS CITED

1. Alshahrani, Merzin. "A Brief Historical Perspective of English in Saudi Arabia." *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*. 2016, Vol.26, pp. 43-47.
2. Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/policy>
3. Ellis, Rod. "Principles of instructed language learning." *Elsevier*, 2005. Pp. 209-224.
4. Fasold, Ralph and Jeff Connor- Linton. *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*. Cambridge university press; UK, 2006.
5. Hakim, Azizul. *English Friends*. June 25, 2018, <https://englishfinders.com/definition-of-language-by-scholars/>
6. Hoque, Enamul. "An Introduction to the Second Language Acquisition." *The Journal of EFL Education and Research*. 2017, pp.1-23

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335690866> An Introduction to the Second Language Acquisition

7. K. Horwitz, Elaine. "Some Language Acquisition Principles and Their Implications for Second Language Teaching." *American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese*. 1986. Vol. 69, No. 3, pp. 684-689
8. Oyewole, Olu. "Influence of Mother Tongue in the Teaching and Learning of English Language in Selected Secondary Schools in Ondo State, Nigeria." *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.8, No.30, 2017. pp.55-64.