



Research Paper

The role of Arab parents to support English language learning in the Israeli Arab context

Accepted 27th October, 2020

ABSTRACT

This article gives evidence on the key role of Israeli Arab parents and family and their significant impact on their children's achievement in English as a foreign language. However, parents and other factors can crucially contribute to English language learning in the Israeli Arab context. Teachers and schools should consider this fact and employ it for promoting English language learning and increasing the number of *5 points (the highest English level high school can get) graduates in the English *bagrut (National matriculation examination). According to the latest statistics, less than 10 percent of the Israeli Arab graduates can get to the highest level of English bagrut exam. In this study, the qualitative research approach was adapted and semi structured interviews have been used as the research tool for collecting data. The participants were (N=20) teachers, (N=20) students and (N=20) Arab parents. The findings yielded the variable factors which were found to influence English language learning. The current article discussed the family as a major factor that affects English language achievements. Discovering these factors will definitely promote English language learning and help our students attain high level of English as a foreign language. The main goal is to make our students more interested in learning the new language and are more likely to go out on a limb and try out their newly learned language. Israeli Arab families give English a great value and importance since they believe that English gives a status amongst the Arab community and they would want their children to reach the highest status.

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Key words: Parental impact, EFL learners, improving language acquisition, high status

INTRODUCTION

Israeli Arab learners face a lot of difficulties learning English as a foreign language due to the minimum exposure to the English language in the Arab community in Israel. Though, a foreign language would not be attained without the support of internal and external factors that have a powerful effect on the whole process of language learning and how learners pick a new language. One of the significant factors that affect language learning amongst the Israel Arab students is parent and family. Besides, there are other factors like teachers and the school, learning context, learning strategies might support and definitely lead them to appreciable success.

The Arab learners tend to take advantage of the existence of the different factors to strengthen the possibilities of achieving a high level of English language acquisition. By setting attainable goals, using flexible and adaptable learning strategies, getting appropriate teaching techniques, language learners will be able to develop their English language and become 'good' language learners.

Parental role as a key factor and other factors promote English as a foreign language. Factors such as 'good' EFL teachers, learning strategies, pleasant atmosphere in the English classroom, utilizing different forms of teaching and assessing procedures will result in developing more

capable and successful language learners and will reduce the burden of EFL learner's learning foreign languages (Suleiman, 2018).

Arab students in the Israeli context learn English to improve their job prospects, get better achievements in school, prepare for their Academic studies, communicate using a global language, get ready for a trip abroad or even just for fun, these are reasons why Arab families want their children to become successful language learners. This article presents facts about the importance of the family as a major role in learning English as a foreign language. In particular, this study is inquiring the Arab minority in Israel and it attempts to explore the young Israeli- Arab learners' attitude towards Arabic-Hebrew dyad and linguistic practices. In addition to both Hebrew and Arabic, we try to find more about the family policy about learning languages in general and more specifically a foreign language such as English. The issue of Arabic in the Israeli community has been discussed in various studies (Spolsky and Shohamy, 1999a; Spolsky, 1999b; and Amara, 2002).

The language learners from different minorities within the Israeli community tend to learn another language or languages because they are on need-to-use basis. They learn languages for different domains and purposes and one of them is surviving life in the mixed Israeli society (Grosjean, 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Israeli Arab context

The status of Arabs in Israel represents a unique phenomenon. Israel is the only country in the Middle East where Arabs constitute a minority. This sector constitutes about 20% of the population in Israel. Arabic is the language of instruction in the Arab sector in Israel. For the Arab pupils, Modern Standard Arabic is taught at schools and is considered their first foreign language. Colloquial Arabic is the mother tongue of all native speakers of Arabic. This means that by the age of seven, they need to learn their two dialects of Arabic, Hebrew as the first official language and then they start learning English. The context is about two nations with two different languages, different religions and a serious political conflict (Perez, 1970). Arab learners have to learn Hebrew as a compulsory second language that they need for different national purposes whereas, Jews do not have to learn Arabic. The Arab learning meet English as their fourth language while Jewish learn English as their second language. All Israeli schools use the same English curriculum despite the differences of status of English in the two sectors. As noted, English is considered as the second language in the Jewish sector. Thus, to meet the standards, Arab learners are expected to be highly motivated in order to be able to close the gap and learn English as good as it could be.

The status of Arabic in the Israeli Arab context

Arabic is considered as the second official language in Israel. Therefore, Israel is the only non-Arab country where Arabic has the official status (Amara, 2002). He explains: "Arabic is the mother tongue and the main national language of the Arab citizens in Israel. Arabic is likewise a community language to a not-significant percentage of Sephardic Jews. Arabic serves as the sole official language of the Arab countries neighbouring Israel and benefits from a special prestige in the Islamic states.

Arabic in Israel is a unique case. It was the main language until the establishment of Israel, when because of changing political circumstances became a secondary language. Despite Arabic being the second official language, it is not a competing partner in a dyadic bilingual state according to the classification by Lambert (1999)." Currently, the aim is not to delve into the history and politics of the Arabic linguistics in the Israeli community since it is beyond the extent of subject matter and instead we are busy thinking of the language use and practices. We are more interested in investigating the young Arab generation's attitude towards their family policy in regards of Arabic as their first language and Hebrew as the first official language in the Israeli society.

The status of English in the Israeli Arab context

Israeli-Arab students speak two languages of Arabic and start learning Hebrew before learning English. Arabic is a 'diglossic' language. It has two different dialects with extensive lexical and phonological differences. Arabic dialects are still treated as variants of the same language despite (Ferguson, 1959). The implication of this fact that Arabic speakers are bilingual and the effect of bilingualism can be tremendous on their cognition. Their brain's functionality is enhanced when they are capable of speaking more than one language. It is just as a muscle that would be stronger when it is frequently trained. Learning more than one language facilitates learning.

English Language Learning of the Israeli-Arab has the status of a foreign language and labeled as their fourth language. The Arab learners start learning English after the two dialects of Arabic and Hebrew. Pupils normally start learning English in the third grade and some even in the fourth grade. Due to the fact that English is a foreign language, students are mainly exposed to English at the primary school.

Factors affecting English language learning

It is common to believe that pupils succeed in learning a new language because they have the aptitude and the inborn skills that help them learn. Foreign language

learning crosses the boundaries of school context and classroom teaching as it was proposed in a lot of the literature. Some learn faster than others and this can be related to different external factors. Many educational studies were interested in finding more about factors that might have an impact of the widespread of English among people who are living in foreign language context. The parental role, family, peer-group, teaching strategies, prior knowledge about the language, and other social factors were examined to see whether they affect language learning (Brown, 2007). Brown claimed that parents have conscious and unconscious influence on their children's attitude towards English language learning (Suleiman, 2018). Besides, children's attitudes are also influenced intentionally and unintentionally by their parents' attitudes towards language learning. Parents' education should influence parents' skills, values, and the knowledge of the educational system which in turn affect parents' educational practices at home. This is transmitted regardless of whether parents are directly involved in language learning or not (Davis-Kean, 2002).

APPLICATION OF LITERATURE

The content analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews conducted with English language learners, their parents and English teachers. The results have revealed that the family of Arab learner's is viewed as a very important factor and plays the role of the external factor that affects English language learning in high schools in the Arab sector in Israel. Evidence can be seen in the words of a parent who said *'my son speaks English with his cousins', 'she speaks English with her uncle', 'to speak English is a must', 'I do not stop buying them storybooks and games in English'*. Additionally, the pupils strengthened this view by saying that *'I want to speak English like everyone in my family', 'all my sisters and brothers are good speakers of English', 'we all read books and watch movies in English', 'Three of my relatives joined seeds of peace because they are excellent in English'*. Further evidence was found in the teachers' words who said *'all the students from this family are good English learners', 'being good in English is a tradition in this family', 'all the brothers and the cousins are excellent in English'*. As has been noted, learners' family can be viewed as a significant factor for promoting English learning.

Consequently, they feel they need to keep the tradition by working hard to make their English at the same high level of other members in the family. They even compete with them and try to be better English language speakers. The reason lies in the fact that they believe English has a prestigious status and they eagerly want to gain this status. As a result, it is irrefutable evidence that children's experiences at home have an important role and it promotes language growth and learning. When parents

provide their children with appropriate resources, they can rely on such as the good income, high education, and a supportive family environment, children will feel committed and take advantage of these rich resources and become better language learners.

Apparently, the current study attempts to bring into focus the impact of parental role, home environment, and family's beliefs about English as a foreign language in the Israeli Arab context. It examines Arab families' attitude towards English language learning.

The parental role as a factor affecting English learning was investigated and the findings have shown that there is positive correlation between language learners' background and their successful English language achievements. Parents who prioritize English language learning are more likely to push their children to keep trying even when they feel it is a very difficult mission to embark on. However, parents who place a great value for learning English and are convinced that being a 'good' English speaker is really an advantage will provide help to their children to become successful language learners. In order to achieve this high level of English, parents had to invest time and money. Even families with very low income were ready to pay for extra lessons or programs that might enhance their English language or they provide their children with the emotional support (Carhill et al., 2008).

Unlike other studies, the current study attests that the social-cultural background of Arab learners' families does not affect their achievement. In sociology, some theories have inquired the type of relationship between poor language achievements and the social-cultural background of their parents. It found out that despite their social cultural deficiency, parents helped their children to close the gap and better their English. They were able to motivate and encourage them to overcome these obstacles by putting greater efforts and be more cautious by taking the English class as a sole chance they should not miss. Parents did not let their low income hinder English language progress among their children. Based on the three major social theories: (1) The theory of cultural deficiency; (2) The theory of institutional deficiency; (3) The theory of the cultural conflicts (Hampton et al., 1995).

There should be a positive relation between social-cultural status of the families and poor English achievement. These theories have been refuted according to findings of this study. The above mentioned theories assert that learners from low socio-cultural status should definitely face problems in foreign language learning due to the fact that cannot find ways to increase their English language exposure. Surprisingly, many Israeli Arab students who were 'good' language learners were not affected by this poor status. They even found the social and economic status as some sort of challenge that they wanted to defeat. Despite the fact that they cannot get the social and cultural support from their families, they were able to become 'good' English language learners.

In addition, families greatly rely on the foreign language teachers and parents believe they have a big impact on how successful English language learners their children will be. English language teachers are highly appreciated in the Israeli Arab context (Suliaman, 2018). However, parents rely strongly on summative feedback such as grades in order to form their impression about their children's achievements and abilities which is normally provided by teachers and schools. Thus English teachers in the Arab sector should be well qualified because in most of the cases they are the only medium of exposure that pupils have. For this reason, foreign language teachers should indicate their level of process.

Thus, the parents' impression can be based on the teachers especially in the early school. Therefore, the parents' impact is recognized by the following influential factors:

- (1) Parents' general beliefs and behaviour
 - (2) Parental, familial and neighbourhood characteristics
 - (3) Parents' child-specific beliefs
 - (4) Parent-specific behaviours (Wild and Lorenz, 2009).
- These factors include education, occupation, income, general beliefs, and beliefs about children's abilities, behaviours, parenting styles, teaching strategies, and so forth (Wigfield et al., 2009).

Precisely, the study claims that the parents' level of language proficiency can be an indicator for their children's level of language of proficiency. Parents who are considered as good foreign language speakers may be countered as an index for the language support their children will be provided with which may lead to high level of proficiency. They then will be indirectly modelling for their children. In that realm, parental context will resemble a warm supporting environment for foreign language learning where children can be exposed to academic-oriented context. Parents will have a positive influential role in their children's language learning success at school contexts and in other contexts (Rueda and August, 2008).

It also proposed that the parental role is very significant in the way they affect their children's feeling of competences, relatedness, and autonomy through their behaviours that satisfy the children's needs to facilitate development of motivation to learn and succeed (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Moreover, the continuous consulting meetings between parents and teachers normally emphasize the remarkable role parents play in shaping the profile of their children's successful language learner. Thereby, we could not ignore how the influence of parents can shape competence beliefs, utility values, and intrinsic values which in turn form the learners' level of performances. Different theories seem to have the same idea about the role of parents in motivating their children to do well in tasks in the different learning contexts as they will believe in their abilities and

competences.

The study shows the language policy within families who are learning a foreign language. In this light, the role of family is significant and needs to be examined in different linguistic communities around the world and more specifically in Israel. Thus, family was found as an index for language learning and became an important matter to be examined in term of ideologies, practices, and managing all family members at their different levels. Recent studies were conducted to investigate the effect that family language policy has in Israel (Kayam and Hirsch, 2012).

However, some families might select their children's schools according to the language learning spoken and used in teaching and learning. For instance parents will think very thoroughly when they send their children to Hebrew, English, or bilingual schools. The reasons standing behind these studies and other studies are that the Israeli community is about different minorities of Arabic speaking community, Russian speaking community of people from the former Soviet Union, and Amharic speaking community from Ethiopia and each minority wants to maintain their language and at the same time learn other languages that helps them communicate well with other minorities in the country and abroad.

The general findings point to the fact that learners from highly integrated society with high level of Hebrew are interested in other languages such as English to equip them with other means of communication with the outer world. By the same token, other minorities are also interested in foreign or second language acquisition but still worried about the first language ideologies and practices (Schwartz and Mion, 2011; Moin et al., 2011; Stavans, 2012). Those families' anxiety stem from the fact they are living as a minority and need to keep their language which is likely to be very new in the Israeli's linguistic repertoire. Both groups of immigrants have presented major demographical and linguistic ideology changes (Spolsky, 1999b).

This reality makes Israel a mixed linguistic community even before we start talking about English. Actually, the Israeli minorities are convinced that they want to keep their linguistic ideologies and this is related to different reasons. Russian speakers believe that their language has been well-organized and want their first language to be preserved even if they want to be immersed in the Hebrew speaking community, but Amharic is still dominant among people from Ethiopia for other reasons such as the socio-economic status and that disrupts the integration in the Israeli community and makes Amharic speakers dependent upon their first language rather than other languages. Despite all, younger generations from different minorities intended to signify a shift towards the first official language in Israel. However, English has a long standing history within the Israel's linguistic context and have existed for years before Russian and Amharic. Russian and Amharic are relatively new linguistic reality in Israel (Spolsky, 1999b).

CONCLUSION

Parents and family have been viewed as a significant factor that contributes to the success of English language in the Israeli Arab context. The findings show that Arab language learners are significantly influenced by their relatives. When their relatives and family members have positive attitudes towards learning English and believe English is an important language, they feel they should be like their relatives and refused to be less. To achieve this level, they put greater efforts and work harder to better their English language. Similarly, the family's attitude towards English language has a strong relationship with what Arab students achieve. The Arab learners of English believe that family is dominant in foreign language learning. In addition to family attitude, the number of the family members of the English language learners does not play a role in their language achievements. The study came up with the fact that most of the participants came from big families and yet they attained a high level of English.

The Arab students have reported that English is an important foreign language to be acquired and what is more, it was noticed that learners' attitude towards English was a factor that promoted their English language learning and brought them to work hard to become successful English language learners.

The study, in short, has investigated the parents' attitude towards English language learning as a factor that affects successful English language learning. It was assumed that when parents and families adopt positive attitudes towards English learning, their children will become successful language learners. However, when we talk about learning English in the Israeli-Arab community, we cannot avoid mentioning the parental attitude towards the English language.

The findings of the study were a further confirmation that Arab parents' positive attitudes towards learning English brought their children to better English language achievements. Therefore, parents' attitude was an indicator that has a significant importance for the positive relationship between parents and family's attitude and high achievements in English. It was presented in the pupils answers when they said: *"My parents have exposed me to English since I was three years old", "My parents offered me many English courses and programs", and "they buy me story books as gift"*.

In conclusion, the significant positive role of parents was attested by the finding of this study shows that Arab 'good' English learners have stressed on the support they got from their parents and family. On account of English importance as a global language, parents are very interested and intend to use all available means to help their children develop their English language (Suleiman, 2018). Moreover, they seemed to be very proud to speak about their children as 'good' English language speakers since they have been convinced that English gives a status among other people in

the same Arab community. Some parents have expressed their feelings when they said: *"When I hear my son speaking English with a native like accent I feel very proud and ready to put bigger efforts and more money to support my child language learning in order to help him achieve better"*. According to this, we can say that parents' encouragement is strongly considered as one of the factors that affect second and foreign language acquisition (Leaver et al., 2005).

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- Suleiman W (2018). *Improving English Language Learning through Exploring the Profile of 'Good' English Learners among Secondary-School Arab Students in Northern Israel: Israel 2018*.

Cite this article as:

Suleiman W (2020). The role of Arab parents to support English language learning in the Israeli Arab context. *Acad. J. Educ. Res.* 8(12): 517-521.

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