

# Learning Disabilities in English at the Primary Stage: A Qualitative Study from the Students' Perspective

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**Abstract**— This study aimed at identifying the English language teachers' perspectives toward learning disabilities, in addition to the students' suggestions for treating learning difficulties in English language to raise the achievement level of students. To achieve the objectives of the study, interviews were conducted with primary school teachers to identify more reasons and suggestions from their point of view on how to treat students' learning difficulties in English. The results indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the estimates of primary school students for the reasons for students' LDs in English language in several fields among the students. The study concluded with recommendations on the need to diversify in teaching methods, reduce the teaching burden for teachers from lessons, and open channels of communication between home and school to follow up on students' affairs. The study also recommended identifying all the problems students face in the process of learning the language and increasing the awareness of students and their families about the importance of learning English language. In addition, schools should be encouraged to establish a special laboratory for English language, equipped with the latest tools to enable students to listen to the language better and with sound pronunciation, and encouraging teachers to develop remedial plans to improve the achievement level of students.

**Keywords**— English language, students, primary school, learning disabilities.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, English language has facilitated the widespread of electronic networks in the field of public communication. This spread in turn has contributed to improving the use of English as an international language (Almousah, 2020). In addition, Al-Arifi (2020) emphasized that English is the language of communication and understanding between many countries of the world, as it is the language of political and scientific conferences and forums, and the language of publishing and scientific research in many fields, especially technical and medical ones. Therefore, the Jordanian Ministry of Education has continuously developed the teaching of English language, as English is the second official language in Jordan.

There are clear indications of students' weakness in English language, as students are unable to speak English, and their ability to comprehend and understand written texts is also weak (Minshar, 2020). In addition, students are weak in understanding conversations they listen to in English and are weak in written expression. This led to the increase in learning disabilities in English language among students and its great impact on the future of children, their social and professional

lives, and their psychological stability. Such a phenomenon requires a comprehensive, careful, and insightful view of the familial, social, and economic factors interacting with the preparations, tendencies, and psychological trends of each student separately. It is also important to avoid random judgments and intolerant trends such as the misconception of some teachers and parents that learning disabilities are linked to misunderstanding and mental retardation (Musaed, 2018). Therefore, this problem triggered the researcher to investigate and identify the most important reasons behind the students' learning difficulties in English language, including those related to learning language skills.

## Problem Statement

The level of students in the elementary stage in English language does not meet the expected learning outcomes in various language skills (Al-Zoubi, 2013). Therefore, it has become necessary to identify the causes of students' learning disabilities in English language from its various aspects. The rationale behind this reason is that English language is very important in achieving the objectives of the educational system and the progress of individuals scientifically and practically. Therefore, it was necessary to take the opinions of students to face these difficulties, as taking their opinions will lead to a deeper understanding of the language, In addition to achieving better performance on the part of both the teacher and the learner alike.

## Research Objectives

This study aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- Identifying the students' attitudes towards students' learning disabilities in English at the primary stage in Irbid Governorate.

## Research Questions

The present study seeks to give answers to the following research question:

- What are the students' attitudes towards students' learning disabilities in English at the primary stage in Irbid Governorate?

## Significance of the Study

The significance of the current study stems from the importance of English language as the first global language that contributes to the progress of individuals scientifically and practically, so everyone needs to learn it. Therefore, research on the relationship of language skills to students'

learning difficulties in English language may contribute to finding solutions for these reasons. This will help reduce the number of students with learning difficulties in English language in the future. The current study also derives its significance from the importance of the elementary stage, which represents the first pillar of the next educational stage in the educational system, which depends on the quality, and development of students' academic performance (Saadeh and Dhmour, 2017). Therefore, the researcher had the idea of identifying how the English language students perceive learning disabilities.

#### *Delimitations of the Study*

The results of this study are limited to human limitations, as it was applied to the fourth and fifth primary students of English. The study tools were applied in public primary schools in the Second Directorate of Education in Irbid Governorate during the second semester of the academic year 2020/2021. The results of the study also are limited to the validity and reliability of the study instrument.

#### *Definition of Operational Terms*

*The primary stage:* is defined as the stage at the beginning of the educational ladder, where students undertake their spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, and social care in a manner consistent with the nature of each student and according to the goals of the society in which they live (Al-Mutairi, 2009). The researcher defines it procedurally as the stage that includes students from the fourth grade to the sixth grade in public schools in the Second Education Directorate in Irbid Governorate.

*Reasons:* They are defined as the factors that stand behind a particular problem or work to make something happen (Olimat, et al., 2013).

*Students with learning disabilities:* those who have disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes, which include understanding of written or spoken language and their use (khasawneh, 2019).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Students face difficulties in learning English as a second language, which is a multifaceted problem that requires organized and multidimensional solutions. They also face other challenges related to mastering the skills necessary for reading comprehensions, such as rapid recognition of words and an abundance of linguistic vocabulary. They need a kind of education that directly solves their deficits and promote their language level (Nuruzzaman, Islam & Shuchi, 2018).

The problem of students' weakness in English language is one of the challenges facing researchers in the field of teaching and learning English in general. The improvement of students' achievement in English language confirms the good progress of the education process in the right direction. In addition, the teacher grows a positive motivation towards the teaching profession and helping students achieve better. On the other hand, we will find that the achievement of many students in English language is a complex problem, as they feel that it is an unsuitable subject for them and that whatever

they do they will not be good at. Therefore, so we must look into the reasons behind the formation of negative trends towards the acquisition of English language subjects, the most important of which is the low achievement rate (Turki, 2019).

The general atmosphere prevailing in elementary schools neither helps nor encourages learning English language. The student speaks Arabic with the school administration and teachers and learns Arabic language in all subjects. The remaining time to learn English is just limited to a class of forty-five minutes, most of which is covered with Arabic. The time specified to learning English language is very limited compared to other study subjects, which is of course not enough for students to practice and acquire the language. Therefore, it is necessary to take advantage of all the opportunities available to the student in learning the language. As for teaching methods, we find that they do not achieve their goal for several reasons, including that teachers do not speak English in their performance and focus on giving information and teaching it as a subject only, regardless of the purpose of teaching English. In addition, teachers focus on the written contents of the curriculum and neglect the verbal side of the language.

#### *Previous Studies*

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the reasons behind learning disabilities in English language and these studies have come up with different results.

Al-Mawajdeh (2020) identified the reading difficulties facing the 9th-grade students in English language and how to deal with these difficulties from the teacher's point of view in Jordan. The sample of this study consisted of 100 teachers (40 males and 60 females) from Almazar Directorate of Education in Jordan. The author used the analytic descriptive method and developed a questionnaire where its validity and reliability were verified. The result of this study showed statistically significant differences in the teacher's perceptions and these differences are attributed to the variable of years of experience.

Abdel Moneim (2019) investigated the effectiveness of a training program based on strategies of attention and working memory to improve reading skills among students of the third primary with learning disabilities in English at Kafer El Bateek Al assay School, Kafer El Bateek Idara. The sample of this study consisted of 30 students. The study followed the quasi-experimental where the students were randomly divided into 2 groups, a control group of 15 students and an experimental group of 15 students. A pre-test was applied to both groups and then only the experimental group took the training program which consisted of 24 sessions and after that, a post-test has been applied to both groups. A reading and writing scale and IQ test of Ahmad Zaky Saleh were used alongside the training program. The results of the study revealed that there are significant differences in student's performance on post-test in the experimental group that proves the training program is effective.

Williams (2020) examined the effects of an intensive reading intervention RIA (Reading Intervention for Adolescents) on reading outcomes (word reading, vocabulary,

and comprehension) for ninth-grade English language learners with learning disabilities (LD). The sample of this study were students from 3 different large high schools in an urban, diverse southwestern U.S. school district where all student were English Learners by the time of this study or during the past 5 years, this study analyzed the treatment effects only for the English Learners with learning disabilities from the full sample in the study of the (Reading Intervention for Adolescents (RIA) for English Learners (Vaughn et al., 2018). And to analyze the treatment effects, 2 groups (treatment and comparison) were created from the four originally randomized groups of 10 to 15 students. The results of the study exposed the challenges of improving reading outcomes for English learners with learning disabilities in high school.

Swanson (2020) examined the prevalence of latent classes at risk for reading or math disabilities for elementary school children whose mother tongue was Spanish. The sample of this study consisted of 394 students (155 first grade, 129-second grade, and 110 from the third grade) were selected from 30 classrooms from urban schools with a high poverty representation from two large school districts in the southwestern United States, 192 boys, and 202 girls. The findings of this study supported the idea that children at risk for certain LDs reflect a latent class group that can be separated from a heterogeneous sample of children who differ in reading, L1, and L2 measures of vocabulary, math, fluid intelligence, and attention.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section provides information on the methodology of the present study, which includes population and sample, research instrument, and validity and reliability of the instrument.

#### *Population and Sample*

The study sample consisted of (20) male and female students in the primary stage from Irbid schools, who were interviewed for this study.

#### *Research Instrument*

To identify the students' suggestions to raise the level of students' achievement in English language, the researcher developed semi-structured interviews. The interviews were recorded on a recording device (after the teachers' approval), and then each interview was completed separately. The interview questions focused on (6) questions related to the causes of students' learning disabilities in English language and their suggestions for treatment.

#### *Validity and Reliability of the Instrument*

The interview schedule in its initial form was presented to a group of specialized experts to judge the appropriateness of the interview schedule in terms of its validity and affiliation with the subject to be measured and to suggest any amendments they deem appropriate. Some phrases were amended in the questions, and the interview questions consisted of (4) questions in their final form.

### IV. FINDINGS

This section provides the findings obtained from the present study. These findings are presented based on the research question that guides the present research.

Interviews were conducted with (20) male and female students. Their response was analyzed to identify more causes of learning difficulties for the basic stage students in English language from the perspective of the students themselves. Table 1 shows a summary of the results of these interviews.

TABLE 1. The reasons for students' LDs in English language from the point of view of the students arranged in descending order

Rank	Statement	Frequency
1	Unavailability of an English language lab	20
2	The lack of teaching aids in the classroom, and they are limited to tapes and cassettes	18
3	The inability of the teacher to find educational situations that motivate students to use the language	16
4	The unwillingness to learn English	15
5	Parents' inability to help the student learn English	14

It is noted from Table (1) that most of the reasons for students' learning disabilities in English language according to the students' interviews ranged with different frequencies. The reason (lack of an English language lab) got the highest frequency of (20), while the lowest frequency was for (Parents' inability to help the student learn English), which has reached (14). Despite the low frequency of these paragraphs, they have a clear impact if they are taken into account.

The following is a review of the reasons for students' weakness in English language from the point of view of their teachers, with quotations from what the English language teachers said in the interviews.

Reasons for students' weakness in English language at the elementary stage as seen by students:

#### *Unavailability of an English language lab:*

This reason was repeated (20) times by the students. Their responses showed that the teacher and students' lack of a laboratory for teaching aids for the language have the greatest impact on their weakness in language. This was confirmed by what one of the students said, "There is a huge difference between what we hear in the classroom and what we hear and watch in the movies."

#### *The lack of teaching aids in the classroom, and they are limited to tapes and cassettes*

This reason was repeated (18) times. The students' responses showed that the teachers' lack of teaching aids in the school and the school's failure to provide various means have a great impact on the students' weakness in English language. This confirms what one student said, "The teacher did not bring during the last semester any educational tool to class."

The researcher attributes this to the school's lack of interest in English language teachers, especially concerning providing educational aids, whether basic or supportive.



*The inability of the teacher to find educational situations that motivate students to use the language*

This reason was repeated in the students' responses 16 times, and the students' responses showed that the teacher's inability to find educational learning situations that motivate students to apply the language could be the main reason for students' learning difficulties in the English language in general. The teacher should be motivating and encouraging his students to use the language. This was confirmed by what one of the students said, "The English language class is the most boring class." The researcher attributes the reason to the teacher's ignorance of appropriate teaching methods, which would create educational situations that motivate students to learn the language. Teachers must be trained in modern teaching methods that contribute to creating educational situations that motivate students to use the language.

*The unwillingness to learn English*

This reason was mentioned in the students' responses (15) times, and the students' responses showed that the desire to learn is a prerequisite for success in any subject, regardless of its difficulty. This confirms what one of the students said, "It is impossible for me to learn English." The researcher attributes the reason to the students' feeling that the English language is not important and their teachers do not encourage students to like the language. The teacher plays an important role in shaping students' attitudes towards the subject he teaches.

*Recommendation*

One of the most prominent recommendations of this study is to focus on the need to diversify in teaching methods, reduce the teaching burden for teachers from lessons, and open channels of communication between family and school to follow up on students' affairs. It is recommended to identify problems in the process of learning English and increasing the awareness of students and their families about the importance of learning English. In addition, encouraging schools to establish a special English language laboratory equipped with the latest equipment to enable students to listen to the language better and with sound pronunciation, and to encourage teachers to develop remedial plans to improve the achievement level of students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors extend their appreciation to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Khalid University for funding this work through Small Research Groups under grant number (RGP.1 /40/42)

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