

Doi: 10.34120/0085-036-144-012

## **The Position of EFL, Phases, and Potential Challenges in Kuwait: Kuwait University as an Example**

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### **Abstract**

Although introduced to learners from KG, English is considered a foreign language in Kuwait. Learning English in Kuwait is still a challenging endeavor to many students. However, this paper sheds light on three aspects related to learning English as a foreign language: the first aspect is the position of English, the second is the phases of English development followed by the challenges students encounter in their academic career as learners of English as a foreign language. The number of the sample students is ninety-two students from both genders taking English courses at the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University as part of their curriculum. Findings identify the main impediments represented in three main factors; namely, motivation, exposure, and rare practice of English outside the classroom.

**Keywords:** EFL, Language acquisition, Fluency, Verbal interaction, Interpretation, Motivation .

## Introduction

The digital communication revolution has broken all barriers of contact among people worldwide. Hence, learning other languages has become a necessity to attain appropriate proficiency at least in spoken communication. In Kuwait, there are general and specific purposes for the selection and concentration upon English. In general terms, Qatip Arifi (2017) argues that the humanistic approach in teaching gives better results. Primarily, it helps the individual grow to be an open-minded person. Being a 'monolingual' leads a person to believe that his/her language is the most expressive language in the world. Since language is deeply rooted in culture, it is easy to draw that conclusion if one has never been exposed to another language in formal or informal situations, or as Grittner (1977) concluded: 'the study of another language is essential to understand what language is all about' (P.27). At the same time, there is a utilitarian benefit in the sense that being able to speak, understand, read, and write another language can help a person get a better job or promote his career, particularly when the foreign language has an international status, at economic, political, educational, and social levels.

Kuwait has strong diplomatic and commercial ties with many English-speaking countries such as the United States of America and the U.K as well as countries that use English as the official language of communication such as India. This necessitates the availability of Kuwaitis with mastery of English to carry out the task of communication with such countries. Even within Kuwait, there is a great demand for Kuwaitis to speak English because all foreign companies and banks shared between Kuwait and other countries conduct their businesses and transactions in English. The need to learn English for students studying abroad

has become inevitable because their success is totally dependent on their ability to speak English. The more English students can learn at home before going abroad, the better they can perform in their studies. However, English in Kuwait is taught as a foreign language starting from grade one in public and private schools. The general English course is taught for 12 years. Moreover, Kuwaiti higher educational institutions, schools, multinational, and big national companies realized the importance of English in institutions,

schools, and everyday life. A huge bulk of research focuses on EFL and the implementation of L2 in schools, universities, and workplace. Second language knowledge is a key issue in globalization.

Many scholars, such as Montaña-González (2017), conducted research on learning EFL. They found that the aspects of grammar, cognition, and communication are very helpful in learning a second language. The research samples exhibit various results on learning English. However, Alkhateeb (2018) identifies dynamic relations between first language proficiency and second language skill in writing. To verify the hypothetical relations between L1 and L2, Alkhateeb (2018) made many interviews with the sample study. He found that competence in L1 is likely to substantially enhance the process of L2 learning. The various variations in the research were subject to deep analysis to verify the increasing second language acquisition. The role of Arabic as first language in highlighting the importance of EFL in ESP situations has been assessed by researchers like Al-Tarawneh and Al-Mithqal (2019). They found positive correlation between Arabic as L1 and English as L2. The current paper investigates the opinions of 92 male and female students enrolled in the remedial English language course and 10 faculty members at the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University. The position of English at the College of Social Sciences is EFL, which means that students' exposition to English is limited. However, findings of the research were negative in general, raising the importance of EFL. Such importance encourages the researcher to conduct more investigation by including a larger sample. The purpose of such research would be to obtain more congenial and community centric findings. According to Richards (2001), learners of English as a foreign language deeply believe that the more they are exposed to English, the more crucial learning acquisition they will achieve. This argument is supported by other scholars in other countries. The findings demonstrate that the four language skills of EFL learners rely on their "composing capacity" (Richards & Rodgers, 2003). About forty years ago, Seliger and Long (1983) supported the claim that English language teaching needs to be evaluated to identify the challenges and obstacles that impede Arabic native speakers to develop their proficiency in English. The calls were dedicated to the poor performance of Saudi students particularly in remedial courses. The situation in Kuwait is very similar, if

not identical, to that of Saudi Arabia. Many more contemporary researchers support this opinion; (Al-Ahdal & Al-Ma'amari, 2015, Kitishat et al., 2020). Researchers, like Smith (1980), Rababah (2002), Seliger (1983), found that Arabic speakers learning English as a foreign language encounter many problems in the learning process. The main issues of the learners are summarized as:

- 1 - Universities have no data about school leavers who join different colleges.
- 2 - Many schools and faculties/colleges lack appropriate and clear educational plans of English.
- 3 - The implementation of teaching aids and techniques was unpleasant to learners.
- 4 - The learning environment is inappropriate.
- 5 - Observations showed that students suffered in expressing their opinion using appropriate English in classes.

It is worth mentioning that once COVID-19 Pandemic struck the world, many governments had to impose general or partial lockdown, and Kuwait is no exception. In March 2020, the Kuwaiti Cabinet decided to suspend education in all educational institutions. However, in the following month the Ministry of Higher Education and Higher Education decided to start online education using Microsoft Teams application. In 2020, the Ministry of Higher Education adopted hybrid teaching method, i.e., classes combine both face-to-face or online based on teachers' preference provided that teachers and students strictly abide by health precautions.

## Discussion

People use images, signs, and symbols to express their thoughts and feelings. To educate and understand the images, signs and data are refined. What people mainly care about is their native language although there are thousands of other languages that people may want to learn. Moreover, Krashen (2002) claims that learning a foreign language is represented in a cycle that is centered around the former, the learner needs to add correspondence circumstances. Krashen also believes that adding correspondence circumstanc-

es provides blunder remedy that is similar to the investigation of linguistic parameter far from everyday language. Krashen, furthermore, believes that language acquisition is not intentional, or spontaneous, while learning a foreign language is intentional and cognizant. He also thinks that learners focus on content more than they do on structure. Learners concentrate on structure only in the learning cycle of that language, whereas L1 is naturally absorbed.

## Teaching Approaches

Teaching EFL approaches are diverse. The most common approaches include Task- Based Language Teaching, the Natural Approach, the Grammar-Translation Method, the Audio-Lingual Method, Suggestopedia Language Learning Method, Communicative Language Learning, the Total Physical Response, and the Silent Way. Not all approaches are of similar importance. The majority of language teachers do not rely on only one approach. Moreover, curriculum designers, teachers, teaching material developers can adopt any teaching style or approach requested or needed by learners or imposed by language institutions, schools, and colleges.

## L1 Versus L 2

It is opportune to point to the distinction often made between two settings in language learning, second versus foreign language learning. The term second language is used in applied linguistics and refers to the learning of any language after the first language, irrespective of the status of that language vis-à-vis the learner or the country in which the language is being learned. In the rapidly developing field of language learning, second language is thus used as a cover term to include the study of the inter-languages of second and foreign language learners. Hence, it includes the study of learning English by immigrants and non-English-speaking minority groups as well as learning English by students in European and Asian countries. As such, the usage of the term is imprecise (Richards, 1978). However, the researcher perceives second language learning when language is spoken by a group of people outside the classroom and the learner has ample opportunity to hear that language or interact with members of the target language group in that language.

The term foreign language refers to a setting where the target language is not a common language in the country where it is taught. Rather, the use of a foreign language is exclusively restricted to classroom setting where there is hardly a chance for learners to communicate in this language outside the classroom. In the Kuwaiti setting, English is not used as a lingua-franca, but a foreign language.

Many scholars, such as Krashen and Long believe that L2 learners who acquire L2 dialects early are more likely to begin characteristic openness to L2 dialects and surpass adults who start L2 at older age. On the other hand, Krashen (2002) considers second language learners, who start learning L2 at old age, as more capable of syntactic and morphological development than younger L2 learners. After long time of L2 exposure, L2 learners acquire native-like acquisition of L2. The stages of L2 accomplishment of the sample study of the current research are listed in Table 1:

**Table 1**

*Pros and Cons of L1 and L2 as noticed at the Faculty of Social Sciences*

<b>Speed</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>Acquisition is quick</b>
Stages	Planned phases of development	Planned phases of development
Defect Development	Non-straight leading	Non-complex
Depth of Information	Side by side contribution	Side by side contribution
Achievement (1)	Not feasible	Feasible
Achievement (2)	Rarely fully positive	Positive

### **Phases of Second Language Acquisitions**

According to Swaffar, Arens & Morgan, 1982; Benattabou, 2020, EFL involves five phases, which are Pre and Early Production, Speech Emergence, Intermediate and Advanced Fluency. Learning fast depends on many factors as well as the amount of effective training, the length of time spent on learning, and family foundation. It is worth mentioning that EFL is closely associated with specific timeframe. It is noticed that EFL proficiency can be achieved if learners imitate native speakers in their style of language use.

Below are simple explanations of EFL phases:

- 1 - The Pre-Production Phase: This phase is called the “silent” phase. In this stage of EFL, students are involved in the target language. Learners are expected to acquire between five and six hundred words. Furthermore, students express their eagerness to listen to their language teachers. Visual images and picture as well as other sign language are interesting to learners. To express their satisfaction, EFL learners repeat the signs teachers make. The approach that is decisive in this context is the Total Physical Approach. Language instructors should focus on certain activities, such as comprehension, listening, and building up vocabulary.
- 2 - Speech Emergence or Development: due to the vocabulary built up in the previous phase, language learners are able to use simple sentences and short straightforward expressions in their talks. Such new skills help learners to be engaged in basic discussions and talks. Moreover, pictures are viable in helping students understand simple stories narrated by teachers in the classroom. However, checking learners’ language errors when using longer sentences is not very important in this phase.
- 3 - Fluency in the intermediate stage: after completing the Speech Emergence or Development Phase, learners’ linguistics competence witnesses obvious expansion. In this phase, learners become more competent in producing more complex and variable expressions since their word bank, or vocabulary competence, has developed tremendously to include around 7000 words. EFL learners’ competence is enhanced by the strategies of the native language.
- 4 - Fluency in the advanced stage: there is no fixed time for this stage, but it takes not less than five years to reach this phase. Because L2 learners have high-level vocabulary, they can participate in any type of discussion. Learners can utilize vocabulary and grammar like native speakers.

**Table 2***Sample Teacher Stimuli for EFL Phases*

	<b>Characteristics/Aspects</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Teacher Stimuli</b>
<b>The Pre-Production Phase</b>	Learners demonstrate bare knowledge. Learners show no coherent language. Learners use the signals of 'yes/no' and points & draws	About six months from the beginning	What is.....? Where....., and when.....?
<b>Speech Emergence or Development</b>	Learners demonstrate inadequate understanding. Learners can reply using one or two-words. Learners use keywords & general phrases. Learners practice simple present tense.	Six months to twelve months	Learners use: "Yes/No", either/or and wh-questions
<b>Fluency in the intermediate stage</b>	Learners demonstrate The learner has an excellent comprehension and can create simple and easy sentences. Learners may make grammatical errors.	From one to three years	Learners form questions using short sentences as well as demands. Why..... How ... Explain ....
<b>Fluency in the advanced stage</b>	Learners fully command understanding of L2 Learners commit minor grammatical errors	Between three to five years	Learners form more complex questions more than one sentence What do you like.....? What would happen if.....? Why/What do you think.....?

## **The Status of English in Kuwait**

Although L1 speakers prefer using their language primarily, they still need to use L2. Therefore, L2 learners need to know at least the basics of L2 to be able to communicate with foreigners. Globalization is now a reality due to the mass movements of goods, communication revolution, and technology. Although it is introduced to students in Kindergarten, English is considered a foreign language. As a result, Kuwaiti students become able to communicate with native English speakers. Educational decision makers, and policymakers realized the importance of English in the process of the country's development.

No matter what second language learners do to improve their proficiency in L2, they are unlikely to comprehend second language as they can do with their first language. English is world's inevitable second language. In Kuwait, English enjoys a prominent position because it is generally used in several aspects of life. For example, different forms of media – such as TV, social media networks, and websites – are mainly based on English language. In addition, petrol trade and medical services mainly rely on English. However, students wishing to join universities, especially technical and medical majors, need English for at least a decade to fulfil the academic demands. On the other hand, Kuwaitis tend to use their native language in their everyday-life situations. Arabic is the official language in Kuwait as it is used in government and public sectors. Many EAP programs offered in universities for both teachers and students are designed to develop teachers' and students' proficiency. However, the outcomes are not satisfactory enough. The causes of such results are variable and beyond the scope of the current research, so that the study focuses only on the impediments as remarked in EFL theory and practice.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of the current paper are:

- a. Identifying the problems Kuwaiti EFL learners encounter in their educational process.
- b. Focusing on the practices that may help EFL learners communicate in English in the classroom as well as in daily life.

- c. Identifying the reasons why Kuwaiti students show no interest in acquiring English.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions are:

- 1 - What are language learners' perceptions of English as a second language?
- 2 - What are the impediments that hinder learners' acquisition of English?
- 3 - What are the reasons that make English learners not motivated?

### **Research Methodology**

The study sample included 92 male and female students from the College of Social Sciences, Kuwait University. All students are Arabic native speakers enrolled in the remedial English Language course 090. To assess students' level, they were subject to intermediate-high level of proficiency. Students were given a descriptive survey to identify the obstacles that impede their development in EFL. A questionnaire was also given to students to answer some closed and open-ended questions. Repeated answers constituted more than fifty percent of the total responses. They are isolated and summarized as follows:

- a. Education authorities represented in the Ministry of Education did not prepare effective and appropriate system for EFL.
- b. Word bank is poor as their level in vocabulary did not improve.
- c. Students' native language is not English.
- d. English is not used outside the classroom.
- e. Anxiety is high in implementing what has been learnt.
- f. Arabic is the dominant language at use, so students are not interested in learning another language
- g. Teachers did not motivate students in the early stages of language learning, so that students lost interest in learning English when they became older.

- h. Students' main purpose of learning English was to pass the exams. They did not care about proficiency.
- i. Students cannot learn English unless they are motivated.
- j. English can be developed if it is used daily, not only in the classroom but also outside school.
- k. Appropriate training corpuses should be provided to develop L2 proficiency.
- l. Practice is crucial in EFL. Students should practice at least two hours a day.
- m. Proper preparations should start at early age i.e. preparations should start in the primary stage and should continue until university.

### **English Language Teaching in Kuwait: Evaluation based on findings**

It is noticed that out-of-date and obsolete teaching and learning approaches are not effective, unsuccessful when rote learning is dominant. Since students are obliged to pass English language tests to be promoted for the next level, they must exert much effort in memorizing the content of textbooks even though they are still unable to effectively communicate with others in English. Parents are fully aware that English is a key subject for both further studies and better employment opportunities. Therefore, students are obliged to demonstrate at least minimal conversational capacities in addition to informative abilities. Hence, education decision-makers, language teachers, parents, and managers realize that effective measures must be taken to improve the current poor status of English.

### **English language and its place in the educational program in the curriculum**

English is learnt to meet specific purposes, such as helping in international trade and support higher studies. Based on the educational policy in Kuwait, students are obliged to learn a second language to both accomplish communicative competence and be able to skillfully and meaningfully inter-

act with people from other cultures. Like other countries where English is a foreign language, Kuwait built English curricula on the four language skills. However, the real situation in the classroom is different. Language skills are not tackled equally. Instead, the main focus is on reading, translation, and writing because tests are designed and focused on these domains (Seliger & Long, 1983), while other skills do not receive enough attention. It is noticed that among other skills the speaking skill is neglected. In this regard, Bygate (1987) says that "Speaking is an undervalued talent in several respects which merit consideration". Dawson and Pospisil (1983) add that language learners are able to generate phrases, but they cannot ask for a glass of water. Therefore, it is inevitable to train students to practice speaking because communication and expressing their beliefs and ideas are vital for their development. After analyzing data, the researcher identifies main causes of poor performance in speaking which are:

- a. English is generally used in the classroom only.
- b. When practicing speaking, learners focus on grammar accuracy rather than maintaining fluency.
- c. Because Arabic is excessively used in the classroom, English development is negatively affected.

Moreover, the speaking skill is relatively neglected in schools. Instead, grammar and language structure are assessed at this level, and only abstract information is evaluated. As a result of such information approaches, learners are enable to acquire or memorize formulaic vocabulary. In many countries, including Kuwait, English language textbooks are designed and supervised by the government, each chapter is designed to tackle one particular aspect of the language.

## Teaching Materials

Government-written textbooks are implemented by using the communicative approach. English teachers totally depend on the materials and approaches adopted in the textbooks. In this context, McRae (1991) comments that "The instructor that practices every coursebook slavishly would eventually bore himself as well as the students". On the other hand, if learners are ex-

posed to Arabic instructions and explanations, they will miss the opportunity to practice the listening and speaking skills in the classroom. Due to inappropriate instructive settings, many language teachers are not proficient enough in spoken English, so that they cannot create proper speaking environment in the classroom. Since the official language in Kuwait is Arabic, English status is influenced by this trend. Hence, most English teachers are competent of reading and writing skills in addition to grammar. Moreover, instructors teach materials that are not interested in because they are obliged to do so. This is because they are requested to abide by the content of the curriculum designed by the government. Another important issue is related to teachers in Kuwait is that the vast majority of these instructors have no adequate training. Britten (1988) comments that “they [teachers] appear to regress into the old way of teaching with their qualification”. Due to the lack of teaching supervision, teachers are reluctant to exploit or implement their ELT training. As a result, English becomes a burden instead of being an enjoyable subject. Teachers also suffer in imparting effective and interesting teaching environment. All these issues have made English language teaching an impediment in the educational plan.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

After completing the research, the researcher supports the opinion that learning activities are not effective enough in raising students’ level because such activities are not receptive. It is also worth mentioning that language teachers are requested to create and design material with rich information in a proper manner. It is recommended that learning activities should be designed based on learner’s needs, so that learners are involved in a diversity of practices. Such exercises include cooperative games, podcasts, role-play, and videos. Language instructors are requested to create an appropriate learning environment for their students. It is important to adopt the learner-centered approach to enrich students’ language capabilities in the classroom. Therefore, any homework or assignment should be appealing, interesting, and essential to students’ life and learning environment. However, Mc Rae (1991) believes that the implementation of homework and language tasks will lead to alterations in the mentality of the teachers towards “reading and interpreting”, so that interpreting is distinct and language learning is totally a separate capability.

To manage the classroom, teachers of English should create the proper environment to practice English. Such practices include providing instructions, learners' responses, and teacher's questions. English is inevitable to enhance the extent of the speaking skill. Such strategy is likely to happen if students practice English daily. Since error-correction is part of the learning process, teachers need to create an environment where errors are identified and corrected. According to (MacLeod & Larsson, 2011), it is not guaranteed that learners' mistakes will develop students' level if the teacher corrects their errors. However, Burt (1975) claims that students' self-confidence and motivation may be elevated by limited correction. There is possibility to develop the speaking skill and conversational capabilities via prolonged practice. Consequently, it is vital for learners to start speaking instead of focusing on grammar and speech correctness.

Interaction is a fundamental issue in language teaching, so that instructors are very concerned about this term. Brown (1994) considers interaction as the core or center of communication in the communicative language teaching approach. Brown (1994) adds that interaction or communication is the perfect approach to identify the means to convey EFL. Communication competence theories emphasize the significance of interaction as people use language to understand others and be understood by others. Other scholars, such as Rivers (1987), consider collaboration, which is related to interaction, as a vital effective factor in language learning. This is because learners build their vocabulary, or lexicon, via active involvement in listening to other learners or teachers. Other factors – such as problem-solving tasks, dialogues, games, or role play – are also very effective in the EFL learning process. However, the situation now is that testing reflects student's demotivation as they are subject to pre-fabricated memorization process, so that they should be obliged to think separately. To solve this problem and make students active language learners, teachers should teach students the habits of thinking and practicing speaking through settings, context, and teaching materials. Moreover, Cotterall (1995) believes that students become more efficient language learners even if they are deprived of tools and the inability to manage their issues from the instructor.

## Conclusion

Many EFL obstacles that impede the language learning process in Kuwait should be tackled. One main problem is the increase of frequent use of Arabic in English language classrooms. If Arabic remains the mainstream trend in English teaching classrooms, it may be difficult to elevate the level of EFL learners. In the meantime, Kuwaitis are enthusiastic to learn English because they realize the importance of English in all aspects of life, academic studies, work, and general communication in their multi-cultural community. Furthermore, in many newly founded private universities in Kuwait, English is either the main language of instruction or essential for admission. Finally, English language represents an inevitable requirement to find a decent job, pursue appropriate education, and establish effective means of communication with people from different cultures.

# مكانة اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مراحل تطورها والتحديات المستقبلية في الكويت: جامعة الكويت نموذجاً

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## الملخص

رغم أنها تدرّس من مرحلة الروضة، تعتبر اللغة الانجليزية لغة أجنبية في الكويت. وما يزال تعلم اللغة الانجليزية تحدياً جدياً للعديد من الدارسين. وتأتي هذه الدراسة لتلقي الضوء على ثلاثة جوانب متعلقة بتعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ يتمثل الجانب الأول بمكانة اللغة الانجليزية في الكويت، في حين يركز الجانب الثاني على مراحل تعلم اللغة الانجليزية ويركز الجانب الأخير على التحديات التي يواجهها الدارسون في مسيرتهم الدراسية. بلغ عدد طلاب عينة الدراسة اثنين و تسعين طالباً وطالبة من كلية العلوم الاجتماعية في جامعة الكويت؛ حيث يدرس الطلاب اللغة الانجليزية كجزءاً من منهجهم الدراسي. تشير النتائج إلى أن العقبات الرئيسية لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية تتمثل في ثلاثة عوامل هي الدافعية و الاحتكاك باللغة و الممارسة النادرة للغة الانجليزية خارج الغرفة الصفية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، اكتساب لغة أجنبية، الطلاقة، التفاعل اللفظي، التأويل، الدافعية.

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