

Challenges of Learning English as a Foreign Language in some Expanding Circle Countries

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Abstract

This study is trying to investigate how English is learned and taught as a foreign language (FL) in some expanding circle countries. The main objective of this study is to shed lights on some of the challenges that learners of English in such countries might encounter while learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in their countries. The study tries to provide some potential remedies and recommendations for helping English language learners (ELLs) use English functionally in communicative situations. In addition, the study presents some experiences of teaching and learning EFL in some Expanding and Outer Circle countries. Therefore, the following questions were posed:

What do international English language learners report about their experiences in learning EFL in their countries?

What are the challenges ELLs encounter while learning EFL in their countries?

Based on studies and research in some Expanding Circle countries, there are many difficulties in learning and teaching EFL in such countries. For example, the history of teaching and learning EFL in some Middle East countries is a history of failure. Middle East students spend six years learning English in mid and high school and four years in university, yet they fail to communicate in English. These students fail to use the skills of speaking and listening, and only few of them are good at reading and writing.

Studies and research show that though English is taught from primary schools in East Asia, students have not reached the satisfied level to use English in communicative situations. Critics see that the methods of teaching English in East Asia focus on teaching grammar, using translation into first language.

In this study, I used Qualitative Research to understand the main questions of this study from the participants' perceptions. As interpretation is a core step in this phenomenological study, I selected the Interpretive Paradigm in conducting the data analysis of this study. To get the primary data of this study, I interviewed 20 ELLs from some Expanding Circle countries. Later, I interpreted the data according to my own perceptions based on theories and literature reviews from secondary resources.

The data analysis shows that all participants of the study find challenges in learning English in their countries. The participants spend several years learning English in school and university in their countries, yet they fail to interact with native English speakers in reality. The participants of the study attribute the challenges of using English functionally to the methods of teaching English in their countries (Grammar Translation Method, Audio-Lingual Method, and Direct Method), lack of opportunities to use English authentically in these countries, lack of self-motivation in learning English communicatively, education system policies of learning and teaching EFL.

Though some of the participants have spent more than three years in the United States, their English is still poor. This might be attributed to the effects of the Grammar Translation Method, which uses the first language in learning English.

According to the findings obtained, I provided some potential remedies and offered some recommendations.