



## **An Overview of the Challenges and Solutions for English Language Teaching in Iraq-Kurdistan**

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### **Abstract**

To be considered fluent in a language, one must speak it quickly and understand it. Iraqi Kurdistan does not employ English as a second language in daily life. Using English to its fullest potential, it is taught and learned in various contexts. However, the Kurdish language education approach does not adequately address this problem. These issues are caused mainly by the majority of university lecturers' lack of training, the classroom environment, the materials used, and the methods often used to educate students in a theoretical rather than a practical manner. One problem connected to this is that textbooks are often not up to date with current events. If a training method that is both practical and useful is implemented, the intensity of this troublesome issue might be reduced or removed entirely from the system. This article review seeks to give a brief overview of English Language Teaching (ELT) at Iraqi Kurdistan establishments and analyze the problems and possible solutions this field is now experiencing. After providing a summary of the challenges and arguing for the validity of those issues, the researchers will provide suggestions for overcoming the difficulties mentioned throughout the study.

Keywords: Iraq- Kurdistan Universities, English Language Teaching, English Programs, Problems, Solutions

### **Introduction**

One of the most crucial problems facing contemporary academic institutions is inadequate attention paid to the planning and executing of qualitative research procedures. As a result, it is indispensable to keep improving its overall quality, which is the next practical step. That leads to more effective instruction, which is to the advantage of students in a higher education system. According to Smith (2006), one of the profession's characteristics is a collection of information that is not only up to date but also has historical origins. The learning level of the students might vary if they are professionally aware of the ELT process. A well-trained teacher may theoretically and practically teach more

successfully than one without training. Initial teacher training improves classroom learning and practice. Theory gives prospective teachers information and subject and a comprehensive understanding of teaching, while exercise helps them handle a class by picking appropriate teaching tactics and approaches. Since its inception, English education in Iraq- Kurdistan has not been planned, directed, or targeted to suit learners' actual requirements. For instance, the most crucial worry at the moment in the academic environment of an Iraq institution is reading rather than using English in everyday situations. Exercises in oral performance are not included in English textbooks, nor are they something that can be found in other places. English instructors often provide to their students.

Consequently, students spend little time practising and using the target language in class. These pupils have a decent foundation in vocabulary and grammar but cannot speak English effectively and articulate their thoughts. The English language has developed into one of the most influential languages in the world and is spoken by many people for various reasons. It is safe to claim that the English language has attained this status. At present, English is the language that is used for global communication, science, commerce, advertising, diplomacy, and the transmission of advanced technology, and it has evolved into a "lingua franca" among speakers of languages that are not mutually intelligible with one another (Coury & Carlos, 2001). Additionally, acquiring a command of the English language helps ensure the availability of chances for jobs, travel, and higher education, as well as an overall improvement in quality of life (Crystal, 2003). In addition, having a solid command of the English language is quite helpful while researching since it makes it easier to look for academic materials, most of which are accessible in English.

In this case, teaching English has grown in popularity and is now recognized as vital at the academic level. Because of this, English is presented as a foreign language at almost all of Kurdistan of Iraq's public educational institutions, particularly for first-year undergraduates in the majority of academic disciplines. Depending on their subject matter, teachers of English as a foreign language face various challenges. According to Endriyati (2019), instructing English to speakers of other languages requires teachers to emphasize reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Anyiendah (2017) contends that a teacher's education and creative abilities are essential but not sufficient for effective learning and that other circumstances challenge the teacher and impede learning. The classroom environment may be challenging for teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), especially if insufficient resources are available. Because teaching a language requires more than just being able to speak it, most EFL teachers face challenges; many believe these concerns impair their ability to lead.

### **Problems in English Language Teaching in Iraq-Kurdistan**

The lack of EFL teacher training programs is one of the difficulties in teaching

English in Iraq, notably in the Kurdistan Region. Those programs offered by the Ministry of Education were ineffective and did not motivate instructors to improve their instruction. Millions of people utilize the English language now as a universal language for communication on a global scale. Asian nations, in general, and the Middle East, have reacted more quickly to the growing need for communication movements students in secondary and high schools in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq continue to face significant difficulties when applying English for communicative reasons (Zughoul, 2003, p. 111). In addition, it has been determined that students in the Kurdistan Region should study English, mainly speaking abilities, since they require them to engage in discussion and communicate information. In light of this, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) decided in 2007 to implement the "Sunrise" English curriculum in secondary and high schools. The study emphasizes the four core talents of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Since 2007, the KRG has made significant improvements to education. English was taught early, and creative thinking was promoted in classrooms. Iraq's Kurdistan region, autonomous since 1991, and the KRI continued utilizing Iraq's English syllabic until 2007. Even though the KRI has exercised its independence since 1991 since they were created using procedures and strategies that did not enhance pupils' communication skills., those syllabi had several issues that needed to be addressed. Iraq's political and economic turmoil presented obstacles to the development of valuable curricula for the English language.

The KRI's Sunrise program is another initiative that falls short of meeting the requirements of Kurdish students learning English. Students of the English language come into their first English lesson having already acquired prior linguistic knowledge already known to the English instructor. Most science and technology courses are given in Kurdish, while many lecturers and almost all students are illiterate in English. These lectures, which are frequently taken directly from such sources or translated from foreign curricula, offer knowledge that has been distilled and summarised. This method is referred to as "Scaffolding" by Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991). Before making inferences about second language lectures that have a significant pedagogical impact, according to Flowerdew (1994), further study is required.

In contrast, Flowerdew (1994) noted that further study of second language courses is necessary. Poor lectures and materials, inadequate teacher training, inefficient teaching tactics, and a lack of a theoretical underpinning are instructor-specific concerns while teaching ESP. Student-related obstacles include demographics, the rigours of learning ESP, English competency, the disparities between their language and others, and English proficiency, lack of vocabulary, dependency on dictionaries, and lack of awareness on how to utilize them successfully while using ESP words. Lack of instructional resources, overcrowded classes, and a concentration on exams are environment-related difficulties (Ghafar, 2022).

Students tended to see English less as a method of communication and more as a

way of acquiring knowledge. They managed to view it more as a subject matter. Students have refrained from utilizing even the small quantity of the language they have received. Consequently, the methods used are not at all communicative and are not developed based on the requirements of English language learners. The problem with the pupils' English has given me many difficulties. The fact that most students could not communicate was a glaring indicator that ELT programs at Iraqi colleges were failing. As a result, I began searching for a solution to the issue of teaching and learning variables such as settings and textbooks, specifically what tactics are successful and how they might be leveraged to improve oral discourse, particularly the proficiency of college students in Iraqi Kurdistan, and how they can do this. I was particularly interested in the measures employed to increase university students' fluency in Iraq-Kurdistan. As a result, I started searching for a way to teach and learn things like places and textbooks, specifically, what strategies work and how they can be used to enhance the oral discussion. This prompted me to seek a solution to the problem. More specifically, this is significant because it will address the students' issues with their oral communication by providing them with possibilities that are not currently being provided by the strategy that has been offered. As a result, we will implement some English language teaching strategies in Kurdistan in the hopes that they will contribute to creating an environment in which English is spoken. These strategies will be appropriate for use in Iraq university settings and will be available to teachers there.

### **Overcrowded Classrooms**

One of the difficulties that English language instructors have to deal with, which is one of the causes for worry, is that "the full homerooms and the effect of such a situation may disrupt teaching and learning," which is one of the problems (Emery, 2012). There are times when the number of students enrolled in each class is low, the number of students enrolled in the school as a whole is large, and the walls that separate the classrooms are poorly insulated; therefore, the sound will go to the other rooms. In contrast to the many challenges accompanying instruction in large classes, there are also those difficulties: pupils sit close to one another. This is because there is an inadequate supply of desks and chairs, which are difficult to relocate due to their fixed positions. The process of teaching and learning must demand an environment that is comfortable and pleasurable; otherwise, instructors may not be able to satisfy the requirements of their students and reach the learning objectives they have set for themselves. (Nurkamto; 2003, Beckrand Westrup; 2000).

### **Restricted Availability of Resources**

There is a wide variety of instructional material at instructors' disposal that they might use to improve the delivery of their classes. Wi-Fi, printers, copy machines,

textbooks, blackboards, computers, other technology (such as Tape recorders), art materials, and instructional posters are some resources that are often accessible to English instructors. Teachers can find themselves in a situation where they have no access to these sources, or they may find themselves in a case in which the supply is restricted, or they may discover that they do not have access to them. Find themselves in a situation where the equipment is not working well. Moreover, because of this resource shortage, teachers cannot implement effective teaching practices (Fatiloro, 2015; Nurkamto, 2003). "Language could only be grasped by using all four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing," as stated (Pande, 2013, p. 417). Because of this, having access to various teaching aids plays a significant role and needs to be made available as soon as it is practical; otherwise, teachers will not be able to educate their pupils efficiently. The availability of educational resources is desperately needed.

### **Language Irregularities**

The first language can be learned, and the second and third languages can be learned after that. This is because We are all aware that the process of learning how to speak our native language, our second language, and our third language are all distinct from one another. When we speak our mother tongue, we can express things without having to think about what we are saying; additionally, our environment is the primary source from which we acquire our native language before we learn particular words and sentences. On the other hand, when we develop a second language, we must first attempt to translate phrases and observations from the target language into our native tongue, after which we must study vocabulary, sentences, and other aspects of the target language. It is a complex language. Furthermore, we pick up our native speech from the setting where we were raised. When we communicate in our mother tongue, we can express it. Without thinking about it (Ying, a graduate of the TEFL certification program in 2019). Fatiloro (2015) said, "One of the most important challenges confronting learners of English as a second language is students' fearful attitude towards the use and usage of English, especially in the presence of a competent user." Communicating effectively in English demands a certain amount of self-assurance and preparation; yet, if a speaker lacks the necessary skills, this might result in a lack of coherence and improper phrases (p.28).

### **Solutions English Language Teaching in Iraq-Kurdistan**

Arguably, teachers need the training and should be familiar with the setting, topic, and other essential facts linked to the class that they will teach, such as the management aspects included in the course. When educators have access to all of this information, they are in a better position to deal with any potential difficulties that may arise because they are aware of the factors contributing to the problems and can devise appropriate responses

to avert them. EFL programs at Iranian colleges might benefit from using oral discourse analysis as an efficient teaching approach, particularly for improving students' speaking abilities. In the real world, during their time in school, students should be exposed to as many different experiences as is reasonably practical. These might range from delivering a quick lesson and fielding questions to participating in a group debate about a passage from the textbook or a brand-new subject.

Additionally, they may include anything else that the instructor deems appropriate. This implies that students' ability to adapt their spoken language usage in reaction to the criteria will be assessed. Posted by the participants, who will include both their professors and their classmates. Both students and instructors have a responsibility to be aware of this and to:

1. Make sure that everyone can hear you and that you speak in a style that is straightforward to comprehend;
2. Show that you are passionate about the topic and that you find it interesting;
3. Always have a positive and affable attitude, a good sense of humour, and an approachable attitude; Keeping a steady gaze toward the target is very important;
4. After making an important point, pause for a moment so that the other students can comprehend what was said and be ready to reply to any questions that may be asked.

The lecturer should utilize drawings, diagrams, gestures, and other pedagogical aids to communicate the lesson effectively. Group work is an excellent in-class and out-of-class exercise that allows students to debate personal interest subjects using learned information. This environment encourages learning and the sharing of new, well-understood information. With group practice, student speaking improves. Individual dialogues do not have characteristics that group discussions include. This strategy assisted us in teaching research courses. Previously, the "Japan Association for College English Teachers" has been discussing a few English language teaching curricula. Butler and Lee (2006) drew attention to the fact that, according to Oba (1994), the previously mentioned association decided to change ELT. For two reasons: first, the textbooks needed to be revised, and second, the curriculum required to be fixed. This information was brought to light as a result of topics about ELT. The approach to teaching English as a second language should be communicative.

This does not mean that an emphasis should be placed on having conversations; instead, the approach should consist of various techniques that help students improve their communication ability. Although Japanese students and graduates are said to be lacking in practically all abilities, Kurdistan students and graduates are not considered to be so lacking in those talents; instead, Iraqi- Kurdistan is said to be lacking in listening and speaking

skills. It is strongly recommended that this be completed outside of class if possible; nevertheless, it should still be assigned by the teachers and checked by them. It is recommended that students have as much experience with it as they can in classes held at educational institutions. Because of this, in-service teacher training is essential, and this is particularly crucial for academics who have an MA degree but have never undergone any form of teacher training. In-service teacher training is required.

### **Iraqi-Kurdistan English Teachers Need More Planning and Practice**

The absence of possibilities for teacher training in KRI offers a significant problem; this difficulty is pertinent to both experienced English educators and potential new employees since it is relevant to both groups of people. English language instructors cannot teach the new English syllabus since they lack the necessary training, which demands a comprehensive comprehension of the student-centred learning approach and general use. According to Vernez et al. (2014), many currently employed instructors in KRI do not possess the level of expertise necessary to implement the new curriculum properly. Instead, they are used to teaching the standard curriculum they were prepared to teach over the years they spent preparing for their jobs. Because of this, they have difficulty effectively adopting the new curriculum. The Ministry of Education does not currently hold an evaluation system that can evaluate the level of English-language competence held by English teachers in KRI. This is the case despite the Ministry of Education being responsible for education. To fulfil the only qualification necessary to work in the nation as an English teacher, one must have earned a bachelor's degree from one of the universities or colleges in KRI that are dedicated to education.

### **The Obstacles Faced by KRI's Qualification Framework When It Comes to English Program**

Effectively implementing that curriculum is equally as essential as establishing a successful one. Instead of a one-time teacher preparation program, English language instructors in KRI need improved continuous education courses. In addition, education classes need to be aware of the many components that make up the current English courses and emphasize active learning and learner-centred techniques. The systems must address the objectives' requirements and the student's request. In a similar vein, Nunan (1988) recommends that educators should have a significant amount of involvement in the "planned curriculum" to develop the "implemented curriculum" (p. 136). The curriculum materials and processes have been consulted to arrive at the conclusions that make up the intended curriculum. The term "implemented curriculum" denotes activities that occur throughout the teaching and learning process. The act of instructing and educating others is an ongoing effort. According to Brown (2001), the instructors and the curriculum

supervisors at the American Language Institute engage in daily discussion and consultation with one another. The English instructors are given ongoing support with the lessons, the adaption of the textbooks, the development of successful teaching tactics, pedagogical innovations, and the provision of practical instruments.

Using this method, English instructors bring forth innovative change. Another problem related to teachers' views, emotions, or cultural norms in situations is their opposition to or rejection of new ideas. Because instructors are content with and comfortable with the current curriculum, almost every new initiative or idea is met with resistance and controversy when it is first introduced. (Richards, 2001). Teachers of English language skills encounter various obstacles, particularly in nations where English is taught as a foreign language. This is notably true in the United States. Many studies have been done that study the difficulties that EFL instructors experience while teaching English, including listening and speaking abilities. It is essential to keep in mind that most of this study indicates that EFL teachers often face many substantial challenges. In this situation, the instructor has challenges because of the class size. Large classrooms are not ideal for teaching listening and speaking skills, according to Eltaib (2011, cited in Hwaider 2017), since there will not be enough time for all students to participate pretty, and the instructors' teaching tactics will not work in such a setting.

Furthermore, Hayes (1997) lists the following issues with teaching in big classes: discomfort, a loss of control, lack of individualized attention, dishonest assessment, and ineffective students. He continues by saying that teachers must accept their issues because it is doubtful that class sizes will decrease soon. Technology indeed offers many benefits for teaching and studying languages. Additionally, technology is required in the classroom for teaching English to speakers of other languages, mainly when concentrating on developing their listening and speaking skills. Therefore, a further difficulty for EFL instructors teaching these abilities in classrooms is the absence of technology amenities. According to Kusumaningtyas (2017, p. 4), technology aids and involves students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in classroom information enrichment (Young, 2008), which will increase their willingness to study English (Costley, 2014). Finally, technological tools help pupils comprehend information quickly and clearly (Nomass, 2013). Technology also allows the teacher to teach the children realism (Cao, 2015).

### **Recommendations**

Even though English education has a long and illustrious history in Iraqi-Kurdistan, the following variables have the potential to contribute to the development of the nation in this particular field:

1. Learners of English need to be persuaded that the method (learner-centred), which offers them an excellent chance for exercises in the ability to comprehend through listening activities, and mechanisms well and results in a significant increase in educational



gain. This includes allowing students to utilize previous actions as examples when practising new ones later.

2. Encourage students to study by pointing out the benefits that may be obtained from the student's own life experiences and emphasizing these benefits.

3. Recognize the potential for an open exchange of opinions to deepen both the instructor's and the student's understanding of the material.

4. In the premise that "practice makes perfect," begin oral communication practice with a focus and make it a regular part of your routine.

5. Students of English who learn these skills as a method of expression will be able to exploit the English language more readily and fluently without having a complete command of its grammatical structures. These skills will be gained as a means of expression.

6. Oral discourse analysis in English classrooms focuses primarily on encouraging students to talk fluently and meaningfully via effective and purposeful input. Speaking is an example of a productive skill requiring a certain level of preparedness in terms of receptive skills. To properly prepare for developing productive skills, gaining general and specialized information is impossible without first developing reactive abilities such as attention and comprehension via lots of practice. Therefore, practical input is the first factor that impacts these abilities. This goes hand in hand with the capacity to listen since someone skilled at listening develops into a competent speaker via production practice. Therefore, the input has to be straightforward in its creation, detailed in its structure, and essential in its terminology. This stimulates thought about the subject and the process of matching knowledge. A sensitive listening capacity is required to perceive and process the information accurately. Those listening pay close attention and go over the most important phrases and sounds in their heads.

### **Conclusion**

One of the main problems in English language education in Iraq, particularly in the Kurdistan Region, is the shortage of training programs for English as a Foreign Language instructors. The courses the Ministry of Education provided did not effectively encourage instructors to enhance their teaching and were thus unsuccessful. Iraq-Kurdistan instructors present English varies according to their interests. Textbooks are impractical for university students, especially when considering the actual application of English. Before and during the time of the Cultural Revolution, several books were compiled, but there was no plan developed for teaching English at the time. The English teachers in Iraq-Kurdistan universities do not use contemporary or approved teaching practices. Teaching English might use a combination of traditional face-to-face contact in the classroom with audio-visual aids for individual training. Concerns regarding the proper use of the language are common among students studying English. This is due to the instruction in English that

was received. The vocabulary of the topic, which may be expanded via the use of synonyms, determines the extent to which English language learners can use the language. Students could be encouraged to communicate more rapidly, for instance, by drawing pictures. Students may find it easier to recognize patterns with the assistance of tape recorders, videotapes, and movies. Learners of English may benefit from having access to native English speakers' voices provided by these technologies.

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