



English For Academic Purposes As A Constituent Of Preparatory Year Program: The Context Of The Arabic Speaking Students

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ABSTRACT

This investigative literature paper attempts to evaluate the possibility of introducing the sufficient English for Academic Purpose (EAP) content in the Preparatory Year's (PYP) English curriculum. The paper questions the possibility at all in the context of the Arab world's colleges and universities, for both linguistic and education challenges. Being intended for equipping PYP students with a functional college English and preparing them for the all-English course books of their chosen majors, only with a sufficient dosage of EAP can this goal be achieved. The paper does the investigation by conducting a topical literature review under three premises that it developed from the reality of the Arab world's school English level of proficiency compared to the commonly adopted PYP English curriculums, and the international Standardized Tests of English Proficiency (STEP) tests as a reference. The paper concludes that, introducing the sufficient dosage of EAP in the PYP English curriculum, is a challenge for particular reasons pertaining to the Arabic speaking school leavers' English foundation at one hand, and the minimal required EAP size and diversity of vocabulary.

Key words: Preparatory Year Program, English for Academic Purpose, Standardized Tests of English Proficiency

INTRODUCTION

Background

There are rather multiple reasons for the low levels of English proficiency among the Arab students in general and throughout all the levels; the student, the teacher, the surrounding environment, the curriculum, educational system, and others according to Zand-Moghadam, Meihami & Ghysfvand (2018). Hence comes the greater role that falls on the teacher in finding alternatives and solutions that suit solving the problem, and also does not ignore the role of the student as the axis of the educational process that suffers from deficits and

shortcomings. Insufficient English language dose in schools –elementary, intermediate and secondary, is uniformly the reality of the Arab world according to Ahmed (2010). This is at the time when learning English even when taught as a subject depends on sequenced and aggregate academic plans which is inexistent in most of the Arab’s educational systems. With exception of the Arab Frank-phone nations of North Africa –Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania; English remained a foreign language to the rest of the Arab populations of about 300 million, argues Latif (2002).

Ranking between the 4th and 5th among the world’s most widely spoken languages in terms of population, and 3rd by the number of countries that recognize it as their official language, tells a lot about Arabic language. Of all, this global significance of Arabic language may help understanding the issues of the Arabic speaking population with English language discussed in the paragraph above this. Today counting well over 300 million the Arabic speaking population throughout 22 countries in Asia and Africa, this region of the world is everything but to describe as an ESL one despite its British colonial history. Jumping to a fact that is more relevant to the subject of this discussion, this English-Arabic language “staleness” is observable the most at the educational level. The outline below is a brief summary of the status of English language in the Arab world’s educational systems:

English in schools	Only recently has English has been introduced in the primary education systems of almost the countries. Otherwise, English is a subject taught 3 days a week, 45min lesson in the majority of the Arab countries.
English in colleges	English is fully the medium of instruction in very few Arab colleges and universities; some of which are foreign. A great deal of the Arab colleges adopt a mix of English and Arabic languages.
Exceptions	All-English international schools limitedly exist in all Arab countries besides few colleges that adopt all-English medium of instruction.

With ‘lukewarm’ relationship between English language and the Arab world’s educational systems and the Arabic speaking population itself, the calls of re-Arabicizing education has surfaced again widely and loudly. The obvious reason for this call of entirely abandoning English language, is the poor higher education output with the gap of the Arab students’ English proficiency and the all-English textbooks keep getting wider.

Statement of the problem

Whether the Arab school leaver students join their local Arab colleges or foreign ones, they find themselves in the “unified zone” of academic English; the required foundation for digesting the all-English college course books of the different disciplines. However, the Arab school leaver students come from 22 different educational systems, as many school systems and as variant English language competency leveling criteria. Meaning, academic English, English is the language of all college textbooks in these Arab educational systems; in both, the humanity disciplines and in science disciplines. Not to mention of course, a percentage of these school leavers decide to study abroad in European or North American colleges with their native English counterparts. Meaning, all these school leaver students of the variant English foundation will have to catch up

with and digest their all-English textbooks just after undergoing a, 8-month preparatory year program (PYP). From this reality it is doubtful that school leavers who had their core subjects in their L1 would attain EAP basic linguistic foundation.

Hypothesis

This paper hypothesizes that, it is college academic English requisite that sets the bar rather than the school leavers' foundation whether or not they are competent to college admission and to pick up with the all-English medium of instruction. This assumption is particularly true in the context of the Arabic-speaking students who will be majoring in business administration and in empirical sciences that have not been Arabicized so far. This assumption though, accounts for a reality that is full of relativeness and variables when it comes to Arabic speaking school leavers who come from 22 different educational systems. On the other hand, and based on these tow disparities, neither does the Standardized Test of English Proficiency criterion such as STEP, TOEFL and IELETS; necessarily furnish such missing unified criteria for college English proficiency or competence. The reason why not among several other reasons, is because the STEP is not adopted in placing or admitting school leavers into the colleges of most of Arab world.

Method

This investigative literature paper attempts to establish a co-relation between English for Academic Purpose (EAP) and the Preparatory Year's (PYP) English curriculum. This goal will be achieved by conducting a topical literature review under three premises developed from the reality of the Arab world's school English education and its PYP English curriculums. As a reference for EAP sufficiency, the paper takes the international Standardized Tests of English Proficiency (STEP) tests as the criteria for PYP students' EAP competence for college all-English medium of learning. Only the minimal competence in STEP tests is taken as a reference which is referred to as Beginners Level of proficiency in some tests like TOEFL.

Study questions

- Should EAP be a key constituent of PYP program's English courses, at all?
- Is the 1-year PYP program timeframe enough for uplifting school leavers' EAP?
- Would school leavers having their core subjects in their L1 has any impact on their EAP basics?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Arabic-speaking school leaver's level of English proficiency

Using the search phrase "Issues of English language education in the Arab world", on Google search engine's bar, collects results by the million including major studies and research paper by Arab educators and academia. One among several major studies published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing for instance in (2015), states: "English-medium education and the learning of English in the Arab region's schools and universities is lagging behind due to issues of politics, culture, social mobility, and identity (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). The situation is so abject as to doubt it a region of ESL as the local researchers Abdel-Latif & Alhamad (2023) argue; whose paper is entirely dedicated to the debate re-Arabicizing of Arab world's higher education dues to

the poor English output as a medium of education. Furthermore, not even the Gulf region of 6 countries which is viewed as the Arab world's "gateway" to globalization, is an exception as emphasized by Ahmed (2010) who attributes the issues to the very challenge of mandating the use of English as the medium of instruction in academic institutions. Another word of experts by the educators and researchers Preece & Sayeed (2017) who confirm the Arab world's wide phenomena of poor English throughout the three schools and at both the learning and teaching levels. Insufficient English language dose in schools, seems be a common reason for the school students' poor English language throughout the Arab world as noted by (2016). Ahmed attribute the issue to the lack of the sequential and accumulative order of the schools' English curriculum between the three schools. Whereas, Abdel-Latif & Alhamad (2023) among several others points to the insufficiency of English language as a subject taught 3 days a week, and a 45 minute class. The exception however, is brought about by several studies such as the paper by Ahmed (2012) that the wide presence of international all-English schools as well as the introduction of English language subject in the elementary schools of some Arab countries like in Egypt, the UAE, Tunisia and a few others, is producing a satisfactory level of school English level. Regarding the low quality traditional English language teaching in the Arab schools several negative factors collaborate against the students: the teacher, the surrounding environment, the curriculum among others.

A key finding to draw here is that, Arabic-speaking school leavers' English foundation is way behind the proficiency that makes them competent for PYP programs. It is evident that, the main reason for the prevalent low EAP background is the Arab schools teaching core subjects –math, physics, biology, etc.; in Arabic language which leads to missing the basic terms and vocabulary that constitute the scientific English. This seems to be the situation with all the Arab countries, save the shy exception of countries that introduced English language in the primary education. Consequently these PYP students would have the level of proficiency that enables them to absorb college's all-English course books.

English for Academic Purposes

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) as a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) came about in response to the academic needs of the increasing population of L2 students enrolled in universities where English was the medium of instruction (Kusni, 2011). Ever since, EAP courses deal with four main linguistic and educational aspects; namely, 1) college academic writing skill, e.g., essay writing, summarizing, paraphrasing, citing sources and genre analysis or discipline-specific academic discourse such as the use of passive constructions in scientific and technical writing; 2) academic reading and the critical analysis of texts; 3) fluency, interaction and intelligibility of speech such as in small-group discussions; and 4) academic listening skills as key points of lectures. The very intent of EAP English which is often characterized as a practical or pragmatic approach to L2 teaching, is to help students succeed in an academic setting, and therefore it is according to Zand-Moghadam, Meihami & Ghysfvand (2018) whose paper cross-cites earlier studies by Benesch (1993) and Santos (2001). A key characteristics of EAP and directly relevant to the subject of this paper, is the emersion vs. submersion variance of its content brought about by McMahon (2011). According to McMahon ESL students are changed by immersion in Western intellectual traditions, while this is not the case with college's few years' exposure to English language. In connection to this argument, the goal of EAP is to help prepare L2 students for university study, and this is not without a kind of linguistic and intellectual modifications according to Hussain, Albasher & Farid (2017). The researchers explain further in the context of PYP, since the goal of EAP is to help prepare L2 students for university study, it is usually an intensive programs in academic language that are tied to university programs. In line with this and as a worldwide situations, in the countries where English language is the second language (ESL) there are supposed to be efforts of tailoring college preparatory year programs to meet the needs of the students as they needn't to enroll in EAP classes. According to Preece & Sayeed (2017), in average ESL countries the academic institutional structure of higher education builds on the already foundation of academic discourses and knowledge systems. The author cites the example of the Philippines where the L2 students digest the academic discourse(s) easily and socialize into in their EAP classes.

A key finding to draw here is that, English for Academic Purpose (EAP) with the given scholarly and academic content description, it has three main characteristics. First, the EAP proficiency builds on strong general English linguistic foundation including vocabulary size (and diversity) of average 6000 item. Evidently, the Arabic speaking school leavers are way behind this requisite as proven in the paragraph before this. Secondly, the 2-semester PYP program is not enough for uplifting the school leavers to this level, especially as noted by Al-Mahrooqi & Denman (2018) with modules that are mostly repeating schools' basic English. Thirdly, the content of a standard EAP course is still too wide to be taught to the students unfirmly and regardless of their will-be majors; i.e. science, business administration, humanities, etc. Meaning, an efficient EAP course need to be broken yet down to syllabuses or customized as per the will-be majors of the pre-year students for more focused contents. Well, this isn't the case in any of the Arab countries' colleges and universities, neither does it seem to be possible to implement.

International standardized tests of English proficiency

Even though they are not formally adopted by the Arab MoHED ministries in placing and/or exempting from Arab colleges' PYP admission, the Standardized Tests of English Proficiency such as STEP, TOEFL and IELTS are highly regarded. The average Standardized Tests of English Proficiency (STEP) tests are designed for ESL populations where L1 and English languages are closely popular McMahon (2011). The emphasis on the ESL learners' vocabulary size, seems to be a central focus in the literature on the STEP tests. As international ESL leveling standard, tests like TOEFL and IELTS account for the Thematic Vocabulary Learning (TVL) as a stagey of gauging ESL learners' vocabulary diversity (Kusni, 2011). The article cites the example of TOEFL Beginners Level where the set vocabulary size is of 15,000 to 30,000-word, and 6,000 to 7,000 word families. The rest of the STEP tests rate scoring at much higher population of vocabulary which Preece & Sayeed (2017) attributes to the ESL learners whose LI is French, German or Spanish. A portion of the ESL literature on the other hand, is dedicated to arrange of topics and issues related to the STEP tests. A paper by Ahmed (2010) raises issues result from the L1-L2 interaction and conflict too such as the percentage of acculturation in ESL courses that may result in linguistic and intellectual variance. For many non-English speaking populations, they find embarking ESL is tantamount to embark the Western cultural traditions. This view is in many cases adopted by the education policy makers, according to Abdel-Latif & Alhamad (2023) who view the prevalence of English language threaten the local and the minority languages. A support to this view that alienate English language comes from critics like that by Ahmed (2012) who argues that, it would be alarming if many enough students of the local population score high in TOEFL and IELTS tests.

A finding to draw here is that, STEP tests are a viable criteria for gauging ESL students' English proficiency as well as a satisfactory amount of EAP. However, even though passing STEP tests are recognized and they do exempt school leavers from the PYP program's English course in most of the colleges of the Arab countries, this cannot be generalized. They cannot uniformly be imposed and adopted nationwide because as noted earlier by Ahmed (2010) college admission is regarded as a national process by the Arab states and that it should be localized. This plea is partly a plausible argument considering the finding drawn earlier that adopting STEP test passing result in college admission wouldn't be practical with Arabic speaking school leavers' weak English foundation.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that, introducing the sufficient dosage of English for Academic Purpose (EAP) in the PYP English curriculum, is a challenge particularly for the Arab world's colleges and universities. This particular population of school leavers are not only taught general English at school, but also taught the rest of the core subjects in Arabic language; thus, missing EAP basic terminology. The gap of the disparity extends at both ends:

the linguistic and the educational levels. Namely, the school leavers' modest English foundation, and the college PYP demanding EAP foundation. For the Arabic speaking PYP students therefore, being required to have the sufficient EAP dosage in one year, is a transition above their capacitance. A point of implication this situation implies is that, it would be easier for the educators to revise and revamp the quality of school English than to address uplifting PYP students' English proficiency.

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