

## Language Skills and Their Relationship to Learning Difficulties in English Language from the Teachers' Point of View

Mohamad Ahmad Saleem Khasawneh<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Special Education Department, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia,

[mkhasawneh@kku.edu.sa](mailto:mkhasawneh@kku.edu.sa)

**Orcid:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1390-3765>

**Google Scholar:** <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=TkxWc-kAAAAJ>

**Scopus ID:** [57219400813](https://scopus.org/57219400813)

**Research gate:** [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mohammad\\_Khasawneh14](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mohammad_Khasawneh14)

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### Abstract

This study aimed to identify the relationship between learning language skills and learning difficulties in English language among students in the elementary stage in Irbid Governorate from the teachers' point of view. The study used the descriptive-analytic approach. The sample of the study consisted of (100) male and female teachers, who teach the fourth and fifth grades, distributed as follows: (50) males and (50) females. To achieve the objectives of the study, a questionnaire was designed to identify the relationship between learning language skills and learning difficulties among students in English language. The questionnaire included the following dimensions, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The results of the study revealed that the overall degree for the relationship between learning language skills to students' learning difficulties in English language at the primary stage from the teachers' point of view was high in all dimensions of study. The study concluded that it is important to identify the importance of learning language skills for students with LDs and teachers should be aware of these skills and their role.

**Keywords:** English language, speaking, listening, reading, writing, learning disabilities.

### Introduction

In recent years, English language has facilitated the widespread of the electronic network 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. The idea of this study came to identify the relationship between learning language skills to the learning disabilities of students in English language and methods of treating them. Therefore, it was necessary to take the opinions of teachers 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 causes of learning disabilities among students in English language at the elementary stage in Irbid Governorate from the teachers' point of view.
- Identifying the relationship between learning language skills and learning difficulties in English language.

### **Research Questions**

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

- What is the relationship of language skills with the learning disabilities of students in English language in Irbid from the teachers' point of view?

### **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 its quality, and development of students' academic performance (Saadeh and Dhmour, 2017).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The results of this study are limited to human limitations, as it was applied to the fourth and fifth primary teachers 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).

### **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 subject, 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.

Yousif and Abdallah (2020) investigated English prepositions problems encountered by Sudanese university students. To collect the data for this study, the author used a test for the participants and followed the descriptive-analytical method. The sample of this study consisted of 50 second-year English Language students from the Faculty of Arts at Al Neelain University academic year (2017-2018). SPSS was used to analyze the data. The results of the study showed that English prepositions cause great difficulty for Sudanese university students and that the interference of Arabic language is a direct cause of the problem of literal translation from Arabic into English.

Al-Arifi (2020) aimed to identify the difficulties facing teaching English Language at the primary level from the point of view of teachers and the proposed solutions for them. The sample of this study consisted of 88 female English Language teachers at the primary level in Al-Quwaiyah Governorate, where only 83 responded to the survey. This study followed the Descriptive Approach (Survey) where SPSS, Pearson correlation, Cronbach's Alpha, and Standard Deviation were used as tools to analyze the collected data. The result of this study

showed that the difficulties facing English language teaching at the primary level in Al-Quwaiyah governorate include four elements: Difficulties related to the educational environment, difficulties related to the academic curriculum, difficulties related to teaching methods, and difficulties related to the teacher.

Khalaf and Fadel (2020) aimed to analyze the written discourse errors made by Iraqi English Language students and to suggest error solutions. The sample of this study consisted of 20 essays that have been written by 3rd year English Department students at the University of Anbar. The author followed the qualitative method and used Corder's 1974 steps of error analysis. The results of this study showed that the written discourse errors are made mostly because of the difficulties of learning English as a foreign language and the interference between the Arabic language and acquired one.

Badawi and Hamid (2020) aimed to analyze the difficulties encountered by Sudanese government school students in pronouncing some consonant sounds and clusters. The sample of this stud consisted of 20 students from Al Izba Basic School for Girls-Al-Amlak-Khartoum. This study followed the descriptive-analytical method, and to collect data from teachers the author used a questionnaire. The study followed the quantitative method and to collect the data the researcher used a questionnaire as an instrument. The findings of the study showed that some factors harm pronunciation, such as inadequate training in phonetics the differences in sound systems between Arabic and English, and phonology.

Abu Salah and Al-Hadidi (2017) aimed to identify the difficulties of learning writing in English language faced by (4 - 6) primary grade students from the point of view of their teachers in the capital city Amman. The sample of this study consisted of 351 randomly chosen teachers (58 males and 293 females) from the Directorate of Education / Kasbah District in the capital Amman. The study followed the descriptive survey approach. The author designed a survey that consisted of 40 paragraphs. The results of the study showed that the level of difficulties in learning to write in English language came in a high level and all areas.

## 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 (100) male and female teachers, who were chosen from the teachers who teach the fourth and fifth primary grades. 10 schools of males and females were chosen by the stratified random method to consist of (5 schools for females) and (5 schools for males). The study was conducted on a sample of 100 teachers as shown in Table (1).

Table 1. Distribution of the study sample according to independent variables

Variable	Category	Frequencies	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	50	50%
	Female	50	50%
<b>Academic qualification</b>	Graduate	80	80%
	Post-graduate	20	20%
<b>Experience</b>	3-1	10	10%
	7-4	40	40%
	More than 7 years	50	50%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Research Instrument

The instrument of the study consisted of a measure of the relationship of language skills to students' learning difficulties in English at the primary stage from the teachers' point of view. The study instrument consisted of two parts. Part one included general information about the study sample (teachers). The second part included the statements of the questionnaire addressed to teachers, which were divided into the following topics (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The response was graded on each statement according to a triple scale and was determined at three levels: high (3 degrees), medium (2 degrees), and low (1 degree).

### Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the correlation coefficient was calculated. The correlation coefficients are shown in Table (2) below.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient and repetition stability of the instrument

Field	Test Re-test	Internal consistency
Listening	0.91	0.85
Speaking	0.87	0.86
Reading	0.88	0.85
Writing	0.90	0.87
Total	0.89	0.86

Table (2) shows that the value of the total reliability coefficient of the study instrument was (0.89), where the listening field obtained the highest stability factor (0.91), and the lowest stability factor was (0.87) for the speaking field.

## FINDINGS

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

Results of the research question of the study.

To answer this question, the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills to students' learning difficulties in English were extracted as follows.

The first field: language skills

Table (3) shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties among English language students and the overall degree of for the language skills fields.

Table 3. The mean scores and standard deviations of the statements of the language skills fields arranged in descending order according to the mean scores

Language skills	Mean score	Standard deviation	Rank
Listening	2.71	.322	High
Speaking	2.67	.403	High
Reading	2.59	.431	High
Writing	2.56	.428	High
Total	2.63	.396	High

It is evident from Table (3) that the overall degree of assessment of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties among English language students was generally high. All of the

statements of the questionnaire were also high, as the “listening” field came in the first place, while the “writing field” came in the last place.

The listening field:

Table (4) shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties among English language students and the total degree of assessment of the listening field and its statements.

Table 4. The mean scores and standard deviations of the listening field arranged in descending order according to the mean scores

Rank	Statement	Mean score	Standard deviation	Level
1	Poor ability of students to connect sentences by listening	2.76	.464	High
2	Student's inability to link the audio material to real life situations	2.75	.478	High
3	Weakness of students in following the instructions of the course in English language by listening	2.75	.518	High
4	Poor comprehension of the listening material	2.68	.576	High
5	Lack of sufficient listening materials to get students used to listening	2.69	.563	High
6	Difficulty distinguishing students by hearing similar words	2.63	.576	High
	Total listening field	2.71	.529	High

It is evident from Table (4) that the overall degree of assessment of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties in the field of listening was high. All of its statements were also high, as the statement, “Student's inability to link the audio material to real-life situations” came in the first place. The statement, "Difficulty distinguishing students by hearing similar words" came in the last place.

The speaking field:

Table (5) shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills to learning difficulties among English language students, and the overall assessment degree for the speaking field and its statements.

Table 5. The mean scores and standard deviations of the statements of the speaking fields arranged in descending order according to the mean scores

Rank	Statement	Mean score	Standard deviation	Level
1	Poor ability of students to express their thoughts orally	2.72	.513	High
2	Not focusing on conversational experiences during the lessons.	2.68	.586	High
3	Poor ability of students to synthesize language terms	2.66	.532	High
4	Poor ability of students to form correct sentences	2.63	.599	High
	Total speaking field	2.67	.403	High

The results in Table (5) show that the overall degree of assessment of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties in the field of speaking was high. All of its statements were also high, as the statement, “the weak ability of students to express their ideas orally” came in the first rank. The statement, "Poor ability of students to form correct sentences" ranked last.

The reading field:

Table (6) shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties among English language students and the overall degree of assessment of the reading field and its statements.

Table 6. The mean scores and standard deviations of the statements of the reading fields arranged in descending order according to the mean scores

Rank	Statement	Mean score	Standard deviation	Level
1	Difficulty deriving word roots	2.68	.576	High
2	Difficulty pronouncing vowels in English	2.65	.595	High
3	Difficulty distinguishing silent letters	2.63	.576	High
4	Difficulty reading and summarizing English texts read by the teacher	2.57	.608	High
5	Difficulty reading English sentences	2.54	.643	High
6	Difficulty understanding the meanings of the reading material	2.50	.664	High
	Total reading field	2.59	.431	High

It is evident from Table (6) that the overall degree of assessment of the relationship of language skills with learning difficulties in the field of reading was high. All its statements were also high, as the statement, “the difficulty of deriving the roots of words” came in the first place. The statement, “The students’ difficulty in understanding the meanings of the reading material” ranked last.

The writing field:

Table (7) shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the relationship of language skills to students' learning difficulties in English language and the overall degree of assessment for the field of writing and its statements.

Table 7. The mean scores and standard deviations of the statements of the writing fields arranged in descending order according to the mean scores

Rank	Statement	Mean score	Standard deviation	Level
1	Difficulty expressing in writing life situations.	2.64	.550	High
2	Difficulty distinguishing letters and syllables	2.62	.655	High
3	Lack of marks (grades) for written assignments	2.59	.659	High

Rank	Statement	Mean score	Standard deviation	Level
4	Failure to correct written assignments assigned to students	2.51	.722	High
5	Lack of written assignments assigned to students	2.44	.773	High
	Total writing field	2.56	.529	High

The results in Table (7) show that the overall degree of assessment of the relationship of language skills to students' learning difficulties in the field of writing was high. All of its statements were also high, as the statement, "Difficulty expressing in writing life situations" ranked first, while the statement, "the lack of written tasks assigned to students" came last.

## DISCUSSION

The results in Table (3) showed that all language skills statements received high grades by teachers, and the fields of the questionnaire came in the following order, speaking, writing, listening, and reading.

In the field of listening, the results showed that the students face a real weakness in listening, especially the linking of sentences while listening. The researcher attributes this to the teacher's weakness in enabling his students to have listening skills. Therefore, it is necessary to link the information in the course with the subjective experiences of the students. Education must be linked to the life of the student. The more education is based on the students' basic needs, the more connected to the education itself and becomes able to continue with it and more accommodating to it. Thus, it will have an opportunity for creativity in the lessons they receive. As for the field of speaking, the results showed that all the averages of this field came at a high level. The researcher attributes the reason for this to the fact that students face a real weakness in conversation skills because of their teachers not focusing on conducting conversations in English in the classroom. In addition, students' fear of making mistakes or feeling shy while they speak in front of their colleagues is also another reason.

In the field of reading, the results showed that all the averages in this field came at a high level. This is a clear indication that teachers see that students face weakness in terms of reading skills. It is also an indication of the weak foundation of students concerning reading, especially letter training. Students find it very difficult to distinguish letters, especially those that are written and not pronounced, as the student is not exposed to many exercises and activities that enable him to distinguish between them.

As for the writing field, the results showed that all the averages in this field came at a high level. This is a clear indication that students face real weakness in the field of writing. The researcher attributes this to the teachers' lack of focus in their teaching on this particular skill and their focus on other skills. In addition, there are weak appropriate opportunities for the student to show his skill in writing and expressing himself.

## 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.

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